



Picasso, *The Blind Beggar*. Barcelona, 1902. Watercolor on paper, 53.9x35.8cm. Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University, Bequest of Collection of Maurice Wertheim. Class of 1906.



Picasso, *The Old Jew*. Barcelona, 1903. Oil on

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 so stygian as his canvases in the depths of the Blue. If a gloomy pregnant woman holding her babe can pray at the seaside by the prow of a mysterious boat drifting without its helmsman:



Right: Picasso. Woman by the Sea.
Barcelona, 1902. Oil on canvas.
85x60cm. Inscribed to Dr. Josep
Fontbona. Private collection.

so in the same season he can offer us a pen and watercolor:



BARCELONA 1902



Top right: Picasso. *Woman at a Bidet*.
Barcelona, 1902. Pen and watercolor
on paper. 19.8×13 cm. Museu Picasso,
Barcelona.

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 which 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 the only tool is his instinct that objects which look alike must have unspoken similarities in their nature. It is worth repeating: 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 is needed to surround an ambition which has begun to feel livid, he may also have been stirred painfully on reading another critical piece by Felicien 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 one--the time is ripe-- will become their Greco? [La Revue Blanche, Paris, September 1902]

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 had 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 1200 pesetas that would allow a middle-class Spanish youth to buy his way out of conscription. Perhaps his mother paid a price as well for it seems to be her begging which finally produced the liberating sum from Uncle Salvador.

That situation now disposed of, and just before his twenty-first birthday, Picasso was on his way to assault the

artistic bastions of Paris for a third time. Three of the worst months of his life awaited him.

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From the beginning, all went wrong. It had taken most of his funds to buy a train ticket from Barcelona to Paris; he ended up in Montparnasse sharing a cheap hotel room with his travelling companion, a Spanish painter named Bocarrel. Since the latter was paying the rent, Picasso bunked on the floor.

The next day, first act of his visit, he brought some of his work to Durand-Ruel's gallery, and was turned down. If he went on to Vollard, nothing happened there. He might have hoped to wonder if Matisse had painted the wall.

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From the beginning, all went wrong. It had taken most of his funds to buy a train ticket from Barcelona to Paris; he ended up in Montparnasse sharing a cheap hotel room with his travelling companion, a Spanish painter named Rocarol. Since the latter was paying the rent, Picasso bunked on the floor.

The next day, first act of his visit, he brought some of his work to Durand-Ruel's gallery, and was turned down. If he went on to Vollard, nothing happened there. He might have begun to wonder if Mañach had poisoned the well.

Over the next few days, it came apart further. At the end of the week, Rocarol's money was gone and Picasso, on his own, and not wishing in his straitened circumstances to see any of the other Catalan emigres, shared an attic room in the Hotel du Maroc on the rue de Seine which he shared with a sculptor named Agero. It 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 to draw, and on one occasion

after he had failed to sell a charming pastel he had done, perhaps for the very purpose of making a sale, he went to visit Rocarol at [the] studio where he was staying. No one was in but he ran into Rocarol a little later on the street. "I've just been to your studio," he said and then went on to confess, "The door was open. I found some bread on the table and I ate it. I found some coins, too, and I took them." [ASH, pp. 66-67]

The poverty he had been painting had now become virtually his own. Since Picasso was a believer from the age of three (after the Malaga earthquake) in a catastrophic view of history--things go along as usual until there's a

catastrophe!--this present inability to sell to any dealer must have given him a vision of the perverse power of fashion. We know that the fear of being out of fashion would keep him so much on edge for the rest of his life, that there never came a time, no matter how renowned and wealthy he became, when he felt either financially or artistically secure.

Later, referring to this period in a letter to Max Jacob, Picasso would characterize his time at the Hotel Maroc as abysmal, "the days of poverty. . .I think with disgust of those Spaniards at the Rue de Seine." Sabartes adds that such disgust:

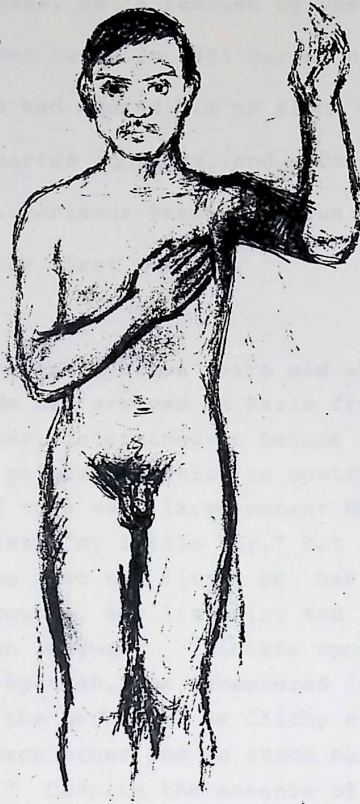
came from an inability to stomach some grotesque incidents and the pettiness of persons known to him and to Max. Picasso refused to speak about this matter and the vile and repugnant egoism of the individuals concerned, preferring not to stir the mud with which he was besmirched during a difficult period at the Hotel du Maroc. [Sabartes, p. 91]

Richardson adds:

Why all this mystification? . . .Palau speculates that the "vile and repugnant" Spaniards wandered from room to room with the aim of organizing some sort of orgy. If this theory is correct, the culprits could only have been men: Picasso is unlikely to have minded girls invading his attic. [R., p. 258]

It is not unlikely that homosexual tensions are stirring

again. 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 one was poor and economic offers may have been soliciting 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.



Picasso. *Nude Self-Portrait*. Paris.
1902-03. Pencil on paper, 27.5x20.5 cm.
Private collection.

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 had adored him on sight with a passion even greater than Sabartes idolatry, and certainly with fewer circumlocutions. Arianna Stassinopolous 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 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, and the next morning Picasso and his Spanish friends descended on Max. "Picasso painted on a huge canvas," he later wrote, "which has since been lost or covered over, my portrait seated on the floor among my books and in front of a large fire. I remember having given him a Dürer woodcut, which he still has. . .and all my Daumier lithographs; I gave him everything but I think he has lost it all."

CAFÉ - BRASSERIE

Quatre

754, Boulevard de Clichy

PARIS (XV)

BILLARD

TELEPHONE
230-03



26x20cm
Z XXII 42-124 Portrait of Max Jacob 1904

X In many ways Max did give him everything, far beyond his Durer and his Daumiers. This short, prematurely balding intellectual, who wore a monocle with ths Max did give him everything, far beyond his Durer and his Daumiers, This short, prematurely balding intellectual, who wore a moore a monacle 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." [p. 58, ASH]

Jacob was now employed as a tutor to a boy in a well-established bourgeois family, and he took his pupil to meet Picasso at the Hotel du Maroc. The deplorable conditions proved dramatic. What authenticity! "For the rest of his life," Jacob is reported to have said of his pupil, "this nice gentleman will remember having seen misery coupled with genius."

Jacob took him in. Picasso moved to 137 Boulevard Voltaire where Jacob had a fifth-floor room, spare, charmless, but large, and they shared a double bed, while Jacob provided what must have been the equivalent of a good college education in those large reaches of french literature where Picasso still knew nothing and buttressed the literary with the mystical.

Picasso's debt to Jacob is not small. He was to learn

a great deal from the poet including the beginning of some real capacity to speak French. The true gift, however, may have been his introduction to poetry. It can be proposed that metaphor was a more neighborly form of cultural exchange for Picasso than logic. Reason with its formal avenues, its detestation of swamps, backwaters, and crooked alleys had, for Picasso, always been a species of foe, the tactic used by others to reduce his strength. Reason was an extended syllogism that extended from don Jose's artistic maxims to society's control of formal 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 or celibate, 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.

. . .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.
[ASH, p. 69]

Picasso was not at all pleased when Jacob's book Le Roi de Béotie appeared in 1921 with such disclosures and it may have colored the hostility he later felt for the poet. While willing to create all sorts of myths about himself, Picasso was not in the least inclined to remove his hand from the lever on the legend machine.

At this time, however, his education continued. Jacob was addicted to ether and henbane. Again, while we do not know whether Picasso partook of the drugs, it may have been his ~~first~~ first intimate experience of living with someone who did, and Jacob, who had a mind capable of the most exceptional intuitions, must certainly have led Picasso along many a road to the occult. He knew a good deal about palmistry, could read the Tarot with much mystical investiture, and was a devotee of astrology. To Picasso, for whom God, catastrophe, and the gnostic language of form were all manifests of his fundamental belief in a world beneath the world of appearances, there had

to have been intellectual intoxication in 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 his family once more for money, he managed to sell one of his best Blue Period paintings, the Mother and Child on the Shore that he had painted in Barcelona and brought to Paris.

He could, however, find no buyers for the rest of his work and had to store it with a Catalan friend, Ramon Pichot. How depressing a conclusion that must have proved to the three most penurious months he would ever spend in Paris and how it must have crimped the veins of his generosity in the future, how ambivalent it must have left him about money. For the rest of his life he was always in fear of poverty and yet he detested the rich.

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

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. [Laporte, Sunshine at Midnight, p, 19]

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,

after all, could be sitting on the outcome; he may be their agent. We can assume that Picasso possessed some of this psychology. By way of Sabartes, we know that in later years he could not even bear to part with his fingernail clippings and, in this time, in 1903, painting the white walls of Sabartes' apartment on the Carrer del Consulado, he wrote the following inscription: "The hairs of my head are gods like myself, although separated from me."

How could the dust, therefore, not be possessed of most 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 spirit that adheres both to people and to inanimate objects. A beautiful woman wearing a beautiful gown is, whenever she looks overpoweringly lovely, more than the sum of herself and her dress. It is rather as if the kuntu of the gown happens to be dwelling in lively harmony with the kuntu of the woman; the effect, therefore, is intensified. So, Picasso's dust. The dealers of Paris might have rejected him on his last visit there, but the spirit of the place still clung to him--the spirit accepted him. In just such private 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 a creature of the gods, a scion--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 did not believe it to some private degree, however, there would be no explanation for the man who would yet emerge over the decades to come.

Sabartes 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, "Some day I'll come back and we'll continue." [Sabartes, pp. 93-94]

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.

Over the years, however, the paintings of this so-called Blue Period have become popular favorites. Very rich people consistently pay higher prices for them than for any other examples of twentieth-century art. These distillations of suffering and want either exorcise the guilt of mammon or else make it the more enjoyable. [R., p. 269]



Picasso. *The Blind Man's Meal*. Barcelona, 1903.
Oil on canvas, 95.3×94.6cm. The Metropolitan
Museum of Art, New York.

We can add that part of the power of these paintings is owed to the depth of his depression itself. We can only guess at the prodigious woe he feels at the task that now presents itself. If he perceives more than others, and he must have had deep intimations already of how much more he could see in ways that other artists did not see at all, 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, middleclass--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 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 his 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 solace 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 that can be alleviated, but is as universal as life. That makes wealth a little more palatable! Indeed, by such a logic, wealth and poverty are each universals. Ergo, the Blue Period would come into its commercial own 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 which brought him the greatest sums were precisely the works which had cost him the most miserable days of his life.

What works he painted and drew in this period, however.



La Vie

Barcelona,
1903

Oilon canvas

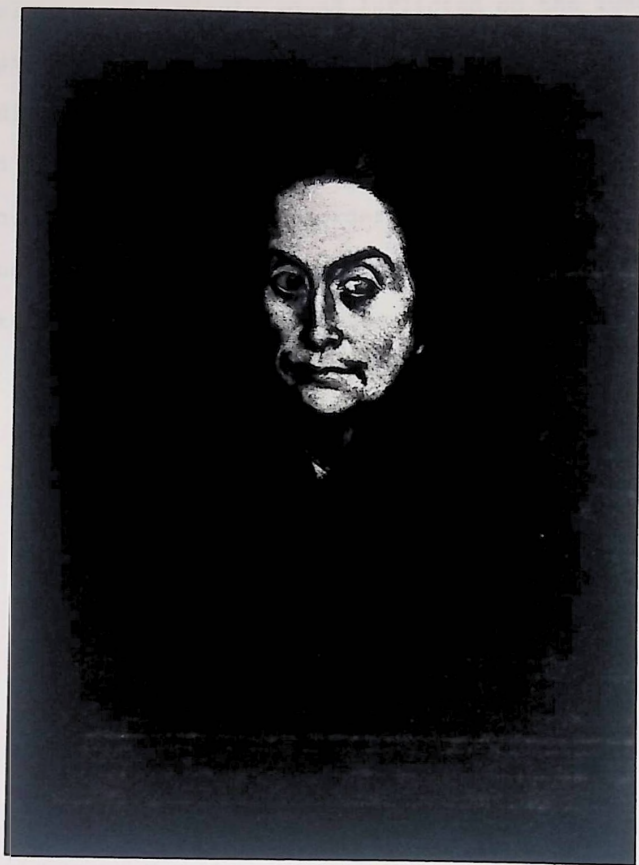
197 x 127,3 cm

Cleveland
Museum
of Art

It may be significant that La Vie, the most obscure of these paintings and the richest in private themes, also celebrates the return of Casagemas. Picasso, while still living at home, no matter the discords between don Jose and himself, had gone back to the studio he used to share with Casagemas, its walls still bearing the decorations he had painted on them some three years before:

If Picasso had a healthy respect for the ravages of dread, and was obviously well aware of its unruly and wholly destructive effects upon Casagemas, nonetheless, he had a gift for using his own dread in measured quanta. Even as a cigarette smoker is enabled to think more clearly while smoking because it has become the confirmed habit of the brain to

cerebrate whenever it is threatened or wounded, and each inhalation is a minute wound inflicted on the lungs (thereby inspiring a compensatory flow of thought to offset the injury) so did Picasso probably enter into such precise negotiations with dread. Despite its terrors, he flirted with dread. It encouraged him to work in order to exorcise it. Those small emanations of dread that he could all but imbibe from the walls of the studio may have been the stimulant to this work.



Picasso. *La Celestina*. Barcelona, March
1904. Oil on canvas, 81x60 cm. Musée
Picasso, Paris.

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Picasso. *La Celestina*. Barcelona, March
1904. Oil on canvas, 81×60 cm. Musée
Picasso, Paris.

His preoccupation with sexuality, whether potent or less than potent, remains intense. Even in the midst of the Blue Period, his erotic drawings have a cachet that would have made him a pornographer's living if that had been all he did. We must remind himself that he could never work without going in several directions at 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.

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Picasso. *Angel de Soto with a Whore*.
Barcelona. 1902-03. Ink and
watercolor on paper. 21 x 15.2 cm.
Museu Picasso, Barcelona.

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



Barcelona 1903
Pen, sepia, wax crayon 13x9cm

This assignment of roles for the phallus and testicles appearing respectively as man and woman, would show up again from time to time. One need merely look at an aquatint done in 1966, not less than sixty-three years later. No surprise if it is vastly more sophisticated, and we are now asked to deal with two kinds of male genitals, one with a languorous albeit tumescent woman at the core, and the other with a pair of heavy ready-to-stomp feet as feisty 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.)



134-19

134-19

15 novembre 1966. VI

Aquatinte et eau-forte

H. 22,5; L. 32,5

B.II, 1418; Baer. VI, 1446, B.b

Après l'aciérage de la planche: épreuve
d'artiste numérotée « VI/XV » avec cachet
« Picasso », tirée sur vélin de Rives par Crom-
melynck.

MP 1990-166

Télégraphique
134-19
Picasso
15 novembre 1966
ou page 249

The 1966 painting is the resumption of a theme that in 1904, trapped in Barcelona, may have reminded him of Paris with its sexual tolerance. He may have known that he was on the edge of leaving Barcelona forever. There will be brief visits back, but essentially he is taking 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.

For all his reclusiveness, Picasso remained on excellent terms with his mother and sister. His father was becoming more and more of a problem. Failing eyesight, melancholia, and a lack of rapport with his incomprehensible son had exacerbated don Jose's bitterness. And so, as Sabartes puts it, "his family fades into the distance."
[R., p. 295]

Early in the spring of 1904, Picasso decided once again to go to Paris, but this time the move would be permanent. Paco Durrio, a sculptor and old friend from Barcelona, 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 he could consider his own.

Part III:

Fernande

In the summer of 1900 when Proust met Fernande Gilman, he was twenty-two and she had just turned twenty-three. It seems certain from their letters that they first spoke to each other, and would not begin to love another until the end of the summer of 1900, a full year later. Every indication provided by Proust's letters is clear that it was Proust, not she, who was to love for the interval between.

Since Fernande is accurately quoted in her translated book of letters, Proust and his Friends, published in 1931, and

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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 Pallarès, Casagemas, Sabartes, and Max Jacob to the constant company of a woman who is neither a whore nor a concupiscent playmate nor a one-night love, but a woman in his domain, his serious mistress. According to Fernande, he was ready to marry her, and was uncontrollably jealous, (with some cause, we can assume--tall, red-headed, and beautiful, she stood out vividly in their impoverished bohemian circle.) For that matter, she was a successful artist's model when they met and was much in demand by other painters.

Indeed, on the hot summer Sunday when she finally agreed to move in with him, she had been posing during the previous week for two well-known academic stalwarts named Corman and Sicard, and they were each in the middle of large canvases for which she was the model; Picasso, however, insisted she stop. How many nude and half-draped models had he seduced himself,

after all! Besides, he could fortify his own rule of thumb 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." [Souvenirs Intimes, p. 191]

"I don't give a fuck," 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 onto the explorations that would result by 1907 in Les Femmes d'Alger. By 1908, he had entered Cubism and his collaboration with Georges Braque. At the age of twenty-eight, he was already an international figure, and prosperous enough to move with Fernande into a bourgeois apartment on Boulevard de Clichy. He had over those

years become fast friends with Guillaume Apollinaire and Gertrude Stein and was esteemed to be the innovative center of the most passionate artistic controversy of the past 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, Cezanne, 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 the world's public 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 had obviously gotten under way in those seven years since 1905. Fernande--let us enjoy the presence of the number--was the first of the seven major mistresses and wives who would exercise a measureable influence upon his work. If he has often been depicted as a monster in his relations with women, let him also be characterized as well as wholly magnetized by his relationships. He would extract a unique inspiration out of the different style in which he lived with each woman. And he would honor them in his fashion. Even in depicting his detestation of his first wife, Olga, or in the

savage portraits of Dora Maar and his second wife, Jacqueline, he he lived with these woman, nonetheless, in a manner that some men never do--he was in the relationship--which is to say that he saw the woman as his equal. No matter how hideous and distorted may have been the mode by which he sometimes portrayed these three women, he could never have delineated them so if he had not entered into a depth of detestation for what their relationships had become. In drawing such a portrait of the anomaly of the relationship, he thereby was disclosing how hideous were his own spiritual sores. The physiognomy of his psyche was present in each of these portrayals respectively of Olga, Dora, and Jacqueline.



Bust of a Woman with Self-Portrait. Paris, February 1929
Oil on canvas, 28 x 23 $\frac{3}{4}$ " (71 x 60.5 cm)
Zervos VII, 248. Private collection



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Such extremes of cruelty would come later--by which time (in the late 1920's and 1930's and certainly by the 1960's) he was a wealthy and profoundly disappointed man. 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 was alone, and each Cubist painting was a reconnaissance through ambiguities of perception that would have endangered sanity in a weaker man. Nonetheless, 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!



Van Dongen. *Portrait of Fernande
Olivier*. 1906. Pastel on paper.
72x61cm. Petit Palais Musée, Geneva.

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.

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.

[Picasso and His Friends, p. 17]

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 Les

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 all the time. 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 11 Rue de Navarre 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 and second, gave him a sort of magnetism. . . Picasso and his friends.

-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. . . [Picasso and his Friends, p.

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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 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 his. 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.



Pablo Picasso. Photograph with a dedicatory
inscription to Suzanne and Henri Bloch, 1904

Picasso, Soviet Museums, frontispiece

In the evening when I return [from work], I've taken the habit of sitting myself 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. [Souvenirs Intimes, pp. 165-167]

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." 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. [Picasso and his Friends, pp. 27-28]



*d'après un dessin
de Pablo Picasso
Paris 1904*

Picasso, *The Frugal Repast*, Paris, 1904.
Etching, 46.3x37.7 cm. Private
collection. Inscribed to Junyent.

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

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 to give backing to the cobwebs. The floor was pocked with the scars of old cigarette burns, and the squalor of dead butts. The bath-tub, the mattress on legs, the rusted cast-iron stove, the cane chair, the trunk that served as another chair were repositories for half-squeezed tubes of paint. Large unfinished canvases were stacked at every angle, and there were no curtains. It was summer and 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 soon after, as if he had been looking at them through any one of those windows that had no curtains, even as they were floating away on a sea of peace.



Picasso. *The Lovers*. Paris, August 1904.
Ink, watercolor and charcoal on paper.
37.2x26.9cm. Musée Picasso, Paris.

 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. [Souvenirs Intimes, pp. 165-167]

Laurent is the sculptor with whom she has been living for the last few years, although she has been getting ready for some time to leave leaving him.

Can I, perhaps, love this boy at last? Picasso is fine, intelligent, and extraordinarily taken with his art. And yet, would abandon everything 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. [Souvenirs Intimes, p.166]



Above right, Picasso. *The Artist
Watching Fernande Asleep
(Meditation)*. Paris, 1904. Pen and
watercolor on paper, 36.8x27 cm.
Private collection.

He no longer sees his friends, no longer works or rests. Yet he stays in his place 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 physically, he pleases me also. He's sweet and gentle, but he's not well-groomed and that bothers 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. Leno and Georges have invited me to stay [with them, and] I pretend to accept, then I go to Pablo's studio, but it's still a mess, because Laurent, who has never been jealous, now is. 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 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 from this, because 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? [Souvenirs Intimes, pp. 166-167]

We may as well orient ourselves to a few of her concerns. Fernande Olivier was twenty-three years old in 1904, four months older than Picasso. Born out of wedlock, she began life as Amélie Lang, and 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 the last name of Laurent which was Debienne, and promptly changed it to de Labaume. Madame de Labaume was 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 within the last name 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,
which is to say the edifice in which he now has a studio and
she shares one with Laurent Debienne, is one story high on
Place Ravignan,



Front entrance, Bateau Lavin

Skua, p 205

but descends at the rear four stories down to the street in back; the Bateau Lavoir was attached to the side of a cliff. Yawning 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 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 black by an accumulation of dust which 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 of slop pails being emptied and let fall 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 without any other wall but the wood itself. Laughs, cries, we heard

everything; all resounded, without reserve.
[Souvenirs Intimes, pp. 114-115]



Staircase at the Bateau Lavoir. Photo: André Fage.

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, Andre Salmon, and Pierre MacOrlan would live there at different times. Even Ricard Canals, for all his contemporary reknown in Barcelona, had been 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 Mar, 1904, Picasso found congenial company. He saw a great deal of Max Jacob and of Ramon 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:

Picasso's French was still far from fluent,
still very heavily-accented and

high-pitched, as Andalusian French is apt to be. Self-consciousness about his accent combined with shyness--something he never really lost and subsequently camouflaged with horseplay--made him seem more taciturn than he really was. Hence Picasso's constant need for the company of his Spanish friends. [R., p. 301]

All the same, this final trip to Paris was affecting his palette.

Little by little the blue light that had permeated Picasso's paintings for the last two years began to lose its chill. Certain pictures are still excessively, exclusively blue. But even that quintessential image of the blue period, the scrawny, sulky, sexy alley-cat known as the Woman with a Helmet of Hair with her indigo chignon and ice-blue skin, has lips of palest pink. Flesh tones become ruddier, and by the middle of the summer there are even reddish backgrounds. [R., p. 302]



Picasso. *Woman with Helmet of Hair*.
Paris, 1904. Gouache on board.
41.6×29.9cm. The Art Institute of
Chicago. Bequest of Kate L. Brewster.

He found mistresses among his models and there was one he would keep seeing during the year he was courting Fernande and failing to convince her to live with him. The model's name was Madeleine and she was sylph-like, bird-like--her nose formed a straight line with her forehead.





Picasso. *Portrait of Madeleine*. Paris, 1904. Pastel and gouache on cardboard 67×51.5cm. Musée Picasso, Paris.



Picasso. *Madeleine Crouching*. Paris, 1904. Pencil and charcoal on canvas, 100×81.5cm. Musée d'Art Moderne, Saint-Etienne.

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 sense of how to reverse sentimentality. If he was telling Madeleine that he loved her and they had suffered a loss, well, of what great use was an artist who couldn't bring off several things at once?



Picasso, *Mother and Child*, Paris, 1904.
Black crayon on paper, 33.8x26.7cm.
Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University.
Bequest of Meta and Paul J. Sachs.

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."



Woman in a Chemise, Pablo Picasso, 1901, Oil on Canvas, 100 x 130 cm, The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL, USA. Photo: The Art Institute of Chicago.



Picasso. *Woman in a Chemise*. Paris, 1904. Oil on canvas, 72.5×60cm. Tate Gallery, London.

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 him in order to marry André Derain, and to be known thereafter as Alice Derain, but in this period, she had a brief affair with Picasso who teased her desire one day by giving her L'Anti-Justine, a pornographic book by Rétif 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?

Picasso. *Alice Derain*. Paris, 1905.
Sepia on paper, 36×26.6cm. Galerie
Rosengart, Lucerne. Inscribed to the
sitter.



Anti-Justine had been loaned to Picasso by a new friend he had met in October. All through the long winter of 1904-1905, even as Picasso worked at his usual intense rate and diverted himself from his failures with Fernande by moving from affair to affair, the relation to his new friend Apollinaire, the unique and soon-to-be-legendary Guillaume Apollinaire, began, month by month, to deepen. 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.

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. [Picasso] comes from afar, from the compositional opulence and brutal ornamentation of seventeenth-century Spain. Those who are acquainted with him will recall that the manifestations of his ferocity transcend mere experiment. He has discovered

himself to be more of a Latin in morality, more of an Arab in rhythm." [Appolinaire, "Les Jeunes: Picasso, Peintre," La Plume, no, 372 (15 May, 1905), pp. 478-480]

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. In such manner, the intervals in which he did not believe in himself could be shortened. For bad moments, he would have good reviews to look at.

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 the new friend Apollinaire, a huge presence replete with intellectual stimulation and a splendid sense of how to spend an evening reciting poetry, but we will reckon with him later. For now, we are still connected to Fernande, and she, by her account, is deliberating in the wings. Her relations with Laurent, although seriously deteriorated, nonetheless continue. 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. I only knew them by sight. When Pablo heard my voice, he suddenly dropped a guitar, which almost broke from falling, and he 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 redhead.

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. [Souvenirs Intimes, p. 170]

Having decided to leave Laurent permanently, she accepts an invitation from the Canals, 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.

The Spaniards that come to Canals' studio make up my court. And how amusing it is! This Paco Durrio, the sculptor, whom I knew at Pablo's place during the several weeks when I was living with him, doesn't look at me too favorably. He thinks I prevent Pablo from giving everything to his art. 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. [Souvenirs Intimes, p. 172]



Fernande Olivier and Benedetta Canals
in Canals's studio, 1904. Private
collection.

Fernande then describes a young man who for days has been following her in the street. When he finally comes up to her, he explains that he has traced her to Canals' studio and was delighted to discover that that is where she lives since he is a friend of Ricard Canals. What luck!

He turned out to be a Catalan painter with a not-wholly-sympathetic quality. 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 he had something I can't quite describe that 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 who, generally speaking, only runs after rich women. He owes them a good deal for the way 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.

[Souvenirs Intimes, p. 173]

All the same, 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."

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 in 1911 that reads: "Yer de toute la journe, je ne ai pas eu de letre de toi et ce matin que j'atendais non plus esperons que cete apres-midi je serai plus eureux." A translation weighted for errors would go about like this: "Yisterday, 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 her life than to present some full-sized excerpts from Souvenirs Intimes. If this will take us on a considerable excursion away from our artist, our protagonist, it will also provide the special flavor of Fernande's presence, which is 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. The impatient reader, here to learn about Picasso, is advised to skip a few pages. The rest of us will feel superior to such a move so soon as we recognize Fernande has something to tell us of the psychology of beautiful young girls who feel unloved, and how many of us, comes the next question, 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.

My aunt was the guide. She should never keep a
maid. The French were full of laziness, they ate
and drank, they were dirty, they stole, they were
not "civilized." There was a word left to her
and I would have to choose I took a library. No
manifestations of independence had been permitted
at the American convent where my aunt, the
ancestor of the family, had been raised.
[Souvenirs Intimes, p. 11]

I passed my early years with a heavy heart,
waiting for a word or tender glance, sometimes
sensing the love without words for me. I
was up to. I would be like my uncle as he went
off with me, to have left his wife, his daughter,
in order to have only me, as if I had been his
wife, his only daughter, but there it was, life
and the marriage itself was really. [Souvenirs
Intimes, p. 11]

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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.
[Souvenirs Intimes, p. 12]

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.
[Souvenirs Intimes, p. 14]

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. [Souvenirs Intimes, p. 16]

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 lack for anything for you to dishonor us completely. A circus performer! It doesn't surprise me a bit."
[Souvenirs Intimes, p. 17]

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. [Souvenirs Intimes, p. 23]

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. [Souvenirs Intimes, p. 46]

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. [Souvenirs Intimes, p. 63]

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. [Souvenirs Intimes, p. 64]

My aunt's latest mania consists of wanting to marry me off to an old accountant. 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 that man. 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. [Souvenirs Intimes, p.64]

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. [Souvenirs Intimes, p. 65]

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 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, consomme, 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. . . took Paul aside and began to speak to him seriously, but Paul was stubborn and soon became angry. Then Henri said, "I'm going to warn the family," and Paul passed over into begging. Huge tears ran down his cheeks. I was afraid suddenly with a fear larger even than the one I'd had the night before, fear of the love of this man more than the man himself, because he had no hesitation about appearing miserable with his face swollen and washed with tears.

Henri also 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 divan, Hélène and myself in the bed. Since then they've continued to stay in this house. . .

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. He left with Hélène, and 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 towards 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. [Souvenirs Intimes, pp. 65-70]

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 don't want to get married to Paul. I would prefer to die than to live with him 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 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, "If you wish to lodge a complaint for corrupting the morals of a minor, I will wait here for the malefactor and will take him away. As for the little one, she looks innocent. The man has to be a swine."

Since I seemed to be more and more frightened, my aunt made me sit down, seated herself beside me, and 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, nor what he earned or if he loved me. I said to my aunt, "I don't want to get married to Paul. He frightens me and treats me badly. . . 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 immoral, 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. Besides, this marriage will only have the witnesses you find because none of us will be present at that ceremony. You'll be married in three weeks, you'll have a thousand francs to get you started with the housekeeping 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. . . .

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. [Souvenirs Intimes, pp. 70-77]

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?

[Souvenirs Intimes, pp. 79-80]

We are being treated to the love story of a brute. It might be comic if it 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 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, ~~his~~^{he} loves her terribly and takes her forcibly, 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, until 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, but mine were of despair, while his were--he said it himself--of joy. Henri and some friends of Paul's served as witnesses. No members of our respective families were present at the ceremony of this ill-fated marriage. Paul's parents live in the country.

No news from my aunt. She sent over a trunk with my things in it. She added a gray robe, a hat, and gray shoes in order that on my marriage day I might be decently dressed. My godmother sent 500 francs which, with the 500 francs from my aunt, will make the 1000 francs that Paul has gotten out of this. He doesn't leave me any of the money. He wants us to move out to the suburbs. [Souvenirs Intimes, pp. 80-81]

We are living at Fontenay-Sous-Bois. Paul wants me to pay attention to the housekeeping, make dinner, have it all ready for his return each evening. This bores me and I don't do anything.

Yesterday when he came in, he found me curled up. I was so absorbed with what I was reading that I didn't even know he'd come in. He went into a wild rage and smashed a vase of marigolds on the