

Pablo Picasso's Work in the Early Days of the German Occupation

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Abstract

Pablo Picasso found refuge in the seaside resort of Royan on September 2, 1939, the eve of the declaration of war. There, he joined his ex-companion Marie-Thérèse Walter and their 5-year-old daughter Maya. His new mistress, Dora Maar, a photographer he had met in 1935, accompanied him. In the early months of 1940, he leased a studio in *Villa Les Voiliers*. Picasso was quite prolific during these stressful months in Royan. He would only settle back in Paris in August of that year. The intense nature of his creativity at this time provides a perfect reflection of life under the German Occupation. Using recently uncovered correspondence, drafted poems and sketchbooks, I analyze the impact the tragic events of this period had on Picasso's output while also examining correlations between his literary and plastic creations. The detailed interpretation of his works uncovers their true autobiographical nature, demonstrating a clear tendency in the artist to filter his experiences through those of his companions, friends and acquaintances.

Keywords

Picasso, Royan, Paris, Marie-Thérèse Walter, Dora Maar

1. Picasso's Trip to Royan

Picasso was closely attuned to events of the day in the summer of 1939, and he felt that an all-out war in Europe was imminent. Germany was on its way to take Danzig and start the conflict within two or three months (Drake, 2015: pp. 8-9). In early July, Picasso made arrangements for his ex-companion, Marie-Thérèse Walter, together with their four-year-old daughter Maya, to be driven to Royan (Figure 1), a resort town located midway along France's Atlantic coast at the mouth of the Gironde river, looking out over the Bay of Biscay (Nash, 1998: p. 211; Bernard, 2019a: p. 70). He had stayed there—specifically at the *Grand Hôtel du Parc*—in the summer

of 1923. Settled in the *Villa Gerbier-de-Joncs*, mother and child would enjoy their seaside holiday and would moreover be as safe as anyone could be, at a good distance from Paris, if war were to suddenly break out.

After mobilization was announced, Picasso opted for returning to the capital. The large room where he had painted the *Guernica* mural was now emptied of all that could be safely stored away, the monumental stove with its complicated chimney in the center the only remaining ornament (Penrose, 1981: p. 332). Friends had flocked to his studio the minute they had heard he was back in Paris, so on August 29, he fled to the more peaceful apartment in *Le Tremblay*. He was really worried. Britain and France had just signed a treaty with Poland promising military assistance should the Germans invade. What to do if war came? The front page of *Le Matin* described how shops were plunged into darkness; trucks in *Les Halles* market had been requisitioned by the army. In the interest of security, phone calls to numbers outside Paris could only be made from post offices and callers had to produce proof of identity (Drake, 2015: p. 13).



Figure 1. Royan. ca. 1939.

As expected, Nazis troops entered Poland on September 1 (Gohr, 1988: p. 12; Ullmann, 1993: p. 213; Monod-Fontaine, 1994: p. 58; Nash, 1998: p. 212; Rosbottom, 2014: p. 19; Fattal, 2017: p. 6; Bernard, 2019a: p. 71). Suddenly, the streets of Paris were covered with posters informing the population of the decision to mobilize: “Parisians, our country is in danger and with it our freedoms... As always, Parisians will do their duty while remaining cool, calm and collected. They will all enthusiastically rally to the flag and defend the same ideal. *Vive la France*”. Five million Frenchmen enlisted. Simone de Beauvoir wrote in her diary: “An elusive sense of horror underpinned everything in the here and now and that lay ahead: you could not predict anything, imagine anything or relate to anything” (Drake, 2015: p. 16). Brassai recalled running into Picasso on the boulevard Saint-Germain: “He was a worried, distraught man who did not know what to do. He ordered crates,

began to have his paintings wrapped up and packed” (Brassaï, 1999: pp. 48-49).

In the end, he made the decision to rejoin Marie-Thérèse and Maya, but he did so in the company of his new partner, Dora Maar, checking in at *Hôtel du Tigre* (Baldassari et al., 2002: p. 381; Alvarez et al., 2019: p. 33). Penrose describes the artist’s quarters: “The rooms in which he lived for the next few months were cramped and badly lit. The town itself, apart from its harbor, had few attractions. Accepting the situation, however, he settled down to a regular routine in which the main factor [was] work” (Penrose, 1981: p. 326). Having left Paris with hardly any art supplies, he desperately scoured local shops to buy up whatever he could find (Boggs, 1992: p. 261). After a while, he decided to get a studio in the same villa where his daughter and her mother were staying (Ullmann, 1993: p. 240; Baldassari, 2006: p. 235).

From Royan, Picasso closely followed the war developments. The appearance of rotted steer skulls and flayed sheep parts in his drawings reflect the future aftermath of the lethal conflict. In Sketchbook 42, on which he worked through October 29-30 (Tosatto et al., 2019: pp. 66-67), we see for the first time the motif of the female nude seen from behind, her two profiles joined at the nape of the neck.

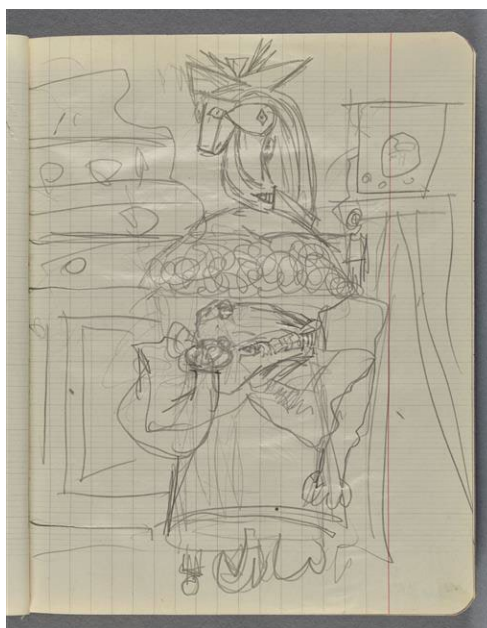


Figure 2. *Femme au chapeau*. Royan. October/1939. OPP.39:049.

Penrose proposes a psychological reading: “The head is in varying degrees split in two, seeming to look both out into the world and into itself with apprehensive tear-filled eyes” (Penrose, 1981: pp. 330-331). Picasso confessed that many of these drawings were portraits of Dora. In *Femme au chapeau*¹ (Figure 2), she holds on her lap the head of a skinned lamb similar to those he used to give to his Afghan hound. The way she is holding the blood-soaked head sends a chill down the spine,

¹*Femme au chapeau*. Royan. October/1939. Pencil on graph paper. 21.8 × 16 cm. Musée Picasso, Paris. OPP.39:049.

as two of her fat fingers stick through its two openings, one from the eye socket and the other from the mouth. While she might remind us of a Pietà holding Christ's dead body on her lap, this is a nightmarish vision, a negation of the traditional iconography of the Virgin Mary (Baer, 1998: pp. 93-94).

Moreover, the head combines human and animal elements, as can be seen more clearly in a later painting based on the drawing: *Tête de femme au chapeau*². This indicates a close relationship between the lamb skull and the woman, and hence, a foreboding of her own death. Simultaneously, her emphatically upright posture and anachronistic long robe give the figure the terrible appearance of a primitive death goddess, clearly recalling the negative aspects of Magna Mater representations in ancient Mediterranean culture. As Ullmann comments, "What we are looking at is not the face of a person, but the physiognomy of an epoch that was marked by excessive destruction" (Ullmann, 1993: pp. 224-228).

The previous animal carcasses led to pictures of tortured and monstrously deformed women in *Femme au chapeau bleu*³ (Figure 3) or *Tête de femme*⁴. Maar's bust is no longer really human here, its budding, puffed and woven head, or its rhomboid neck, create a kind of scarified effigy (Cabanne, 1975: p. 61).



Figure 3. *Femme au chapeau bleu*. Royan. 3-October/1939. OPP.39:052.

The hysterical crisis or *folie érotique* promoted by the Surrealists, often embodied in a broken body, found a certain resonance here. "Beauty will be convulsive or will not be", Breton had said (Baldassari, 2005: pp. 247-248). After war broke out, he came to portray Dora more and more frequently as a sacrificial victim, a

²*Tête de femme au chapeau*. Royan. 11-October/1939. Oil on canvas. 55.2 × 45.7 cm. Los Angeles County Museum of Art. (Inv M.2005.70.105). OPP.39:047.

³*Femme au chapeau bleu*. Royan. 3-October/1939. Oil on canvas. 65.5 × 50 cm. Musée Picasso, Paris. OPP.39:052.

⁴*Tête de femme*. Royan. 4-October/1939. Oil on canvas. 65.5 × 54.5 cm. Musée Picasso, Paris. OPP.39:038.

tearful symbol of his own pain and grief at the horrors of tyranny and war. In the course of events, it is hardly surprising that the poor woman became increasingly traumatized, and at the end of the war, suffered a severe nervous breakdown (Tosatto et al., 2019: p. 86).

On October 4, he painted the oils *Tête de femme*⁵ and *Crâne de mouton*⁶, almost equating the suffering represented in both. The face was reduced to an assemblage of muted colored triangles shaped like the muzzle of an animal, thus contaminating the human sitter with a bestial quality (Léal, Piot, & Bernadac, 2000: pp. 334-343). In the second painting, one finds at once a realistic, even naturalistic, purpose in the rendering of the details, and a desire for expressiveness, which is translated as much in the color as in the brush stroke. The composition is particularly bare. Its abstract background, with a gradient of tones ranging from gray-brown to ochre-yellow, gives a subtle illusion of depth. The skull, coarsely cut and in a dominant red, stands out. Showing its sharp teeth like an infernal grinding machine, it simultaneously suggests violence and pain. Death is omnipresent, reflected in each point of the painting, through the severe linear strokes and the bleeding pigments. From the Spanish Civil War, he understood the misery of war and the distress it caused to people. Through the sheep's head, a poor and derisory object, he shouts his fear and vulnerability (Tosatto et al., 2019: p. 89). Bernadac sees an antecedent for it in Francisco de Goya. There is something about the pain expressed in the wide opened mouth and the black circles for eyes that suggest the influence of the Spanish artist, in particular the agonized figures with expressive mouths of the victims facing the firing squad on 3 May 1808 in the *Museo del Prado* (Boggs, 1992: pp. 262-263).

On October 26, he started Sketchbook 21 (completed September 19, 1940). It is a magnificent example of fluctuation between drawing and writing, the two media sometimes facing each other or alternating as we leaf through. The notebook, of a small size so that he could keep it in his pocket and have it always at hand, also contains the first outlines of poems, offering multiple variants, sometimes repeated several times in almost identical organization, with erasures and additions being the norm (Michaël, 2008: pp. 58, 72). One of the drawings in it was closely related to the oil *Dora Maar assise*⁷ in which she confronted the viewer with wide, sparkling eyes which compete with the stars on the garish wallpaper behind her.

She assumes her role of prophetess Cassandra, displaying the frantic frustration of a seer who can foretell the future but is cursed by fate not to be heard—only Picasso listens to her warnings, making her the medium through whom to project current and future events.

In *Tête de femme au chapeau mauve*⁸ (Figure 4), Dora widens her eyes like a

⁵ *Tête de femme*. Royan. 4-October/1939. Oil on canvas. 65.5 × 54.5 cm. Musée Picasso, Paris. OPP.39:038.

⁶ *Crâne de mouton*. Royan. 4-October/1939. Oil on canvas. 50 × 61 cm. Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lyon. (Inv 1990.20). OPP.39:011.

⁷ *Dora Maar assise*. Royan. 26-October/1939. Oil on canvas. 73.3 × 60.3 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, NYC. (Inv 1998.23). OPP.39:099.

⁸ *Tête de femme au chapeau mauve*. Royan. 27-October/1939. Oil on canvas. 55.2 × 45.7 cm. Christie's. #51, 2477, 11/01/11. OPP.39:036.

Byzantine icon, mesmerized, staring in disbelief at something unknown, but certainly ominous and terrifying, a clear and present danger, some vast horror lurking in a more distant future.



Figure 4. *Tête de femme au chapeau mauve*. Royan. 27-October/1939. OPP.39:036.

Again, he transformed her into a modern Sybil, but one who does not speak, turning her into a silent oracular presence whose facial expression of inner distress is her prophecy. The spiky configuration of her lips and the thin parting of her mouth underscore her speechless state. During these increasingly distressing years, he coerced her mysterious and inscrutably impassive visage into reflecting the ominous and troubled mood in Europe, wreaking an unsparing brutality on her visage, contriving some shocking new pictorial identity for her. With the war less than two months old, she appears to be staring in the face of something far more calamitous than ever before, a catastrophe on a scale hitherto unprecedented and unimaginable. A huge yellow stain marks Dora's cheek. A month later, the Nazis would require all Jews living in their jurisdiction to wear a yellow star of David.

In the portrait of Dora, he painted at the end of the month, *Le chandail jaune*⁹ (Figure 5), she resembles a flat board (as in African sculptures) and is composed of segments. The mask-like double visage underlines the idol character of the figure. This is what Picasso himself called a “conjuring picture”, that is, an expression through which he tried to relieve himself of his fear of a world menace by objectifying his anxiety in his pictures (Ullmann, 1993: pp. 286-288).

Indeed, feelings of fear and alienation from one's familiar environment, of a “narrowing” of one's sentient world, soon spread across France. Anticipation of a close encounter with the enemy and possibly occupation called for a recalibration of psychological as well as physical sense of time. Beauvoir often spoke in her diary

⁹*Le chandail jaune*. Royan. 31-October/1939. Oil on canvas. 81 × 65 cm. Nationalgalerie, Museum Berggruen, Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin. OPP.39:033.

of feeling “out of time”. She wrote: “For the last two months, I had lived my life simultaneously in the infinite and in the moment. I had to fill the time minute-by-minute, or long hours at a time, but entirely without a tomorrow” (Rosbottom, 2014: pp. 22-24).



Figure 5. *Le chandail jaune*. Royan. 31-October/1939. OPP.39:033.

On December 24, he composed the long poem *la boîte à ordures* which includes lines like “night disgorges itself in the azure ... the emptiness of the sky with its angles lit ... the emptiness of the night of the sky empty of caresses and of laughs” (Rothenberg & Joris, 2004: pp. 182-184). The next day, he wrote another, *le charbon plie les draps*, which read “on the torn skin of the house clacking at the window forgotten at the center of infinite emptiness the black honey of the ripped sheet by the icy flames of the sky the eagle vomits its wings” (Rothenberg & Joris, 2004: pp. 184-185), clear suggestions of impending disaster. In a third one, *sur le morceau de peau*, he played with similar concepts, adding a sense of claustrophobia: “The wall advances very quickly to receive the alms of the cast shadow ... the wall rushes at the call and clings to the willing shadow ... the house empties its guts on the sky” (Rothenberg & Joris, 2004: p. 186). According to Gasman (2008), Picasso’s encounter with cosmic “silence” revitalized his ineffable belief in a voiceless, mystic entity, marking the final stage of his journey toward an ever “deeper knowledge of the world”. This encounter with the mute “infinite center” was, for him, a form of “ingress into reality”. Through his art, Picasso sought to find the means of mastering horror, revealing it, denouncing it, depicting it, and stripping it bare (Daix, 1965: pp. 180-182).

2. Change of Studio

On January 3, he met with Andrée Rolland and agreed to rent from her the apartment at *Villa Les Voiliers* with a studio on the seafront. It was on the third floor,

overlooking the sea and the *Belle Epoque* houses of the town, and located next to the splendid *Hôtel de Paris* (Nash, 1998: p. 212; Caws, 2000: p. 150). The well-lighted rooms were sparsely furnished, but he did not waste any time piling in all sorts of other pieces, bought at auction or in secondhand shops, that he generally put to unexpected uses (Cabanne, 1975: p. 327). Although living there with Dora, Marie-Thérèse, who was lodging in the nearby *Villa Gerbier-de-Joncs*, was not far from his mind. In *I amer liquid*, he included many references to colors that he had previously used to represent the young blond (green, lilac, mauve): “the bitter liquid that the king distills that powders the edge that packs down the milk that milks the green of the shutter of the lilacs thrown on the wall circling the house warming itself in the sun on the stones ... the armor’s steel studded on the mauve supporting all the responsibility of the marked blow and all the consequences” (Rothenberg & Joris, 2004: p. 187). He might have been feeling remorse about not spending enough time with her and the baby. In another poem from January 5, *une figure jolie*, he was beginning to question the future of his relationship with Dora: “a pretty figure even that of the beloved woman is only a game of solitaire the symptom of the foreshadowing of the heap of entangled threads of a system to be set up no matter what on the farfetched plans of the so delicious perfume be it of the heap of shit that the colors of the floodlight let blossom ... the pink that has to be drawn with the frozen ashes of the angles and of the arches before chance doesn’t materialize” (Rothenberg & Joris, 2004: pp. 187-188). In the poem *un symptôme*, in which the tangled threads of fate are already predicted to drag him and Dora through pain: “a symptom that denies the diversity of trajectories of blows so tangled in networks of colored threads of a frequency more or less accelerated by the metronome of + or—terrific heat going from well-being to pain ... the picture predicted by all the oracles already marked by red fire at the desired point of the map” (Rothenberg & Joris, 2004: p. 188).

From January 10 through May 26, he worked on Sketchbook 217, which contains drawings on the theme of the bullfight as well as studies of female heads, and women sitting in chairs (Warncke & Walther, 1991: pp. 430-432). Whereas the golden presence of Marie-Thérèse had inspired joy and a sense of well-being in the early 1930s, the dark-haired Dora now served as a more fitting muse for the exorcist rituals that Picasso required in his art as he dealt with the devastation and unbridled violence around him. In these portrayals, as Freeman states, “the strokes of his hand mirrored the thoughts in his mind” (Freeman, 1994: pp. 190-196). Beneath the rich glowing colors, flat decorative forms and arching arabesques, Picasso hints at a fragile temporality, and outlines a host of personal anxieties as he watches the world around him descend into chaos.

3. A Brief Visit to Paris

He left Royan on February 5 for a long stay in Paris (Cabanne, 1975: p. 326; Fluegel, 1980: p. 350; Gohr, 1988: p. 12). He took advantage of these visits to settle administrative formalities (Bernard, 2019a: p. 106; Tosatto et al., 2019: p. 102). The

impression the desolate city left on him was reflected in the poem *la nuit arrachée*: “The night so brutally snatched from the evaporating sky torn up by so many pins the whiteness of its linens found itself bleeding drop by drop ... in the echo of the stone thrown in the well” (Rothenberg & Joris, 2004: p. 189). By the end of the month, he was back in Royan (Ocaña, 2004: p. 267). His unsettled mode of life made it impossible for him to paint large-scale canvases, yet he worked with greater fervor than usual, filling page after page of his sketchbooks with rapid pencil drawings. He had set a new production record even for himself when he completed seventy-one drawings in a single two-day period the previous month (Gedo, 1980: pp. 192-194).

On May 10, continuous German aerial attack on the Netherlands and Belgium was followed by invasion, having immediately beaten French and British troops that had come to offer their support (Bernard, 2019a: p. 107). Hitler told the *Reichswehr* that the decisive hour had come (“For 300 years, it was the aim of the English and French rulers to prevent every real consolidation of Europe and, above all, to hold Germany in weakness and impotency”) as published in the *Times*. Extra French forces were duly dispatched north to engage with the enemy, in accordance with the established contingency plans (Drake, 2015: p. 38). Two days later, the Nazi blitz conquest of the entire country began (Daemgen, 2005: p. 33). During operation, *Fall Gelb*, 134,000-foot soldiers, 1222 tanks, and nearly 40,000 trucks—“the greatest traffic jam known to that date in Europe”—steadily made their way through the forested valleys of the Ardennes, and then along the Somme Valley, pushing relentlessly towards the River Meuse in four slow-moving columns each nearly 250 miles long, cutting off and surrounding the Allied units that had advanced into Belgium to meet the expected invasion. Picasso departed for Royan on May 16 (Mahler, 2015: p. 183).

4. On the Eve of the German Invasion

Through the end of June, the army would courageously fight the advancing enemy, suffering high casualties. In the month and a half that the Battle of France lasted, between 55,000 and 65,000 French and colonial troops had met their death, and maybe as many as 120,000 had been wounded. Almost two million had been taken prisoner (Rosbottom, 2014: p. 31). Parisians who remained in the city were determined to carry on as normal, as if doing so would somehow make the war go away. Due to government censorship, people were not even aware that plans to establish a line of defense from the Somme to the Maginot Line had been abandoned, and they did not know that the army had failed to retake Abbeville, Amiens, Laon, and Rethel. But they saw waves of refugees arriving in the region—not just Belgians, but also ever-increasing numbers of French people, both military and civilian, who were fleeing south (Drake, 2015: p. 46).

The letters he received from Zervos and Kahnweiler during these conflictive months were emblematic. The former informed him of Carl Einstein’s suicide. The dealer was residing at Le-Repaire-l’Abbaye near Saint-Léonard-de-Noblat

(Haute-Vienne) by Limoges in the Limousin region, where he had sought refuge at the Lascauxs' home. From there, he asked him for a check for Einstein's widow Lyda (Bouvard, 2019: p. 153).

On June 4, he made further studies for the oil *Grand nu assis (Femme se coiffant)*¹⁰ as part of Sketchbook 21 in which the female figure took on hitherto unimagined forms. Many of its pages were also literally dotted with poems crossed out or left incomplete. Both text and graphics often coexist on the same page. In both cases, incessant repetition, modification and inversion became the norm, resembling *cante hondo* singing and its weave of improvisations. This can be seen in the poem *la beauté qui s'évapore*. "The beauty that evaporates from its hands sets down its dewiness in the sewer system ... climbing flowers elbowing under the green rug of the linden ... the acrid emanations of the lilac cloth ... the flames race after the braid that consumes itself in a spiral" (Rothenberg & Joris, 2004: p. 191). Two days later, German forces crossed the Somme and reached Forges-les-Eaux, just 75 miles north of Paris. In an emergency response, some 10,000 French soldiers were placed about thirty miles north of the city, together with 200 guns and 30 assault tanks (Rosbottom, 2014: p. 26). As a possible reaction to the feared, impending attack, many of Picasso's depicted heads lost some or all of their flesh, the bone structure or the bone itself becoming visible. Lips no longer covered the teeth, and there was a vacant look in the eyes. The metamorphosis to skeleton in several of them became almost complete.

As the invading army was just ninety miles from Paris, the Third Republic held its last cabinet meeting on June 9. Newspapers and radio stations attempted to bolster anti-German sentiment and stiffen the resolve of Parisians, describing the Nazis as "barbarian hordes" (Rosbottom, 2014: p. 27). The next day, in a letter dispatched from Paris to Royan, Zervos informed Pablo: "Here, it is starting to get worse. It's been two nights that I have not closed my eyes as the gunshots are approaching... As I was about to mail this letter, I met a soldier coming from Gisors. He tells me that the Germans did not enter [the town], but what they did is beyond imagination. It seems that nothing has been left standing and that the town is in complete ruins" (Amic & Perdisot-Cassan, 2017: pp. 228-229; Bernard, 2019a: p. 108; Tosatto et al., 2019: p. 114). That same day, Picasso made the drawing *Buste de femme*¹¹, where Dora was clothed in muddy green against a brownish background, a color scheme suggestive of the German uniform.

German troops entered Paris on June 14 (Goggin, 1985: pp. 1, 58). It happened almost silently. The city had lost 60 percent of its population and, aside from the invading army vehicles, its streets were empty. Soldiers took up positions in front of ministries and army buildings, while senior officers installed themselves in the city's best hotels, starting with the *Crillon* in Place de la Concorde and soon also the *Meurice*, *Lutetia*, *Raphaël* and *George V*. The military command, the

¹⁰*Femme se coiffant*. Royan. 5-March-19-June/1940. Oil on canvas. 130.1 × 97.1 cm. The Museum of Modern Art, NYC. (Inv 788.95). OPP.40:002.

¹¹*Buste de femme*. Royan. 10-June/1940. Oil on paper laid down on canvas. 64 × 46 cm. Sotheby's. #30, N08633, 05/05/10. OPP.40:481.

Militärbefehlshaber in Frankreich (MBF), set up its headquarters in the *Hôtel Majestic*, close to the Arc de Triomphe. Heinrich Himmler had arranged to have some twenty members of the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt (RSHA)* smuggled into the city. They soon established their base in the *Hôtel du Louvre*. The commando was led by an SS major, Helmut Knochen. Their purpose was to keep an eye on the Reich's "ideological enemies", especially Jews, Communists, anti-Nazi Germans and Freemasons (Drake, 2015: pp. 90-91).

5. France under the Occupation

At first, Picasso did not paint anything directly related to the new circumstances. One must consider that, as a foreigner in an invaded country, a supporter of Republicans in Spain and a "degenerate artist", he was already considered a prime suspect (Tosatto et al., 2019: pp. 11-12). In accordance with Dora's "Kafkaesque" personality, Picasso would often portray his lover trapped in a room, imprisoned behind bars or constrained to a chair against a dark and somber green background as in the oil *Buste de femme*¹² from June 16. Although distorted, she is immediately recognizable, her large sickle-moon-shaped eyes mournful, delicately edged with crimson to suggest they are red from crying. As Walther states, "the value and authenticity of the picture is achieved ... through the unceasing timeliness of suffering... The work is dominated by pain and horror, not as a momentary phenomenon but the ever-present dark side of human life" (Walther, 2001: pp. 67-68). The color and outlines are by no means harmonious; rather, they create a confrontational atmosphere (Warncke & Walther, 1991: pp. 453-678).

In the face of defeat and occupation, the French responded successively with anger, despair, resignation and accommodation (Riding, 2010: p. 108). Even before the armistice was signed, sad, defiant, anxious, or hostile refugees had begun drifting back to Paris. The authorities had given people until the end of September to return home (Drake, 2015: pp. 81-83). About this time, Picasso surprisingly made several classical drawings of Marie-Thérèse like *Portrait d'une femme assise*¹³, which seems like a serene and lovely apparition among the other studies of contorted nudes. The image of his former mistress may however carry a broader, patriotic meaning. Her profile evokes that of Marianne, the feminine embodiment of the ideals of the French Republic (as seen on the national seal), which were now being threatened by the occupier. Dora, for her part, continued to be associated with trial and tribulation, as may be observed in the drawing *Dora Maar et Têtes de mort*¹⁴ where she took the role of the tortured victim, an incarnation of suffering to the point of madness, appearing disfigured to emulate the purposeful annihilation of the individual sought by the Nazis (Tosatto et al., 2019: p. 12).

¹²*Buste de femme*. Royan. 16-June/1940. Oil on paper laid down on canvas. 64 × 46 cm. Christie's. #520, 6146, 06/30/99. OPP.40:487.

¹³*Portrait d'une femme assise*. Royan. 21-June/1940. Pen & India ink & wash on paper. 24 × 13 cm. Christie's. #410, 7060, 06/23/05. OPP.40:527.

¹⁴*Dora Maar et Têtes de mort (Études)*. Royan. Summer/1940. Pencil on paper. 22 × 19.1 cm. Private collection. OPP.40:494.

The armistice was signed on June 22 at Rethondes (near Compiègne) by Henri Philippe Pétain, on terms dictated exclusively by Germany (Bertrand-Dorléac, 2008: p. 6; Alvarez et al., 2019: p. 33; Tosatto et al., 2019: p. 102). France was to be divided into an “occupied zone” in the north and west and an “unoccupied zone” in the south. The following day a jubilant Hitler toured the capital in the company of architect Albert Speer and sculptor Arno Breker (Nash, 1998: p. 214; Daemgen, 2005: p. 33). He wanted to see examples of the city’s past to understand how it had arrived at the center of the world’s urban imagination. Two major strategies of the Occupation were: to keep Paris in stasis as an example of an ideal metropolis, and to undermine its most distinctive trait, its porosity—that is, its openness to liberal ideas and to outsiders (Rosbottom, 2014: pp. 79-95). That same day, the German army entered Royan (Spies, 2011: p. 188). His first glimpse of the occupying troops was probably from the terrace of the *Hôtel du Tigre* where he lived. The high command set up its headquarters in the *Hôtel de Paris*, next to his atelier at villa *Les Voiliers* (Goggin, 1985: p. 47). He again considered leaving town, but came to the conclusion that it would be a hassle to move the bulk of his art, always his primary concern, and to transplant his many complicated personal relationships into foreign exile, notwithstanding the many offers from abroad.

By early July, Pétain’s collaborationist government had been installed at Vichy (Bernard, 2019a: p. 108). He and his future deputy, Pierre Laval, had spotted the town’s suitability as a seat of government. Situated in the center of the country, only thirty miles from the demarcation line dividing occupied and unoccupied zones. It was just a few hours away from Paris by road or rail (Riding, 2010: pp. 118-119). The environment created by the Pétain regime was one of secrecy, veiled discourses, manipulative statements, suspicion, and double-talk (Bertrand-Dorléac, 2008: p. ix). This might explain the level of complexity in the encoding that we find in Picasso’s texts at this point. In his wartime epic *La corrida*, the evil “wings of the sky with blood puddings” are placed in a region between earth and heaven (Rothenberg & Joris, 2004: p. 192). To understand his conception of evil existing above the earth and directing its air-fleets aggressively towards the earth below, it is necessary to follow its trajectory from hell to heaven in the Cosmographical Diagrams that he designed to accompany his poems, as Gasman (2008) argues. The infernal “winged bull/winged eye” emanates from the infernal center of the imbricated cosmic half circles emitting an axial ray, stopping on the edge of the containing semicircle traversed by the gyratory garland of clouds separating the material, observable, cosmos from the intelligible “heaven of heavens”. The additional seven lines/rays fanning out from the emblem of that winged all-seeing beast attempt but fail to extend beyond the despicable chain of clouds marking the impenetrable otherness of the highest heavens, as already noted in *a ce moment la cloque* (2.4.1938), where “leaping upwards”, his body, the “room... bangs itself against the clouds”, being thus prevented from penetrating the terra incognita of the surrounding godless or void infinity. The spheres of the material cosmos are surrounded by an impenetrable infinite void: the “scaffolding of the

sphere is leaping in the infinite void” he had written in *la plaque photographique* (7.1.1940).

In Picasso’s diagrams, the infernal center is shown without commentary as a dot-like black point enclosed in a circle (sphere), described by him as the “globo” of the earth, itself the center of the surrounding spheres of the universe, whose diameter gradually increases to culminate in the largest, all-containing, outermost cosmic ring called by him the “cielo” (the heaven). The center of evil in the diagrams is confronted by the militant forces of good, portrayed as an armed but immaculate “white lily which climbs on all four the ladder of the roof [is] wallowing between [the sky’s] daggers [and] honey fritters [and with the] wings of her scissors [she is] cutting the string of the globe that falls face down on the sky and bursts” in *azucena que sube* (2.8.1940) (Rothenberg & Joris, 2004: p. 186).

In his paintings, the cramped, dark, low-ceilinged, stripped-down interiors, opaque, austere, and greyish forms, express the material and psychological confinement in which beings and objects are condemned to suffer. “Asphyxiation is watching”, Zervos wrote to him desperately on August 8. And a few days earlier: “The city is dead, almost petrified ... Here life is extremely sad, a grisaille that suffocates ... The country is emptied, emptied of everything” (Bernard, 2019b: p. 32).

Zervos continued to keep Picasso informed of the situation in the capital, letting him know, for instance, that the Spanish embassy had posted notices on the doors of his apartment in the 23, rue La Boétie and his studio in the 7, rue des Grands-Augustins, placing both “under its protection” (Limousin et al., 2019: p. 176; Tosatto et al., 2019: p. 117). The stress the artist was living under was reflected in one of the most unhinged pages of his sketchbook from July 24, *Feuille d’études: nus aux bras levés, bustes et têtes de femme, crânes, yeux*¹⁵, covered with drawings of a woman with extended arms on both sides of the head, as well as busts with mouths roughly sutured, and sheep skulls whose eyes are pinned with fiery eyes. They might have been influenced by Dora’s earlier photcollages with invading and threatening eyeballs. In fact, she had also used similar fragments of the human anatomy in her well-known montage *29, rue d’Astorg* (Madeline, 2019: pp. 25-26).

Picasso added another section to his long epic poem *La corrida* with *langue de boeuf* (Figure 6) (Rothenberg & Joris, 2004: pp. 204-206). The recurring verb “plow over” in the text refers to the unstoppable threat of obliteration (Ullmann, 1993: p. 233). His status as a foreigner and suspected communist placed him in a delicate position. Admittedly, Spain had declared its neutrality, but refugees crossing the Pyrenees had already been forcibly sent as *compagnies de travailleurs* to factories or, even worse, to concentration camps in Germany (Bouvard, 2019: p. 150).

¹⁵*Feuille d’études: nus aux bras levés, bustes et têtes de femme, crânes, yeux*. Royan. 24-July/1940. Pen & blue ink on paper. 41.3 × 30 cm. Musée Picasso, Paris. OPP.40:242.

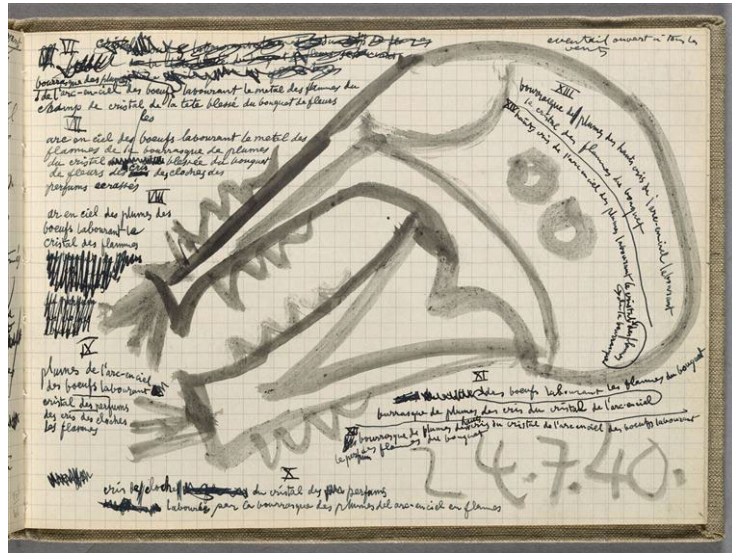


Figure 6. *Langue de bœuf*. Royan. 24-26-July/1940. OPP.40:202.

The artist also feared to be classified as a Jew and get the brutal treatment he witnessed in others, especially foreign Jews. As early as the 1920s, Pablo's ethnic background had been questioned by art historians like Elie Faure. While recognizing his intellectual influence on European painting, Faure had accused him of being "a Mediterranean in which Semitic blood prevailed". "Could Picasso be Jewish?", he had asked (Polack, 2019: p. 157). On July 28, in another move against "outsiders", the French government instructed the Paris police to order all foreigners over fifteen living in the Seine department to register with the authorities by August 6 (Drake, 2015: p. 110).

A couple of days later, he received another letter from Zervos: "We are suffocating ... I feel overwhelmed now, especially since, as you know, we are cut off from any postal service with the unoccupied zone ... In Royan, you at least have the sea, air, light, here we are in a prison. We hear nothing here except about food, bread, etc. There is almost nothing to eat and people are starting to find it difficult" (Tosatto et al., 2019: p. 119). In a desperate attempt to reduce consumption, the Vichy government decreed at this point that bread could go on sale only twenty-four hours after it had been baked, when it was already starting to go stale. Very soon, with shelves in the shops ever more depleted and queues outside increasingly common and growing longer by the day, they started introducing further restrictions.

Picasso made one of the rare self-portraits of the period in two pencil drawings from August 11, *Portrait de l'artiste*¹⁶ and *Autoportrait*¹⁷. In the latter, as Baldassari describes, "his head bursts out of his collar, the eyes bulging, the pupils dilated, more from helplessness than fear" (Baldassari, 2006: p. 238). The realization that the Occupation might be a direct threat to his life precipitated an intense self-

¹⁶ *Portrait de l'artiste*. Royan. 11-August/1940. Pencil on paper. 16 × 11 cm. Museum Ludwig, Köln. (Inv ML/Z 1994/037). OPP.40:009.

¹⁷ *Autoportrait*. Royan. 11-August/1940. Pencil on paper. 16 × 11 cm. Private collection. OPP.40:015.

examination. He depicted himself with a very serious expression, not looking directly at the viewer, as though to shield his private thoughts from an interrogator. Under the weight and framing power of the Nazis, in this airless environment, artists and intellectuals who stayed in France had a very thin margin in which to work (Bertrand-Dorléac, 2008: p. xi). Picasso saw nothing but evil all around. The “eye in the air” of the inimical winged bull was not so much an idea, a cosmological abstraction, for him, but a perception of a presence that he could see face to face. In *brújula forjando* the “axe of the [taurine] sun “shining in heaven’s “mantle of cruelty”, and the missile’s cutting “angle that falls from the plate of lenses” glittering on the night sky, tumble on the “rugged skin of the sand”, where Picasso, the “bled blue... dries with his paper the [blinding] light that insinuates itself through the grooves “ of his sandy deathbed” (Rothenberg & Joris, 2004: pp. 216-218). He attempted, for the first time, to illustrate precisely the singularity of the infernal “well” and its resident, the cosmic “winged bull”: the black mouths [are] swelling in the flayed flesh of the well torn out from the bottom of the [bull’s] eye flying like a ball without interruption from the sky to the earth and from the earth to the sky. In three unusually disturbing texts written between August 17 and 19, as if in a trance, hypnotically suspended between consciousness and sleep, he absent-mindedly kept on repeating one single phrase—“tomorrow Sunday in the Cartagena bullring at four o’clock in the afternoon, weather permitting there will be a bullfight”—referring to the cyclical return of the “corrida”, his symbol for the war that was being waged around him.

On August 15, early in the morning, in front of the *Hôtel du Golf*, a German sentinel guarding the *Kommandatur* had been gunned down. Late that afternoon, an apparent stray bullet had come flying through Pablo’s dining room window on the main floor below his studio at *Les Voiliers* (Goggin, 1985: p. 58). The situation became extremely tense. Some individuals, perhaps engaged in pre-*Résistance* activities, had several times cut one of the main electrical cables near Royan. German authorities had threatened “capital punishment” and warned that they would take “hostages” to guarantee the “cessation of sabotage” (Gasman, 1998: p. 66). On that same day, he made a series of drawings of the café in front of his residence transforming what began as realistic depictions into more abstract, turbulent images. The completed painting of the same scene, *Café à Royan*¹⁸ (Figure 7), alluded to his growing disenchantment with the town under Nazi control through his use of acid-toned colors, mixing yellow with violet, blue and green with orange.

He feared that in a community so much smaller than Paris, he was all the more conspicuous as a foreigner (Tosatto et al., 2019: p. 122). Although Pétain’s regime was based in Vichy in the south, it also had responsibilities all over the occupied zone. To maintain order, it counted on the traditional network of *préfets* who provided Vichy with crucial information about the population’s increasingly hostile reaction to the Occupation (Riding, 2010: p. 121).

¹⁸ *Café à Royan*. Royan. 15-August/1940. Oil & Ripolin on canvas. 97 × 130 cm. Musée Picasso, Paris. OPP.40:006.



Figure 7. *Café à Royan*. Royan. 15-August/1940. OPP.40:006.

6. Life in Occupied Paris

Picasso returned to Paris on August 25 (Mahler, 2015: p. 184; Dagen, 2009: p. 489; Alvarez et al., 2019: p. 33; Limousin et al., 2019: p. 143; Tosatto et al., 2019: p. 104). Life in the capital was slow. The artist divided his time between his Grands-Augustins studio and *Le Catalan*, a restaurant near the studio owned by the Catalan Monsieur Arnau where he ate. It reminded him of his homeland both in ambiance and cuisine. Although he was under surveillance, he was not extremely worried about the German authorities (Figure 8).



Figure 8. German officers sitting at a café in occupied Paris. ca. 1940.

“His arrest would have been scandalous”, reported Cocteau who would intervene in his favor with Arno Breker. Picasso also benefited from the support of Maurice Toesca in the police headquarters and André-Louis Dubois, former police chief and deputy director of National Security. In relative tranquility, he could devote himself to his art. About the Germans, he confided to Sabartés: “Basically, if you pay attention, you will see that they are very stupid. So many troops, tanks, power and noise to come here!... But we, without moving from here, it’s been quite some time since we occupied Berlin and I do not think they can kick us out” (Tosatto et al., 2019: p. 102).

Everybody sought someone else to blame for the growing shortages and rising prices. Shopkeepers accused the farmers and wholesalers of hoarding and price manipulation; shoppers accused the shopkeepers of profiteering; collaborationists blamed the Jews. Vegetables became rare: leeks, carrots, turnips, cabbages and potatoes were in short supply. The Vichy government officially introduced an extraordinarily complicated system of rationing. It was hopelessly inadequate as a solution to the issue of scarcity (Drake, 2015: pp. 124-126). As expected, a poem from September 18, *vu matin*, included many references to food items: “clouds oozing drool on the sky’s liquid bricks stinking up the sheets of the vines ... the blue’s harp sprinkled over the batter ... cheese crusts ... butter grass caress of fingers ... a rain of dead birds hits the wall and bloodies the room with its laughter” (Rothenberg & Joris, 2004: pp. 223-224). The next day, he continued with “autre matin”: “while sliding its paunch into the room rips its skin at the butter saw of the plaster’s frigid lips ... drops of blood flowing from its ripped out feathers ... heaped in a corner for this feast” (Rothenberg & Joris, 2004: p. 224).

On October 2, on the eve of Rosh Hashanah, press announcements and leaflets distributed near synagogues informed Jews that they had to register at their local police station by the end of the month (Rosbottom, 2014: p. 244). The same directives ruled that Jewish business owners had until then to display a yellow poster on their premises identifying them (Drake, 2015: p. 131). The following day, Vichy France implemented *Le Statut des Juifs*, authorizing the internment of Jews defined by “race” and stripping them of certain rights (Limousin et al., 2019: p. 143). A malicious rumor started circulating again that Picasso was Jewish. The critic Florent Fels, for instance, claimed: “Max Jacob, who was his most intimate friend, told me that [Picasso] was half Jewish” (Goggin, 1985: p. 66). Three days after the statute became effective, he wrote *tercera chorreando*, which contained the line “go-between dripping buttery leeches from the maw filled with the blue of Mother Celestina’s powders” (Rothenberg & Joris, 2004: pp. 224-225). One may wonder if his reference to *La Celestina*, the masterpiece of Fernando de Rojas, who was of Semitic descent, was not related to the doomed fate of French Jews.

Many of his friends who had stayed until now made up their mind to leave the city. In mid-October, Breton informed him in a postcard of his decision to take

off for New York with Jacqueline (Postcard dated October 12, 1940) (Baldassari, 2006: p. 311; Bouvard, 2019: p. 150). This same day, Picasso wrote *las calles cuelgan*, which includes the line: “the streets hang from the sky ... poised at the edge” (Rothenberg & Joris, 2004: p. 225). He was probably feeling even more insecure and off balance with the recent regulations imposed on foreigners. After all, he discovered his emotions through what he saw in his portraits of other people, or at least what they reflected back to him through the intermediary of painting. One who served as such a mirror was Dora, prone as she was to calamity. She reacted intensely to all the discriminatory regulations and followed the news closely, as a member of a relatively well-informed intellectual milieu. He had only to watch her reactions to know what he was like, although hers were even stronger and dramatized (Baer, 1998: p. 86). On October 18, a German order placing in sequestration the businesses and property belonging to all Jews absent or arrested, known as the Aryanization Ordinance, was announced in *Le Journal officiel* (Nash, 1998: p. 215). Two days later, the authorities announced that by the end of December, any Jewish-owned businesses opening onto the street would have to be sold or placed in the hands of non-Jewish commissioner-administrators. Once this had been done, a red poster had to replace the yellow one (Drake, 2015: p. 134).

Nazi informers were everywhere. They were closely watching Picasso’s studio, hoping to catch the Jewish sculptor Lipchitz (who had already escaped to America anyway), or any other suspicious visitor. There was gossip making the rounds that Maar was also part-Jewish. Picasso had heard reports that Franco’s fascist thugs were active in Paris, forcibly repatriating wanted Republican exiles for a certain death sentence or life at hard labor. As the titular former director of the *Museo del Prado* under the deposed government, Picasso had been formally accused of looting the nation’s cultural patrimony, under the guise of authorizing protective custody of Spanish masterpieces abroad. Late in the month, he was singled out among other artists in John Hemming Fry’s *Art décadent sous le règne de la démocratie et du communisme* (Paris: Henri Colas), a fascist attack on modern art in general and the purportedly degenerate influence of communism and the *mentalité juive* (Bernard, 2019a: p. 110). The classical painter claimed that the moderns—who had privileged form at the expense of the subject and had neglected the conventional genres, particularly the portrait and the self-portrait, believed to assure man his dignity—had displayed those “features of vulgarity and obscenity” that revealed, instead, “the dual shortcomings of model and artist” (Bertrand-Dorléac, 2008: p. 207). A week later, in the article “Le Salon” published in *L’Illustration*, reviewing the 1940 *Salon d’Automne*, Jacques Baschet also applauded the recent return to traditional art. In a reaction against former “excesses”, the public should look for artists who respond to a “our need for sincerity”, he argued. The Vichy association *Jeune France* promoted similar traditional activities around the country. The man behind it was Pierre Schaeffer, who also proposed the creation of *Radio Jeunesse* (Riding, 2010: pp. 127-128; Bertrand-Dorléac, 2008: pp. 196, 201, 203).

7. Conclusion

Despite the dangers Picasso faced during the early years of the Nazi invasion, he refused to be part of the cohort of European intellectuals who had left for America with the support of Varian Fry and the Emergency Rescue Committee. “Oh, I do not like giving in to force. I am here, I am staying here. The only force that could make me leave would be the desire to leave. Staying is not really an act of courage, it’s just a form of inertia. I think I prefer to be here. Then I’ll stay here no matter what” (Tosatto et al., 2019: p. 104). *Entartete Künstler* for the Nazis, a fervent opponent to Franco’s regime, he was allowed to continue to work, but remained under close and constant surveillance by Gestapo officers, who visited his studio on a number of occasions. Cast into internal exile, he submersed himself in his work, frantically painting day after day, as if a silent protest against the attempt to silence him. Writing of Picasso’s importance in this respect, Barr noted: “His very existence in Paris encouraged the *Résistance* artists, poets and intellectuals who gathered in his studio or about his cafe table... Picasso’s presence during the occupation became of tremendous occult importance... his work has become a sort of banner of the *Résistance* Movement” (Nash, 1998: p. 118).

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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