

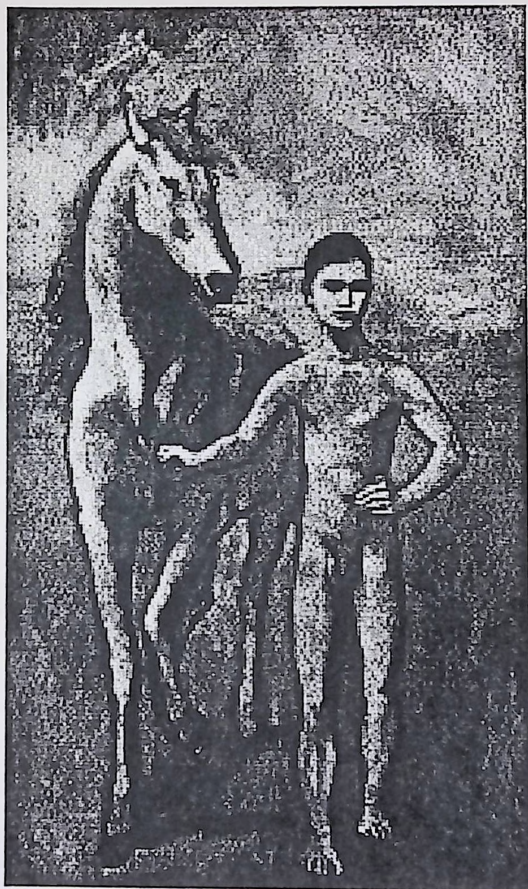
ALSO BY NORMAN MAILER:

The Naked and the Dead
Barbary Shore
The Deer Park
Advertisements for Myself
Deaths for the Ladies (and Other Disasters)
The Presidential Papers
An American Dream
Cannibals and Christians
Why Are We in Vietnam?
The Armies of the Night
Miami and the Siege of Chicago
Of a Fire on the Moon
The Prisoner of Sex
Existential Errands
St. George and the Godfather
Marilyn
The Faith of Graffiti
The Fight
Genius and Lust
The Executioner's Song
Of Women and Their Elegance
Pieces and Pontifications
Ancient Evenings
Tough Guys Don't Dance
Harlot's Ghost
Oswald's Tale

Portrait of Picasso as a Young Man



Portrait of



Picasso as a Young Man

An interpretive biography by

Norman Mailer



THE ATLANTIC MONTHLY PRESS
NEW YORK

Copyright © 1995 by Norman Mailer

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without permission in writing from the publisher, except by a reviewer, who may quote brief passages in a review.

Because of space limitations, all acknowledgments appear on pages 000-00.

Printed in the United States of America

FIRST EDITION

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Mailer, Norman.

Portrait of Picasso as a young man: an
interpretative biography / by Norman Mailer.—1st ed.
Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-87113-608-2

1. Picasso, Pablo. 1881-1973—Friends and associates. 2. Olivier,
Fernande, 1880 or 1881-1966—Relations with men. 3. Artists—France—
Biography. 4. Artist couples—France—Paris. I. Title.
N6853.P5M33 1995 759.4—dc20 95-1877

Design by Laura Hammond Hough

The Atlantic Monthly Press
841 Broadway
New York, NY 10003

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

To Judith McNally

For her insights and her labors
large and small that contributed
so much to the publication of this
work.



I want to acknowledge the aid and skilled assistance of Helen Brown, Veronica Wierzbicka, Louise Apple, John L. de Laure, Margaret Hough, my daughter, Megan, Mark, and Wayne Fennell and the staff of the New York Public Library, as well as the staff of the Library of Congress.

I would also pay my respects to the authors I have used in my bibliography, and particularly to Fernando Olvera, Juan Polanco, John Richardson, Pauline Thompson, Roger Thompson, and Antonio T. de la Cruz.

A special thanks goes out to my son, Nick, and to Megan, my daughter.

I would like to acknowledge the aid and skillful assistance of Sabra Moore, Veronica Windholz, Lauren Agnelli, John Call, Laura Hammond Hough, my daughter, Maggie Mailer, and Wayne Furman and the staff of the New York Public Library, as well as the staff of the library at MOMA.

I would also pay my respects to the authors I have cited in my bibliography, most particularly to Fernande Olivier, Josep Palau i Fabre, John Richardson, Francis Steegmuller, Roger Shattuck, and Arianna Stassinopoulos Huffington.

A special note of appreciation is due to Nan A. Talese and to Morgan Entrekin.

Freedom is freedom. If you jump, you might fall on the wrong side of the rope. But if you're not willing to take the risk of breaking your neck, what good is it? You don't jump at all. You have to make people see. To revolutionize their way of thinking, you have to get to create images they won't accept. Force them to understand that they're living in a pretty queer world. A world that's not real enough. A world that's not what they think it is.

*—Thomas
as quoted by Kaboré in The River of God*



Painting is freedom. If you jump, you might fall on the wrong side of the rope. But if you're not willing to take the risk of breaking your neck, what good is it? You don't jump at all. You have to wake people up. To revolutionize their way of identifying things. You've got to create images they won't accept. Force them to understand that they're living in a pretty queer world. A world that's not reassuring. A world that's not what they think it is.

—Picasso

as quoted by Kahnweiler in *The Rise of Cubism*



Preface

More than thirty years ago, in the early spring of 1962, a contract was signed with Emile Capouya at Macmillan to do a biography of Picasso, and I then spent eight happy weeks in the library of the Museum of Modern Art looking through Zervos' *Pablo Picasso*, published by Cahiers d'Art. Fifteen thousand reproductions of Picasso's paintings, drawings, prints, etchings, lithographs, watercolors, and sketchbooks were studied page by page through thirty-three large volumes.

The experience may be equal to reading all of Shakespeare in two months—after such immersion, one can hardly sustain one's previous view of existence. The thirty-three volumes of Zervos had as large an effect. My mind was left one hair unhinged. I spent the summer writing a dialogue between an imaginary interviewer and myself dealing with such questions as "What is the distinction between soul and spirit?" and "How do we decide on the nature of form?" One even gave answers. It is all there in the last two hundred pages of a book called *Cannibals and Christians*, but those imaginary dialogues contain hardly a word about Picasso. He had stimulated the dialogues in such a way that one had insights into the extremities of one's own thinking but few biographical perceptions about him.

Following that summer, I seem to recollect giving back the advance to Macmillan, or perhaps I had not yet received it; in any event, the project lapsed. I was not ready to write about Picasso. Nonetheless, the impulse persisted (if usually wistful), until a few years ago, when it was stimulated by a book that I liked by half, and by

xiv Preface

half found wanting—precisely what you need and look for in someone else's work in order to get yourself started. In this case, it was Arianna Stassinopoulos Huffington's *Picasso: Creator and Destroyer*, which received a spate of cruel reviews for its faults and did not receive nearly enough good reviews for its virtues. As will be seen, quotes are taken from it more than a few times in the course of what follows.

Other authors would also make their large contribution. One can list Josep Palau i Fabre, Roland Penrose, Patrick O'Brian, Gertrude Stein, Leo Stein, John Richardson, Pierre Cabanne, Jean-Paul Crespelle, Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, Max Jacob, Roger Shattuck, Roy MacGregor-Hastie, André Malraux, André Salmon, Francis Steegmuller, Isabelle Monod-Fontaine, Hélène Parmelin, and not least but foremost—her two books inspired larger excerpts than any other—Fernande Olivier.

Since this work is characterized as an interpretive biography, it may be worth remarking on the terms of such a description. While one can lay claim to no original scholarship, the desire to make Picasso as real as any good character in life or in art has been the literary virtue sought after here. Which is equal to saying that the interpretation of Picasso's life and work as a young man is my individual understanding of him, and I will rest on such a claim. I will not pretend, however, that I did not learn a great deal from the other men and women who have written at length on the artist. Given the singularity of this effort—no original scholarship, much personal interpretation—there was real purpose to quoting other authors at greater length than is customary, and one is prepared to argue for the value of this as a practice. Style, after all, is revelation. Whether good or bad, style reveals the character of the writer who is perceiving the subject. To paraphrase another author is to deprive the reader, then, of the often unconscious but always instinctive critical judgment the reader is ready to make on the merits of the observer if given the opportunity to live a little while in the style. (An observer can be highly imperfect, but if we have insight into his or her flaws, we can learn a great deal about the subject—it is the adjustment all of us make almost all the time when we listen to one person describing another.) Moreover, most authors write better in some of their pages than in others, and so it is close to criminal to summarize an interesting or well-written passage merely to keep the reins of the book in one's own hands. Coming into a sense of Picasso's character calls for viewing him and his work from many an angle, and to stint on the excerpts is to blur each separate vision.

How intense are these visions, and how special! In the course of writing this book, I came across my old copy of Penrose's *Picasso: His Life and Work*, and in it

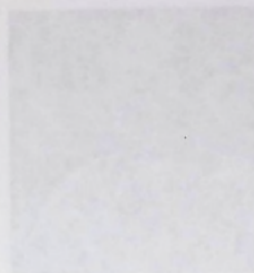
Preface xv

was discovered a page of notes I had written back in 1962. It gave me pleasure that the words set down then were sufficiently contemporary to my present purpose to be put in with no difficulty in this manuscript. It was nice to know that a part of oneself was still playing the same tune three decades later.

Let me wish you enjoyment as you read this book. I had pleasure in writing it. Life is not so bad for an author when he can spend every hour of his working day lifting his eyes from one Picasso to another.

—*Norman Mailer*

Contents



	<i>Preface</i>	xxi
<i>Part I</i>	I, the King	1
<i>Part II</i>	Paris	37
<i>Part III</i>	Fernande	91
<i>Part IV</i>	Pablo and Fernande	125
<i>Part V</i>	Apoilinaire	149
<i>Part VI</i>	Cecile de Stein	183
<i>Part VII</i>	The Brothel	253
<i>Part VIII</i>	The Suicide and the Banquet	261
<i>Part IX</i>	Cubism	287
<i>Part X</i>	The Mona Lisa	315
<i>Part XI</i>	The Decorator	335
	<i>Notes</i>	371
	<i>Bibliography</i>	396
	<i>Photo Credits</i>	399
	<i>Acknowledgments</i>	399

Contents



	<i>Preface</i>	xiii
<i>Part I</i>	I, the King	1
<i>Part II</i>	Paris	37
<i>Part III</i>	Fernande	91
<i>Part IV</i>	Pablo and Fernande	125
<i>Part V</i>	Apollinaire	149
<i>Part VI</i>	Gertrude Stein	183
<i>Part VII</i>	The Brothel	235
<i>Part VIII</i>	The Suicide and the Banquet	261
<i>Part IX</i>	Cubism	287
<i>Part X</i>	The <i>Mona Lisa</i>	315
<i>Part XI</i>	The Decorator	335
	<i>Notes</i>	371
	<i>Bibliography</i>	386
	<i>Photo Credits</i>	390
	<i>Acknowledgments</i>	399

Part I

I, the King

Part I



I, the King

1

Picasso, delivered at 11:15 P.M. in the city of Málaga, October 25, 1881, came out stillborn. He did not breathe; neither did he cry. The midwife gave up and turned her attention to the mother. If it had not been for the presence of his uncle, Dr. Salvador Ruiz, the infant might never have come to life. Don Salvador, however, leaned over the stillbirth and exhaled cigar smoke into its nostrils. Picasso stirred. Picasso screamed. A genius came to life. His first breath must have entered on a rush of smoke, searing to the throat, scorching to the lungs, and laced with the stimulants of nicotine. It is not unfair to say that the harsh spirit of tobacco is seldom absent from his work.

Since such family accounts are open to exaggeration, Don Salvador may not actually have shocked the newborn into life. All the same, the story is agreeable. It explains much. Spanish surgeons, for example, do not like to give painkillers to gored *toreros* when cleaning out the wound. Their premise is that the body will heal faster if it has suffered the torment; it must be quintessentially Spanish to assume that reality is the indispensable element in a cure. Don Salvador could have been offering that whiff of smoke as an objective correlative: "Wake up, *niño*" might have been the message. "Life in these parts will seldom smell better than this."

While rapid summary is seldom satisfactory, a quick description can probably be given of the relatives surrounding the infant. Picasso's father, José Ruiz Blasco, was the next-to-youngest son in a large family which was proud to trace its way back to a few aristocratic ancestors. One of them, "Juan de Almoguera, born in

4 Norman Mailer

Cordova in 1605, became both an Archbishop and the Viceroy and Captain General of Peru." (He even "became famous for his forceful denunciation of the corruption prevalent at that time in monasteries or convents.")¹ By 1850, however, the family was no better than middle-class. Commerce had beckoned—Picasso's paternal grandfather manufactured gloves. In turn, several of his sons became successful professionals: a doctor; a diplomat of lower rank; a canon in the cathedral. Picasso's father, however, called himself a painter, and did not work too hard at it when young. He was better known, for a time, as a man about town.



José Ruiz Blasco

Tall, elegant, blue-eyed, "thin and fair, he was sometimes called 'the Englishman' "² by his Malagueño friends and was easily the most spoiled member of the family, even managing for a number of years to live rent-free with his older brother Pablo, the canon, while developing his own reputation as a bachelor sport. (He was one of the regulars at an upper-class brothel run by Lola La Chata where the whores would await their clients "in a conventional sitting-room almost as if they were daughters of the bourgeoisie," and the *mise-en-scène* would include knitting, sewing, reading.)³

It was not until the age of thirty-seven that José Ruiz was finally obliged to go to work. He became an art instructor at the Escuela de Bellas Artes in Málaga, and five years later married María Picasso López, who was then twenty-five.

He had married down. His bride was "small and vivacious with black eyes and dark hair,"⁴ but she was without a dowry. In Málaga, the family Picasso was hardly in social balance to the family Ruiz. What she could offer to the marriage were large funds of energy and a set of thrifty habits well equipped to make the most of the restricted income that came in from her husband's two low-paying jobs: He was also curator at the local museum.

His wife brought in tow the women of her family—her widowed mother, her two spinster sisters, Eladia and Eliodora, and a maid. So, the child of José Ruiz and María Picasso, first to be sired by any of the Ruiz Blasco brothers, would now spend his next few years surrounded by five women all eager to be of service to

Portrait of Picasso as a Young Man

5

him, all ready to take delight in his every move. They make up his first royal entourage. He was christened Pablo Diego José Francisco de Paulo Juan Nepomuceno María de los Remedios Crispín Crispiano Santísima Trinidad Ruiz y Picasso or, in brief, Pablo Ruiz. As an example of prevailing sentiment, his mother would later say, "He was an angel and a devil in beauty. No one could cease looking at him."⁵ Of course, his mother claimed to have told him: "If you become a soldier, you'll be a general. If you become a priest, you'll end up as the Pope!"⁶

In 1900, just before embarking for Paris on his first visit at the age of nineteen, he would do a self-portrait (now lost) that he titled *Yo—el Rey*, and he would sign it three times for emphasis, "I, the King; I, the King; I, the King." It helps us to take measure of the self-importance that burgeons in a small boy adored by so many women. Of course, he only remains a king within the world of maiden aunts: he is defenseless as soon as he steps outside.

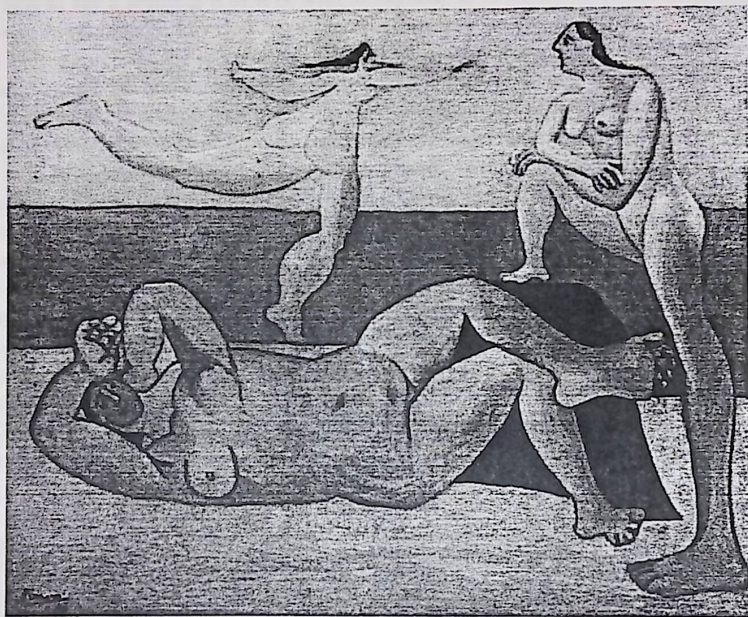
His sister Lola was born three years after Pablo and just three days after an earthquake devastated Málaga. The family fled their apartment on the Plaza de la Merced to stay for a few nights in the studio of don José's most prestigious friend (and employer), Muñoz Degrain, who had an atelier built on a high rock outcrop. Two huge happenings in the life of a three-year-old were now powerfully associated. Just seventy-two hours before the massive disruption to his royal existence caused by a baby sister entering his life, the earth began to move beneath his feet; he was swept up in a blanket and carried to a house that was deemed by his parents to be secure against these terrifying convulsions. Nor was it irrelevant that the place belonged to a man of the first importance to his parents. Muñoz Degrain was not only principal of the Escuela de Bellas Artes, but the most established painter in Málaga. To the child it must have seemed as if the best protection against earthquakes resided in the house of the best painter in town.

Of course, other psychic equations would follow. Since his sister Lola was so soon to follow, the three-year-old boy may have assumed that birth was the after-

*Picasso in 1885*

6 Norman Mailer

effect of a cataclysm. Were women with large bellies omens of earthquake and birth? It is interesting to note the huge misshapen females he would paint in the 1920s. For that matter, his maternal grandmother, still living with them, was a very fat lady with a powerful presence.



Three Bathers, Juan-les-Pins, June 1920. Oil and charcoal on wood, 32 x 39 in.
Unless otherwise noted, works by Picasso were completed in Paris. For all artwork, the dimensions are given to the nearest inch.

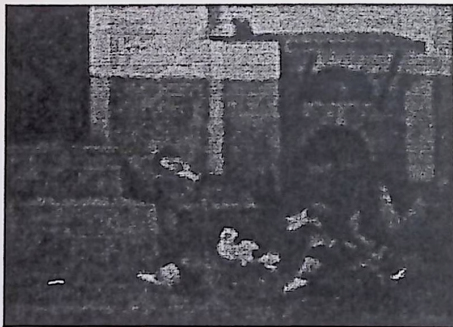
By the 1950s and 1960s, when Picasso, in his seventies and eighties, had become a gargantuan phenomenon to the media, one theme often appears in his interviews. It is that as he paints, something is happening. He is not alone. A process, separate from himself, is working through him. As in Zen, it is doing the job: "One line attracts the other and at the point of maximum attraction, the lines curve in toward the attracting point and form is altered."⁷ Again, in 1964, at the

Portrait of Picasso as a Young Man

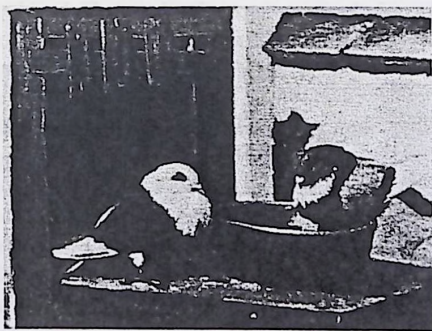
7

age of eighty-three, he made an unusual remark for a man who was now a Communist, and long a dedicated atheist. Referring to the act of putting pigment on canvas, he said to Hélène Parmelin: "Something sacred, that's it. It's a word that we should be able to use, but people would take it in the wrong way. You ought to be able to say a painting is as it is, with its capacity to move us, because it is as though it were touched by God . . . that is what's nearest to the truth."⁸

Let us entertain the speculation that after the earthquake of 1884, the three-year-old saw birth and cataclysm as closely linked to the same force. Separate from all that was daily and predictable in life, this force was what others referred to as God. If disasters were clear expressions of God's presence, there were positive ones as well—the drawings that emerged from his hand. At the heart of the universe, therefore, was a disruptive power never too far away from this mysterious act of drawing. The family legend, according to Palau, who cites Penrose, is that his first word was *piz*, for *lapiz*, a pencil.⁹ Put a pencil in his hand and he could do astonishingly well for a child still looking for his first few words. We can pass over the states of excitement engendered in the court of five women at their beloved's display of early talent, but contemplate the depth of emotion in the father. An academic artist who worked slavishly for his realistic effects, don José had become locally celebrated by now as a painter of pigeons. They were not only his favorite subject but his commercial trademark. If you happened to live in Málaga and were looking for an oil painting full of pigeons to hang in your living room, don José



José Ruiz Blasco, *Palomar (The Pigeon Loft)*.
Málaga, 1875. Oil on canvas, 40 x 57 in.



José Ruiz Blasco, *Pigeons*. Oil on canvas.

8 Norman Mailer

was the painter whose wares you bought. Trapped at his own competent level of mediocrity, don José must have had the same sense of mission (and redemption) that an ex-athlete of no particular renown might feel if his son demonstrated exceptional ability at his father's sport. The father would now have a future. One could be manager for a prodigious talent. To the photographer Brassai, Picasso said in 1966: "My first drawings could never be exhibited in an exposition of children's drawings. The awkwardness and naïveté of childhood were almost absent from them . . . Their precision, their exactitude, frightens me . . . My father was a professor of drawing, and it was probably he who pushed me prematurely in that direction."¹⁰

On the other hand, the boy, not yet six, had difficulty in reading and writing and was wholly unable to comprehend arithmetic. He was petrified when he had to go to school. The man who would become his dedicated memoirist, Jaime Sabartés, describes the process: Each morning, on his way to class, the maid dragged an hysterical little boy through the streets and into the classroom.

At his desk, the child could not concentrate. No matter what the teacher was instructing, he would devote himself to drawing. Sometimes, he would get up and tap on the window at people passing below on the street.¹¹ He might just as well have been a young prince thrown into the bull pen of a county jail. The contrast between his commanding presence at home and these humiliating entrances into a room full of boys his age may have created a fear of the social world that would not leave him for the rest of his life. He showed such panic for these new surroundings that his father had to transfer him to a small private institution, the Colegio de San Rafael, presided over by a friend. The new headmaster, apprised of the boy's unique artistic abilities and exceptional terrors, permitted him to leave class and sit in the kitchen with his wife while she was preparing a meal. There, he was able to draw until his father came to take him home.

There was good reason for the child's inability to learn arithmetic: The numbers did not impinge on him as concepts. Rather, they struck his eye as forms. Later, he would remark that he used to see the number seven as a nose drawn upside-down. Jaime Sabartés has Picasso recalling a few verbal sentiments when going home from school: "I'll show them what I can do! They'll see how I can concentrate. I won't miss a single detail . . . The little eye of the pigeon is round like an 0. Under the 0 is a 6 for the breast, underneath that a 3. The eyes are like 2's, and so are the wings . . ."¹²

Portrait of Picasso as a Young Man

9

We can propose that if the 0 was an eye, then the integer 1 might have signified a person in the distance and 2 was a man or woman kneeling in prayer. If 3 was turned on its side, it became breasts or buttocks—what childish glee! Yes, how he could concentrate on his studies! The number 4 might seem a sailboat in the Mediterranean, 5 a phallus and testicles, 6 a wineskin that men drank from at bullfights, 7 is our friend the nose, and 8 is a head on a body, his fat grandmother perhaps, while 9 might be a flower on a curved stem.

The examples are arbitrary. In whatever manner he saw each number, it is safe to assume they lived in him as forms; he could not, therefore, comprehend them as ciphers. In any case, he was drawing all the time.¹³ We have to conceive of what a small miracle in these early years were lines on a piece of paper. To Picasso, a face emerging under his pencil could transport him to the world outside, a process altogether equal to another child's wonder at the fact that being able to speak could bring food or comfort. Since the forms inscribed by his pencil were as real to him as words, it must have been reasonable to believe that pictures produced results as simply and directly as spoken language; both were magical processes: A small cause produced a large effect! So it was not unnatural to assume that as one drew, one steered one's way through a field of forces capable of producing earthquakes or infants. Yet, by dint of his drawing, he could be relatively safe. Fifty years later, he would tell Roland Penrose that among the first things he would draw were spirals. In Spain, one could buy *churros*, spiral-shaped fritters. Draw a spiral and he would receive a *churro* from his mother or his aunts. Early magic!¹⁴

A second sister, Concepción (Concha) was born when he was six; a few years later, the family for economic reasons was obliged to move to Corunna, on the northern coast of Spain. The municipal museum of Málaga, where don José had earned a good part of his income by serving as curator, had now closed down.

In Corunna, however, that once-petrified boy who could not bear to go to school became more manly, at least by his own latter-day account in an interview not published until 1982. He speaks of becoming a prime member of a gang.¹⁵ It is far from impossible. One of the mysteries of boyhood is that one does grow out of fears which but a few years before were seemingly permanent. Whether he actually chased cats with a shotgun, as he claimed, or served as maestro to the other eleven-year-olds when it came to mock bullfights is dubious. What may be more likely is that his ability to draw won some admiration from the gang. If he

10 Norman Mailer



Don José, Corunna, January 1, 1895. Pencil with white chalk on sketchbook page, 5 x 5 in.

Doña Maria, (left) Corunna, 1894. Conté crayon on sketchbook page, 5 x 5 in.

seems to have thrived in Corunna, that was not true for his parents. Uprooted from Málaga, where they had lived for all of their lives, they soon became depressed in the new city.

Of course, one of these drawings was made but ten days before their youngest daughter would die of diphtheria, on January 10, 1895, at the age of seven. The

Head of a Child with Bonnet, Corunna, 1894. Pencil on sketchbook page, 5 x 5 in.



sketch of Conchita was probably done by Pablo in the previous spring.

At the beginning of his thirteenth year, therefore, he would experience a trauma that would be the very stuff of future obsession. To conceal from his little sister how grave was her condition, the family had celebrated the Christmas season as usual, but they knew: Conchita, confined to bed, was mortally ill. Her thirteen-year-old brother—in what state of desperation and noble resolve we can only surmise—took a vow directed to one no less than God: If Conchita's life could be spared, he would give up all thought of painting again.

Portrait of Picasso as a Young Man 11

We know from John Richardson that some sixty years later Picasso told Jacqueline Roque, his second and last wife, of this vow.¹⁶ A few years earlier he had also recounted to Françoise Gilot his anguish as he watched Conchita deteriorate:

... he was torn between wanting her saved and wanting her dead so that his gift would be saved. When she died, he decided that God was evil and destiny an enemy. At the same time he was convinced that it was his ambivalence that had made it possible for God to kill Conchita. His guilt was enormous, the other side of his belief in his enormous power to affect the world around him. And it was compounded by his primitive, almost magical conviction that his little sister's death had released him to be a painter and follow the call of the power he had been given, whatever the consequences.¹⁷

Arianna Stassinopoulos Huffington may be too complete in her assessment of the power of this incident; even for a genius, the age of thirteen is a little early to decide that God is evil—but then if Picasso was telling the truth to Gilot and Jacqueline Roque, he had taken a prodigious vow. Only a saint would not have had some afterthoughts about the cost of offering up one's talent for a sacrifice, and only a remarkably virtuous child would not have slipped back to drawing on the sly even as Conchita was failing.

What we do know is that Picasso safeguarded this story for close to six decades. That suggests he gave his word and betrayed it. How could he not feel tainted when she died? God was not only overlord of the field of forces but a judge, doubtless, who kept records of broken vows.

His father suffered noticeably from Conchita's death. Depressed already by the three and a half years he had spent in Corunna, don José would walk each day to the school where he taught, then, after work, come back the few blocks to his house and stare out the window. He would study the rain. In place of that coterie of friends and relatives who shared the warm air of Málaga with him, he now had no company for these cold and northern reaches. He was marooned in a seaport on the winter Atlantic; he did not even have an occasional patron for his pigeons. In Málaga, he had enjoyed taking his son to bullfights, and "once," says Huffington, "the little boy was so taken by a bullfighter's 'suit of lights' that he would not stop crying until he had touched it."¹⁸ According to a later interviewer, the boy sat on the torero's lap, "looking at him, overwhelmed."¹⁹

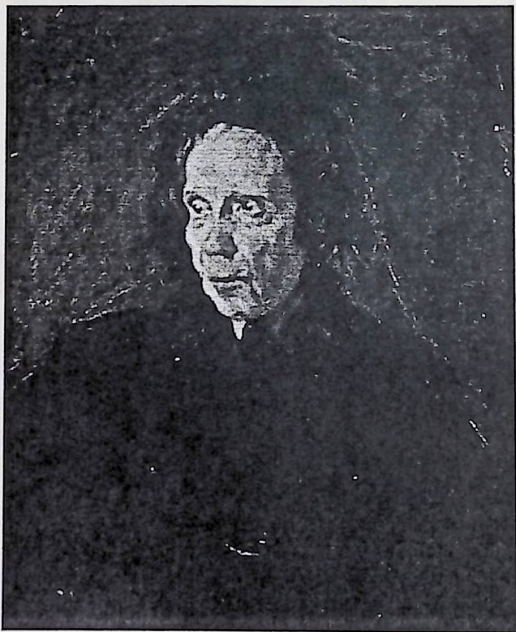
Yes, a suit of lights could produce a primal excitement, and don José had been the agent of such joy for his son. Now, in Corunna, don José was surrounded by his dark little wife, dark little son, and dark little daughter. Lost was the one child,

12 Norman Mailer

Conchita, who had offered promise of being tall and fair. He grieved. As the Picasso legend developed forty and fifty years later, often with the aid of Sabartés, we are asked to believe that don José gave up painting and bestowed his brushes on his son, whose talent was already demonstrating more than exceptional promise. According to an interview conducted by Pierre Cabanne with Manuel Pallarés, soon to be Picasso's best friend in Barcelona, it was "made up out of whole cloth,"²⁰ and, for that matter, there are, according to Richardson, paintings by don José dated later than this period.²¹ The story, as related by Picasso forty years later to Sabartés, is better appreciated for its subtext. The boy may have decided that there was little to pick up any longer from his father's maxims on how to paint.

This siege of tedium came to an end, however, for don José. A teacher at La Llotja School of Fine Arts in Barcelona was ready to exchange his post for one in Corunna. So the Ruiz family was soon able to transfer to Barcelona. There they not only arrived with the knowledge that the move was major for the family—a

shift from a provincial town to an artistic center—but that they were arriving with a son who was exceptionally accomplished for his age. The oil of Aunt Pepa, painted during a stop for a family visit in Málaga, en route by sea from Corunna to Barcelona, is there to impress us. At the sign of such talent in a fourteen-year-old, we can understand how he had to break his vow.



Portrait of Aunt Pepa, Málaga, c. 1895-96. Oil on canvas. 23 x 20 in.

2

Barcelona was practically the world capital of anarchism. The medieval society of Catalonia, based on a rigidly hierarchical system, had totally collapsed at the beginning of the 18th century. The various classes that had given that society its shape were replaced by new classes, at least in the upper echelons, but these new classes remained alien to the country itself. They were like the forces of an occupying power . . .¹

Barcelona was the place to develop. Picasso's self-importance would develop into a rich view of himself as a rogue, an outlaw, a conquistador ready for artistic battles not yet waged. If in Corunna he had underlined *latrocinor*—"I am a pirate; I am a raider"—in his Latin grammar, such roles soon took on more reality. The art students he met at La Llotja, seen through the eyes of an adolescent, were anarchists, madmen, wild men—in short, young middle-class students like himself. Still, they could feel themselves possessed of a genuine mission. Surrounded by a stifling bourgeois world that was virtually summoning them to throw it over, they were full of the intoxication that, yes, they were the ones who would do it. Since the Ruiz family came to Barcelona in September of 1895 and Picasso, but for occasional sojourns in Málaga, Madrid, and Horta de Ebro, would live in this capital of Catalonia for the next five years, it proved to be a powerful, fearful, and stimulating adolescence. Picasso, as we shall see, had a profoundly divided nature, but it was the saving mark of his wit to proceed in opposed directions at once: For the early years in Barcelona, he explores religious subjects and sex.

Of course, the religious themes come first. His family was still immersed in

14 Norman Mailer

Conchita's death; besides, the family tradition was pious. Don Salvador (of the cigar smoke) had not only become the richest member of the family but the most devout: he and his wealth would be most approving of the new direction taken by his nephew. Since there were also substantial prizes waiting for the winners of competitions, don José all but directed his son during that first year in Barcelona to complete a major painting called *First Communion*. Indeed, don José sat as the



First Communion. Barcelona. 1996. Oil on canvas, 65 x 46 in.

model for the father, his sister Lola was the communicant, and the son of a friend of his father posed for the altar boy. It is worth noting that our fourteen-year-old not only treats these principals as individuals, each with a singular presence, but indeed the candelabra, the floral arrangement, and the altar cloth are just as carefully drafted and painted. The immanence of objects is entering his life. They speak to him as creatures virtually as alive as his models. The sentimental Catholicism of the painting is enhanced, therefore, by his primitive regard for the mysterious value of inanimate objects.

It is obvious. He will be able to make a good living as a painter of religious subjects, or, yes, he would if he were

ready to move artistically in one direction. Given the opposites in himself, however, it need not surprise us that he spends a good deal of time in his fourteenth and fifteenth years visiting the brothels in the Barrio Chino of Barcelona.

Picasso's legend would have it that he was an unusually magnetic personality from early adolescence on, and proved irresistible even then to the prostitutes he visited; before he was sixteen, he would know more about sex, went the legend, than most men will ever know. It was certainly not an image of him that he was about to dispel in later years, but it is not easy to believe. For one thing, where did he find the money?

Richardson wonders whether his fellow students occasionally treated him, "or were his boyish charms such that the motherly whores did not charge him?"²

Such an hypothesis is conceivable, of course, but one has to question how many women were loving in the Barrio Chino. While he could, with his facility for drawing, have charmed many a whore or paid for his sex with a quick sketch, a visit to a brothel was more likely to have been not only an extraordinary experience for a young art student but harsh as hell. In 1948, more than fifty years after Picasso's introduction to the Barrio Chino, the look of the quarter suggested that it had not changed in a hundred years. The buildings were very old, the streets were wet alleys, and the particular establishment shown to the American visitor by Loyalist friends (who wished to produce a prime example of conditions of social depravity under Franco) happened to be the most famous whorehouse in the quarter. In a large bare room, along a dais some sixty or seventy feet in length, forty or more women in bras and panties were bellowing out the catalogue of their specialties before a near mob of a couple of hundred men, just about all of these putative customers puffing away on cigarettes as if to raise a wall of smoke between themselves and the cacophony of sexual advertisement bombarding them. The density of smoke in that room cannot be exaggerated.

Every half-minute or so, one of the women would succeed in capturing one of the men. Holding her client by the hand, she would step off the dais and lead him promptly to a grilled window, where he could purchase a ticket in triplicate—a stub for the house, a receipt for the client, and a copy for the woman; then, still proceeding hand in hand, they would mount a staircase divided down the middle by a balustrade, the railing installed to separate up-coming traffic from down-going; on the latter side, whores in the process of saying farewell would stroll down the stairs to take up a position again on the dais. All the while, cigarette smoke mounted like storm clouds. It was 1948 and one was full of Loyalist sympathies; all the same, it seemed difficult to believe that every bit of this was uniquely Franco's fault. That brothel in the Barrio Chino possessed its own air. Such nonstop avidity had the power to echo back through a century.

16 Norman Mailer

Yet if the legend is correct, we are asked to believe that our once-delicate child, dragged daily by the maid to school, has now metamorphosed, just eight years later, into a phenomenally precocious whorehouse stud. Picasso would certainly become the first master of metamorphosis, but it is asking a lot to picture him there ready for action at the age of fourteen or fifteen. The answer may be that he would go to these places with a physically powerful friend, Manuel Pallarés, whom he had met at class in La Llotja, and that Pallarés, tall and well built, served as an unofficial bodyguard.

Pallarés, the stolid son of peasants from a small village who were well off enough to send him to school in Barcelona, was himself twenty, but he was soon captivated by the personality of the fourteen-year-old who worked at the easel next to him. In an interview with Pierre Cabanne in 1972, Pallarés, then ninety-six, recalled their early friendship with what one hopes is some measure of accuracy:

He had a very strong personality . . . He was appealing and way ahead of the others, who were all five or six years older . . . he

grasped everything very quickly; paid no apparent attention to what the professors were saying. Picasso had no artistic culture, but had extraordinary curiosity . . . took things in the blink of an eye, and remembered them months later . . .

In everything, he was different . . .

Sometimes very excited, at other times he could go for hours without saying a word . . . He could get angry quickly but calm down just as fast. He was aware of his superiority over us, but never showed it. He often seemed melancholy as if he had just thought of some sad things. His face would cloud over, his eyes become dark . . .

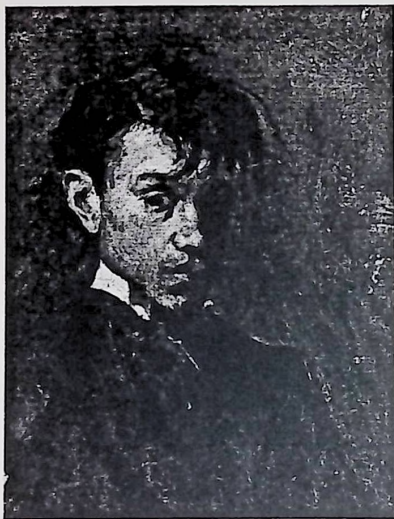


*Portrait of Manuel Pallarés, Barcelona, 1895.
Oil on board, 14 x 10 in.*

At fifteen, he neither seemed nor acted like a boy his age. He was very mature.³

There is a self-portrait Picasso did at this time that suggests a considerably more inhibited view of himself.

The twenty-year-old and the fourteen-year-old took walks down the Ramblas together, sketched together, went to cafés together; if Picasso visited the Barrio



*Self-Portrait. Barcelona, 1896. Oil on canvas.
13 x 9 in.*

Chino with anything like the frequency he claimed, Pallarés, presumably, was taking care of the tariff. Picasso, in return, would insist that his parents invite Pallarés each Sunday to dinner. After a few such get-togethers, don José and doña María came to the conclusion that the new, mature, and physically powerful friend was a wholesome influence on their temperamental son, the older brother he had never had. When alone, however, neither Picasso nor Pallarés bothered to be conspicuously adult. Picasso recalls leading Pallarés up to a roof in order to lower a coin to the ground, the ducat attached to an invisible black thread. Whenever someone bent over to pick it up, they would snatch back the money. Great glee!

At other times, they might drop pebbles on people passing below. In Barcelona's February Carnival of 1897, they went out together dressed as women. Pallarés made a male conquest—a most persistent seducer—whom he could only get rid of by knocking him down with a punch.⁴ Some friendships live on their memories. At the age of ninety, Pallarés would still come to visit Picasso each summer at Mou-gins.

During these first years in Barcelona, Picasso was busy with work. In 1896, *First Communion* was shown at the Exposición de Bellas Artes, where such locally famous painters as Ramón Casas and Santiago Rusiñol had work hung in the same

18 Norman Mailer

year; and in 1897, another painting, *Science and Charity*; received an honorable mention in Madrid at the General Fine Arts Exhibition.

Once again, don José had been the model. "Every time I draw a man," Picasso said in later years, "I think of my father. To me, man is don José, and will be all my life."⁵

In this connection there is an anecdote in *Picasso's Women*, by MacGregor-Hastie, that is without attribution but derives probably from Tristan Tzara, who by his own account was a great intimate of Picasso's from the 1920s on through the next thirty years and served MacGregor-Hastie as "an almost bottomless pit from which I mined Picasso tales long before I thought of writing this book."⁶

MacGregor-Hastie, speaking of this period, informs us that Picasso, before quitting Barcelona for Madrid

... found a way to lose his virginity. Even before the holiday, he had his eye on a young girl who drew wine in the bar above which he had his secret studio. She was a tall thin girl, unlike the voluptuous women most male virgins are attracted to, but she had a ribald sense of humour and made him laugh. She said later that one day, while she was laughing with him, he got her up against a barrel and "made himself a man." Looking at her spare body and red hair, he said to a friend that it had been "like fucking his father."⁷

The story may be worth no more than its paragraph. Tristan Tzara was not only a raconteur but a surrealist, which is about equal to saying that to him, a made-up tale had the virtue of being untarnished. Bourgeois truth, after all, was always sullied. All the same, the story, if in any way valid, might have a touch of connection to Picasso's evolving decision over the next few years to change his signature. Pablo Ruiz was yet to become P. Ruiz Picasso, then P. R. Picasso, and finally, by 1901, certainly at what pain to don José is not agreeable to contemplate, Pablo Picasso. The name fell more happily on the ear—and certainly suggested a more interesting painter—than the more commonplace Pablo Ruiz.

As Picasso was to tell Brassai in 1943,

"I'm sure [what attracted me to it] was the double 's' which is very rare in Spain . . . Have you ever noticed that there's a double 's' in Matisse, in Poussin, in Rousseau?"⁸

In any case, such a transformation was hardly routine at the turn of the century in Spain (when the pride of being born a man was still as powerful as blood), especially since he was taking his mother's name in preference to his father's. Intensi-

fying this misidentification (which, paradoxically, offered him a more profound sense of identity) was his physical resemblance to his mother—he would always belong to her short, dark, sturdy Mediterranean stock—"so small that her feet did not touch the ground when she was sitting."⁹



Science and Charity, Barcelona, 1897. Oil on canvas, 77 x 97 in.

That change of name was still a few years away. In 1897, his father must have been proud of *Science and Charity*, which looked to be obtaining a small but positive effect on his son's career. Sabartés mentions that a critic in Madrid mocked the treatment of the invalid's hand—"isn't the doctor taking the pulse of a glove?"—but the prestige of an Honorable Mention excited his uncle don Salvador, who was now married to a Malagueña of impeccably aristocratic family and living "in the Alameda, the most fashionable avenue in Málaga."¹⁰

Don José and his family went back to visit for their summer vacation in 1897, taking *Science and Charity* with them. It had been up for sale in Madrid at the

20 Norman Mailer

extremely high figure of 1500 pesetas (half of don José's annual salary), but had not sold; now, don Salvador, being presented with the painting as a gift, was sufficiently impressed to hang it in the front hall. Science and Charity! It is virtually a logo for the good doctor. Ready to join with don José in planning for the young painter's future, don Salvador agreed that the boy should be sent to the Royal Academy in Madrid; he rounded up all the relatives in Málaga to contribute their share of the expense.

The arrangement, however, did not work out. Don Salvador might have taken a closer look at *Science and Charity*. It may be sentimental, pious, and posed, but there are subtly rebellious elements. The mirror above the sick woman's head is an extraordinary object to be found in an impoverished room: the ecclesiastical and the sexual are brought together in a flamboyant frame that suggests a baroque vagina, which is to say that it is richly over-articulated. If such a visual metaphor would hardly go unremarked today, Picasso, in that era, could count on the certainty that his relatives were not about to separate an object from the word that signified it—a mirror was a mirror; what would it matter what it looked like? Emblematic of his future humor, however, it lives on the wall of that painting vibrantly at odds with the theme.

Picasso would not do much work in Madrid. Alone, resentful of his family's eagerness to direct his career, he was frustrated to discover that instruction at the Royal Academy was even more academically constrained than at La Llotja. Soon enough, he began to disappoint his father's friend and former employer, Muñoz Degrain, who, as one of the principal teachers at the Royal Academy, was planning to keep an eye on don José's son.

... right off they failed to get along. Muñoz Degrain expected to see the little boy who did sketching at the port in Málaga, but instead found a young man confident of himself, his personality, and his talent. No way to establish rapport. The gap between them was the first sign of Pablo's independence. Degrain liked his friend's son, appreciated his talent, and was wise enough to ascribe the gap to Andalusian pride. Later, he would wistfully say, "Had I been able to help him, he would have turned into a good naturalistic painter like me."¹¹

In fact, Muñoz Degrain had dispatched letters to don José criticizing in detail the absenteeism, lack of work, and general bohemianism of the prize son. Such word also got back to don Salvador, who promptly cut off the stipend. Picasso, now living on what his parents could scrape together, found himself too poor to rent a studio. He was reduced to painting in the open air, and it is possible that in

Portrait of Picasso as a Young Man 21

the course of living alone in an unheated room without close friends in the city, reduced to being a sketch-pad artist tramping the streets, he may have developed the beginning of a confidence that he could live on next to nothing as a bohemian. If so, it would serve him later in Paris.

He also struggled with illness, and spent more and more time in bed in the spring of 1898, and came down with what could have been scarlet fever. For his convalescence, he returned to Barcelona to discover that the city was in an ugly ferment. The war to subjugate the revolution for independence going on in Cuba had just taken another disastrous turn; the U.S. battleship *Maine* had been sunk in Havana harbor. It was now almost certain that America would soon be in the war against Spain. So, the old laxity in conscription procedures was no longer acceptable to the local authorities. Pallarés, to avoid the draft, had decided to go back to his native village, Horta de Ebro, which was well isolated in the mountain wilds near the border between Aragon and Catalonia. There, he could hide out.

Picasso went along. He would stay with Pallarés for the next half-year. The descriptions by other writers of this period are rich:

Every evening, when he had finished painting for the day, Picasso would go and meet his friend Pallarés, who usually painted in the oil mill his family had beside the road. Picasso loved watching the mill hands at work. Sometimes, too, he would lend a hand with whatever work was being done at his friend's home, bringing in the hay, or on winter evenings helping to make up the cakes of dried figs. According to what he later told me himself, he also appears to have spent long hours at the village forge, watching the smith working the bellows, shaping the iron and shoeing the horses. From a whole pile of sketches and drawings done at lightning speed, we can see that he took an interest in many other manual activities [and] later in life, when he was to say: "I learnt everything I know in Pallarés' village," it surely meant that he appreciated the direct contact with the life and the people of the village as a real initiation. Not only because it was a help to him in Barcelona or Paris when he had to cook his own food or do up a parcel properly, but because it was reflected later in his plastic language, in the love he revealed in many of his works for certain humble or rudimentary materials previously despised: paper, cardboard, string, nails, cloth, etc.¹²

Picasso's eye served as his intellect—no mean intellect. His eye must have provided a keen sense not only of how one lived in an agricultural community but of the ardors called for to sustain oneself. Even the trip from Barcelona to Horta de Ebro is like a rite of passage.

22 Norman Mailer

They took the train to Tortosa, where Pallarés' brother was waiting for them with a mule. They packed their easels, canvases, color-boxes, and baggage on the mule and walked, first up the fertile valley of the Ebro, with its orange-groves still in flower . . . then they struck southward across the mountains . . . rising continually into a new air and a new vegetation—arbutus, rosemary, lentiscus, rock-rose, thyme—the highland country with vast stretches of bare mountain, forests of Aleppo pine, and wastes: only a few primitive villages in the fertile parts and an occasional isolated dwelling . . . The road dwindled as they went, and in fifteen miles or so it was no more than a mule-track. In a deep and sunless gorge, haunted by vultures, it wound about on either side of a rapid stream, crossing it by fords in the less dangerous places.

For one who had never been outside a town and who had never walked five and twenty miles in his life, even with the help of a mule, this was a striking introduction to a new world . . .¹³

A few days later, Pallarés and he packed food, canvas, and oil paints and went further up into the mountains to paint, settling on a natural shelter beneath a huge boulder perched above a fast-running mountain stream that went hurtling down to a gorge below.

With only the occasional poacher to see them, they went native, Picasso recalled. They daubed their cave with paint, threw off their clothes and stayed naked. At night they slept on a huge bed of hay they had cut; they washed under a waterfall.¹⁴

Arianna Stassinopolous Huffington, on the basis of an unpublished interview with Françoise Gilot, adds a gypsy who is "two years younger than Pablo" to their ménage.

The gypsy taught him the meaning of the random chirping of the birds, and the faraway movement of the stars, and how to forge an alliance with nature, animals, trees, and the invisible. Together they watched the daily miracle of dawn and took long walks on the rough mountain paths. Theirs became a burning friendship and whether they were in the cave or back in the village, they were always together . . . The way Pallarés told the story, just he and Pablo explored Horta; the way Pablo told it, on the one occasion he talked about his passionate friendship, it was always he and the gypsy. "Pallarés was the sturdy piece of bread," he added . . . The gypsy [in contrast] was to the city boy a symbol of freedom as well as the incarnation of a sacred and awe-inspiring world. To solidify their loyalty with an age-old ritual, they took the knife that the gypsy carried

Portrait of Picasso as a Young Man 23

everywhere, cut their wrists (sic) and joined the flow of their blood. But there was a serpent in their paradise: the world outside Horta. The gypsy saw it first and decided to act in the only way he knew how—violently and decisively. He drew his knife and cried out with the same passion that Patroclus felt for Achilles many centuries and cultures before: “I love you too much. I must go away. Otherwise I will have to kill you because you are not a gypsy.” . . . He did not love less but his love had become an unbearable weight, and so that same night he vanished forever, wounding Pablo’s feelings and leaving him even more bewildered.¹⁵

While much of Huffington’s book is most readable, the passage just quoted is sufficiently overwrought to suggest that her gifts as a writer are not for passionate love and violence.

All the same, there is every possibility that Picasso had a few homosexual episodes in his youth. Richardson, who takes pains to protect Picasso’s heterosexual sanctity, uses his well-earned authority to dispose of the gypsy:

The mule boy . . . has been misrepresented by Stassinopoulos Huffington. On no evidence whatsoever, she accuses Picasso of having “a burning friendship” that burgeoned into a passionate love affair “physically as well as metaphorically true” with this child. Stassinopoulos Huffington claims he was a gypsy “two years younger than Picasso and . . . also a painter.” Pallarés, who is a most reliable witness, says he was around ten years old—about what he looks in Picasso’s drawings.¹⁶

Whether the cave proved a site of homosexual idylls or but a stage in male bonding is no longer knowable, but Picasso had his share of primitive experiences during the half-year sojourn that followed in the village of Horta de Ebro: He would soon learn more than he wished to ingest about death in primitive places.

Richardson and Patrick O’Brian both mention a village autopsy that Picasso witnessed. An old woman and her granddaughter were apparently killed by lightning. To verify whether this was so, their bodies were dissected. Shades of Frankenstein, a nocturnal



Goatherd, Horta, 1898. Black chalk on paper, 12 x 9 in.

24 Norman Mailer

autopsy was performed in the grave-digger's shed with no more for light than a lantern. On this Gothic set, the night watchman made a cut with his saw from the top of the young girl's scalp down to her neck in order to expose the brain. The night watchman also smoked a cigar (described as blood-stained) through the course of the act. Picasso soon turned ill and had to quit the shed. Patrick O'Brian, in the face of such evidence, came to the conclusion that so crude a dissection,

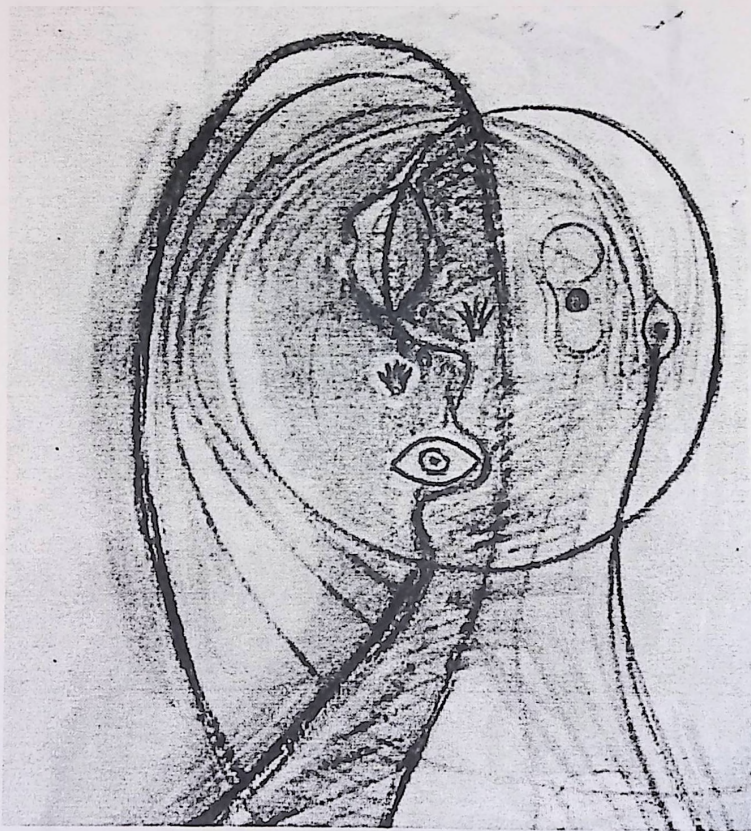


detail from Standing Woman (left), 1955. Oil on canvas, 39 x 32 in.

Portrait of Picasso as a Young Man 25

the severing one half of the face from the other, had such a profound effect upon Picasso that he would, over the years, depict endless variations of that theme. Richardson is appalled by such a notion and decides on his own authority that split heads and double profiles have a pictorial, not an autopsical, origin.¹⁷

Given the intimate ferocity of Picasso's eye, one does not have to agree with Richardson. If nothing declares the state of death more dramatically than the split-



Head of a Woman, 1925. Charcoal on paper, 24 x 15 in.

26 Norman Mailer

ting of a face, Picasso might have concluded that character could also be delineated in that manner. It will take thirty years before his portraits present half of a full face meeting a profile, but then he may have been pickling such horror through several decades. What is not debatable is the shock we feel when we encounter his double faces. The portraits impinge on us with all the contradictions of their double



Head of a Woman, August 1935. Oil on canvas, 25 x 19 in.

Portrait of Picasso as a Young Man 27

personality: We are filled with a sense of *their* authority and *our* horror. Holding this autopsy in mind, how much they do suggest anatomical dissections, if only on the dissecting table of his perception. He was, with all else, a coroner, and he delineated every anomaly in the psyche of his subject when the mood to perform a spiritual autopsy came over him.



Bust of a Woman, Royan, June 10, 1940. Oil on paper, 25 x 15 in.

3

By December of 1898, Spain had lost Cuba and the Philippines. The authority of the monarchy was now seriously impaired.

Pierre Cabanne offers a vivid portrait of the Barcelona to which Picasso returned early in 1899:

... a city of contrasts, drunkenly turning toward the northern breezes wafting in fragrances of Nietzsche and Novalis, delighting in César Franck. Alongside its anarchist troublemakers and its aesthetes, its staid bourgeois and pious industrialists, it had a horribly poverty-stricken population, living in sordid filth; thousands of wretches were penned into the notorious *barrio chino* where a dubious fauna of whores, killers, deserters, foot-pads and street urchins permeated the huge mass of workers exploited by their bosses, and now there were super-added the sick and wounded repatriated from forever-lost Cuba, forgotten and made to order for the fomenters of rebellion.¹

Sympathy for the poor may have stirred in Picasso at this time, but it would have had to war against his sizable ambition to succeed. Since that fierce ambition already detested the sycophantic attitudes necessary for commercial success as a painter, he must have felt spiritually dislocated. At seventeen, he was certainly no patriot, and felt contempt for the crumbling empire of Spain and its complacent bourgeoisie, who had managed the country so badly—as a corollary, he felt estranged from his parents. They might adore him, they might support him, but there was nothing in their philosophy to impress him unless it was his father's limited managerial talents. Already, Picasso had rejected the paternal route laid out

Portrait of Picasso as a Young Man 29

for his career. This itinerary would have him strive to win prizes at state exhibitions so that he could thereby acquire a prestigious teaching post. Once that was in hand, Pablo could plump out his income by a growing reputation as a portrait artist, a successor, conceivably, to Muñoz Degrain. That scenario brought no large spark to the adolescent eye.

Add to this a subtler alienation. He was an Andalusian in Catalan country; that was not unlike being a poor Puerto Rican in New York. Sabartés would write: "Among Barcelonians of my class, the word Andalusian [is] never pronounced without a grimace of repulsion . . . tight trousers, short vests, cordoban hats and cock and bull stories, ugh!"² If there was one clan in Spain who would claim machismo for their own, it was Andalusians; scorned by the more cultivated north, they were deemed too Catholic, too reactionary, too authoritarian. Forty years later, they would be Falangists. (Franco's rebellion found its first support in Andalusia.) By contrast, Catalans, speaking a language as separate from Spanish as Portuguese, considered themselves an old race with their own bona-fide aristocracy.

Picasso could barely comprehend the tongue when he first came to Barcelona; if he was accepted by some of his fellow students for his talent, it was in spite of being from Málaga. After speaking and listening to nothing but Catalan during his six months in Horta de Ebro with Pallarés, he was fluent, however, on his return. He had also appropriated a new identity: He was now a self-declared Catalan. That may have been the subtlest alienation of them all: At the core, he could only feel more fraudulent.

Add the paradox of being endowed with an exceptional intelligence that had to keep company with an undeveloped education. Living among nihilistic but cultured middle-class students, he must at that time have hardly been able to contribute to the coffee-house discussions of Art Nouveau and modernism, of *Jugendstil*, *Sezession*, German Expressionism, and the new work of Edvard Munch and Toulouse-Lautrec. Nonetheless, Bakunin's first principle of anarchism—"The urge to destroy is also a creative urge"³—was there for a credo. Nor would he have been indifferent to Nietzsche's declaration (which would later prove even more valuable to Hitler): "I myself am fate and have conditioned existence for all eternity."⁴

Most of all, however, he absorbed the tenets of "modernism." In Barcelona in 1899, modernism called for the artist to play all the roles that might be needed to fortify the spirit of change: One must be ready to act as painter, sculptor, poster artist, dramatist, polemicist, actor, juggler, acrobat, and/or café-owner, architect,

30 Norman Mailer

interior decorator and, by all means, impresario. One could have added: guerrilla warrior. Any notions of aesthetic hierarchy—the painter to be honored above the poster artist—were to be discarded. In hierarchies rested congealed power—oppressive, constipating, deadening. Freedom resided in the demolition of category.

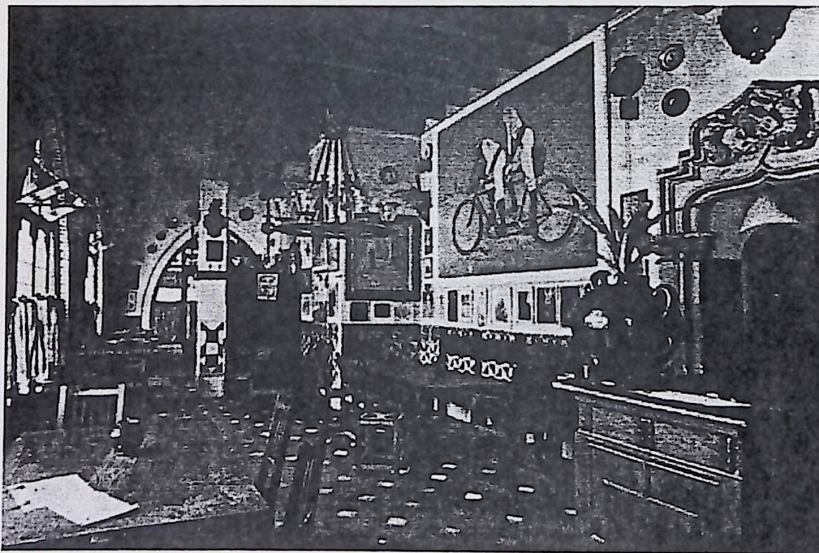
The local paladin of *modernismo* was the painter Santiago Rusiñol, who offered the following manifesto in two speeches at the Festa Modernista in 1893 and 1894, three years before Pablo's family even moved to Barcelona.⁵ The translation from the Catalan is by way of John Richardson:

[Our aim is] to translate eternal verities into wild paradox; to extract life from the abnormal, the extraordinary, the outrageous, to express the horror of the rational mind as it contemplates the pit."⁶

Its corollary: "We prefer to be symbolists and unstable, even crazy and decadent, rather than fallen and meek."⁷

By 1899, the movement had its own café, Els Quatre Gats, a coffee-house.

Els Quatre Gats c.1899



Portrait of Picasso as a Young Man 31

restaurant, and bar that soon became a center for advanced bohemian circles in Barcelona in the late Nineties. Rusiñol and Ramón Casas, Isidro Nonell, Ricard Canals, and Miguel Utrillo (father of Maurice) were the established painters who formed a nucleus, meeting there on many a night.

Since these men were about ten years older than Picasso, he did not drink with them so much as with his own younger group. It is worth noting that in Picasso's *tertulia* was Jaime Sabartés, a new friend who thirty-five years later would become his secretary, his confidant, and the all-but-official curator of the legend.

Sabartés, as is evident from the charcoal-and-watercolor Picasso did of him in 1900, not long after their first meeting, reveals his inner nature by his surface appearance (or is it that we are responding to Picasso's talent for characterization?).

Sabartés writes, "After lunch we met in Els Quatre Gats and from there I accompanied him to the studio. Henceforth, every day was the same. At times I left him at the foot of the stairs; at others, if he insisted, I went up with him. If he asked me to stay, I stayed. [Sometimes] he was more at ease once he began to work than if he were alone, for with me at his side, he did not need to think about me."⁸

It need come as no surprise that Sabartés considered Picasso's other friends as not good for much more than wasted evenings in the low-life of Barcelona, but



Sabartés Seated, Barcelona, 1900. Charcoal and watercolor on paper, 19 x 13 in.

32 Norman Mailer

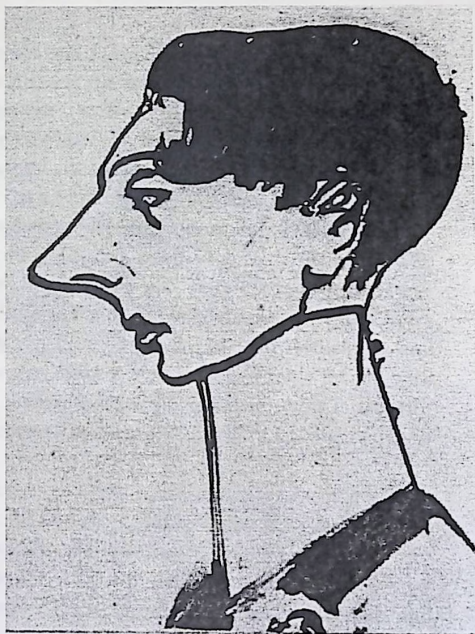
then Sabartés' most attractive virtue for his new friend may have been that he always had pocket money.

Besides, Sabartés was slavish. Even at the age of nineteen, Picasso could enjoy an absolute sycophant. In *Picasso: Portraits et souvenirs*, published almost forty years later, Sabartés takes us for a ride on the good horse Hyperbole:

... It was my first visit to his studio in Escudillers Blancs Street. It was noon. My eyes were still dazzled by what they had seen among his papers and sketchbooks. Picasso . . . intensified my confusion with his fixed stare. As I stepped in front of him to say goodbye, I was ready to bow, stunned by the magic power that emanated from his whole being, the marvelous power of a magus, offering gifts so rich in surprises and hope.⁹

Picasso was more intimate, however, with another friend, Carles Casagemas, whom Sabartés, as one would expect, did not approve of at all. One is tempted to claim (on the merits of the ink-and-watercolor that Picasso did of Casagemas, also in 1900) that there are few caricatures of a young aesthete which tell us as much. Picasso was influenced doubtless by Aubrey Beardsley, who had died in 1899 at the age of twenty-six, but then what an excellent influence it proved to be for this portrait!

The youngest child in a wealthy and established family, Casagemas was over-indulged—in fact, he



Casagemas as a Dandy, Barcelona, 1900. Ink and watercolor on paper, 7 x 6 in.

Portrait of Picasso as a Young Man 33

carries the label to new levels of meaning. Casagemas was so taken with the legitimacy of his impulses that he had a love affair with the daughter of one of his sisters. If it was platonic, that may have been the consequence of his addiction to morphine and his serious devotion to booze. He was also involved in *anarquismo*, *decadente*, and *Catalanisme* and had set up headquarters in a wing of his parents' large apartment on Carrer Non de la Rambla. There, he kept a studio in which Picasso and he not only worked together, but on Sunday afternoons, Casagemas would be at home for a salon—

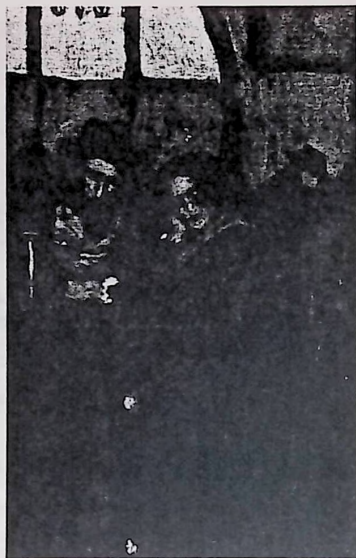
huge get-togethers where he and his friends acted out ideas selected by chance; the main participants were the Reventos and the de Soto brothers, Vidal Ventosa, Pallarés, and of course Picasso. They also indulged in doing "fried drawings": their art work was dipped in a pan of boiling oil and "fried," often with strange results.¹⁰

For a year and a half, Casagemas and Picasso were so close that their most significant separations would take place at the door to a brothel. There, Casagemas, whether on drugs, drunk, or sober, would find some excuse to leave; it is generally accepted that he was not only impotent but that it was the monumental burden of his life. Since he also had an intense interest in firearms, he must, as a friend, have been a veritable isle of peace and security. All the same, he could pay the rent. He and Picasso soon shared an unfurnished loft on the top floor of a broken-down building off an alley in the old part of town, high in the Reforma. The streets around were populated with beggars who may have offered Picasso's eye more than a few stimulations for the Blue Period yet to come. At the studio, since Casagemas had provided the lodging, Picasso did the interior decorating and painted the walls "with the things they lacked: a great bed, a table loaded with exquisite food, a safe, and even a manservant and maidservant (this latter with more than usually exuberant breasts) awaiting the orders of the two new tenants."¹¹

Years later in Paris, at a banquet in 1908 at the Bateau Lavoir given by Picasso to honor Henri Rousseau, the *Douanier* said to him: "You and I are the greatest painters of our time, you in the Egyptian style, I in the modern,"¹² an interesting remark. Egyptian tombs also had their walls decorated with drawings of food and furniture designed to make the dead noblemen feel comfortable and well fed.

In this period, Picasso, in accordance with *modernista* precepts, was trying to

34 Norman Mailer



*Interior of El Quatre Gats, Barcelona. 1900.
Oil on canvas. 19 x 11 in.*



*Menu for Els Quatre Gats, Barcelona.
1899-1900. 5 x 6 in.*

make a living with posters, illustrations for magazines, charcoal, pastel and pencil portraits of his friends, and whatever else was at hand.

By such labors he was not, however, bringing in enough money to survive. The pencil portraits sold for only a few pesetas, and his sketches for posters were never printed. On the other hand, he had the rare excitement of learning that an ambitious oil, *Last Moments*, had been accepted for the Spanish pavilion at the Exposition Universelle in Paris opening in May 1900—no small honor: The Exposition was even more than a supercolossal world's fair—it would also apotheosize the advent of a new century that appeared, by every indication, to offer a magnificent era of progress.

It is a pity that *Last Moments*, a large canvas, was later painted over by Picasso. The artist who came to signify the dislocations and horrendous metamorphoses of the prodigious century to come would not even have a photograph of



The Universal Exposition, Paris, 1900.

the painting that hung in the Spanish pavilion of L'Exposition Universelle.

Of course, he and Casagemas and Pallarés were now obsessed with going to Paris. There one could find real stimulation for one's talent, and real painters. How could one be properly accepted by the art world of Barcelona if one had not spent time abroad?

A campaign was undertaken, therefore, to convince his parents to put up some money. It is not difficult to conceive of the discussions that ensued. If doña María believed altogether in her son's divine talents, don José preferred him to remain in Barcelona or Madrid. In those two cities resided much of don José's essential estate. He had spent his life making good contacts. Now, they were not being used. That was equal to squandering them. It is the essence of middle-class intuition that art is reckless, art is putatively criminal. So it is prudent to domicile it, to surround talent with security.

Don José lost, however. Finally, he could not resist. He knew better than anyone how talented was his son. Picasso would later tell Sabartés:

"My father paid for the trip. With my mother he came to bid me good-by. When

36 Norman Mailer

they returned home all they had were a few pesetas in my father's pocket. They had to wait till the end of the month to get out of the red. My mother told me all this much later."¹³

Nor was it routine to convince Casagemas' parents. They were not without some idea of their son's essential condition, but, of course, there is usually another motif secretly at play in families that live with an unstable son or daughter—they are not necessarily loath, not entirely, to see them depart. If Picasso argued that Paris might be a tonic for the wild one, the parents must have listened—señor Casagemas came up with the wherewithal.

Before leaving Barcelona, Picasso did a self-portrait in which the Catalan words *Yo—el Rey* ("I, the King") circle his head three times. He was five-foot-three and a very young man, but then, the same could be said for Napoleon when he was nineteen. Paris was there to receive both of them.

Palau i Fabre describes their preparations for departure:

Picasso and Casagemas had identical suits made in black corduroy . . . When Pallarés learnt this from Picasso's parents, [he] immediately went off to have another such suit made for himself which in later years he described to me as follows:

"The jacket was very loose, with a round collar buttoned up to the neck so as to hide the waistcoat and, in case of extreme necessity, the absence of a shirt. The trousers were in the same material, narrow and open at the bottom with two buttons to fasten them."¹⁴

On to the capital of the world; on to the empire of sophistication!

Part II



Paris

1

At the turn of the century, Montmartre was not without comparison to the Lower East Side of New York as it is today. The hazards in occupying a studio were similar. Hoods with sexual panache—that is, *apaches*—abounded; so did whores. La Butte de Montmartre was in the process of transformation from the farms and windmills that had charmed van Gogh a little more than a decade earlier to the cobblestone streets of Paris itself.

Although he could not speak French, Picasso was hardly lonely in Montmartre—there were any number of Catalan artists in the quarter. He and Casagemas soon settled in the studio on rue Gabrielle of Isidro Nonell, who had gone back to Barcelona. Once installed, Picasso proceeded to paint at a great rate, in response to the work of Corot, Courbet, Daumier, David, Delacroix, Ingres, Manet, and a host of Impressionists that he could now see hanging in a variety of museums and galleries. He also visited the Exposition Universelle in the company of Casas and Utrillo and had the pleasure, presumably, of their veteran company while looking at his *Last Moments*.

He had just turned nineteen. He was in a fever of creativity, and continued to make the rounds of avant-garde galleries on the rue Lafitte—the names of those dealers now have a ring: Durand-Ruel, Bernheim-Jeune, Ambroise Vollard. Everywhere he encountered art that he wished to appropriate for his own style. If Picasso's intellectual insights were not verbal, the curve of a line proving quite the equal of a turn of phrase, the work of painters he found exciting could stimulate his intellect into funds of new perception.

40 Norman Mailer

He was also competitive. As soon as another painter had an impact on him, he would proceed to absorb the work, recreate it, mimic it, and so invest himself in the other painter's style deeply enough to be able to perceive reality by way of the other's vision. Indeed, until Picasso enters the Blue Period we cannot say he possesses a style. He is very talented and just about wholly derivative. Since he would, across the arc of his entire career, discover more new styles than any painter who had come before him, he has to be the foremost example of why one cannot instruct talented artists by established principles. How many teachers would have been tempted to say to him at that point in his career, "You ought to look for your own style."

Not yet. He was going to absorb the world before he would try to recreate it. "It was in Paris I learned," he said, "what a great painter Lautrec had been,"¹ and the evidence is in an ambitious oil, *Moulin de la Galette*.



Le Moulin de la Galette. Autumn 1900. Oil on canvas, 35 x 46 in.

Portrait of Picasso as a Young Man 41

How these women dominate the men in this canvas! They are lovely, coquettish, confident, intimate with each other, and not at all unsinister in their collectivity. Already we can feel the impact of Paris upon Picasso. It is in the liberation of these sophisticated French women. Their grasp of how to manipulate a man has to be one universe beyond the Spanish whores he has known. So he regards French women with the lust for action and the profound respect of a nineteen-year-old learning to be an animal trainer. Paris, itself, is an aphrodisiac.

Casagemas wrote to a friend:

"The boulevard de Clichy is full of mad places like *Le Néant, Le Ciel, L'Enfer, La Fin du Monde, Les 4 z'Arts, Le Cabaret des Arts, Le Cabaret de Bruant* and a lot more which don't have the least bit of charm but make lots of money. A "Quatre Gats" here would be a mine of gold and muscles . . .

There's nothing as good as that nor anything like it. Here everything is fanfare, full of tinsel and cloth made of cardboard and papier-mâché stuffed with sawdust . . . The Moulin de la Galette has lost all its character and l'idem Rouge costs 3 francs to enter and some days 5. The theatres too. The cheapest places and cheapest theatres cost one franc.²

Picasso, by way of Nonell, had been introduced to a thirty-year-old Catalan art dealer now working in Paris. He was named Pere Mañach and he had, in fact, paid one hundred francs for three pastels Picasso had done of bullfights. Quickly, Mañach sold them to another dealer, Berthe Weill, for one hundred and fifty francs. This quick turnover, plus the fact recounted by most biographers that Mañach, "because of his preference for young men," was "instantly mesmerized by"³ Picasso, resulted in an offer of one hundred and fifty francs each month as a draw upon the paintings he produced.

Manyac introduced Picasso to Berthe Weill, whose audacity and willingness to support young artists made her gallery at 25 rue Victor-Masse an influential center in the art world of Paris. She was referred to as *La Mere Weill*, or "little old lady Weill," but although she was short and stocky, she was in fact young and lively. When she arrived at the rue Gabrielle one day at the hour arranged by Manyac to see Picasso's work, there was no reply no matter how many times she knocked. She left angrily, sought out Manyac who had a key to Picasso's studio, and together they returned to the rue Gabrielle and walked into his room. They found him under the bedcovers with Manolo.⁴

Whether they were in a sexual act or merely playing a prank on Mme. Weill is

42 Norman Mailer

not clear. Weill writes in her book *Pan! Dans L'Oeil* that Manolo was a Catalan sculptor then in Paris, but Richardson thinks it was Casagemas. Since Manuel Pallarés had joined them by now (wearing his identical black corduroy suit), he could also have been the Manolo cited.

Pallarés told me that when he reached Paris he found nobody waiting for him at the station, though he had written to tell his friends the exact day and hour of his arrival. So he got a vehicle to take him to the rue Gabrielle where he found his friends with three models, who all immediately embraced and kissed him. Just at that moment the postman arrived with the letter he had sent. They all went off to

lunch at a restaurant at the Moulin Rouge and in the afternoon visited the Louvre. That night they had to improvise a bed for Pallarés . . .⁵



Isidro Nonell and a Female Figure. Barcelona, c. 1902. Watercolor and ink, 10 x 6 in.

Casagemas, Pallarés, and Picasso were now living together with three women. If their new French friends spoke of themselves as models, it was not wholly untrue; the women had had a go-round with Canals, Nonell, and a number of other Catalan artists in Paris, and probably had posed for them. There were Germaine Gargallo, her sister Antoinette, and a friend named Odette, who became Picasso's girl during this period even though she spoke no Spanish and he had no French. Casagemas fell madly in love with Germaine, and Pallarés was left with Antoinette. Casagemas would joke about it in his letters to Ramón Reventós:

Paris 11 November 1900
Family life is heaven. In the com-

Portrait of Picasso as a Young Man 43

ing week, which begins tomorrow, we're going to fill our lives with peace, tranquility, work, and other things that fill the soul with well-being and the body with strength. This decision has been reached after a formal meeting with the ladies. We've decided that we've been getting up too late and eating at improper hours and everything was going wrong. On top of this, one of them, Odette, was beginning to get raucous because of alcohol—she had the good habit of getting drunk every night. So we arrived at the conclusion that neither they nor we will go to bed later than midnight and every day we'll finish lunch by one. After lunch we'll dedicate ourselves to our paintings and they'll do women's work, that is, sew, clean up, kiss us, and let themselves be "fondled." Well, this is a kind of Eden or dirty Arcadia . . .

Yours Carles⁶

In fact, the situation proved a disaster for Casagemas. Lovemaking in that studio must often have been a spectacle; the humiliation Casagemas had sought to avoid by never going along with the others to brothels may now have suffered from open display. He was hardly in possession of the kind of readily available virility that could undertake the tests of an orgy, and Germaine was lusty. Doubtless the photograph of her, taken in 1900, does her small justice, but her mouth is worth a second look.

Casagemas, in the midst of such orgiastic franchise, had to have been in a state of titillation, sexual anguish, outsize jealousy, and acute homosexual panic. Sharing a bed



Germaine Gargallo, c. 1900

44 Norman Mailer

with a woman for the first time and unable to accomplish more than "fondle" her, he began to come apart so badly that Picasso, growing uneasy about his friend's sanity, decided to go back to Barcelona with him. If it seems off that Picasso would be so ready to cut his trip short when much seemed to be opening for him, it can be noted that he was also afraid of the police. Anarchists abounded among their Catalan acquaintances, and the French authorities were on the alert for subversive activity. Since Picasso had signed an incendiary manifesto, he was able to avoid an inquisitorial session with the Paris police only through the intercession of a client of Mañach's who had bought one of his paintings. This wealthy Parisian, Olivier Sain-sère, had influence with the authorities. Shortly thereafter, Picasso decided to cut short his visit. The manifesto he had signed, in concert with his paranoia, now exacerbated by what well might have been sexual excess, plus any guilty residue of his formal Catholicism, plus Casagemas' growing imbalance, must have been a psychic concoction to put him into his own panic. Besides, he had promised his parents to be home for Christmas.

It was not routine to convince Casagemas to return with him. Casagemas was referring to Germaine as his "fiancée"—no matter that there had even been a night when Germaine taunted him for his impotence. No one is more romantic than an impotent man with dreams of sexual glory. He would be all things to this new and passionate fiancée, but he was also ready to terrify her and the others with talk of suicide. He might be impotent, but he was still more courageous than the others. He would die for a premise, a principle, a passion. What an anxious state for all three men! It is to be noted that Pallarés, for all his stolid virtues, had a good deal of fear of the local *apaches* (who had doubtless been looking him over—one big fellow to another) and so he had no wish to live alone at 49 rue Gabrielle after the others left. Besides, the place must have felt spooked by now with the ghosts of bygone orgies. So Pallarés moved to another studio, and the other two reached Barcelona a couple of days before Christmas. Thus ended the first trip to Paris.

Right after Christmas, Picasso and Casagemas moved on from Barcelona down to Málaga. Andalusia's warm sun in winter might be calming to Casagemas' nerves.

It is also likely that Picasso, shamed by the panic he had felt during his near-encounter with the Paris police, was in a mood to shock his bourgeois relatives. In any case, he and Casagemas arrived

wearing the same corduroy suits they had had made in Barcelona, but after three

Bohemian months in Paris they were in a distinctly shabby, almost threadbare state.

[They] tried to get rooms at a hotel or boarding house called the "Tres Naciones" in the Calle de Casas Quemadas. But their clothes and appearance in general must have been really slovenly, because the landlady at first refused to take them in. Finally, Picasso had to apply to his aunt, María de la Paz Ruiz Blasco, who lived in the same building, in order to get himself and his friend accepted as reputable guests.⁷

He now compounded his appearance by wearing a sort of fob or pendant in which, instead of a romantic curl of hair or a miniature, there was a stuffed beetle. This invention had been made fashionable by some of the Art-Nouveau decorators, like Wolfers, and Picasso had probably brought it from Paris.

When Don Salvador saw his nephew behaving in this eccentric way—and, worse still, not wearing mourning for his aunt, Pepa, who had died a short time before—his first reaction was to give Pablo the address of a tailor and tell him to order a suit of mourning immediately.

By the time the suit arrived, the situation had become quite impossible.⁸

Picasso had taken pains to reply to his uncle by renewing his acquaintance with Lola La Chata, the same whorehouse madam who had once taken care of his father. In the south of Spain, one could look to vice as quickly as to virtue for a sense of tradition.

Casagemas, meanwhile, was wholly obsessed by thoughts of Germaine living alone; Germaine the con-



La Chata. Málaga, 1899. Charcoal, watercolor, and wash on paper. 12 x 3 in.

46 Norman Mailer

cupiscent alone in Paris! A drawing made of him one year earlier suggests his love-sick state in Málaga.



Portrait of Carlos Casagemas.
Barcelona, 1599. Colored pencils

By now, it seems not unlikely that Picasso was weary of his friend—Casagemas demanded time, all of one's time. He had become so disturbed that Picasso may not have known any longer how to keep control of him. So, he called once more on his uncle Salvador to arrange boat passage home for his unstable companion.

He would never see him again. Back in Barcelona, Casagemas became more obsessed with the need to see Germaine; indeed, he was sending her letters twice a day begging the lady to marry him. Finally, he declared that he was returning to Paris. Germaine reacted to this announcement by going back to the husband she had left to have a fling. He, good ex-mate, accepted her temporary need for sanctuary.

Casagemas had obviously built up a few hopes. He appeared again in Paris on February 16, 1901, wearing a new and well-tailored green velvet suit. Germaine met him at the train station to announce that she would never marry him. Next day, Sunday morning, Casagemas proclaimed that he was going right back to Barcelona and invited Odette, Pallarés, Germaine, and a few other friends to a farewell dinner at a local restaurant. He spent the afternoon composing a few suicide notes. At dinner, he seemed free of depression, indeed, signally elated. He even stood up to make a speech in French, and took out a letter for Germaine.

... all the others later said that from that moment on they could not remember exactly what happened. Apparently, however, Casagemas took a pistol from his pocket, while Germaine crawled under the table and placed herself exactly behind Pallarés, using him as a shield. Pallarés suddenly saw a pistol barrel pointing at him, without understanding why, and he barely had time to deflect the direction of the pistol before Casagemas shouted at Germaine: "*Voilà pour toi!*" Pallarés heard a deafening explosion just beside his wrist and felt Germaine's hand, which had been clinging to his chair, gradually loosening and sliding down. In a moment Germaine was lying motionless on the floor.

Casagemas, thinking he had successfully carried out his action of revenge, then

cried: "*Et voilà pour moi!*", fired a shot straight into his brain and fell where he had been standing, doubled up over a chair.

The people at the other tables fled from the restaurant in panic. After a few moments, they crept back, preceded by the police. Casagemas was taken first, immediately, to the nearest chemist's and from there was at once transferred to the Hôpital Bichat, where he died at half-past eleven the same night.

Germaine picked herself up and, weeping and sobbing, embraced and kissed Pallarés, begging him to forgive her for what she had done. She had played her part in the comedy to perfection.

She and Odette then took Pallarés to the chemist's, for one of his eyes had been irritated by the shots and he could hardly see. Then the two women carried him off to Odette's house, where they settled him in an enormous bed . . .⁹

Picasso would not receive the news until a few days later in Madrid, where he was now living once again. The news "left all the young men of his generation stunned, but none so much as Picasso."¹⁰

The suicide would yet have an overpowering effect on his palette, but it would be many months before he would turn to dark blue as the dominant color of his vision. The only immediate evidence of his horror at the suicide is in his assessment of how much a certain kind of woman can demand and how little she will give back. Perhaps he is trying to see with the eyes of the dead Casagemas.



Lady in Blue, Madrid. 1901. Oil on canvas, 52 x 39 in.

48 Norman Mailer

He will continue this theme in *Dwarf Dancer*, also done in Madrid. The dwarf is as full of female force as any woman he portrays. He is already underlining the cost of sex. You will never, say these paintings, enjoy a woman for less than she is worth, or at least not such women as the ones painted here, whole in their meanness of spirit and without a hint of weakness, even when they are dwarfs.

If one would ask why Picasso was back in Madrid to receive the dreadful news about Casagemas despite the miserable experience of his first visit, it is because he was now working with a Catalan friend, Francisco de Asís Soler, who had just started a new magazine called *Arte Joven* and wanted Picasso to do the illustrations. Soler, in turn,

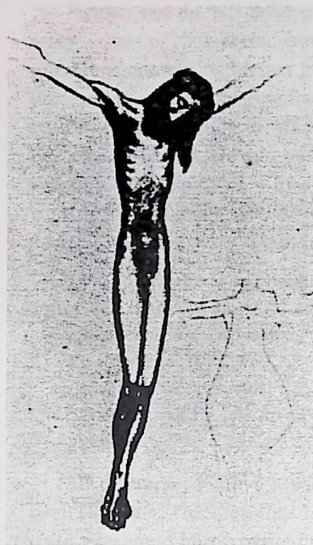
was in Madrid on business in connection with an invention of his father's . . . called the "Electric Belt." According to the prospectus, this belt was a sort of panacea for ailments of certain organs (liver, kidneys and intestines), besides being capable of curing impotence.¹¹

The magazine had to be doomed from the start. Their advertising revenue came from the electric belt, and nothing else. His move to Madrid serves, nonetheless, as an example of how many roles Picasso was ready to explore during this period. His



Dwarf Dancer. 1901. Oil. 16 x 9 in.

Portrait of Picasso as a Young Man 49



confusions were deep, his ambitions intense, his tastes divided. In Barcelona in the preceeding year, two ink drawings give us some clue to the opposites in himself. Even at the age of nineteen, he had a great deal already to offer both sides of his personal divide.

If *Arte Joven* was any part of his desire to conquer Madrid, the magazine did little. Once again, the Madrileños gave him a small welcome. Meanwhile, Pere Mañach was dunning him from Paris. Mañach had been sending 150 francs a month regularly, but where were Picasso's paintings? He needed them. Mañach had arranged a show at Ambroise Vollard's gallery.

Untitled (Christ), Barcelona, 1902. Black lead, 14 x 10 in.

Untitled (Nude women with stockings), 1900. Pen and ink



50 Norman Mailer

Picasso and de Asís Soler put out a few issues of *Arte Joven*, but their mixture of anarchism, literary innovation, and mannerist drawing found no enthusiastic audience in Madrid or Barcelona—in fact, the most extreme reaction may have come in a letter from Uncle Salvador soon after they asked him to help their finances.

“What on earth are you thinking of? What are you after? What do you take me for? This is not what we expected from you. What ideas! And what friends! . . . go on this way and you’ll see where you land . . .”¹²

All the same, Picasso must have been drawn to the idea that he, the child who could hardly write or read, was now associated with a journal that looked to guide the intelligentsia of Spain.

When *Arte Joven* folded, Picasso hurried back to Barcelona. He still had to deliver canvases for the show Mañach was giving him in Paris, and for the next two weeks he did a series of bullfights, cabarets, seascapes, and an oil of his sister Lola. To save money, he was recycling old canvases, and worked therefore in a thick impasto, a new mode for him. Fourteen days of herculean labors and he was ready again for Paris.



Self-Portrait, Madrid, 1901. Charcoal on paper, 15 x 12 in.

2

During his second and fatal two-day visit to Paris, Casagemas had stayed in Pallarés' studio at 130 boulevard de Clichy; it was there that Picasso installed himself on his return to Paris. Pallarés was now back in Horta so, for a roommate Picasso chose Mañach, his dealer. That is roughly equivalent to an actor asking his agent to move in with him, but then, Mañach was willing to pay most of the rent and accept the smaller of the two rooms available. He was, by all accounts, obsessed with Picasso—his talent, his person, his commercial possibilities.

If Picasso was much haunted by Casagemas, it was still a productive period for him. Having left Barcelona with twenty paintings, he now had one month to produce another forty in order to satisfy the opportunity offered by the gallery impresario Ambroise Vollard. Of course, Picasso was creating a large opportunity for Mañach as well. As the middleman between Vollard and Picasso, Mañach had everything to gain, or to fail to gain. Vollard's gallery on the rue Lafitte could lay claim to having promoted Renoir, Degas, Sisley, Pissarro, and Gauguin; Vollard was becoming even more renowned as the man who had championed Cézanne with his first major exhibition in Paris in 1895, and with another in 1899; in fact, his considerable prestige rested on how skillfully he had gathered recognition for Cézanne. To Picasso, the comparisons had to be daunting. Not yet twenty, he had the opportunity to move into the best company; it is characteristic of the fundamental paradox of his nature that his bravery in artistic matters would be equaled by his audacity in emotional relations at this time. Shocked and obsessed by

52 Norman Mailer

Casagemas' suicide, he was still ready to move into the studio where the dead youth had stayed with Pallarés for his final hours in Paris, and then almost immediately he commenced an affair with Germaine. The incestuousness of close friends can collect a few more permutations here. Manuel Hugué, the Catalan sculptor called Manolo, who happened to be at the Casagemas table on the night of the shooting, soon thereafter had managed to strike up his own affair with Germaine. Now, Manolo was superseded by Picasso. Manolo proved jealous for at least a week, after which he and Picasso became better friends than ever. It was as if the round of couplings had made them inseparable. Later, Fernande Olivier, Picasso's first serious mistress, would describe Manolo as



Manolo (Manuel Martínez i Hugué). Self-Portrait, Paris, 1901. Conté crayon on paper, 12 x 7 in.

bohemian, easy-going, perpetually on the look out for a bed, a dinner, or "*una peseta*", with a sharp eye for any potentially profitable leg-pull. He was the quintessential Spaniard, small, with the blackest possible eyes set in a black face beneath the blackest of black hair [and] was usually greeted by his friends with a mixture of pleasure and suspicion.¹

Richardson adds, "He was also a great liar, pick-pocket, practical joker, con man,"² and recounts how Manolo, on being disciplined once by his father, a Spanish general, burst into tears, asked permission to embrace his

parent, and in the high feeling of this penitential conciliation was able to pick the general's watch out of his pocket. To avoid military service, Manolo subsequently fled to France.

He was probably the only person Picasso permitted to mock him, criticize him, contradict him. Manolo even got away with the diabolical joke of introducing the youthful-looking "Little Pablo"—condemned to silence by his ignorance of French—as his daughter. Picasso's indignant protests were drowned out by a chorus of laughter and applause. Manolo was not alone in divining a certain girlishness in Picasso: the French Catalan sculptor Maillol, whose studio Picasso visited around this time, gives a description of him: "he was thin, he had a slight build, he was very like a young girl . . ."³

It is, yes, the incest of friends. Picasso was now inhabiting Germaine's body, the very same body that his dear friend Manolo had been keeping warm since Casagemas' death. In effect, Picasso was appropriating the psychic remains of Casagemas even as he was violating the dead friend's romance. Yet, by a more occult logic, he was also offering his sanctification to the dead man's lost relationship. Is it not just these complications that inspire such intense reactions to incest? How many can bear such close quarters between violation and sanctification?

Picasso must also have been at large in that sexual no-man's-land between heterosexual and homosexuality. Whether he and Casagemas had gone to bed as homosexuals or had played at the edges, or whether, to the contrary, Picasso, true to the severe Andalusian standards of machismo, had drawn a line over which he chose not to pass, may be less pertinent to our understanding than to recognize that he was immersed now in homosexual preoccupations. He had to have carnal knowledge, at no matter what emotional costs, of the nominal *widow* of Casagemas. Even as he would copy other painters—even to mastering their signatures—as one more means of entering into their mentality, so did he absorb the loss of his friend by searching for Casagemas' presence in the body of the woman he had chosen for marriage.

If, in the process, he became the dead man's sexual overlord and (to put it at its worst and most extreme) the thief of Casagemas' romantic hopes beyond the grave, it was also an act of love; it may even have been a species of expiation—to fornicate with Germaine was to invoke Casagemas rather than to dispel him.

He also had a great burst of creative energy. Arriving in Paris with twenty canvases, he managed in a few weeks to add the forty more needed for the on-

54 Norman Mailer



Child with Doll (Le Roi Soleil).
1901. Oil on cardboard.
20 x 13 in.

Nude with Stockings. 1901.
Oil on canvas. 26 x 20 in.



coming show. Much was hurried, and no significant vision emerged, but the work was spirited, colorful, sensual, charming, and highly purchasable. Virtually no trace of Casagemas appears, nor any hint of the Blue Period soon to come.

Lacking his own gallery, Mañach was all the more a manager; he told Picasso to do a portrait of Gustave Coquiot and "offer it to him."⁴ Coquiot, who was a critic-for-hire, wrote, in the guise of a preface to the show, a rave review. Since he also had the contacts needed to satisfy his cottage industry in aesthetics, Coquiot placed his panegyric in a newspaper, *Le Journal*, one week before the show opened.

This very young Spanish painter, who has only recently come among us, is a pas-



Woman with a Cape (Jeanne).
1901. Oil on canvas. 25 x 19 in.

Boulevard de Clichy (left). 1901.
Oil on canvas. 24 x 15 in.

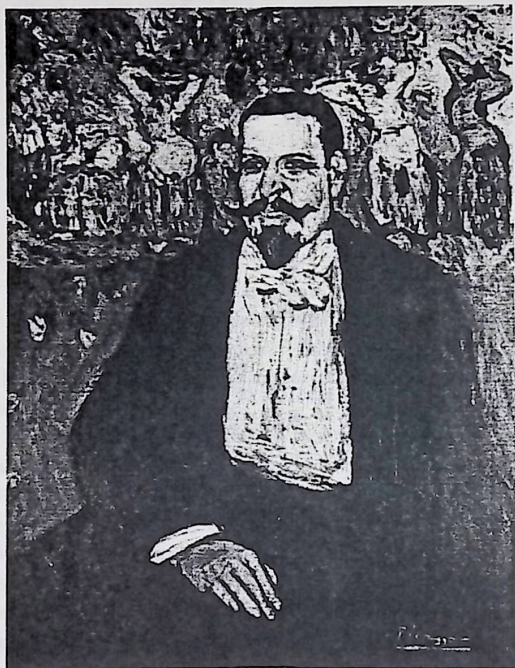
sionate lover of modern life . . . Here we have a new harmonist of bright tonalities, with dazzling tones of red, yellow, green and blue. We realize at once that P. R. Picasso wants to see and express everything . . . Here, to begin with, are his street women, the whole range of them, with fresh or ravaged faces. We see them at the café, in the theatre, in the bed even . . . For the high-class ones he chooses seductive tones with nuances of pink or mother-of-pearl flesh, while the pickpocket and murderess is seen lying in wait for her prey or reducing him to exhaustion in some sordid garret . . .

Here (too) are the happy, mischievous little girls in exquisite pink and grey, with their wild dances and fluttering skirts . . . the beauty of lively dance-halls, cafe-concerts and racecourses with their excited crowds. Here for instance is a

56 Norman Mailer

dance at the Moulin Rouge, with the boys gyrating in front of the girls who dance a frenzied cancan, legs wide apart, fixed on the canvas like agile butterflies as they swirl around in a flurry of skirts and underwear . . .

Such, at the present time, is the work of Pablo Ruiz Picasso—an artist who paints all round the clock.⁵



Portrait of Gustave Coquiot, 1901. Oil on canvas, 39 x 31 in.

For payment, Coquiot received the oil portrait of himself in blacks and whites with strong reds and yellows—a close study of venality! Coquiot might applaud his work, but Picasso was mortgaging away no portion of his objectivity.

A critic of greater integrity, Georges Faillet, who used *Félicien Fagus* as a pseudonym, wrote a highly favorable but admonitory review in the prestigious *La Revue Blanche*.

He paints—and beautifully; his appreciation of “substance” bears sufficient witness to the fact. Like all pure painters he

loves colour for itself, and every substance has its own colour. In addition, he is attracted by every subject, and everything can be a subject for Picasso: flowers expand furiously outside the vase, while the air around them has a dancing luminosity; the multicolored specks of a crowd against the green of a race-course, or against the sunlit arena of the bull-ring; the naked bodies of women, all kinds of

Portrait of Picasso as a Young Man 57

women, or their downfall after exposure and punishment, seen through the flexible use of their multicoloured clothing . . .

In the same way that he explores any subject to the full, he is capable of using any idiom, slangy or obscurantist, and even borrowing from a friend. Apart from the great precursors, it is easy to detect numerous likely influences: Delacroix, Manet (clearly indicated with his Spanish connection), Monet, van Gogh, Pissarro, Toulouse-Lautrec, Degas, Forain, and Rops perhaps . . . All are momentary; he abandons them as easily as he adopts them: he is clearly in such a feverish hurry that he has not yet had time to forge his own personal style; his personality is underlined by this fever, by this impetuous, youthful spontaneity (happy not to have reached twenty and to be able to do three canvases a day). For him the very danger lies in this impetuosity, which could easily lead him into facile virtuosity and easy success. It is one thing to produce and quite another to produce something worthwhile, just as violence and energy are two different things. And such a lapse would be particularly lamentable in this case.⁶

The praise may have been bountiful, but a basic wound was touched—would he always lack his own style? In the unaccustomed headiness of having a little money in his pocket (since half of these canvases were sold and the show was considered a success), his preoccupations in the months following the show turned gloomy.

Sabartés had come to Paris and was now living on the other side of Paris, in Montparnasse. Since their friendship traveled on the pleasure of conversation, they were capable of walking many miles at night. When one visited the other, he would be escorted home, only to find himself walked back to where they had started. Round trips between Montmartre and Montparnasse were no small hikes, but Picasso must have been riding many an anxiety. His relation to Mañach is never specified by biographers too clearly. Arianna Stassinopoulos Huffington suggests that the dealer was a homosexual, and Palau i Fabre speaks of him as “the black sheep of a respectable family,”⁷ while Richardson once again quashes these implications, although not authoritatively. The suggestion persists that Mañach was a homosexual bull and Picasso was afraid of him, longed to be free, yet could not pry himself loose. If these remarks are without high focus, it is because none of the witnesses to this period do more than hint at the difficulties—it is certain, in any event, that Picasso did not like to be alone with Mañach and would often stay out half the night to avoid him.

It is also interesting that about this time he does portraits of Mañach and him-



Portrait of Pere Mañach, 1901. Oil on canvas. 39 x 26 in. Self-Portrait, 1901. Oil on canvas. 32 x 23 in.

self that most certainly exhibit some sharing of resemblance (even to the distorted length respectively of the right and left shoulders). Since the self-portrait hardly looks like a nineteen-year-old painter, is it wholly unlikely that he was wondering whether sexual cohabitation between two men might not produce a certain congruence of appearance.

In reaction, perhaps, to all those works of overflowing *joie de vivre* that he did for Vollard, now, not one month after his show, Picasso would paint an incredible oil of the dead Casagemas. It is only eleven by fourteen inches, but it may be fair to speak of it as his first major painting, and he felt sufficiently private about it to show this work to very few friends. (See next page).

He takes us a distance with the candle flame. It is the first of Picasso's paintings to lead us into deeper perceptions than we might arrive at on our own, or by familiarity with other painters. He is making his own statement at last, and it could be argued that there will be a direct line of development over the next decade from the Blue Period, soon to appear, into the vast aesthetic range of Cubism. Picasso has entered the world of visual equivalents.



Head of the Dead Casagemas. 1901. Oil on panel. 11 x 14 in.

One can ponder the concept. An artist's line in a drawing can be the equivalent of a spoken word or two. The bend of the fingers can prove equal to a "dejected hand," or the outline of the upper leg muscles speak of an "assertive thigh." Form is also a language, and so it is legitimate to cite visual puns—that is, visual equivalents, and visual exchanges. No matter how one chooses to phrase it, artists, for centuries, have been painting specific objects, only to discover that they also look like something else. A flower's petals in the sardonic view of Picasso at the age of seventy-three (by which time he trusted nothing in man, cosmos, or nature) could as easily be perceived as a cluster of grasping hands.

It can be taken as a joke, a visual pun, but he has discovered that a candle flame not only looks like a vagina, but indeed just such a form should be present, since a vagina, after all, helped to destroy Casagemas. Be it said that Richardson has also seen it as "an incandescent vagina."⁸ Of course, that portion of the paint-

60 Norman Mailer

ing also remains a candle flame—polar are the nodes of lust and grief—but in this symbol they are speaking for one another: The candle flame also embodies the sorrow of Casagemas' mother sitting in vigil, and Picasso broods with her. After all, she is the same mother he convinced but a year ago to allow her son to go to Paris.

On the other hand, the candle flame and/or vagina not only speaks of a mother in mourning but allows Germaine Gargallo to be present. It opens the supposition that every good painter is a philosopher, ready to speak, if mutely, to other artists rather than to people outside the world of painting. So, Picasso might find no obstacle to suggesting that we are not only delivered into the world by way of the vagina but can also be destroyed by one, only to be mourned in turn by another. If

it is only the view of a young Spaniard, he is nonetheless committed to his private perception that nature gives us hints of her profundity and her buried secrets; and the language—call it the key—that nature shares with humankind is form.

A second portrait of Casagemas was to follow. As if Picasso is haunted by how luminous is the boundary between life and death, he now paints an oil on cardboard, *Casagemas in His Coffin*, twenty-nine by twenty-two inches, done in blue, and adds to it another portrait in blue of Sabartés.

As Sabartés was to say of that portrait, neatly tying together his nearsighted-



Casagemas in His Coffin, 1901. Oil on cardboard, 25 x 23 in.

Portrait of Picasso as a Young Man 61

ness and the vanity that would not permit him to wear glasses in a public place:



The Poet Sabartés (also known as Le Block), 1901. Oil on canvas. 32 x 26 in.

The canvas was facing the wall when I arrived. When Picasso put it up on the easel, I was astonished to see myself just as he had surprised me in the café, in a fugitive moment of my journey through life. Contemplating myself fixed upon the canvas, I understood what it was that had caught my friend's inspiration: here is the specter of my solitude, seen from without. Because the gaze is lost in the darkness it cannot pierce, thought wanders, and because the vision is myopic and the mind cannot leave the gaze behind, thought and gaze unite and are lost in the void.⁹

Yes, the Blue Period has commenced. This portrait of Sabartés will launch it. For a few years Picasso's paintings will breathe on the edge of the void, inhabiting an empty midnight plain where life itself hovers on the edge of extinction. Picasso is about to enter the darkest and longest depression of his life.

Casagemas' suicide now permeates his vision. Sexuality departs from his work, and dread collects on each canvas. One can only speculate about his unvoiced fear of punishment. He feels full of complicity—not only did he encourage Casagemas to leave Málaga, but he had rushed into bed with the virtual widow of his friend. These first paintings of the Blue Period are hardly to be comprehended if we do not assume that Picasso was in a long slow-dissolving panic at the depth of his responsibility for Casagemas' demise.

62 Norman Mailer

To add to his woe, Mañach was opposed to the new turn in his painting. So was Vollard. Picasso had made a name for himself as a young phenomenon who could cheer a living room with his warmth, his vitality, his libido itself. Now canvas after canvas echoed the bottomless misery of the world. Vollard rejected it whole; Mañach hectored him; and Picasso decided to go back to Barcelona. It is significant that he now had no funds. Had he squandered them? Or had he caught a difficult-to-treat syphilis? While this question cannot be answered, it does give a further explanation for his lack of funds and his depression. It would also account for his new-found interest in the women's prison at Saint-Lazare where prostitutes were treated for the same disease.

Once again he was reduced to writing to his father for the fare. While he waited for the answer, Mañach applied pressure.

Days passed. Sabartés goes into Picasso's state at this time and culminates his descrip-

tion with an account of how he and Picasso came back to the studio late one night with the keen trepidation that Mañach might be waiting:

At nightfall we went out together, climbed up the Place Ravignan, [but] left Durio's studio very early for Picasso wanted to get home to see his mail. We went up in single file, like children afraid to face the dangers we imagined ahead. But



Women at the Prison Fountain, 1901. Oil on canvas, 32 x 25 in.

Portrait of Picasso as a Young Man 63

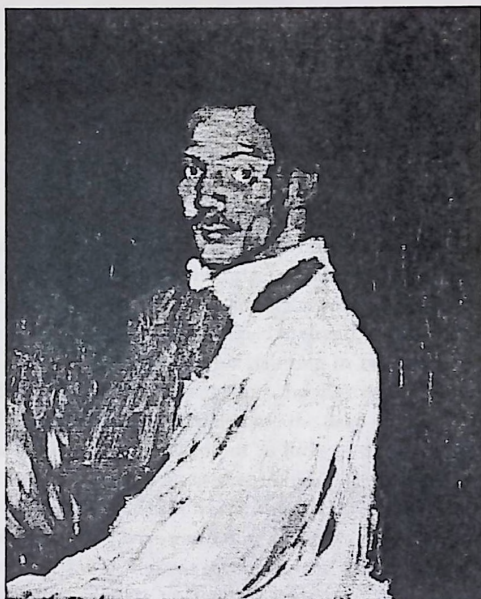
when Picasso opened the door, fear vanished, the letter [from don José] was on the floor. On the bed, fully dressed, Mañach was lying on his stomach, talking to himself, as if delirious:

"The letter! The letter!"

Picasso gave him an ugly look, made a scornful grimace and let us into the studio without uttering a word. What for? The three of us were surely thinking the same thing. His eyes surveyed the walls, the floor, the ceiling, and we all went out again into the street. Doubtless he could not work there any longer. He needed a change of environment.¹⁰

Picasso took the train to Barcelona a couple of days later. A self-portrait done before he left Paris is certainly not close here to Maillol's impression of him as girlish.

Self-Portrait: Yo Picasso, spring 1901. Oil on canvas, 29" x 24" in



3

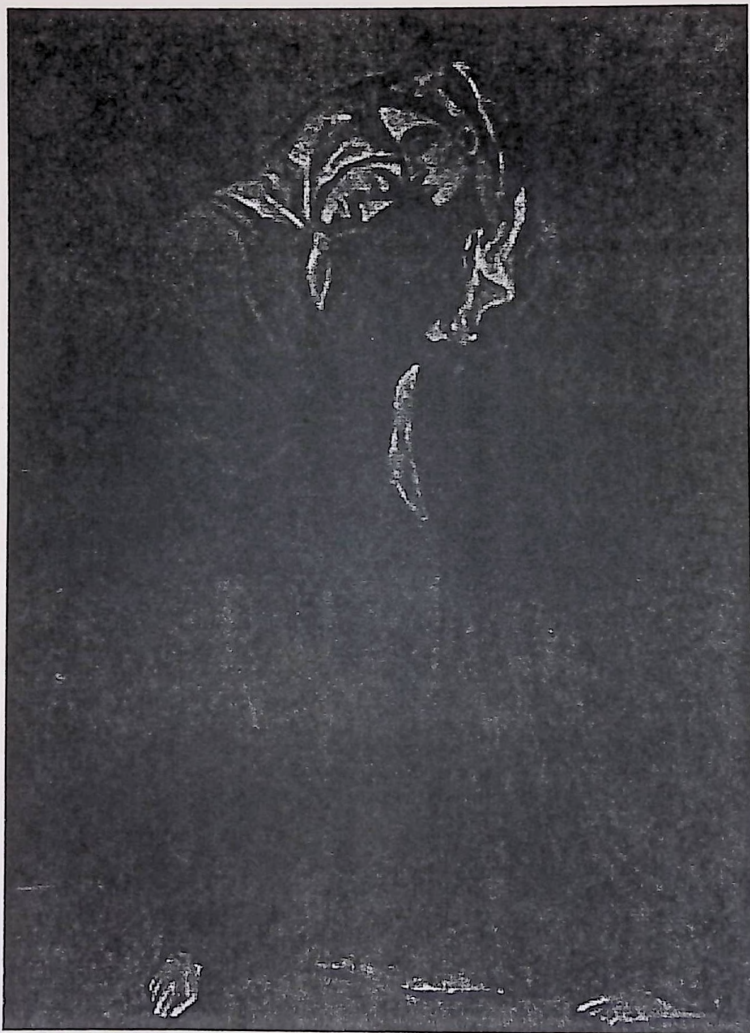
Picasso went back to Spain in January of 1902 and would not return to Paris until the end of the year, and then it was only for a few months before he came back to Barcelona and would work there until the spring of 1904. Short of money, depressed, at odds with his parents, steeped in dread, he was immersed in the Blue Period. If he had been criticized for painting in twenty borrowed styles, now, months after the death of Casagemas, he was exploring a concept that was simple enough: Nothing but a blue palette!—the deep depression of dark blue. Small wonder that painters had staked out so little of that ground and it was available as a territory that belonged altogether to him.

Who can measure the power of artistic investiture? Owning the one powerful style of the Blue Period for a few years may have given him the artistic strength to migrate into a multitude of other styles over the next seven decades. Be it said that each style he took up was sufficiently arresting to stand as a complete oeuvre for another painter, even a major painter. Of course, Picasso had to pay the spiritual impost for the first style: In the early years of the Blue Period he was seriously depressed and may have been closer to suicide than he would ever be again.

Entering the Blue Period, his depression poured out of him like unstanched blood. If he suffered in his own gloom, the irony is that these morose works can also qualify as sentimental art since they are just tender enough to become prodigiously popular in decades to come.

One would not wish to suggest that Picasso was not also inveighing against the inequity of the world, but the Blue Period also speaks from the depth of his sexual

Portrait of Picasso as a Young Man 65



The Two Sisters. Barcelona, 1902. Oil on panel, 59 x 39 in.

66 Norman Mailer

fear. In later, more prosperous times, Picasso would always be ready to certify the legend that he had always been a voraciously active sexual animal, happy consort to the brothels of Barcelona and the whores and models of Paris, and there seems small doubt that sex, from an early age, was the preoccupation of his life (indeed, for that matter, has there ever been an artist able to capture the sight *and* the smell of carnality more closely than Picasso?), but it will blur our real comprehension of him to assume that he was a simple stud gifted with indefatigable virility and absolute confidence as a performer. The variations in his self-portraits give more than a glimpse of the distance he saw between strength and weakness in himself. A large portion of his young manhood can even be seen as a search for his sexual identity. But there is little question that in this period, one drawing after another is there to remind us of the impotence of the male and the overbearing carnal presence of the female. Even his flowers burgeon with female power.

Still Life with Flowers (Peonies).
spring-summer 1901. Oil on canvas.
20 x 13 in.



Woman in Stockings. 1901. Oil, 25 x 19 in.



Portrait of Picasso as a Young Man 67



The women in his family also appear as formidable. In the portrait of his sister Lola done in 1901, she cannot be more than seventeen.

It would be hard not to believe that in these years he sees women as harbingers of mortal threat, principles of execution severe enough to have killed Casagemas.

Portrait of Lola, 1901. Oil on wood, 14 x 9 in.

Nude Lying Down (also called Female Nude), spring-summer 1901. Oil on canvas, 27 x 35 in.



68 Norman Mailer



Untitled (Nude with squid), Barcelona, 1903. Pen, sepia, and wax crayon, on trade card, 5 x 4 in.

Untitled (Nude in hammock), Barcelona, 1903. Pen, sepia, and wax crayon on trade card, 5 x 4 in.



Reclining Nude and Figures, Barcelona, 1903. Wash and gouache, 10 x 14 in.

Portrait of Picasso as a Young Man 69

There is also a drawing of Germaine Gargallo in a Phrygian headscarf of the kind obligatorily worn by the syphilitic prostitutes then housed in the prison of Saint-Lazare. It returns us to the possibility that Picasso might have contracted a venereal disease. Syphilis in the era before penicillin could produce any man's Blue Period—the treatment was exceptionally painful.

A venereal disease can also generate a perverid sexual obsession. Picasso at one point in this period wrote a note on a drawing he had done of a female nude: "*Cuando tengas ganas a joder, jode*"—"When you want to fuck, fuck"¹—which has been generally interpreted by his biographers as a species of logo—heartily



Germaine in a Headscarf, Barcelona. 1902.
Oil on canvas. 15 x 16 in.

Self-Caricature and Other Sketches, January 1, 1903. Pen on paper, 5 x 4 in.



tumescent, promiscuous Picasso. It can also be seen, however, as his attempt to find sanction. When a diseased man wishes to fornicate, which indeed can be a passionate impulse—one's phallus, after all, is not only venereally inflamed but stimulated—the question has to present itself: Is one, therefore, twice evil? It is worth repeating that Picasso was far from having sloughed off the last of his Catholicism. One need only take a look at his *Simian Self-Portrait* in 1903 to get some notion of his view of himself in heat. It is a low por-

70 Norman Mailer

trait, but he is hardly unsatisfied with himself. Only a real man can be this much of a satyr, he is also saying.

The suspicion still remains that he may have been, for considerable periods through those years, obsessed with impotence. It appears in this drawing from his sketchbook:

Can we begin to contemplate what public reaction in 1903 might have been to this crucifixion? Here, the head of Christ can also serve for the button of the clitoris! It is enough to paralyze a young artist from exploring further into any philosophy of form. Perhaps it did inhibit him. Surely it is no accident that the figures of so many of his men at this time are bereft of their genitals. Part of Picasso's profound depression in the Blue Period has to derive from a sense that his artistic insights were leading him into more and more dangerous discoveries. What, he had to



Celestial Vision (Crucifixion). 1903. Pen and ink, 12 x 9 in.

Portrait of Picasso as a Young Man 71



*Parody of Manet's Olympia with Sebastián.
Junyen-Ídal and Picasso. Barcelona. 1901. Ink
and colored pencil. 5 x 4 in.*

*Preparatory drawing for La Vie. Barcelona. 1903.
Conté crayon on paper. 6 x 4 in.*

have asked himself, if he proved not brave enough to become the artist he wished to be? By contrast to the powerful women he depicts, the men in a great many of his drawings are singularly neutered now.

Even his couples go limp in their embrace:



72 Norman Mailer

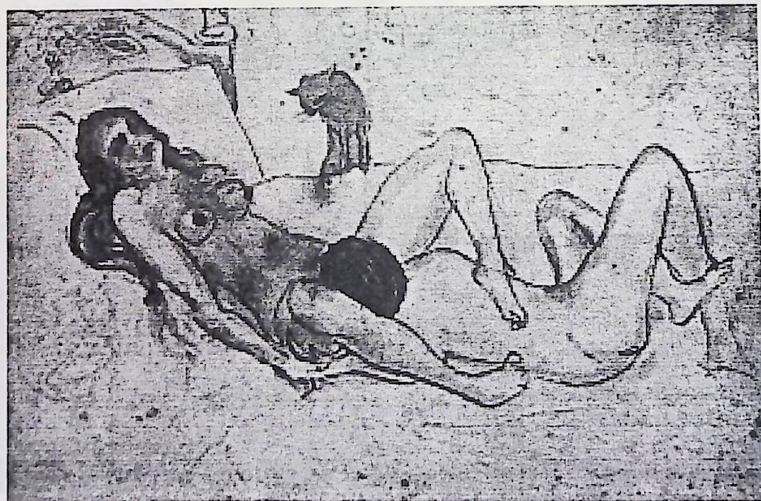


*Embrace,
Barcelona.
1903. Pastel
on paper.
35 x 22 in.*

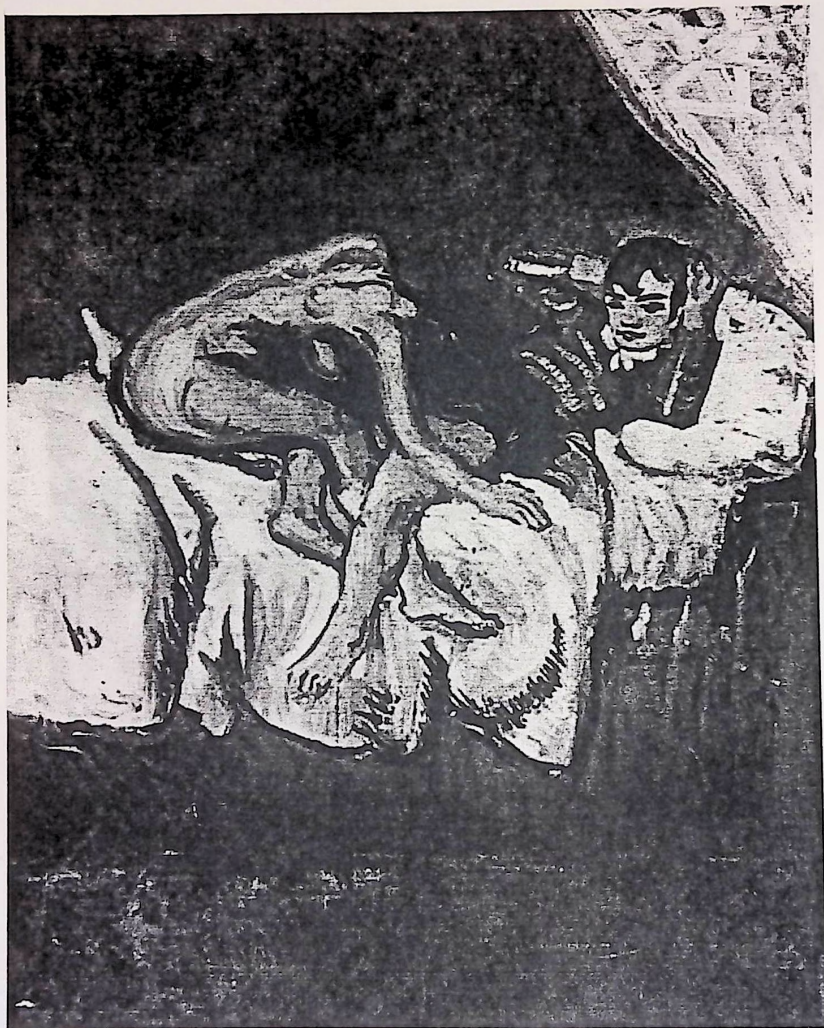
*Lovers Making
Love (above
right), 1901
or 1902.
Watercolor
on sketchbook
paper, 5 x 7
in.*

*Two Figures
and a Cat
(below right),
Barcelona, c.
1902.
Watercolor
and pencil,
7 x 10 in.*

Portrait of Picasso as a Young Man 73

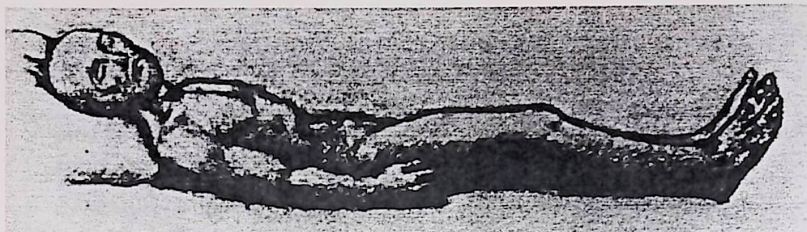


74 Norman Mailer

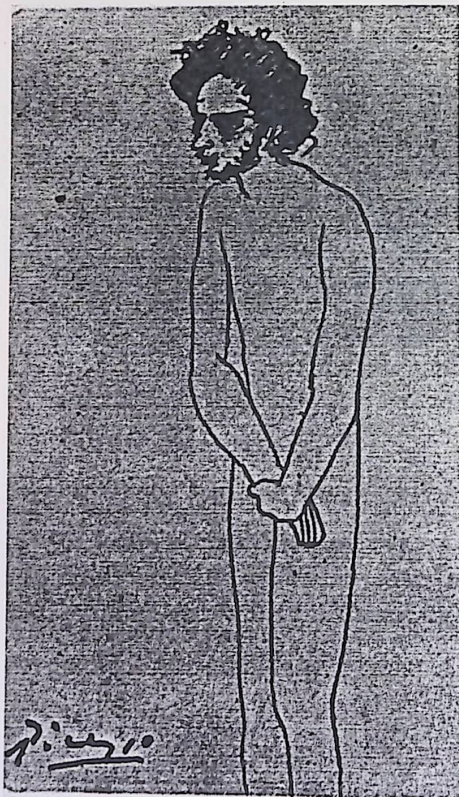


Portrait of the Artist Making Love, 1903. Oil on canvas, 26 x 21 in.

Portrait of Picasso as a Young Man 75



Dead Man, (above) 1902. Crayon on paper, 7 x 12 in.



Casagemas Naked (left). Barcelona, 1903-04. Pen and blue crayon on trade card, 5 x 4 in.

76 Norman Mailer

This mood prevailed from 1902 to early 1904, and in that time Sabartés, self-nominated Sancho Panza, becomes his intimate more than ever; no surprise, then, if Sabartés is proprietary about the Blue Period. Picasso, in the midst of this depression, obviously has greater need now of the all-but-flaccid friend. Indeed, by 1902, after Sabartés followed Picasso back from Paris, he was pleased to see that his friend's work continued in the same vein.

What I could see was sufficient. His pictures continued to bear the blue characteristics which bound my ideas to his, reminding me of the period spent in Paris almost by his side. Had I found him following another road now, I would have thought he was doing so deliberately in order to detach himself from what had only recently united us.²

Apart from these personal elements, a portion of Picasso's gloom can certainly be attributed to the world around him. Social conditions in Barcelona were deteriorating. Anarchists and conservatives were both on the march: the slums of Barcelona were renowned throughout Europe for their abysmal living conditions; strikes and general strikes had increased; workers had been shot in the street.

Picasso joined no socialist nor anarchist groups, but the slums through which he often wandered offered a squalor to intensify the melancholy he brought to his canvases. We must never lose sight of his prophetic sensitivity to the real intimations offered by events. The injustice of social life in Europe at the turn of the century was probably as palpable to him as leprosy or earthquake—a sizable remark—but then, who has ever given us more intense portraits of concentration camp victims before half of them were even born? *The Blind Beggar* and *The Old Jew*, both painted in 1903, can serve as emblems for 1944 in Auschwitz.



The Blind Man, Barcelona, 1903.
Watercolor on cream wove paper mounted
on canvas. 21 x 14 in.

Portrait of Picasso as a Young Man 77



The Old Jew, Barcelona, 1903. Oil on canvas, 49 x 36 in.

78 Norman Mailer

His personal life during this period is not nearly so hopeless as the tone of his work, and is replete, as always, with contradictions. Art, even at the most demanding level, can, on occasion, free an artist of an obsession. Obviously, his own mood was not always as stygian as his canvases down in the depths of the Blue. During the same season, he can offer us a pen-and-watercolor that is high-style in its smudges, and fine and hellish in its humor: there is menstrual blood in the bidet, and the whore is contemplating it with the same low-key woe that a musician might bestow upon a guitar that has just snapped a string. But let us not speak prematurely of all the guitars to come. He is still in the foothills of his lifelong preoccupation with the Lord's hiding places and secrets, and his only tool is his instinct that objects which look alike must have unspoken similarities in their nature. It is worth underlining over and over: Form is as much of a presence to him as sound is to others. We are deducing a great deal from one casual drawing, but that is fair. The monumentality of Picasso's art is that it will become more and more difficult to come upon any of his scribbles that does not tell us a great deal indeed.

All the same, he is depressed, deeply depressed, through 1902 and 1903.

Since depression often serves as the insulation that surrounds an ambition which has become too livid, he may also have been wounded by reading another critical piece by Félicien Fagus about young Spanish painters, including Picasso:

They do not yet have their great man, their conqueror . . . who will give shape to a limitless universe . . . Which of them—the time is ripe—will become their Greco?³



Female Figure, Barcelona, 1903. Pen and watercolor on paper, 5 x 5 in.

Portrait of Picasso as a Young Man 79

On October 25, 1902, he would also be twenty-one and eligible for military service. Since he is forever confounding us with his special mix of bravery and cowardice, it can come as no surprise that he has a horror of going into the army. Some of his adult fears were as deep as his early terror of school. What price must his pride have paid to ask Uncle Salvador to come forth with the quit-price—or was it his mother who had to do the begging?

We know that Picasso, too, bought his way out of military service, and he himself told me that it was his uncle Salvador, the elective head of the family, who provided him with the necessary two thousand . . . pesetas.⁴

Army service now settled, Picasso was on his way to assault the artistic bastions of Paris for a third time. It was just before his twenty-first birthday and three of the worst months of his life awaited him.

4

From the beginning, all went wrong. It had taken most of his funds to buy a ticket from Barcelona to Paris; then, as the first act of his visit, he brought his new work to Durand-Ruel's gallery and was turned down. If he went on to Vollard, there is no record of anything happening there. The Blue Period inspired no enthusiasm. At the end of the week, his money was gone and Picasso had to share an attic room in the Hôtel du Maroc on the rue de Seine with a sculptor named Agero. The garret was so small and the ceiling sloped so abruptly that one man had to lie on the bed if the other was to move around. Moreover, it was filthy and dark.

To keep warm, he would visit the galleries of the Louvre. The poverty he had been painting had now become virtually his own. From the age of three, Picasso was a believer (given the Málaga earthquake) in a catastrophic view of history—things go along as usual until there's a catastrophe! So this sudden inability to sell his work must have given him a nightmarish vision of the perverse power of fashion. Certainly, the fear of being out of fashion would keep him much on edge for the rest of his life—there would never come a time, no matter how renowned and wealthy he became, when he felt financially or artistically secure.

Later, Picasso would characterize his time at the Hôtel du Maroc as abysmal. Sabartés quotes from a letter Picasso wrote to another friend, Max Jacob, "I am thinking, too, about the days of poverty, and I become sad when I think with disgust of those Spaniards at the Rue de Seine," to which Sabartés adds,

Picasso's disgust with the Spaniards of the Rue de Seine came from an inability to stomach some grotesque incidents . . . Picasso refused to speak about this matter

Portrait of Picasso as a Young Man 81

... preferring not to stir the mud with which he was besmirched during a difficult period at the Hôtel du Maroc.¹

Palau i Fabre adds:

Picasso retained very unpleasant memories of a group of Catalans in the Rue de Seine . . . This leads me to suppose that one fine day they invited Picasso and Agero to some meal or other, or even invaded the attic room in order to organize some sort of party there that must have degenerated into a most lamentable orgy.²

To live in a small room with another man when each has to take turns lying in bed, to be a figure in the corridors of a cheap hotel where other men were looking for an orgy, would not be comfortable, no, especially when he was poor and economic offers may have been coming in for his body rather than his work. One can make too large a case of the nude he did of himself in this period—modest, unadorned, a little seedy, certainly depressed, and taking the vow of allegiance to . . . to what? To his continuing heterosexuality? It is tempting to read too much into this drawing.

In such a pass, he is rescued by one more homosexual, Max Jacob. He had met Jacob in 1901, during his previous trip to Paris, and Jacob was inspired to a romantic passion even greater than Sabartés' idolatry. Certainly there were fewer circumlocutions. Arianna Stassinopoulos Huffington gives a full description of the first meeting.

Max was twenty-five years old when he met Picasso. He had arrived in Paris from Brittany three years earlier, determined to become an "artist"—a poet and a painter. "Stick to poetry" was Picasso's advice, and to a very large extent Max took it. He called Picasso "my little boy," but listened carefully to what the little boy had to say. At first, of course, any listening and talking had to be done in sign language: "Picasso spoke no more French than I did Spanish," he remembered



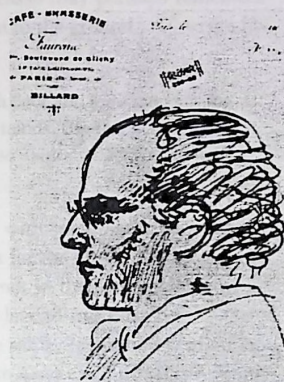
*Nude Self-Portrait, 1902-03.
Pencil on paper, 11 x 5 in.*

later of his first meeting at the boulevard de Clichy studio, "but we looked at each other and we shook hands with enthusiasm." Despite the absence of a common language, they took to each other right away . . . 3

Jacob would write: "As for Picasso and me, we spoke in sign language until morning."⁴ Soon enough, he would describe Pablo as "perfectly handsome, a face like ivory . . . in which eyes shone, much larger than they are today, while the crow's wing of hair was like a caress on his low forehead."⁵

Let us go on with Huffington's description of Jacob:

This short, prematurely balding intellectual, who wore a monocle with the sensuality of a woman wearing a garter belt, had already gained considerable influence in the demi-monde of poets and painters which he had made his home. He would launch some and help the careers of others already launched, but none would he love as deeply and as unconditionally as he loved Picasso. A tormented homosexual all his life, Max called homosexuality "an atrocious accident, a tear in the robe of humanity."⁶



Max soon took him in. Picasso moved to 137 boulevard Voltaire, where Jacob had a larger room than the attic space offered at the Hôtel du Maroc, and Picasso soon began to acquire something of an education in French literature. Max would often recite Verlaine:

Portrait of Max Jacob, 1904. Pen.
10 x 5 in.

*I believe in coloured hours,
Blue and rose, when your delights
Are bared for me through sleepless nights.*⁷

Picasso's debt to Jacob is not small. He was to learn a great deal from the poet, including some real capacity to speak French. The true gift, however, may have been his introduction to poetry. It can be proposed that for Picasso, metaphor was more accommodating than logic. Reason, with its formal avenues, its derestation of swamps, backwaters, and crooked alleys, had, for Picasso, always been a foe. Reason, a.k.a. common sense, was a tactic used by others to reduce his strength. Reason extended from don José's maxims on an artistic career to society's control of proper

manners and machine guns, whereas metaphor was elliptic. With it, one could leap through time and space.

So, they lived together. Whether they were lovers we will never know. It does appear that they contemplated suicide together. "Picasso may perhaps remember the day we gazed from the height of our balcony down to the ground . . ." wrote Jacob later.⁸

. . . they were both leaning over a balcony on their fifth floor and for a moment the same thought of putting an end to it all crossed their minds. But it was only for a moment. "We must not have ideas like that," Picasso said abruptly, as though wanting to shake both of them out of a dark trance.⁹

Jacob's book *Le Roi de Boétie* appeared in 1921 with such disclosures as this, and it may have colored the hostility Picasso later felt for the poet. While willing to create all sorts of myths about himself, Picasso was not in the least inclined to let anyone else put his hand on the lever that moved the legend-machine.



Woman by the Sea (Mother and Child on the Seashore). Barcelona. 1902. Oil on canvas. 32 x 23 in.

All the same, Jacob had a mind capable of the most exceptional intuitions. Addicted to ether and any other intoxicating drug available, he certainly must have taken Picasso down many a road to the occult. He knew a good deal about palmistry, could read the Tarot, and was a devotee of astrology.¹⁰ Since God, catastrophe, and the language of form were all manifests to Picasso of another world beneath the world of appearances, there had to have been many a new insight daily while living with Max Jacob.

All the same, it was the end of the year and he was cold, he was freezing, his parent's home in Barcelona was warm. Hating to ask don José for money still once more, he managed to sell one of his best Blue Period paintings, *Woman by the Sea*, painted in Barcelona and brought to Paris.

84 Norman Mailer

He could, however, find no buyers for the rest of his work and had to store it with a Catalan friend, Ramón Pichot, a depressing conclusion to the three most penurious months he would ever spend in Paris.

He would now spend fifteen months in Spain, and the greatest works of the Blue Period would be painted during this period. His first few days back, however, could hardly have been peaceful. More than forty years later, Geneviève Laporte would describe his return.

I learned one day how Picasso, exhausted by the poverty of his life in Paris, had returned to his parents' house in Spain. He arrived in the evening and, worn out by the long journey, went straight to bed. The following morning, while he was still asleep, his mother brushed his clothes and polished his shoes so that on waking Pablo found that he had been deprived of "his dust of Paris." He told me that this put him in such a terrible rage that he almost reduced his mother to tears.¹¹

His fury may be worth our attention. It is reasonable to assume that a field marshal, arising early on the morning of a major battle, might pay great notice to such normally insignificant details as to whether he first places his left leg or his right into his trousers; the forces of destiny could be sitting, after all, on the outcome; the field marshal may be their agent. We can assume that Picasso possessed something of this psychology. It is worth remembering that superstition is our earliest form of psychology, since it is the very stuff of motive. Psychological reality is what we act upon. In this sense, the presence of the evil eye is as psychologically real to some as are our own modern assumptions that we really do act from the promptings of the ego, super-ego, and id, that trinity, incidentally, which has become no more and no less than our most prominent twentieth-century psychological reality—that is, our own working set of superstitions. For Picasso, it would not have been hard to believe that what came in contact with his body, or grew out of it, was of value. By way of Sabartés, we know that in later years he could not even bear to part with his fingernail clippings and, during this time, in 1903, painting the white walls of Sabartés' apartment on the Carrer del Consulado, he wrote the following inscription: "The hairs of my head are gods like myself, although separated from me."¹²

How could the Parisian dust, therefore, not be possessed of special properties? In a few years he would be preoccupied with African masks and their powers of exorcism. Among Bantu tribes, for example, there is great belief in *kuntu*, the particular spirit of each person and each inanimate object. A beautiful woman wearing a beautiful gown is, when overpoweringly lovely, more than the sum of herself and her

Portrait of Picasso as a Young Man 85

dress. It is rather as if the *kuntu* of the gown is able to dwell in lively harmony with the *kuntu* of the woman; the effect has been, therefore, intensified. So, Picasso's dust. The dealers of Paris might have rejected him on his previous visit, but the magical dust of Paris would still cling to his shoes. In just such fashion may he have seen himself. Certainly, he had to believe (given the miracles of delineation that emerged from his fingertips when he picked up a pencil) that he might be an off-spring—if we are to deal with the limitless extent of his vanity—of the godhead itself.

If he had subscribed to that entirely, he would have been mad. If he had not believed it to some private degree, however, there would be no explanation of the man who would yet dare to tear apart the world of appearances.

Sabartés has an interesting description of Picasso with a brush in his hand:

I rented a small apartment in a corner house in the narrowest part of Consulado Street—an old house with steep and dark winding stairs . . . I had two rooms and a kitchenette . . . The walls were whitewashed, the floors covered with ill-baked bricks, and beams supported the ceiling . . . I took it because I liked its dilapidated state, because it was picturesque, and because its winding stairs reminded me of a belfry tower.

A few days later Picasso came to decorate the walls . . . We were alone; he began to work as soon as he arrived . . . As usual, in surrendering to his creative obsession he seemed to isolate himself from everything around him and yet to appropriate the environing space, as if he were drinking in the air, as if his ideas were floating thereabouts and he feared someone might take them away from him. He did not remove his eyes from the wall; he seemed oblivious to outside contact. One might think some occult power guided his hand and caused it to follow, with the tip of his brush, some path of light which only he perceived, for the brush was never lifted from the wall, and the line which it left behind did not seem to proceed from an intention, but to emanate from the wall itself . . .

Facing the window he painted a half-naked Moor hanging from a tree . . . The feet were rigid, just slightly inclined forward: one was bare and from the tip of the other still hung a babouche, forming a right angle with the sole of the foot. This miracle of equilibrium, which gave a slight appearance of life to the lower part of the Moor's body in the throes of agony, attracted the eye and directed it toward the ground, where a young couple, totally naked, delivered themselves, in the presence of the hanged man, to the passionate game of love.

As he lifted the brush, Picasso turned his glance away from the wall and told me, "Someday I'll come back and we'll continue."¹³

86 Norman Mailer

He was indeed industrious these days. For over a year, one painting after another would be added to the Blue Period, even if they were almost impossible to sell. In later decades, the opposite phenomenon occurred, and the prices were higher

than for any other examples of twentieth-century art. These distillations of suffering and want either exorcise the guilt of manum or else make it the more enjoyable.¹⁴

One ought to add that part of the power of these paintings is due to the artist's depression, his prodigious woe. If he has deep intimations of how much more he

can see than other artists, then his life must become a mission, even a crusade. Yet, there is so large a part of him that is materially passionate, ordinary, and small—which is to say, middle-class—with a greedy desire for recognition, precisely what the paintings of the Blue Period are not bringing him at all.

There is a rich irony. Perhaps such works did not sell in those years because the people who viewed them were not yet wealthy enough. The Blue Period speaks to the profound contradictions of those very rich



The Blind Man's Meal, Barcelona, 1903. Oil on canvas. 37 x 37 in.

who are invariably weary in spirit and never free altogether of depression. How can they not be miserable? Great wealth induces greed and treachery in everyone within the court of the tycoon; honest relations are consumed by dishonest appetites; the man of great wealth often lives in gloom amid sensations of profound isolation. The guilt accompanying great wealth presses upon the rich man's psyche powerfully enough to suggest the overburdened backs of Picasso's blue-tinted victims and orphans; yes, the prodigiously wealthy collector can feel kinship with the poor, and so-

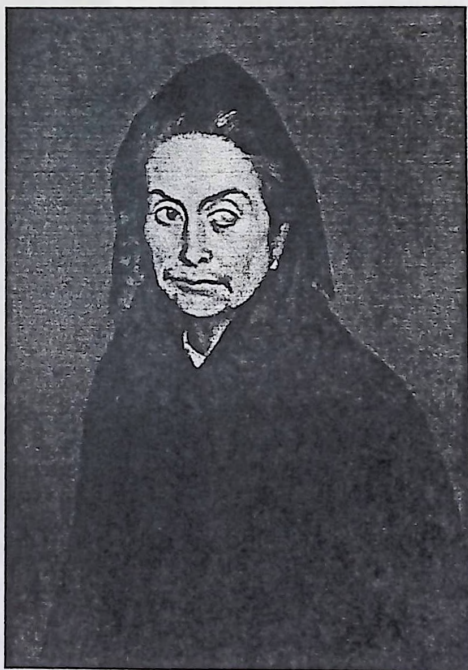
Portrait of Picasso as a Young Man 87

lace as well for his guilt inasmuch as the power of the Blue Period lies in its suggestion that poverty is not a reflection of temporal passing conditions but is as universal as life. That makes wealth a little more palatable! Indeed, by such a logic, wealth and poverty are each other's counterparts—universals! Ergo, the Blue Period would come into commercial fashion about the time collectors of sufficient wealth encountered the works. Nor did it hurt that Picasso was, by then, well established and his later paintings were much more difficult to comprehend. There is an added marrow of satisfaction in purchasing the early work of a great and near-unfathomable genius. Of course, the irremediable bitterness in Picasso's soul, the power of the inner sanction he felt later in life to wound and humiliate others, had to come in part out of the paradox that the paintings that brought him the greatest sums were precisely the works which had cost him the most miserable days of his life.

What fabulous works he painted, however, in this period! *La Celestina* can serve as one example.

It may be significant that *La Vie*, the most obscure of these paintings and the richest in private themes, also celebrates the return of his dead friend as a model. Picasso was still living at home, but, to avoid discord between don José and himself, was using the studio he had once shared in Barcelona with Casagemas, its walls still bearing the sumptuous handmaidens he had painted some three years before.

Once again, he was eri- 32 x 23 in.



La Celestina. Barcelona, March 1904. Oil on canvas, 32 x 23 in.

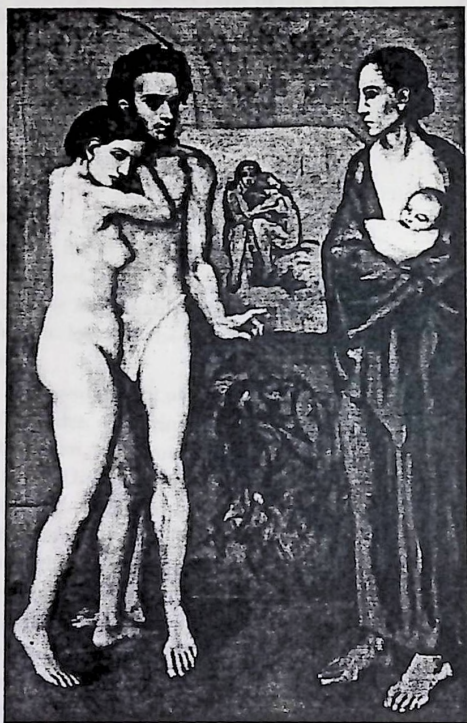
88 Norman Mailer

tering a realm that could prove unruly to an average person's composure. If Picasso had a healthy respect for the ravages of dread, and was obviously aware of its destructive effects upon Casagemas, nonetheless he had a gift for making use of his own dread. It is likely that a cigarette smoker can think more clearly while smoking—many of us have the kind of brain that will react to a threat or a wound

to the ego by immediately beginning to celebrate. Since each inhalation of cigarette smoke is a minute wound inflicted on the lungs, the mind develops a habit of reacting to the infinitesimal injury by a compensatory flow of thought.

In analogous fashion, Picasso may have entered into just such precise negotiations with dread. He could live with dread if it came to him by measured quanta—inhalations, so to speak. Controlled amounts encouraged him to work in order to exorcise the sensation. So, small emanations of dread that he could all but imbibe from the walls of Casagemas' studio may have been the stimulant to virtuoso strokes.

His preoccupation with sexuality, whether potent or less than potent, remains in-



La Vie, Barcelona, 1903. Oil on canvas, 77 x 50 in.

tense. Even in the midst of the Blue Period, his erotic drawings have a cachet that would have made him a good living if pornography had been all he did. We must remind ourselves that he could never work without going in several directions at

Portrait of Picasso as a Young Man 89

once, and the pleasure of contemplating the heated timelessness of foreplay and finger-fucking is immortalized in an eight-inch-by-five-inch ink-and-watercolor he did of his friend Angel de Soto in late 1902 or early 1903, a good year at least before *La Celestina*.

All through 1903 he must have been readying himself to return to Paris. There is a dreadful erotic drawing with pen, sepia, and wax crayon he did that year on a 3 1/2-by-5 1/2-inch card that nonetheless suggests his profound divisions over sex. If the god of the phallus, conventionally drawn, is not only happy but radiant, his full scrotum is occupied by an abject woman. The conclusion is inescapable: Picasso is telling us where to look for the root of femininity in men.

This assignment of roles for the phallus and testicles, appearing respectively as man and woman, will show up again from time to time. One can even come across an aquatint done in 1966, not less than sixty-three years later. It will not surprise us that it is vastly more sophisticated: We are now asked to deal with two varieties of male genitalia. One offers a languorous albeit tumescent woman at the core, and the other provides a pair of heavy feet as ready to stomp on you as the face in the head of the phallus. (Picasso's late humor is rarely at rest, and so the phalluses, their separate roles now defined, are surrounded by what certainly appear to be body lice.)

That 1966 painting is the resumption of



Angel Fernandez de Soto with a Woman, Barcelona, 1902-03. Ink and watercolor on paper, 5 x 6 in.

Untitled (Erotic drawing on trade card), Barcelona, 1903. Pen, sepia and wax crayon, 5 x 4 in.



90 Norman Mailer



Untitled, November 15, 1966. Aquatint etching

a theme he first explored while trapped in Barcelona, dreaming of Paris with its sexual tolerance. He may not have known that he was on the cusp of quitting Barcelona forever. There would be brief visits back, but whether he was aware or not, he was getting ready to take final leave. He does not know, as we do, that

the first major and thoroughgoing affair of his life is waiting for him. Before it is over, these male and female aspects of his nature will be considerably more familiar to him.

Early in the spring of 1904, he heard from Paco Durio, a sculptor and old friend from Barcelona. Durio was giving up his studio in Montmartre, a special studio in a most special place, the Bateau Lavoir, and so for the first time in all these years, Picasso would have a place in Paris he could consider his own.

Part III



Fernande

1

In the summer of 1904, when Picasso met Fernande Olivier, he was twenty-two and she had just turned twenty-three. If their affair began soon after they first spoke to each other, they would not begin to live together until the end of the summer of 1905, a full year later. Every indication provided by Fernande makes it clear that it was Picasso, not she, who was in love for the interval between.

Since Fernande is agreeably candid in her translated book of memoirs, *Picasso and His Friends*, published in 1933, and even more so in her second set of memoirs, *Souvenirs Intimes*, written in 1955 but not published in Paris until 1988 (and as yet untranslated), we can probably accept a good deal of her evaluation of the relationship. Her presentation has authority. Once Pablo and Fernande commence to share his studio at the Bateau Lavoir, Fernande becomes the first woman whom he is ready to accept as a serious mate. He has passed from male bonding—at the least!—with Pallarés, Casagemas, Sabartés, and Max Jacob to the constant company of a woman who is neither a whore nor a playmate but a woman in his domain, his serious mistress. According to Fernande, he was ready to marry her, and was uncontrollably jealous. (That was with some cause, we can assume, since she was tall, red-headed, and beautiful; she stood out vividly in their impoverished bohemian circle.) For that matter, she had become a successful artist's model before they met and was much in demand by other painters.

Indeed, in the week preceding the hot summer Sunday when she finally agreed to move in with him, Fernande had been posing for two well-known academic stalwarts named Corman and Sicard, and they were each in the middle of large can-

94 Norman Mailer

vases for which she was the model; Picasso, however, insisted she stop. He would not trust such a situation. How many nude and half-draped models had he seduced himself, after all! Besides, he could amplify his own memoirs with the sexual anecdotes of a hundred other painters. As Fernande writes:

I no longer work. Corman, the old buzzard, understands when I inform him that I can't pose, and he doesn't insist. Sicard wrote to Picasso, however: "Come with her, then, during these sessions. There is only another two weeks of work."¹

"I don't give a fuck,"² Picasso was to reply. He certainly didn't. If he was going to live with a woman, why then treat her with less possessiveness than he brought to his paintings? Would he allow another artist to put a stroke to one of his works-in-progress?

They would not separate until the spring of 1912, and in those seven years Picasso was to move from the Blue Period through the Rose Period and on to the explorations that would result by 1907 in *Les Femmes d'Alger*. By 1908, he had entered Cubism and his collaboration with Georges Braque, and by 1909, at the age of twenty-eight, he was already an international figure, and prosperous enough to move with Fernande into a bourgeois apartment on the boulevard de Clichy. He had by that time become fast friends with Guillaume Apollinaire and Gertrude Stein and was on the verge of becoming the innovative center of the most passionate artistic controversy of the preceding fifty years in Paris, larger, perhaps, in its impact upon the avant-garde than the visual shocks presented by Manet, Monet, Renoir, Degas, Pissarro, Seurat, Cézanne, van Gogh, Gauguin, Toulouse-Lautrec, or *les Fauves*. With Cubism he had become, for some, a mutilator of aesthetics, for others, the artist-as-hero, which is to say he had already commenced to be *Picasso*. As *Picasso* he would live in the forefront of Western culture for the next sixty years and more; he would die as the wealthiest painter who had ever lived, and possibly the most prolific.

A great deal was obviously shaped in him over those seven years from 1905. Let us enjoy the presence of the number. Fernande was the first of the seven major mistresses and wives who would exercise a measurable influence upon his work. If he has often been depicted as a monster in his relations with women, let him also be characterized as wholly magnetized by such relationships. He would extract a unique inspiration out of the different style in which he lived with each woman. And he would honor each of them in his fashion. Even in depicting his detestation of his first wife, Olga, or in the portraits of Dora Maar and his second wife, Jacqueline

Portrait of Picasso as a Young Man 95

line, which could hardly be more savage, we can see that he lived, nonetheless, with these women in a manner that some men never do: He was *in* each relationship—he saw the women as his equal. No matter how hideously he presented these three women, he could never have delineated them so if he had not entered into a depth of revulsion for what their relationship had become, and that, in turn, disclosed how hideous were his own spiritual sores. The physiognomy of his psyche is present in each of these portrayals, respectively, of Olga, Dora, and Jacqueline.



*Bust of a
Woman
with Self-
Portrait,
February
1929. Oil
on canvas,
25 x 24 in.*

96 Norman Mailer



Woman Seated on a Chair, 1939. Gouache. 15 x 15 in.

Portrait of Picasso as a Young Man 97



Nude, May 2, 1967. Oil on canvas, 45 x 35 in.

98 Norman Mailer

Such extremes of cruelty would come later—by which time (in the late 1920s and 1930s, and certainly by the 1960s) he was as wealthy as Midas and profoundly disappointed. He had taken his long decline down an aesthetic retreat from the great discoveries between 1907 and 1912. Those had been the five most creative and astonishing years of his life. But for the working presence of Georges Braque, he had been alone, each Cubist painting a reconnaissance through ambiguities of perception that would have endangered the sanity of a weaker man. In the face of such inner peril, this Spaniard, of weak and intermittent machismo, drenched in his own temerity, full of sentiments of social and intellectual inferiority, short in stature, was possessed of the ambition to mine universes of the mind no one had yet explored. His female companion for these most creative years of his life was a woman who is not without interest in her own right. While their love will suffer the fate of most passionate relationships—at a point they will fail to come closer,

and so drift just a little apart, thereby to grow some distance apart—she is, nonetheless, the first of those women who will love him for all of his life. Since it is more than likely that she gave him the dignity to believe in himself as a man, so too did he acquire that indispensable buttress to extreme ambition, a measure of self-respect in the social world. Of course, she is worth our close attention!

Fernande Olivier has described herself as indolent, and the description has generally been taken up. Some biographers speak of her as a charming odalisque or as “la belle Fernande,” and she has even written:

I remember our childish joy on those days when Picasso managed to make a few extra francs. He used to spend it on eau-de-Cologne because I adored scent.



van Dongen. *Portrait of Fernande Olivier*. 1906. Pastel on paper, 25 x 24 in.

Portrait of Picasso as a Young Man 99

Then there were the days when we were obliged to fast, and the piles of books bought at the little bookshop in the rue des Martyrs: sustenance which I found essential since Picasso, out of a sort of morbid jealousy, forced me to live like a recluse. But with some tea, books, a couch, not much housework to do, I was very very happy.

It was Picasso who swept the studio and did the shopping. I was, I admit, extremely lazy.³

Dreamy may be the more generous word. From an early age she lived with the best of her memories and the sweetest of her fantasies under signally unhappy circumstances. If her literary gifts are modest, still they are not without talent. If she had had a better childhood, where more attention was devoted to her, it is not unlikely that she would have become a good novelist. Her perception is incisive, and in *Souvenirs Intimes*, written when she was seventy-five years old, on the basis, she claims, of a journal she kept through her adolescence, a variety of sharply drawn characters are seen with the same unsentimental clarity that Picasso brought to his portraits in late adolescence; the personages in this second book are evaluated with enough composure to suggest that she has absorbed a few lessons from Flaubert. The list of novelists manqué is always long enough to wind out to the horizon, but Fernande Olivier did live with a great painter through his most profound period of artistic transition and so we are in debt to her for *Souvenirs Intimes*. She will have considerably more to tell us about Picasso than does Gertrude Stein.

The accepted view of Fernande is that she was not only lazy but lusty, a healthy female animal, born to model and share a painter's bed; but then, the common view of Picasso is that he was a priapic demon and screwed everything not nailed down, a glorious oversimplification created in large part by the painter himself. Over her late adolescence, Fernande had to travel through a succession of miserable experiences. Her romantic life began abominably, at the age of seventeen, and for the next five years, she feared, detested, and put up with attacks of copulation—so she virtually saw it—as a necessary concomitant to having any relations with men at all. On the other hand, she had to deal with men constantly. Having left home without a trade, nothing was more logical in her situation than to become an artist's model.

Let it be said that by the time we turn the page and allow her to speak for herself, she has picked up a good bit of the art of living with a man as best she can.

2

I was staying at 13 rue de Ravignan when I first noticed a rather curious person who had just moved into the house . . .

There was nothing especially attractive about him at first sight, though his oddly insistent expression compelled one's attention. It would have been practically impossible to place him socially, but his radiance, an inner fire one sensed, gave him a sort of magnetism . . .¹

That is from her first memoir, *Picasso and His Friends*. As if it were all one work, we can pick up her account in the second book, *Souvenirs Intimes*.

For some time now, I've been finding him always in my path, and he looks at me with large, heavy eyes which are both acute and pensive at the same time, full of contained fire, and he stares so intensely that I can hardly keep myself from looking back. I cannot guess his age. The pretty line of his lips suggests he is young. The deep wrinkle that runs from his nose to the corner of his lips would make him older. His heavy nose, with thick nostrils, gives his face a certain vulgarity, but it is a most fascinating and moving personality that comes off this person. An acute spirituality emanates from him. Despite his smile, his eyes remain solemn and his pupils are shrouded in a bottomless melancholy. His gestures, simple and clearly sketched, reveal a kind of timidity from which one cannot exclude an intense pride.

However, I've not yet answered him when he tries to engage me in conversation.

In the evening when I return [from work], I've taken the habit of sitting myself

Portrait of Picasso as a Young Man 101

in front of my door with a book. I rest there until night falls. When friends come, we bring our chairs from the studio and we form a little circle. This Spanish painter, in his turn, is in front of the main door surrounded by a group of artists of his nationality who speak noisily. They annoy me a little but, all the same, add a good deal of color to this corner already so colorful.²

On a hot evening in August, coming home from work, she is caught in a heavy downpour and finds this "rather curious person" in her way as she is hurrying to her door. "He was holding a tiny kitten in his arms and he held it out to me, laughing and blocking my path. I laughed too, and he took me to see his studio."³ Inside, she was suitably impressed. He was obviously a painter of remarkable talent.

[He had done] an etching . . . of a man and a woman sitting at a table in a wine-shop. There is the most intense feeling of poverty and alcoholism . . . the effect was strange, tender, and infinitely sad.⁴

Nonetheless, she would later characterize her seduction in quintessentially French terms: "For several days now, I've been coming around to think that I've gotten into a new stupidity. It's the rain that was the cause of it."⁵



Pablo Picasso, 1904

The Frugal Repast, 1904. Etching.
15 x 15 in.



102 Norman Mailer

She must have been not only intrigued but, to a degree, repelled. The studio had two dogs living in it and a white mouse in a bureau drawer; animal effluvia was in the air and on the floor. There were cobwebs everywhere and dirt in the corners. The floor was pocked with the scars of old cigarette burns and the squalor of dead butts. The bathtub, the mattress on legs, the rusted cast-iron stove, the cane chair, the trunk that served as a substitute for a second chair were all repositories for half-squeezed tubes of paint. Large unfinished canvases had been stacked at every angle, and there were no curtains. It was summer. The studio was a furnace.

Her new lover, however, was smitten with her. Never has there been better evidence of a profound beginning to an affair than the drawing he made of them on that

hot August day, as if he had been looking through one of the windows that had no curtains and saw them floating away on a sea of peace.

Her feelings are considerably less intoxicated:

I go back to the house of the Spanish painter. He has an absolute adoration for me. That touches me. He's sincere, but it's necessary that I be cautious because I don't want Laurent to know where I go.⁶

Laurent is the sculptor with whom she has been living for the last few years. She has been getting ready for some time to leave him, but still!

The Lovers. August 1904. Ink, watercolor, and charcoal on paper, 15 x 10 in.



Portrait of Picasso as a Young Man 103



Méditation (Contemplation), 1904. Pen and watercolor.
14 x 10 in.

Can I, perhaps,
love this boy at last?
Picasso is fine, intel-
ligent, and extraor-
dinarily taken with
his art. And yet,
would abandon ev-
erything for me. His
eyes implore me. He
watches, religiously,
whatever I do . . .
when I awake, I find
him at the head of
the bed, his eyes full
of anguish, fixed on
me.⁷

He no longer
sees his friends, no
longer works or
rests. Yet he re-
mains in his studio
in order to see me
more often. He
asked me to come
live with him. I'm
taken by him. It's
sweet to be loved so
much, and physi-
cally, he pleases me

also. He's sweet and gentle, but he's not well groomed and that does bother me. I don't give a damn about disorder, but I have a horror of people who don't take care of their person. I don't dare to let him become aware of that; it's too delicate. But I have to get to that point with him.

I've decided to sleep no longer over at Laurent's place . . . I go to Pablo's studio.

It's all still a mess, however. Laurent, who has never been jealous, is that way now. Despite my rebuffs, he is obstinate in trying to convince me to remain with him. However, I leave after dinner, and go running over to Pablo's place; he is

104 Norman Mailer

waiting for me behind the open door. For the ten days or so that I've been playing this little game, there's not yet been an ugly row; it is even amusing. However, I don't want any trouble. Laurent, despite his laziness, can be a brute. Besides, a fight with Pablo could turn bad; Pablo speaks immediately of using his revolver. I'm not afraid, but I have a horror of scandal. It's much better to act softly, peacefully, circumspectly. Besides, I can't decide whether to move in with Pablo. He's jealous, he hasn't any money, and he doesn't want me to work. Well, then, it's stupid. And I don't want to live in his miserable studio.

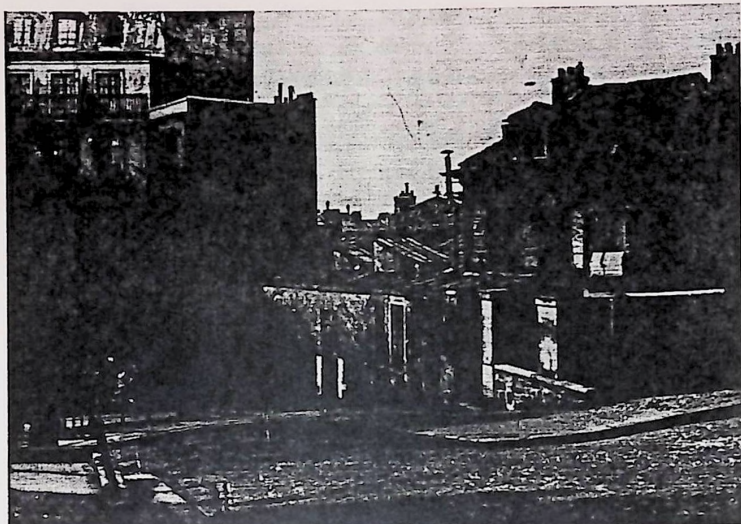
There it is: I don't love him. I've made a mistake again. What an idiot nature I have. I no longer want to go to bed with him, and so this perpetual adoration of his that I took to so strongly at first is now monotonous. I'm bored. I'm bored whenever I am no longer alone. I am never bored when I'm with a book, but a lover bores me, irritates me. When *will* I fall in love?⁸

We may as well orient ourselves to a few of her concerns. Fernande Olivier was born out of wedlock and began life as Amélie Lang, then was raised by her mother's half-sister, who married her off at eighteen to a brute named Percheron. Later, Fernande seems to have taken on Laurent's last name, which was Debienne, and promptly changed it to de la Baume. Madame de la Baume—one of the names she went by. We can suspect that she often felt an inclination to move on to a new role, a not uncommon ambition, but her need to re-make herself was genuine; the young girl who lived in any of these names did not always have the finest chances for survival.

Before we look more closely at her life, however, it is worth picturing that unique habitat, the Bateau Lavoir, where Picasso and Fernande have met. We are speaking, after all, of a piece of architecture that will never be repeated. Old and funky, it is by any conventional measure a decrepit slum-tenement, but it is also, in lopsided manner, half grand. The edifice in which Picasso has his studio and Fernande shares living quarters with Laurent Debienne is no more than one story high, on rue Ravignan, but plummets in the back four stories down to the street behind. The Bateau Lavoir was attached to the side of a cliff. Yawing wooden stairways, slanted halls, cockeyed rooms and a variety of skewed angles, moldering windows, and crusted skylights gave a view onto the roofs of other buildings, few of which could have offered as many closet staircases, trapdoors, oubliettes, and warped floors. Christened by Max Jacob after the laundry barges on the Seine, the Bateau Lavoir offered no more for running water than a tub-sink on the cellar floor, and further along, as Fernande tells us . . .

a bad-smelling corridor led to the only WC, a dark closet whose door could not be closed for the lack of a latch. It shook at every current of air, which is to say each

Portrait of Picasso as a Young Man 105

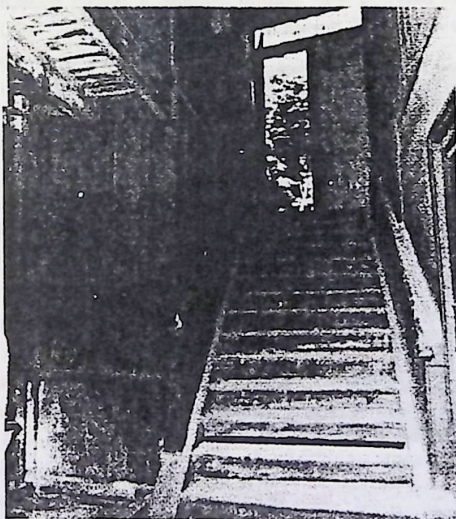


Entrance to the Bateau Lavoir.

A staircase in the Bateau Lavoir

time that someone opened the large wooden door to the street.

A narrow corridor was lit by a glassed-in ceiling, but such studio lights were darkened by an accumulation of dust that must have been there forever . . . A strange and sordid house, the most diverse noises resounded from morning to night, discussions, songs, exclamations, cries, the racket



106 Norman Mailer

of slop pails being emptied and dropped to the floor, the noise of pitchers being set down on the stone of the fountain, doors slammed, and the most questionable groans which passed right through the closed doors of these studios. Laughs, cries, we heard everything; all resounded, without reserve.⁹

To the inhabitants, the Bateau Lavoir must have been not unlike the crazy attics and cellars some had known in childhood; its odors could recall many a painter's infancy. Stinks abounded, and as much mess as was to be found on any playroom floor. If infancy is where a large part of one's creative powers are impounded, then voyages of the psyche back to that state (like drunkenness) can free up many a stimulation. It is true, in any event, that the Bateau Lavoir was filled with painters and had its share of poets, anarchists, and students for its thirty studios and apartments. Van Dongen, Max Jacob, Modigliani, André Salmon, and Pierre MacOrlan would live there at different times. Even Ricard Canals, for all his contemporary renown in Barcelona, was dwelling in the place with his wife, Benedetta.

Since painters were always moving in and out, Picasso soon acquired the rudiments of furniture—a bed of sorts, a broken-down chair and table, and a few other amenities for the sum of eight francs.

Arriving in May of 1904, Picasso found congenial company. He saw a great deal of Max Jacob and of Ramón Pichot, a Spanish painter now married to the same Germaine Gargallo whom Casagemas had wished to marry. Indeed, in these days, about all of his friends were Spanish, a reflection perhaps of the difficulties he still experienced in speaking French. There were many besides Fernande who saw him as shy in those days.

Still, much was stirring. The ice-bound reaches of his depression had begun to thaw. A suggestion of warmer hues came into his palette.

Following the beginning of his affair with Fernande, all too soon cut off by her, he found other mistresses among his models, and there was one he would keep seeing during all of that winter of 1904–1905, when he was courting Fernande but failing to convince her to live with him. The model's name was Madeleine



Portrait of Madeleine, 1904. Pastel and gouache on cardboard, 26 x 20 in.

Portrait of Picasso as a Young Man 107



Mother and Child and Four Studies of Her Right Hand, 1904.

Woman in a Chemise, 1904. Oil on canvas, 25 x 23 in.

His oil *Woman in a Chemise* may also be of Madeleine. As Richardson remarks: "Picasso would always take pleasure in the fact that the skinny allure he contrived for his Blue Period girls predicted a look that fashionable women would cultivate decades later."¹⁰

There was also a young woman named Alice who was living with a mathematician named Princet. In a couple of years she would marry Princet and then quickly divorce

and she was sylph-like, bird-like—her nose formed a straight line with her forehead.

By the summer of 1904, Madeleine was pregnant. With Picasso in full accord, she had an abortion. All the more reason, then, to commemorate the loss with another drawing of Madeleine in the fall. No humor is, perhaps, as hard-eyed as the Spanish knowledge of how sentimentality is to be derided. Of course, the drawing is so fine that he is also telling Madeleine that he loved her and they suffered a loss, but then, of what great use is an artist who cannot bring off several things at once?



108 Norman Mailer

him in order to marry André Derain. In this earlier period, she had a brief affair with Picasso, who aroused her desire one day with *L'Anti-Justine*, a pornographic book by Retif de la Bretonne. If her face reflects an intense but guarded excitement, it is, according to Picasso's biographer Pierre Daix, the moment when Picasso chose to do her portrait. Is he commemorating her mood by putting an exclamation point after her name?

L'Anti-Justine had been loaned to Picasso by a new friend he had met in October. All through that long winter of 1904-1905, as Picasso diverted himself from his failure to impress Fernande by moving from woman to woman, his relation deepened with his new friend Apollinaire, the unique and soon-to-be-legendary Guillaume Apollinaire. In *La Plume* of May 1905, Apollinaire, writing about the Blue Period, would say:

These children, who have no one to caress them, understand everything. These women, whom no one loves now, are remembering. They shrink back into the shadows as if into some ancient church. They disappear at daybreak, having achieved consolation through silence. Old men stand about, wrapped in icy fog. These old men have the right to beg without humility.¹¹

and then would add:

More than any other poet, sculptor, or painter, this Spaniard sears us like a sudden blast, his meditations are unveiled in silence.¹²

It was as if Picasso had been waiting for years for just such a fine pen to confirm his talent, a poetic voice to certify what he knew already, if with but one part of himself—that he was a great painter. Now, the intervals in which he did not



Alice Derain. 1905. Sepia on paper, 14 x 10 in.

Portrait of Picasso as a Young Man 109

believe in himself could be shortened. He would have splendid language written about himself to read again in bad moments.

So, a double life began in the winter of 1904–1905 and would proceed through the spring and into the summer. On the one hand, there was his new friend Apollinaire, a huge presence bringing with him evenings of poetry and intense intellectual stimulation. He will develop into a very large figure in Picasso's life, but we will wait to take our understanding of his influence on the painter. Our emphasis is still at this point on Fernande, and she, by her account, is deliberating in the wings. Her relations with Laurent, although seriously deteriorated, nonetheless continue after her brief fling with Picasso. In the passage to follow, she has just come back from a sojourn in the countryside with the sculptor:

When I arrived, I went looking for Pablo. He wasn't in his place, and so I climbed the stairs to Canals' place, where he usually ate. When Pablo heard my voice, he suddenly dropped a guitar, and ran around like a wild man. His joy at seeing me gave me pleasure. I was very well received by Canals and his woman—a beauty, a red-head.

I ate with them, and then, Pablo and I went back to his place. He was desolated when I told him I only wanted his friendship, but he prefers that to nothing.¹³

Having decided to leave Laurent permanently, she accepts a more permanent invitation from the Canalses, paying them room and board out of the sums she makes as a model.

They are so nice to me. I'm really much happier here than at Laurent's place.

Pablo, in turn, is much changed now. He asked me to marry him. If they knew that I'm already married, what a shock! The evenings are gay here; there are always five or six friends playing the guitar and singing Spanish songs after dinner, a meal that usually consists of an enormous plate of spaghetti.

Benedetta is Italian, and this plate is one of her specialties—nourishing, and at the level of our means. The men, all artists, speak among themselves of their work. Benedetta and myself spread ourselves out on the couch, content to be admired. Benedetta is very beautiful.¹⁴

Fernande then describes a young man who has been following her in the street. When he is finally ready to speak, he explains that he has traced her to Canals' studio and was awfully pleased to discover that that is where she lives. He is, after all, a friend of Ricard Canals. What luck!

He turned out to be a Catalan painter with a not-wholly-sympathetic quality.

110 Norman Mailer



Fernande Olivier and Benedetta Canals, 1904

He looked less like a painter than someone who was a Spanish guitar player. still young, with an energetic face and lots of egotism. Very carefully dressed, but something I can't quite describe irritated me. He was, however, gentle and immediately commenced to give me compliments. Canals told me, "I can't even recognize Sunyer. He seems intimidated. He's so sure, usually, of himself. I believe you've made a great impression on this guy, for generally speaking, he only runs after rich women. He owes them a good deal, for that is why he's well dressed."

Sunyaer ate with us. As for Pablo, naturally, he never misses a day, and spends his time looking at me with a sad expression in his eyes that seem always ready to enter you in spite of yourself.¹⁵

No matter, she maintains her reserve. There are lacks in Picasso she can hardly ignore: "Poor Pablo is very unhappy, but I can do nothing about it. He writes to me in a French that's full of, I can only call it, high fantasy. And it's in rather barbaric grammar and spelling. Desperate letters."¹⁶

Portrait of Picasso as a Young Man 111

She is certainly French enough to be appalled by this form of incompetence. Even so late as 1911, there is a letter from Picasso to Fernande that reads: "*Yer de toute la journé, je ne ai pas eu de letre de toi et ce matin que je t'atendais non plus espérons que cete après-midi je serai plus heureux.*"¹⁷ A translation weighted for errors would go about like this: "Yisterdey, all dey long, I did no get a letre from you and this mornin I'm not waiting anymore but hope that thes afternoon I'll be more hapy."

Considering the state of his orthography in 1911, one doesn't want to speculate too long about 1905. "Barbaric grammar and spelling" has to be a deterrent to her, a fact we can confirm as soon as we encounter the middle-class pinch-mindedness of the aunt who raised her.

There is probably no better way to summarize Fernande's life than to present some full-sized excerpts from *Souvenirs Intimes*. If this will take us on a considerable excursion away from our protagonist, Pablo, it will also provide the special flavor of Fernande's presence. She will prove by turns piquant and banal, vain and wounded, critical and generous, wise and full of folly. She is not ordinary, and her story has the added advantage of its considerable readability. Of course, we will be obliged to make the acquaintance of a number of people who have nothing to do with Picasso's life, and so the impatient reader, here to be informed about Picasso, is advised to skip ahead. The rest of us may yet feel superior for resisting such a move, or will, so soon as we recognize that Fernande has something to tell us of the psychology of beautiful young girls who feel unloved. How many of us, comes the next question, can ever know enough about that?

In any event, the proof of how nicely she writes is that the best way to get a sense of her personality is to take a few generous extracts from her work, and live with some of the people she encounters before she meets Picasso.

3

My aunt and uncle . . . had a daughter two years younger than myself, whom they adored and spoiled . . . There were never caresses for me, and that induced me to live very much within myself.¹

I did like my uncle, but he didn't dare to show openly any of his affection for me. My aunt would reproach him, nonetheless, for preferring me to his own daughter . . . In my turn, I preferred the housemaids. As soon, however, as I attached myself to one, she would be replaced by another . . . My aunt was the cause. She could never keep a maid. She found them full of faults: They ate too much, they were dirty, they stole, they were too "emancipated." That was a word dear to her, and I would hear it whenever I took a liberty. No manifestations of independence had been permitted at the Augustine convent where my aunt, the aristocrat of the family, had been raised.²

I passed my early years with a heavy heart, waiting for a sweet or tender gesture, sometimes searching for it without even recognizing what I was up to. I would've liked my uncle to have gone off with me, to have left his wife, his daughter, in order to love only me, as if I had been his true, his only daughter, but there it was. Life does not rearrange itself so easily.³

I've taken first in my exams. It's too bad; I would have preferred being left back. I would like to become a great tragic actress; I am gifted for that. Some time ago, my uncle took us to the theatre, and since then I no longer think of anything but that. When I said, somewhat fearfully, that I would like to work at the conservatory, my aunt uttered loud cries, "Go on the boards? Oh, well! We no longer

Portrait of Picasso as a Young Man 113

lack for anything for you to dishonor us completely. A circus performer! It doesn't surprise me a bit."⁴

A few pages later in this account, Fernande, with considerable trepidation, invites a few friends from her lycée to visit after school, but she is most uneasy waiting for them to arrive. She has neither told her aunt of what is about to happen nor given her friends a true picture of what life is like at home. Be it said that the dialogue that follows will be believable only to those who have had the experience of living in a French middle-class home.

When I heard the bell ring, I felt ill. My aunt knew Antoinette but not one of the other three girls. When she learned that they were there on my invitation, I heard her call out for me. Ready to cry, I arrived in time for her to say, "Since when do you give invitations to my house? This is not your home; you know it. You are being brought up by charity. You certainly don't lack for cheek. How are you going to end up, I ask myself? I ask you to judge, ladies, for I'm sure that in her place you would all have acted differently. Anyhow, since you are here, let her take you to her room and you can all have a moment together." With that she had wholly demolished the impression I had been trying to give of my life to conceal how abnormal it was.⁵

Today, at the table, they were talking about my appearance. Uncle Charles found my eyes and my hands intelligent, and pretty. But my aunt thought my eyes were small, and my hands were like spiders. As for my hair, I had too much of it, she said; that took away any distinction. I'm indifferent to being treated in this fashion by her, because I'm now old enough to be able to notice several things, and above all, that my uncle is proud to go out with me.⁶

Hélène, the nice maid, has just spoken to me in secret. It seems her brother-in-law has seen me in the street and can no longer think of anything but me. I don't know him, but he's old—twenty-eight years old, and isn't really her brother-in-law, just the brother of her fiancé. I don't believe I want to meet him. If my aunt ever suspected that Hélène was talking to me like this, she wouldn't wait a moment to fire her.⁷

Yesterday Hélène brought me a letter from this brother-in-law in which he begged me to speak to him. He sends me little presents. I'm flattered. These attentions from a grown man please me. But I've never seen him. I don't even know how he looks.⁸

My aunt's latest mania consists of wanting to marry me off to an old account-

114 Norman Mailer

tant. She even made a scene and slapped me in front of him because I said, in his hearing, that I would never get married to a fat old man. That gave me a notion of the kind of life I would have if married to him. I promised myself I would cut these family ties. Since my aunt won't give up on the idea, we will see which of us is going to have the last word.⁹

Abruptly, without warning, we are given a transition worthy of a good novelist:

For the last three days I've been locked up in a little apartment that I don't dare leave, so great is my fear that my family will find me. Yet I want so much to be far away from here.

It isn't funny, and I no longer know how it happened because the man who abducted me also disgusts me profoundly.¹⁰

All right, then, the other day I met the brother-in-law and he went along with me to Saint Sulpice. His name is Paul Percheron . . . a small guy, with regular features and large dark eyes, a little wall-eyed and yet without expression. He has a dull complexion but beautiful teeth in a thick-lipped mouth above a small chin. His hair is black and curly, which I don't like in a man. Bearded, a little heavy, his arms too long, his hands too short, and on top of that, he's ordinary. When I met him, I didn't dare to tell him my real desire, which was that he should go away at once. But instead of taking the trolley-car, he hailed a carriage and before you knew it, there we were sitting next to one another in the cab. He was looking at me in a way to frighten me. He took my hands and covered them with kisses. Then he wanted to put his arms around me, but I cried out and he drew back. However, he then began to tell me that he loved me, that he was wild about me from the moment he had seen me, that he could no longer think about anything but me, and so I ended up by finding that nice.

At the City Hall (where I had to go to get some of my documents stamped), he waited for me, and when I was done, he suggested that we have a hot chocolate in the Bois de Boulogne. I was tempted, but I told him that I had to be back before 6 o'clock so my aunt would not know anything . . . All right, I found myself in a carriage again under the trees. I was beginning to feel aware for the first time of my importance. In the Bois, in a restaurant already filled with people, I felt a little ashamed because I was hardly well dressed and we were being stared at. Paul, however, seemed proud to have me. We ordered and I ate cakes and bonbons, and as I was mad about sweets, I no longer thought of the time. When we did look at his watch, I was terrified. It was 6:45. I would never be brave enough to go back to

Portrait of Picasso as a Young Man 115

my house. Surely this time, as I had so often been warned, it would be the convent or the House of Correction. I began to cry. What was there to do?

Paul didn't say anything, but I could feel that he was pleased. At last he said to me, "Don't go back. I'll take care of you, and tomorrow I will see your uncle and ask for your hand in marriage." That, however, did not console me, and I continued to cry. We walked along a path in the woods and he drew me bit by bit further into the trees, and then took me by the waist and glued his mouth on mine, giving me the most disgusting of kisses so that I almost suffocated. "I have to teach you many things," he said to me, and he paused: "Now you are my woman and I must teach you above all how to make love." "You will never teach me like this," I answered. "It's dirty and useless."

He began to laugh and I laughed too despite my fears because his face was so pitiful and happy at the same time. I had nothing to do now but to follow him. I couldn't go back to my aunt after this escapade. He'd made me well aware of that. We took another carriage and the thought of going to a restaurant consoled me somewhat: to enter such a place, to order what I wished, soup, consommé, chicken casserole, foie gras, salad, ice cream—I drank wine and some cherry brandy. I left the restaurant very gay. We walked along together as he led me to his house.

He lived in a tiny apartment on the sixth floor of a new building in front of Montsouris Park. What happened next? A night of horror. How could the child I had been just a few hours before have been able to bear up under these odious revelations? I know I will atone painfully for this folly, and my life will be marked by it forever. What are they going to do? Surely they will come looking for me. Hélène, whom I saw yesterday, knows nothing other than that my aunt is shaking her head and saying, "It's her funeral," and they're all whispering about me.

Hélène and her fiancé, Henri, have spent the day with us. Paul seems to swim in happiness. He brings me so much in the way of cakes, chocolates, fruit that it seems to me I've never seen so much in my life. This morning he searched the neighborhood in order to bring me some linen. At noon, Hélène began to prepare the meal. Since we can't go out, we play cards, but I feel sick, heartbroken, sad enough to die. The others are all so happy. I can hear Paul confiding in Henri. He went on about my beauty, my innocence, and Hélène, with a bright smile, said to me, "Is it true what Paul's saying? Seven times last night? Oh, I congratulate you." She began to *tutoie* me and I was annoyed by that. Then, at the mention of last night, I fell sobbing on the couch and almost became hysterical. Henri, the brother . . . spoke severely to Hélène, who, on his direction, put me to bed. I needed that; I was sick, weak, feverish in my bones, my flesh. She covered me with warm linen. Then it was decided they would all spend the night here, Paul and Henri on the

116 Norman Mailer

divan, Hélène and myself in the bed [but] Paul has now begun to menace his brother with I don't know what threats in order to make him leave. Poor Henri, who only wanted to protect me, can't stay [so] Paul again passed the night in loving me—as he put it. What a horror.

I'm alone all day. I don't go out. When night comes, I'm there, curled up on a sofa with the magazines spread all around me. I've forgotten what time it is, whose life it is. When Paul comes back from work toward 6 o'clock, he finds me uncombed, not dressed, in bed—stupefied. I know he's not happy about that.

Another terrible night. How to get out of this? I would like to look for a job but don't know where to go. I have a fear of the stairway I'd have to go down, of the concierge, of the street, of the police. I go back to reading. I eat bread and drink chocolate. I don't know how to cook; I don't even know how to comb my hair. My curls are tangled.

What an agreeable life I would lead if there wasn't the menace of these nights with Paul. What pleasure can he find in making love? It all seems so dirty. Can't we sleep peaceably, side by side? What does it get him to go in for such activities? I don't understand a thing. Paul becomes crazy at such moments. Besides, he makes me so afraid that I tremble; I let him do whatever he wants to me. He tells me that I'm like a beautiful marble statue that nothing can bring to life. Thanks to God, I hope it's true. I don't want to see myself ever caught in such madness.¹¹

Well, there it is: My aunt is going to come. Hélène arrived just now in a total state of fear. How does my family know? It seems that they put the police on a search, interrogated Hélène, who admitted to everything and gave my address . . . When I told Paul, he turned green. But of what is he afraid? I know my aunt. She's going to treat me as someone infested with lice . . .

What have I done? I would prefer to die than to live with Paul for the rest of my life. He asked me if I think there might be a dowry. I look at him with horror. A dowry? I'm an orphan, and my aunt has taken care of me because my father (her brother) asked her to, and left a little money for my upkeep and my studies. Paul had a dissatisfied attitude when I explained all that to him. "Ah," he said. "I love you enough to take you one way or another." With a weird laugh he threw himself on me and I had to submit to his caresses . . .

I wake up and dress early expecting the arrival of my aunt, but she doesn't come. Hélène is here; we've eaten together and we're going to prepare a *pot au feu*. It's easy, but the cleaning of vegetables—that's not agreeable. She told me to put in some butter, and since there was a good deal of water, I put in half a pound. When Hélène, who had gone to look for some bread, came back, I told her what I'd done and she was almost in a rage and told me that I was as stupid at cooking as I

Portrait of Picasso as a Young Man 117

was at love. I'm shocked, because now Hélène treats me as an equal and I sense her vulgarity.

My aunt arrives with a policeman. In a fury, she leaps upon me and slaps me and I begin to cry. She contemplates me with a look of disgust and stupefaction . . . Then, her fury and her hate relieved, she begins to look the place over. "How badly it's kept up," she says. "And you who don't even know to comb your hair—why have you done this?" I don't answer; I'm afraid. "Why didn't you tell me that you didn't want to marry M. Deforce?" In a nicer tone, "I wouldn't have married you off against your will." The policeman comes near me. I believe he wants to take me away, and I feel sick. I must have passed out for a short while because I found myself stretched out on the couch and my face was soaked in water . . . The policeman said to my aunt. ". . . the little one, she looks innocent. The man has to be a swine." . . .

My aunt said to me, "You must get married as soon as possible to this individual. Give me some information about him."

But I didn't know anything about him, not what he earned or if he loved me. I said to my aunt, "I don't want to get married to Paul . . . Every night, he keeps me from sleeping and I am covered with bruises."

The policeman had a crude laugh.

"It's your fault," answered my aunt. "When one is inhumane, one is punished. You must get married; you will get married or I will no longer want to hear anything about you, and you will go to reform school."

"No, put me in a convent."

"Convents don't want fallen girls like you . . . Marriage or reform school."

I was disheveled, my eyes brimming with tears. My mouth dry. I was shaking.

When Paul came in, my aunt didn't reproach him at all. She looked at him with disdain and asked, "How do you intend to save the situation?"

"We'll get married as soon as possible," he replied.

"You understand," my aunt then said to me. "I hope that you will choose marriage."

I nodded my head. Like a heroine in Racine. I felt myself sentenced to the gallows, and swore to myself to leave after I was married. Nonetheless, I asked, without any great hope, "Don't you want to keep me in your house till the day of the marriage?"

"Never," she replied . . . "You will only come back to my house once you are married. [Then] you'll have a thousand francs to get you started with the house-keeping expenses, and that's all. You can tell that to monsieur," she said inclining her head toward Paul, who seemed as frightened as myself. At last, she was gone . . .

118 Norman Mailer

Hélène and Henri arrived in the evening, and I asked her to sleep over. I was sick following this scene with my aunt, and I began to shiver with fever. Paul was frightened. I spent the night next to Hélène, who got up and covered me with warm clothes. Then she made me drink warm sugared wine, but I vomited it up and began to have convulsions. Fever took me over . . .

The doctor came, and I believe he made some reproaches to Paul, who seemed penitent and has promised to let me alone or leave me with Hélène for a day or two till I'm getting along better. Paul will sleep over at his brother's house; Hélène will stay with me. I am going to bless this illness which frees me from Paul for a little while.

Paul has brought me several books, Anatole France, D'Annunzio, Abel Hermant—I don't know these authors; I've read so little. I am grateful for this attention. He also offers me long red and yellow gladiolus, which are so beautiful in the sunlight that I spend a good deal of time contemplating them. If he were willing to leave me alone at night, perhaps I could get around to having a little affection for him. I begin to feel a little hope again and am almost happy. There's a lot of sun in this poor apartment.¹²

There we go. It's all begun again last night. Almost no rest and he still desires me while I am worn out, used up, and want to go to sleep. Then he throws himself on me again, crying out, "Oh, but you are so fresh and sweet, so pretty, how I want you! The more I take you, the more I want you. I'm wild about you!" and begins to make love to me all over again. I let him do it. I'm half asleep . . .

Each night is like this. He becomes wicked; he's impatient; he asks me what I'm feeling, why I remain inert. He swears to me there will come a day when he will give me pleasure and happiness. When I beg him to let me sleep, he rolls on top of me like a madman. I prefer to say nothing, but then his eyes bore into me and he says between his teeth, "I will bring you to life," and I feel fear. It seems this fear he reads in my face excites new embraces.

Yesterday, I cried out in revolt, "My God, my God, despite my faults, despite my unworthiness, protect me, or let me die!" Then he looked at me and began to cry. He no longer touched me that night.

This morning, he's on his knees by the bed asking me to forgive him. He cries and he holds my hands very sweetly and I began to feel a little hope, but suddenly his face changes, it goes tense and there, again, he's on me. Can this be love?¹³

We are being treated to the great love of a brute. It might be comic if he were not such a bad piece of work and she were not suffering so. Abstractly speaking, however, it remains a comedy. He is full of violence and the bullying reflex of a

Portrait of Picasso as a Young Man 119

man who was probably beaten often as a child. Now, in his turn, he beats her for the smallest infraction on his vanity or desire. But then, his ugliness purged, he loves her terribly all over again and takes her forcibly, trying to express the intensity of his love, only to recognize, once he has quieted down, that she still can't bear him. So he weeps because he loves her and she doesn't love him. But then the injustice of it so overcomes him that he beats her again. Yes, if the blows didn't hurt, it would be a comedy.

Well, it's done. Yesterday I was married to Paul. He was all attentive, very proud, he had tears in his eyes.¹⁴

Fernande's aunt is not present, but she has sent over a trunk with Fernande's clothes, a gray robe, hat, and shoes to be married in, and a minimal dowry—1,000 francs—which Paul uses to move them out to the suburbs.

Now the newlyweds dwell in a *banlieue* called Fontenay-Sous-Bois, and it is Paul's hope that Fernande will now pay attention to the housekeeping. However, it bores her. He comes home, finds her curled up with a book, far-off on exotic seas of her imagination, and he crashes a vase full of marigolds to the floor.

"You're no better at housekeeping than you are in bed!" he cried out. Then he struck me violently. I was so afraid that I wanted to escape and made for the door. With a leap he was on me and began to beat me. Blow after blow . . . my look must have been wicked indeed because he beat me even harder and said, "Don't look at me like that—I'm capable of killing you."

Finally he threw himself on me, thrust me onto the sofa, and took me brutally, in his fashion. Then he lay on me inert, heavy on my body, without even seeming to breathe, and I didn't dare to move. I felt sorry that he wasn't dead . . .

At last, when he came to, he got up looking haggard, then, recalling what had happened, got down on his knees and again asked me to forgive him. Then he went out to look for some dinner and came back with his arms full of flowers, presents, bonbons.¹⁵

I'm pregnant. The doctor that Paul brought over warned him that I shouldn't have too many emotional scenes. Paul says he doesn't want to have a child, that he will take me in a month to see a woman his friends know.

I cry and ask why. "I love you alone," he says. "A child will annoy us and cost too much. I don't earn enough."

I try to do the housekeeping. I attempt to cook. But it bores me. And I don't succeed despite the cookbook. It's always either under- or over-cooked. Paul, who

120 Norman Mailer

loves food, gets very angry but no longer beats me . . . I pass days before the window, my hands holding my knees . . . I still feel myself to be a child and a young girl and yet it seems to me I'm fifty years old.¹⁶

The steps to the garden are icy, and she slips and falls, goes into false labor, and loses her child. She cries, "but Paul is content."¹⁷

When she recovers, they spend a Sunday in Paris visiting her aunt and uncle for the first time, and her uncle, jealous and offended by her marriage, acts coldly but never stops looking at her.

When I left, my uncle slipped 20 francs into my hand. I'll probably buy some handkerchiefs and a bottle of perfume. I've always wanted that.

Yesterday, on coming back, Paul smelled the perfume on me. He was furious because I hadn't told him about my uncle's gift and then had gone out from the house without permission. "How did you do it, since you don't have a key?"

For the first time, I felt anger build up in me. "I left the door open," I answered him. "When I want to go out, I leave the door open. And if somebody comes in and steals from us, all the better. You bore me, and the furniture, and the house, everything, everything!"

Then he began to beat me again, like the first time, and like the first time I was capable of reacting without making a sound, without tears, and he therefore got worse and worse. At last he took me in his arms and carried me over to the bed while saying things so stupid and obscene that I was ashamed and he took me the way he always does, and the way it always happens. I felt frightened, inert, cold, and there's my life.

Hélène comes. She told me that she'll take me to Paris and Paul won't know anything about it. It's the unemployment season for her and she's going to stay several days with me. She asks if I'm beginning to get along in this new life, if I'm growing at all attached to Paul. Witnessing the anger and disgust that appear in my eyes, she understands that there's nothing at all going on.

She smiles and says, "I believe I know someone who could console you, the friend of a friend that I have . . . Henri doesn't know anything; it's not necessary for him to know."

All this frightens me: Two men at the same time, and she loves Henri? Is it so easy to fool each one? Despite my fear that Paul may find out, I leave with her the following day. She takes me to lunch with her friend at the house of another friend, L., who manages a large café on the boulevard de Saint Denis . . . After the lunch we drink some liqueurs and spread out on some sofas. Suddenly I feel myself embraced by powerful arms which nonetheless hold me gently and I feel myself

Portrait of Picasso as a Young Man 121

disappearing into the huge chest of L. However, when he makes another gesture that announces the beginning of the act I undergo with Paul each night, I utter a cry, and want to leave. Hélène calms me down, leads me to another room, and promises that no one will enter. Through the open door I hear her tell L. how at a certain point the act of love begins to frighten me; then she makes me return with her to L., who assures me that he only wants what I am willing to give him happily, and I am caught up again in the sweetness of his voice and his two large arms which hold me tenderly, and his lips are warm on my neck and on my eyes. His light, skillfully applied caresses slip me over into a daze that I find adorable, even astonishing in the way it leaves me. I stay that way, curled up against this man for I don't know how long. I don't know. But I only have awakened from this dream when the voice of Hélène warns me that we have to go back. I would be happier to stay. I would be happier if we never had to return to Fontenay, but I promise to come back tomorrow.

"Oh well," says Hélène to me on leaving, "Paul's the one who's going to profit by it."

I look at her with disbelief. "How can my husband profit from what another has shown me?"

"I believe that you're still frigid," says Hélène.

"I'm what?" I don't understand what she's saying. "Aren't I like others? Isn't Henri sweet and gentle? It's impossible that he carries on the way Paul does."

Hélène bursts out laughing. "Do you believe Paul's different from the others? He's passionate, that's all, and you're frigid."

Another thought obsesses me then. Why has she taken this lover? I ask it of her and she replies to me, "I stay with Henri because he's going to marry me, but in bed I like the other better." I found that ugly of her, and told her to confess everything to Henri—how could she live in these lies? That seemed to amuse her and she said, . . . "I have to have several men. That's my temperament. I'm fickle."

To have temperament! Does that mean you have to desire getting into these filthy things?

We got back at six o'clock in order that Paul would not learn anything. [The next time] L. took me to his house, and we ate together at a little table. I had caviar and oysters and drank white wine. It was delicious. After lunch, I lay down on the divan and L. began to undo my skirt. I didn't have the will to resist him; I was becoming all soft and strange. An odd sensation grew in me and it made me wish to bury myself in him. Soon enough, I found myself nude and his lips ran all over me, stopping on occasion for a time, then leaping on, but it was I who led him back to me when I felt him withdraw. It was like a game. Then suddenly, his

122 Norman Mailer

caresses made me lose my senses completely and I shivered from the effect of a sensation that I would not have believed was possible. Unhappily, I came back most brutally into reality when he took me in the same way my husband did. If he hadn't, disgust might have overwhelmed me less and I would not have been so suddenly sobered up. I felt more than ever that I could never get used to the idea of this act . . . I will not go back on Saturday.

I did return there after all—not for lunch, but to be embraced. I told him that I would get there at two o'clock and that I didn't want the conclusion that repulsed me so. He took me in his arms laughing, and embraced me like the other time, and undressed me. Same procedure, same drunkenness, same disgust at the end. I will no longer go back to him, but certain of his caresses I will miss. I'm missing them already. Despite all that, I can't overcome my repugnance.

When Paul starts the same games with me, *everything* he does is revolting.

Hélène comes over and I tell her about my decision not to go anymore to Paris. "Ah," she answers, "for certain things you're full of feeling, but for others you're like marble?"

I'm annoyed by what she says, but I don't have any rebuttal.

What a silly story is mine! Yesterday, after lunch, Hélène lay down next to me on the sofa and then she began to embrace me and I commenced to feel very strange, just as with L. Then she slid down to my feet and began to offer me the same caresses and made me tremble completely, but it was very agreeable. To be able to experience this sensation nearly divine for so little.

Hélène comes sometimes for lunch and her caresses calm me, but I don't love Hélène.

Ugly scenes between my husband and me now take place daily. An egg overcooked and he wants to beat me. I show him my temper. I tell him I will go away someday. He shrugs his shoulders. "I will catch you, and you will go through a very bad moment," he tells me. All the same, I answer, "I'm going to leave, and soon."

1900: It's spring now. The month of March is marvelous. The Exposition is going to open. All the world is happy. I can't go to Paris. I have no money except for the two and a half francs I have saved.¹⁸

It is worth interjecting that this is, of course, the same Exposition Universelle that accepted a canvas of Picasso's and thereby drew him to Paris for his first trip.

On another visit to her aunt's house, she confides in her uncle concerning the misery of her marriage, and he speaks to Paul.

Portrait of Picasso as a Young Man 123

My husband reproached me for having complained. "And me?" Paul added. "Don't I have my complaints about your indifference, your inability to keep house? You don't do anything to please me. And I am obliged to find in your disgust, in your rejection of me, in your indifference, the excitement I was hoping to find in your love." I burst into a wicked laugh and repeated, "My love? But where would you put such love, since I cannot begin to understand what you mean by love. I'm repulsed by ugliness and everything in you is ugly, the expression of your eyes, your gestures, your pleasures." Yes, I was able to say that. I'm beginning to understand that mine is the life of nearly all those women who have married without love to human beings without delicacy. Hearing me say this, he took on the expression of a madman and I only succeeded in having him throw himself upon me once more.

I close my eyes—I don't defend myself in order that everything will be more quickly finished. Now he wants to force me to open my eyes, to look at him. He plays with the fear that he reads in my expression, that he augments by his wild words. He will kill me, he says, and only his ferocious and brutal orgasm frees me from the embrace.

I am going to leave. I am going to leave: Whatever, the first job that comes to me, even to be a maid, but to flee from this, to get away, to get away.

And, as always, when I find myself alone, my good spirits come back and I forget. I place myself again in the warmth of my dreams; I see an interior life put together out of all the elements of my imagination and I succeed in tasting a few moments of happiness, but when evening falls, the anguish which has been waiting for me comes to me again and I feel my heart tremble in my trembling body.¹⁹

Part IV



Pablo and Fernande

Part IV



Pablo and
Fernande

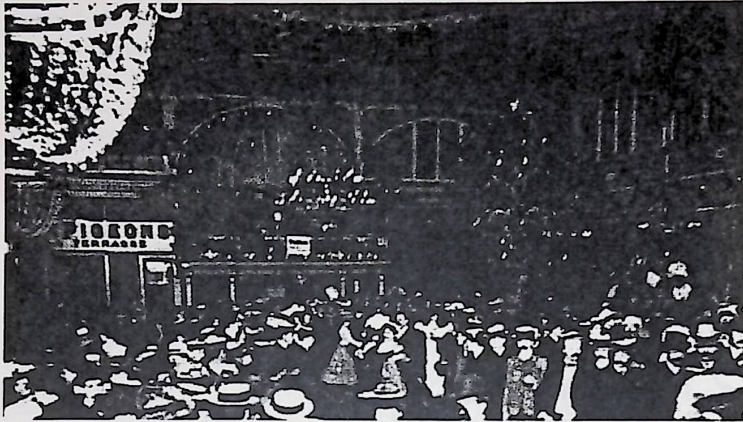
In another few weeks she will leave her husband and begin to live in Paris. So, too, will Picasso be leaving Barcelona for the first time, and they will even live within a few kilometers of each other, although they will not meet until 1904. Since we will stay with Fernande until then, it may be worth taking another look at Paris in 1900. The entrance to the Moulin de la Galette had, for example, this appearance in daylight hours:



The entrance to the Moulin de la Galette, c. 1895

128 Norman Mailer

Whereas at night, it offered another scene altogether:



The Dance Hall at the Moulin de la Galette, 1895

In 1900, Picasso would visit the Place du Tertre, in Montmartre. Here an old photograph can remind us of how much a city square could still look like a painting at the turn of the century.

Picasso is still nineteen in 1900, but he does a self-portrait in which he looks wise, thirty-five years old,

and sufficiently cosmopolitan for any banquet in Paris—indeed, a perfect and elegant bachelor for all the banquets to which he was not invited.

Once again we can see how intrigued he is with visual puns. The lower left-hand



The Place du Tertre, in Montmartre, 1904

Portrait of Picasso as a Young Man 129

corner of the drawing offers a sketch of bare round buttocks that can also serve as a plump face staring upward, the dimples in the cheeks serving as eyes; in the upper left-hand corner, the pen drawing of Riera looks at first like a pair of sad breasts about to droop, but then Riera has been drawn upside-down.

He is preparing himself, doubtless, for all those pleasures of sex that lie somewhere between appetite and the study of the human form, precisely those observations of the female body that one can only make in the course of a long affair.



Self-Portrait and Other Sketches. Barcelona, 1899-1900. Pen on paper. 12 x 9 in.

2

Let us go back, then, to Fernande. The Exposition Universelle of 1900 is also having its effects on her. It is a new century, and she, as we know, is about to leave her husband.

Yesterday evening one of the most brutal scenes took place. I am wounded—I have actually been wounded in the shoulder by a piece of broken glass, which went a full centimeter into my flesh, such was the force of the blow. He struck me with a carafe; I was bleeding, and I was obliged to pull out of the wound a piece of material from my dress that had gone in with the glass. All of which did not prevent Paul from ending this scene by throwing me on the couch before I could even take care of my shoulder. Afterward, coming back to himself, he was overcome with anguish because the flow of blood wouldn't stop. I didn't want his attentions. I believe I was ready to kill him if he came near me.

I refused to lie down near him. He must have cried all night, for in the morning he had a wholly swollen face. He was hideous. I see him as hideous. How have I been able to wait so long?¹

That morning, so soon as he leaves for work, she collects all her papers—her nest egg as a French citizen!—marriage and birth certificates, school diplomas, even the notebook in which she keeps precisely this journal—so she claims—and, going to the station, she takes the half-hour train ride to Paris, gets off at the Bastille, and goes to an employment office whose address she had clipped from a newspaper. Told to come back at four o'clock, she is afraid to wander for fear she

Portrait of Picasso as a Young Man 131

will run into someone she knows, so she tries to read in a small park, but is restless and ends up on the rue de Rivoli, where she stops in front of a bakery shop, afraid to go in since she has only one franc.

I was rooted in front of this exciting store window when I felt an arm slip under mine and pull me literally across the threshold. In a moment, I was aware of myself being seated at a little round table with a bearded, smiling young man who was already ordering something from the waitress, but I still didn't realize what had happened to me until a hot chocolate and some brioches were put in front of me, upon which, incapable of holding myself in, I consumed them voraciously. It was only after having devoured several cakes full of icing and having emptied my cup that I became aware of things again and so was obliged to look into two large, gleaming, and much-amused black eyes fixed on mine, and I surprised myself by bursting out with a laugh so happy that it brought forth an equal laugh from this man facing me, as if I'd suddenly hugged him to me. I do have the ability to pass from despair to gaiety. And suddenly, without reason . . . I can only explain it by saying that I love life and wish to believe in it . . .

I said, "I was so hungry. I hadn't eaten. I have to ask your pardon."

"First," he said, "let me introduce myself. Laurent Debienne, sculptor. Who would like, if you would permit it, to do a bust of you. I have just the right piece of lovely marble. Would it be disagreeable for you to pose for me a few times?"

He interested me suddenly. I had dreamed for so long that I was a young girl who knew artists . . .

He told me that he lived in Neuilly with his family, that economically he was dependent entirely on his father, but he did have a studio in Montparnasse. He got there around nine each morning, worked till noon, had a hasty lunch in order not to lose time, and left at six o'clock. "My father is only giving me two years to earn my own living. He'll help me until then, but after I must fix things so I can get along on my work. In a few months, I'll have to serve with my regiment. I've been postponed several times already in order to keep studying at the Beaux-Arts, but I must, by the time I'm twenty-five, leave for a period of three years. There it is. You know everything about me. Tell me about yourself. Is it so embarrassing?" he asked, seeing me reddened . . .

At the recollection of the employment office to which I must soon go, tears came to my eyes and I had to make a strong effort not to cry. At last I began to tell him my story. His eyes called forth my confidences. Large black eyes were the only beauty of his dark face; otherwise, wrinkles marked the corners of his eyelids, and his nose was too large and jutted out even more given the thinness of his cheeks,

132 Norman Mailer

which were covered by a stiff and much too dark beard. His hair was brilliant, but too dark also. His head was too large for his skimpy little body. And he had a long thin neck within which moved a voluminously large Adam's apple, which seemed always in movement. His hands were heavy and hairy, thick and hard, but something that was agreeably calm came forth from this unknown fellow that suddenly gave me some confidence to speak.

He listened without interrupting me. At the end he said, "Do you really want to work in an office? You ought to take account of the difficulties you're going to meet. Even if you get a job, it will not allow you to begin living alone immediately. You'll have to rent a room in a hotel. They'll ask for your papers and if your husband is looking for you, he'll find you immediately. Besides, you have to work for a month before being paid. And," he added laughing, "I will not always be there to offer you cakes and hot chocolate."

I felt stupefied. It was true. I hadn't thought of all that.

His words chilled me. My new friend watched me fall back into my fears, then he proposed, "Come with me. I will set you up in my studio. I don't sleep there, but in a little room under the stairs there's a bed. To pay me back, you will pose. That's it. And I will give you a little money in order for you to live. Very little. I warn you, for I have nothing beyond the pocket money my father gives me . . . However, you'll be well hidden . . . Don't be afraid to come; you will sleep alone—I give you my word of honor on it."

And now I am there. I can breathe. Laurent left me alone yesterday after taking care of the provisions: bread, apples, nuts, ham; there is tea, sugar, chocolate, coffee in the little kitchen . . .

How nice I felt on this first night despite awakening at the smallest noise.²

In the morning, true to his promise, Laurent comes by with bed linen, roast beef, face powder, and they chat, do the housework together, have coffee, and he plays the piano for her. Then, politely, he asks her to pull down her blouse while he drapes her, shoulders bare, to pose as his model. They work all day, and she discovers that it is very tiring to pose, but . . .

Already, I've begun to forget my past life, my foul nights with Paul . . . I'd rather die than take it up again.

Saying good-bye yesterday, Laurent approached and embraced me gently. I put my arms around his neck and returned his kiss, thanking him for what he's done for me. "It's nothing," he said. "You will give all that back to me by posing. You're the most beautiful model, and I'm the one who owes you thanks."

After his departure, I went to sleep; I was tired. I had no nightgown but found

Portrait of Picasso as a Young Man 133

that I got along very well rolled up in the fur rug. What an odd situation for a young lady brought up in the strictest bourgeois code—naked in the skin of a beast . . .

Time passes. I've been here for five days already. Laurent takes on the job of selling my little trinkets and I came out of it yesterday with some 50 francs that allows me to buy two shirts, two underpants, two sets of stockings, and a night-shirt. Washing each day, I'll have something clean left in reserve. I'm calm with this new life . . . It all amuses me—to pose for Laurent and he does the cooking.³

3

After a few weeks of this, however, the Law of Monotony, that solemn critic of many a new relationship, takes jurisdiction: She begins to feel less content with her new companion. Perhaps, as Picasso would later assume, the sculptor stared and stared at her while she was asleep.



Sleeping Nude, 1904. Watercolor and pen

Portrait of Picasso as a Young Man 135

I don't see Laurent's work get on much. He's slow. It probably takes him two hours to do what others manage in ten minutes. He puts in a lot of time washing a dish or peeling a potato, and it's probably the same way with his sculpture. It is certainly that way when he tells a story. He gets ready for it, so to speak, even for the most insignificant subject. He listens to himself speak, rearranges his phrases, goes off in two directions, comes back to the point of departure, and begins again. He does bore me a little, but he's sweet, gentle, agreeable, and does the housework. That's something.

He also becomes tender . . . Yesterday evening, Laurent came back from his father's house at eight and took me to the Café de Versailles, where we had ice cream. When we returned, he came upstairs and lay down next to me. I found it natural. I didn't experience the sentiment of fear that bothered me so much at the idea of love. He embraced me with so much tenderness that he was able to take me without my guarding myself. I had neither pleasure nor disgust, but I would have much preferred that it had all taken place without the final act. I find that useless. Caresses and kisses are all right—but I don't really like the man, I'm beginning to recognize . . . "You're sweet," he told me, "but you're still without passion. That will come, and I'm patient." From now on, he will sleep at the studio and only go to Neuilly in order to eat.¹

Soon enough, Laurent advises her to pose for other artists so that she can have money for herself. He finds work for her with an old Italian sculptor in Neuilly. A younger painter who had seen her outside Laurent's studio then asks if she'll pose in the nude. Laurent is all for that. "To an artist," he explains, "a nude woman is more decent than a girl in a blouse."²

Soon enough she is working mornings and afternoons with the sculptor and the painter, then with Laurent in the evening. She grows thin, but at least she brings back 10 francs a day and puts it in a cash box so she can buy new clothes. She soon discovers, however, that Laurent has used the money to buy clay and shirts.

What an egotist!

Now he asks me to help the cleaning woman do the laundry once every two weeks. I told him no. I'm working too much for that. He's annoyed for the first time; myself as well. We quarrel. We have a fight and he proves stronger, carries me to the couch in the studio afterward, and finishes by acting like my husband except he was gentle where Paul was brutal. Why, then, do men find so much excitement in violence?³

136 Norman Mailer

Her dissatisfactions increase. She watches with annoyance as he does some carpentry.

Have I already said that he did everything as if he were fulfilling some task of the priesthood? It all had to be foreseen, arranged, decided. He didn't undertake any task until he had prepared it completely in his head, and if he made a mistake, well then, patiently, without revolt, without anger, he would undo what he had done and begin again. How could he have been able to pick me up and decide to take me to live with him so quickly? Now that I know him well, I imagine that while I was gobbling my brioches and swallowing my chocolate, he was thinking of the profit to be gotten from a live-in model that he could send out to pose for others.⁴

Having seen the work of a good many other artists by now, she also decides that his work is banal. He is too stingy to be a good artist, and his lovemaking is less interesting than his talk about it. He is always extolling the virtues of free love, but she has decided that if he speaks a good deal about the generosity of love, he gives little.

Then she comes back from work one day to discover him sitting next to a thirteen-year-old model he has been using. The model is nude! And rude! When Fernande tells her to dress, leave, and not come back, the girl not only insists on being paid but demands 10 francs instead of 5. She is making twice as much as Fernande!

What's nicest about this story is that he . . . has adopted an attitude of dignity and reproval toward me.

"You can't understand an artist like me," he said. "The meanness of your thoughts makes me so sick that I don't even care to take the trouble to show you your error. I could have done a masterpiece but you wrecked that in me."

I didn't know if I was stifling everything in him, but I certainly knew that . . . Laurent's statues . . . remain in a half-worked state. He spends his time uncovering them in order to re-cover them with wet cloths so they don't dry out.⁵

Laurent, however, has a friend, Jacques, a café singer, she finds charming, even if he is thirty years older than her.

He came over one day when Laurent was away with his family. I was down in the mouth, and told him everything, and how I couldn't seem to love Laurent, of my character, my heedlessness, my desire to evade everything.

Jacques consoled me, spoke to me so reasonably, so gently, that I understood then it was all my fault . . . I stay with a man I neither love nor esteem out of a sort of latent laziness. I must have need of steadiness more than anything else. While I

Portrait of Picasso as a Young Man 137

am almost tranquil. I am so unsatisfied in this tranquillity that it changes into nervousness. I laugh without explicable reasons. "Come back often," I said to Jacques. "Come back when Laurent is not here."

He answers, "Come back often? That's dangerous. You are very seductive, my child, and I am no longer young."

At first I felt very put off by this but then was in a wonderful mood and I put my arm around his neck and kissed him sweetly. When he left, I asked myself if it would be all right to give myself to a man much too old for me, but I had a desire to be rocked in his arms and be caressed and protected. He was divorced; he had a family; he had children older than me. I felt troubled. I want to see him again, even this evening. I feel a new emotion being born . . . He's not beautiful; he's too big, sort of fat, although he has the attractiveness of a heavy man, heavy features, deep eyes, good and thoughtful; his mouth is thick but of a fine design. He has beautiful white teeth which show themselves in a large smile. Profound wrinkles cover his forehead and his cheeks, the corners of his mouth and nose. Beautiful hair. I don't know why I love him. Without doubt, because he's spoken to me so affectionately, has confided so. In any event, I love him and want to be near him.

When I saw Jacques again, I reproached him for not having given a sign of life all week. "I'm going to see you this week," I said. "I'm going to see you alone at your house. I love you."

He held me against him, put his lips on mine, and I thought I would faint from happiness.

Since Laurent was going to return any minute, I became reasonable, however, very quickly. After all, I was now sure of seeing Jacques again. Despite a storm that shook the shutters outside and made the house quiver, I passed a delightful day. What a happiness was in me. My life, suddenly enriched, had become precious to me. I went to sleep with Jacques as my imaginary companion. Tomorrow, about four-thirty, I will go to his little place in the Batignolles neighborhood. I can barely contain my impatience. What is this great love going to reveal?

I'm ashamed to say it, but I no longer love Jacques. Wednesday, when I arrived at his home, he had prepared a nice meal with cakes, flowers, and various sweet things he knows I love. Alas, I tasted a joy that I believed was going to be marvelous up to the moment that I cannot get used to, not any part of it.

All of a sudden I saw myself next to an old man whose beard smelled of old cigarette smoke and beer. I felt such disgust that I dressed in a hurry. The poor man held me by the hand and said, "I was certain it would end like this. I've experienced these sudden passions of young ladies. But you leave me with a desire for you that I didn't know yesterday."

138 Norman Mailer

As for myself, what could I answer? I didn't understand anything any longer about this madness that swept over me during the last few days.⁶

After Jacques, she has an affair with a student named Roland. Her life may have more logic than she will allow. It is as if each romance is a preparation for the next and larger romance.

... he was waiting for me, feverishly. And his kisses left me feeling sweet. I found myself in his bed and undressed without having noticed just how it happened. I was sweetly happy, gently happy, and his tender caresses didn't disillusion me. The act of love has not brought me any joy, but I had gone through it at least without displeasure, simply in order that he be happy. And I was happy in his happiness. We stayed in bed all day long and I slept there that night, close to him, and tranquil. Provided that Laurent doesn't bother me too much, I'm going to spend the night at Roland's house whenever I feel like it. He's asked me to come live with him, but I won't do that. Life together, becoming accustomed to one another, spoils everything. It is necessary that a great love come alive in me.⁷

Still another year passes. It is 1904, and finally she meets Picasso. They have their brief affair, she loses interest, and months go by, then the winter. We are almost in the present, which is to say, we are back in the spring of 1905 in that period when Fernande, living with Canals and his wife Benedetta, was trying to decide which of two Spanish painters, Sunyer or Picasso, she would now choose as a serious lover. Sunyer, the more attractive one, who supports himself on the presents of ladies older than himself, wins out.

I've become Sunyer's mistress. A consenting and even amorous mistress, physically speaking. But only physically. That which hadn't yet happened to me, did happen. Why with him rather than with someone else? It's strange. Sunyer hardly pleases me outside of "that." I don't like to spend the night in his place, so I leave. Love, apparently, has nothing to do with sensuality.

Sunyer is a young man, nicely dressed, with a pleasing body, and he's not stupid, but he doesn't touch my heart. I fell into his arms almost by accident, and he revealed to me sides of life of which I was ignorant! It's splendid, it's exciting! But if my senses have spoken, my heart stays closed. I find, on leaving his arms, that I have nothing but a desire to get back to my own bed, to sleep far from him. However, on waking up, I know that come evening I will go to see him again, and nothing can prevent me from doing so.

Poor Pablo. If I could only love him. Yesterday, Laurent arrived like a wild man and brought me over to his place. I was taken to bed. I had to open for him.

Portrait of Picasso as a Young Man 139

He wasn't brutal, but he did take me as if I were his prey. Stocky little Laurent, with heavy, muscular hands, developed by the force of sculpting—he's very strong. But he doesn't excite me at all. I didn't, to my surprise, resist his ardor, and I didn't remain inert, as I used to, but despite all that, he disgusted me. I feared his brutality when I refused him a second time. This evening I will go to Sunyer's place . . .

Sunyer invites me to live with him, but I hesitate. His studio is sad. He has no money, and I don't love Sunyer. I do, however, continue to enjoy his caresses, and ceaselessly. But what makes it happen? Such lovemaking doesn't give me anything on which to live. If I didn't work, I wouldn't eat, and he's out all day long. Yesterday he came back with a package. It was linen for himself. Silk linen, shirts, underwear, socks. Is it true that he has, as I've heard, an old mistress who gives him all that he needs except for money? Ha! I don't give a damn!

I run across Pablo, who doesn't leave me. Happy to see me, his eyes filled with tears, and in his amusing accent, he said, "Come to my house. I love you. I'll do everything for you. You don't *know* what I would do for you!" But I still said no to him. He looked at me greedily, with his large eyes, so brilliant, so restless, so sad. Oh, he loves me, but I don't love him. Can it be that he loves me too much? It isn't only because he is very poor that I don't accept the idea of living with him. Something in me refuses to accept . . . However, his love does warm me up. Perhaps I will get together with him, if he is patient, and if he still wants me, in some future time.⁸

4

In one corner of Picasso's studio, a curtain closed off an alcove. Not long after that summer day in August when he first went to bed with Fernande, Picasso assembled a shrine for her in this space; a wooden crate served for the altar. As Fernande describes it, it had a "pretty pen-and-ink portrait" of her, and "a very fine, white silky blouse lay beside two magnificent cerulean blue Louis Philippe vases containing bunches of artificial flowers like Cézanne must have had."¹

Fernande interpreted the shrine as not only mystical and nostalgic but full of self-mockery. Given her rational French insight, she may have paid insufficient attention to the first element. Not only was Picasso drawn to magic, but Max Jacob was an adept and their new friend Apollinaire was well read on the subject. How could they not have conspired to create a magical house to exert occult induction upon her? If the alcove had once been given such names as the maid's room and the mortuary, since it had served as the closed-off area in Picasso's loft for matinees and one-night stands, well, all the better. The resonance of old fornications would contribute to the magic.

Waiting, he did an etching of Fernande—where she still looked suspiciously like Madeleine. The spring and summer of 1905 went by miserably, and miserable it had to be if his longing for Fernande was

*Head of Woman, January
1905. Etching, 7 x 4 in.*



Portrait of Picasso as a Young Man 141

as large as she has described. At the least, his vanity must have been outraged. For this is the period in which her body has finally declared the end of its long war against the fundamental act. She has discovered that she can have pleasure in it. That these new experiences were with Sunyer, a fellow Spaniard, a contemporary—even worse, a fellow painter—must have bothered Picasso all the more. In the summer of 1905, invited to stay in Holland by a Dutch journalist named Tom Schilperoort, a friend of some Dutch artists he knew, Picasso took a poor man's trip to the town of Schoorl, a remote village nestled in the high sand dunes of the north Holland coast. His new pal, Schilperoort-from-Schoorl, had recently come into a little money and was spending it. Picasso's only disbursement would be the fare.

In Holland, he paints the first of his heavy-limbed women, *La Belle Hollandaise*. Many more will follow in separate periods over the next twenty years, but his comments on coming back to Paris suggest the sizable impact on him of making love to women large enough to remind him of the overweight women of his childhood, the huge grandmother and his aunts.

He will tell a friend, André Salmon, "Fernande is a big girl, but those Dutch women are enormous. Once you get inside them, you could never find your way out again."²

It is not inappropriate that Fernande at this time is modeling for a Dutchman.



La Belle Hollandaise. Schilperoort, 1905. Gouache on cardboard mounted on wood, 30 x 26 in.

142 Norman Mailer

It is Kees van Dongen, who had no small reputation in the Bateau Lavoir. The painting of Fernande done by him in this period may have been a species of trade-off for *La Belle Hollandaise*.

After his return from the Netherlands, Picasso's studio is equal to any metaphor of a furnace in summer. Because of the heat, he works virtually in the nude with, according to Fernande, no more than "a scarf tied around the waist." She remarks that he is obviously proud of his good if short and stocky build ("the beauty of his limbs was no secret") and is more than ready to receive his visitors and friends half-naked.³

In this primal condition, on an exceptionally hot day in September of 1905, their affair, often dormant, but with occasional interludes, now passes into a more serious phase.

One should not deprive the reader of Fernande's account of it:

Coming back from Corman's studio at noon, I ran into Picasso. He was with Guillaume Apollinaire, whom he introduced to me, a large and jovial man, rather simpatico. I promised Picasso that I would come to see him when I came back from work at five o'clock. Upon entering his place as promised, I was suffocated by a new mixture of odors: gasoline, eau de cologne, eau de javel, all done in order to make the studio neat for me and proper. Picasso and Apollinaire had spent the entire day cleaning it, brushing it with the aid of a broom soaked in gasoline. Then the eau de javel, then the cologne. The joy of Picasso! I was almost happy, and felt tender to see him so moved. Since Laurent is away, I promise to see Picasso this evening. He said to me that during this time he's been smoking opium in the home of some friends, but for tonight he will buy a pipe and prepare it for us to smoke. I listened to him, absolutely dumbfounded. This is something new, and in consequence, interests me.

Picasso had bought the necessary ingredients, that is to say, the little mysterious oil lamp, the long bamboo stem with its ivory tip, the pipe with its small octagonal clay bowl in which one smells the sensitive, acid, and penetrating odor of opium, which gave off glints of a beautiful golden amber brown.

Propping ourselves up on the dry mat that covered the floor, as if we were on a bed of feathers, the smoking materials held in the hand, preparing the pipe while



Van Dongen, *Portrait of Fernande Olivier*, 1905. Oil on canvas, 39 x 32 in.

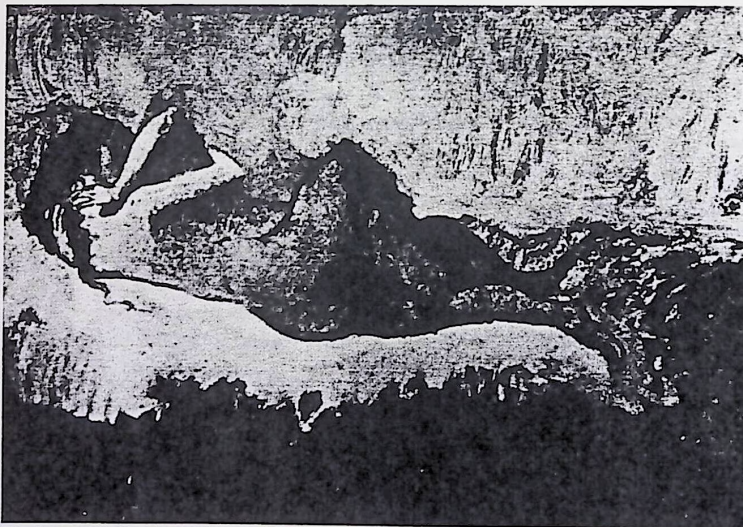
Portrait of Picasso as a Young Man 143

kneading the teardrop-sized piece of pâté on the end of a needle, applying it to the oil lamp held above the colorless flame of the lamp, taking the end of the ivory pipe between the lips, and breathing slowly into one's open lungs, slowly we took in this odorous smoke, bit by bit, breathing it in carefully to keep from choking . . .

Despite the sickness of stomach and the heavy headache that kept me in bed the next day, I can only think of beginning to find once more that spiritual acuity, that intelligent, refined comprehension, that quickening of mental sensations experienced under the effect of the drug. Everything then seemed beautiful, clear, and good. I owe it to the opium, perhaps, for allowing me to understand the real sense of the word *love*. I discovered that I understood Pablo at last . . . He was the one that I'd always been waiting for.

Love grew in me, sudden, burgeoning. A curious intimacy made it seem as if he was now a part of myself. So much did my imagination wish it to be so that this sentiment did not leave me; that, without doubt, was the cause of my sudden resolution to join my life to his.

I stayed for three days with Pablo. I love to smoke opium. I love Pablo. He is tender; he is nice and amorous. He pleases me. How could I have been blind for so long? Not to understand that right here was happiness waiting for me? I no longer



The Lovers Making Love (also called Erotic Studies), 1905. Oil on canvas

144 Norman Mailer

The Place Ravignan, in Montmartre, postcard, 1903

think, as I used to, of getting up in the night to visit Sunyer because his caresses gave me so much pleasure.

Now I am happy in Pablo's arms, much more happy than with Sunyer. I love Pablo. I am going to love him so much. Pablo insists that I come to live with him. What am I to do? I am going to try to get a week for myself . . . But Benedetta advises me not to wait [and] the sun renews all of this old, shabby Place Ravignan, now gay and full of life. This little plaza, scorched with sunlight, its benches so heated in the summer warmth that the paint is melting off, the cobblestones shine, the leaves are dried off their branches, but the old Bateau Lavoir stands on guard and defends its bohemians from the approach of undesirable people: "Bourgeois, prosperous people, don't approach! . . . Here is hope, love, and thought which comes alive . . . All you guarded people, reasonable people, logical people, leave those who live here alone . . .

One very hot Sunday I brought over all my things to Picasso's studio. Now, many years later, I've found again a passage that's a bit lyrical in my diary. Here it is:

"Pablo, it's very hot today. It's a Sunday. I've never liked Sunday. It's a heavy day. It's a starchy day, it has an odor. I hadn't even left my studio. The tired heat

did not encourage any movement. I was meditating, somnolent, stretched out on a couch, a book that I was not reading in my hands. Toward five o'clock, suddenly, I took the decision to leave everything in my short and joyless past in order to go join you . . . I called you. You were working, but you left your canvas and brushes and you came running. I borrowed from you the little wooden black suitcase that you had brought from Barcelona. I threw into it, pell-mell, all the finery and clothing that I possess. You stood there, in front of me, not believing. I poked you a little. Then, in a leap, you were outside, pulling the trunk, carrying the trunk as easily as I would carry any one of my small packages."⁴

How intensely do Pablo and Fernande personify at this point all those delicate, lovely, and exploratory romances that flourished like sensuous flowers on slender stems, those marijuana romances of the Fifties and Sixties in America where lovers found ultimates in a one-night stand, and on occasion stayed together. There was always an element of the *other* in such romances—they were a gift from the beyond—and so the lovers who came together on marijuana could never trust their love altogether: The marijuana was the third creature in the act and might disappear someday.

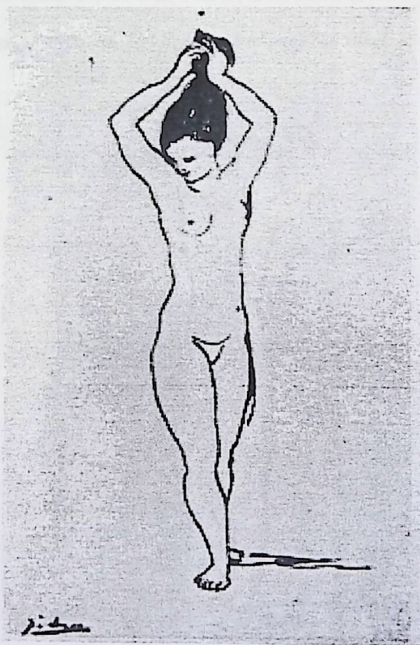
Of all such romances, Pablo and Fernande's seems one of the first. We can wonder if they would ever have begun to live together without the opium. Once the bridge was crossed, however, once she knew she could have extraordinary experiences in bed with him, then many a need and many a mutual social advantage would keep them together for years.

5

There are bound to be questions about the validity of her memory and her manuscript; for now, however, let us enjoy Fernande's aria to love:

At last I'm happy. And Pablo? He no longer sleeps, he tells me. He now does nothing but wait on me since I've consented to live with him. Life goes by sweetly. I, in my turn, feel tranquil, nicely enclosed in this studio. It seems to me that I'm beginning to live my real life.

Pablo loves me. I sleep beautifully. The old habit of resting after long, fatiguing days I still adhere to. I go to bed at nine. Pablo looks at me, draws me, works through the night, lies down

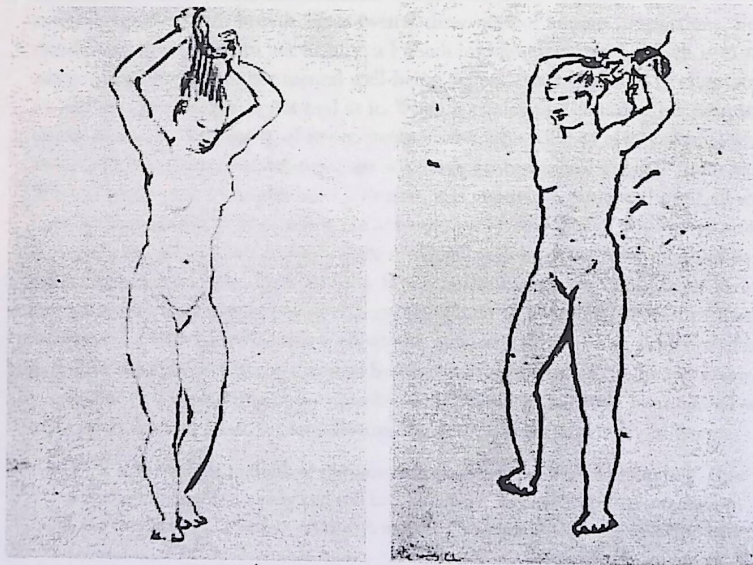


Portrait of Picasso as a Young Man 147

around six in the morning, as he prefers to work through the night in order not to be disturbed, as if it is the night when he lives most. He reproaches me for sleeping all the time. It's true. It is necessary for me to accustom myself to another type of life in order to be able to live a little near Picasso while wide awake.¹

Questions do arise. We are dealing with a manuscript that was composed when she was in her seventies, on the basis, she claims, of a journal she kept from the age of fifteen. While *Souvenirs Intimes* is written more or less artlessly, the effect is not unprofessional, narrative skills are certainly present, and there is an elevated hint of the romance novel—indeed, it is an elegant example of the form. One has to wonder how much of this book Fernande Olivier wrote herself and how much was added by way of an editorial hand; one can also question some of the facts. After she leaves home, she makes no further mention, for example, of her stepsister, who according to some accounts of the period (the unreliable André Salmon's, among others²) lived with a sculptor, Orthon Friesz, who introduced

Untitled (three drawings of Fernande Olivier), all 1905: no. 737 Pen, 9 x 6 in.; no. 735 Black lead; no. 739 Pen, 11 x 16 in.



148 Norman Mailer

Fernande to the first artists she modeled for; that is certainly not so intriguing a scenario as her entrance into modeling by way of Laurent Debienne. We must also assume that Fernande's account is at least as self-serving as most memoirs. All the same, we are offered the sexuality of a young woman who begins her amatory experiences with a disaster yet manages over the years to complete her journey from disgust and frigidity into concupiscence. If that is many a woman's story (as well as many a man's), it can be argued that sexual happiness comes only at the end of a number of such rites of passage; so her account, unless wholly fabricated by someone else, has, whatever its misrepresentations, real value.

Paradoxically, given its wholly self-centered vein, it also provides vivid insight into Picasso's palpable presence in a room. We can read in any and all of his biographies about his moodiness, the incomparable power of his eyes, the feminine delicacy of his hands, the small but well-built torso, the forelock of hair over one eye, the animal magnetism he emits in combination with the social insignificance of his presence—he *looked like a bootblack*, comments Nellie Jacot, a friend of Gertrude Stein's,² but these are merely descriptions. In Fernande's account, we are offered Pablo rather than Picasso. Pablo is so much a presence that we can smell the garlic on his breath. He is twenty-three, and of human proportions. Fernande has, in addition to her beauty, a French middle-class mind, which is to say some crucial portion of her mental well-being depends on her ability to characterize and to classify. She is not bad at it. When it comes to discussing his painting, she is, of course, like many of her contemporaries: She will not always know what she is talking about. Nonetheless, she will have attitudes and express them well. We will enjoy such examples later. For now, it is enough to remark that of all who have written about Picasso, she is the only one who treats herself with more attention than she offers him, and so we are provided with a portrait that enables us to think about his nature as well as hers. If narcissism can be seen not as self-love or outside vanity but as a species of self-imprisonment in which one's most profound relations are with oneself, then it should be apparent through the evidence of her narrative that she is a narcissist, and by what we know of Picasso, he too is one.

At the risk of quoting from myself—and indeed, in just this context!—I will offer the following passage from *Genius and Lust*, a book on Henry Miller:

It is too simple to think of the narcissist as someone in love with himself. One can detest oneself intimately and still be a narcissist. What characterizes narcissism is the fundamental relation—it is with oneself. The same dialectic of love and hate

Portrait of Picasso as a Young Man 149

that mates feel for one another is experienced within the self. But then a special kind of insanity calls to the narcissist, for the inner dialogue never ceases. Each half [is] forever scrutinizing the other. So two narcissists in love are the opposite of two mates. Narcissists do not join each other so much as approach each other like crystals brought into juxtaposition. They have a passionate affair to the degree that each allows the other to resonate more fully than when alone . . . So, it is not love we may encounter so much as fine-tuning . . .

The paradox is that no love can prove so intense, therefore, as the love of two narcissists for each other. So much depends on it. Each is capable of offering deliverance to the other. To the degree that they tune each other superbly well they begin to acquire a skill which enables them to enter the world. (For it is not love of the self but dread of the world outside the self which is the seed of narcissism.) So narcissists can end by having a real need of each other. That is, of course, hardly the characteristic relation. The love of most narcissists tends to become comic, since, seen from the outside, their suffering manages to be equaled only by the rapidity with which they recover from suffering . . .

To the degree, however, that narcissism is an affliction of the talented, the stakes are not small, and the victims are playing their own serious game in the midst of the scenarios. If one can only break out of the penitentiary of self-absorption, there are artistic wonders, conceivably, to achieve . . .³

It is obviously not uncommon for writers, actors, or painters to be narcissists—the exception may, in fact, be the rare case, and there is nothing pejorative about the category (except for its intolerable sense of self-imprisonment). One's narcissism can be handmaiden to one's art. Sometimes it takes no less than a long immersion in oneself to deliver the artist within—sometimes. The graves of suicides remind us that there is no royal road to exceptional endeavor.

If this has seemed a diversion, let us recognize that we are soon going to be immersed in a full company of narcissists. Some royal examples are in the wings.

