

Dear Norman,

4/25/93

I finished Pablo and Fernando today and want to give you my unvarnished reactions. Indeed, they will be poorer than that: incomplete, unassembled, back on the planks.

I loved it. I once wrote that you had great biographical gifts and have repeated the comment since. But I don't think your excellence as a biographer resides in your handling of genealogical detail. You do this deeply enough, but P & F's merit does not rely in its ~~also~~ compilation of information, but in your holding the artist's psyche up to examination — over time, in different joys and peace and the delineating of the dread that Picasso paints from and about. So it is really the portrait of an artist, written by another one who has taken a parallel (nearly) course.

I suppose you have pondered ~~the~~ your parallels with Picasso for some time, since "An Eye on Picasso" in 1959 at least.

You have mentioned him several times in interviews. Anyway, you wear your biographical authority well and use it deeply, like a bullfighter's cape. But the parallels, the similarities in artistic attitude caught me up. I clucked 20, 30 times at the resemblances.

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of your insights, how they ~~arched~~ ^{arched} ~~carved~~
from Picasso to Matisse to Picasso.

Fernande was, is, magnificent.
Her prose is fine, evocative. And what a
tough soul! I was struck with the quick
description of her life after Picasso — working
in a butcher shop! Her exaltation, her class,
is balanced by the meanness, the smugness
of Stein. I thought you were too tough on
her at first, but then began to relish your
authorial forebears of her. I ~~then~~ ^{then} fully
appreciated your stance — not the stance of
the ostensibly objective, fact-gathering
professional, but the novelist-biographer with
some (justifiable) ~~and~~ ^{and} ~~but~~ ^{own} opinions,
voiced. Part of the book's merit resides in
the fact that the usual attitude and apparatus
(some of it) of the biographer is not there. Stein
tortured the truth, so stick it to her.

I thought you handled Apollinaire
gently and justly, enjoying his prattling
and his near-sublimity. I liked him immensely;
he was a sort of a kind Mad Max Ford? Jacob
is drawn very well also, but do you not
wish to tell his end? Braque stands
outside of the bright circle, but there is
only so much room.

I like the thread of execution you look around

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and through the explanations of cubism given by Spollin and Kahnweiler and others. The line on Fernando Wale gave me a shiver, and the whole thing became clear as you moved into time and decomposition, as well as an interior art: "our interior is a species of vertical city." Is this why you have kept the Lego Block City there for so long?

You hint early on, that Einstein's ideas influenced Picasso via the mathematician insurance actuary expert "Pinchot" (sk). But ~~they don't~~ ^{don't} come up again. I thought you would at least allude to the time-space continuum. Maybe it is so obvious in your discussion of past/future, inner/outer, decomposition and death and needs no further nudge. But isn't Picasso taking us around that bend where time becomes space as mass accelerates? I have only read these pages twice, but I wonder if a notch ^{more} isn't warranted.

The photos and plates are going to be important — obviously. Someone (Norris, Judith, Barbara) told me that many of them will have to go. That's too bad. I can see how some of the later cubist ~~mentors~~ ^{mentors} could go, but

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not much else. Those last, obsessed Vaginal meditations reminded me of the last refined prose hallucination of Henry James, the artist at the end of his earthly tether, worrying the bone, trying for the final refinement of his art. And your rich, gentle, comradely, but fair book has set the reader up well to contemplate those holes, those eternal pussies.

There are typos aplenty in the ms., but only two errors I think you'll want to correct. On page 456 you put an apostrophe in Fennegans Wake (or Juliet did). On p. 293 you misuse "hopefully." Did you know that JFK brought that crutch word into American parlance? Read that somewhere.

I hope the full weight of my appreciation comes through in these ramblings. The portrait is in a way a memoir; rather, it has the authority of a memoir because your portrait ~~of~~ of Picasso subsists largely on the feasts and crusts of your own writerly experience, which is (to quote you from another book), "damnable congruent" with Picasso.

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Get, you are far from being slavish
in handling the commercialities. Most
readers will miss half of them, or more.
The most informed readers (myself
included) will surely miss others and
misalign others. In short, will never
know how parallel the two lives are.
But if Plutarch were writing his 37
matched pairs of lives today, he'd not
hesitate to match Norman and Pablo.
With justice.

So hats off to you. I can't
say how it will sell (I'm usually
wrong), but it won't do badly
given the magic of the two names.
Are there as many Americans, grads.
of art history courses, as curious
about Picasso as ~~are~~ there were
more fans hungry for insight into
M. Monroe? Half as many? $\frac{2}{3}$?

Diana and I are looking
forward to our weekend in New York
and seeing you + Nana, Barbara +
Al. I guess the taping of "Don Juan
in Hell" will coincide with our visit.

All Best,
Milo