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Live Like a Poet! At Home in the Bateau Lavoir

In a 1924 letter, poet Max Jacob recalled having prayed in Notre Dame during his young lonely days, "My God! If you exist! Look on my misery! and help me!" In the event, it was the kindly Maurice Méry, publisher of the *Revue d'art*, from which Jacob had recently resigned, who gave practical help. For a while in 1900 Jacob worked on layout at Méry's new comic weekly journal, *Le Sourire*. The humor in *Le Sourire*, like much of the popular press in the immediate aftermath of the Dreyfus Affair, was fearsomely anti-Semitic and racist. Imagining Jacob, a non-observant Jew from a family of Breton shopkeepers, laying out its grotesquely caricatured cartoons points the way perhaps to some of his future dissemblances and ironies.

Nevertheless, Jacob found himself in the control room of Parisian humor. There he undoubtedly came into contact with the editor-in-chief Alphonse Allais, the noted humorist and a regular at Rodolphe Salis's Montmartre café, Le Chat Noir. In such company he did more than cultivate his own wit. He was furthering his poetic education. The tradition of the comic poems and songs performed in cabarets and printed in newspapers ran strong in Paris in the Latin Quarter and in Montmartre; in the 1880s and '90s, Allais loomed large on the scene. He had been associated with the legendary café Le Chat Noir in Montmartre since its founding in 1881 by the arch-Bohemians Emile Goudeau and Rodolphe Salis; he contributed lead articles to the newspaper *Le Chat Noir*, advocating policies such as the assassination of mothers-in-law (under the name

of the eminent critic Francisque Sarcey); he had become the editor-in-chief of *Le Chat Noir* in 1891, and took over also as the leader of the band of pranksters known as "Les Fumistes." Allais was as quick on the draw with verbal wit as he was prone to farce and hoax; to a young poet grieving over the loss of a manuscript of poems in the back room of Le Chat Noir, Allais shot back, "Vous arriverez, Monsieur, car l'avenir est à qui...*perd ses vers*" (You will succeed, Monsieur, for the future belongs to him who loses his verses/*per-se-veres*.)

Cultural life in Paris depended on the milieu of Le Chat Noir and its rivals, like Aristide Bruant's Le Mirliton, which circulated its own newspaper. The leading illustrators of the day—Willette, Caran d'Ache, Steinlen—drew for *Le Chat Noir*, and the clientele who came to be entertained and insulted had included Victor Hugo, Garibaldi, Zola, Vallès, Léon Daudet, and Villiers de l'Isle-Adam. Most important for Jacob, the caustic comic verse composed in this milieu provided an antidote to Symbolism. Where the latter could verge on solemn nonsense, Allais, his friend Charles Cros, and their followers specialized in blasphemous nonsense, assaulted all pretensions, and through puns and crazy rhymes turned poetic conventions on their heads. The verbal textures for which Max Jacob became famous—lexical and phonetic sleights, mimicry, and clash of tones—have at least part of their origin in the verse of the cabarets, and especially in Allais.

It may well have been Allais who put Jacob onto Franc-Nohain, whose discordant, anti-lyrical poems exert a strong influence in the early burlesque poems that appear in Jacob's autobiographical novel *Saint Matorel*. Allais adored Franc-Nohain's work and wrote admiringly of it. Whereas the Symbolist conclaves were known for earnest deliberations upon each displaced syllable as the devotees felt their way into *vers*

libre, Allais's own verses exploded pieties of prosody. In "Prosodie nouveau jeu" (New Game Prosody), Allais announced the invention of the "neo-alexandrine," in which the rhyme occurs at the beginning of each line and the number of syllables can vary, because all the poet needs to do is note the number of each line's syllables at its end and then tot up the sum at the bottom of the poem, making sure to come out with a multiple of twelve. The poem becomes a balance sheet, a satire on the numerological fixations of French verse. Allais was fiendishly inventive with rhyme, composing *distiques olorimes*, phonetically identical couplets such as "De Kelque, préférons qu'orale, à part se rie/De quelques préfets ronds, Cora Laparcerie," and *rimes riches à l'oeil* (rhymes rich to the eye) in which the rhyme is purely visual, not audible at all: *retient/patient.* He particularly enjoyed skewering Symbolist practice, as in "Mournful Poem," dedicated to Maeterlinck and claiming to be "translated from the Belgian," in which wavering *vers libres* recount a necrological romance with a morphine addict. "I could have been Maeterlinck," Max Jacob once remarked, referring to his own facility for writing misty, mellifluous verses. Around Allais, there was not much chance of that.

The year 1900 must have seemed grim to Jacob as he polished the tiles in his attic room; scrambled from one odd job to another; assessed his failures; and muttered his prayers in the shadow of Notre Dame. Laying out copy for *Le Sourire* was not his only employment in this obscure period. At some point in 1900 he was hospitalized in the Hôtel-Dieu for pneumonia, weakness of lungs being a problem from which he would suffer all his life. He returned for a while to the family roost in the Breton town of Quimper, perhaps to convalesce. He spent enough time in Quimper to try being an apprentice to a carpenter there. One can hear, in his accounts of this time, his sense of his family's

disappointment in this talented son who was turning out so oddly: "How many people have I disappointed in my life, which has been so full of hopes and unconscious lies. The protectors of my childhood expected a scholar or an honest civil servant: I gave them some kind of ignorant artist. To the protectors of my youth who expected a painter, I gave a writer, and vice versa. To others I gave nothing at all."

Finding that carpentry didn't suit him, he tried to turn his law degree to some account, and worked for a while as a law clerk in Quimper. He said of himself to the memoirist Robert Guiette, "working for the lawyer, he learned much more than the practice of law. He observed much human sorrow, much meanness, greed, vice, and bad faith." The job provided ideas for characters in fiction, but no career, and soon enough we find him back in Paris angling for another position. By 1901, as the nation seethed—the first major congress of Radicals and Radical Socialists convening in June, Prime Minister Waldeck-Rousseau pushing his anti-clerical proposals into law on July 1—Jacob was working as a secretary for Henri Rollet, a "philanthropic lawyer" who was organizing an exhibit on "The Child through the Ages" at the Petit Palais. In his off hours, however, in long, studious sessions in the Bibliothèque nationale and in his attic room, Jacob was pursuing nothing less than the secret of the universe. In this he was not alone. For a generation, Paris had been simmering with occult activities, rumors of which had spread across the Channel and attracted the attention of such figures as W. B. Yeats and AE. In the mystical atmosphere of French Symbolism, the otherworldly rites, incantations, and incense fumes rising from various little sects blended naturally with a poetic theory of vagueness. Disgust with politics after the defeat by the Germans in 1870 and the violence of the Paris Commune in 1871 may have contributed to this withdrawal

into magical spirituality. Hardly an artist, writer, or musician in Paris was immune to the lure, which tended in some cases toward the mystical Catholicism of the later Huysmans and the Symbolist (and increasingly insane) Francis Poictevin whose dreamy prose Jacob had read in his adolescence; in others to a spectrum from Rosicrucian cults all the way to Satanic worship with proposals for human sacrifice. The two principal occult salons in Paris included names still familiar today. Around a certain M. Chamuel one could meet the so-called "Sâr Péladan," a magus, prolific novelist, and manic disciple of Huysmans; Villiers de l'Isle-Adam; Barbey d'Aurevilly; Papus; Stanislas de Guaïta; and Anatole France. Around Edmond Bailly, publisher of *l'Art indépendant,* gathered Villiers; Mallarmé; Huysmans; Félicien Rops; Odilon Redon; Toulouse-Lautrec; Pierre Louÿs; Henri de Régnier; Debussy; and Satie.

It was the Kabbalah, generally considered in France of that period as merely one of various occult systems, which made the most enduring impression on Jacob. For one thing, it gave him oblique access to the Jewish heritage that his immediate family had almost completely ignored. For another, it opened up a vision of a poetic world: a world conceived as emanating wholly from the power of language, with the secret doctrine of the Bible hidden in the numerical values of the letters of the alphabet. Max Jacob is neither the first nor the last poet to feel the grandeur of a vision in which God manifests Himself in the Word. "In the beginning was the Dot *which is not God,*" he explained to his friend Michel Levanti in 1937, "then there was the Voice. Then there was articulation, or letters. The world is *the book of God*. This is not an image. Everything is letters or number. From that follows the importance of the name! the name of the Lord is sacred and all existence is attached to the name: to name is to create. So that I add that to spell is a magical operation.

Diction!!!" Furthermore, the Kabbalah presents a thoroughly symbolic version of the universe. Truth lies behind veil after veil, and can be approached only through long initiation: "Thus it is written (Psalm cxix, 18): 'Remove the veil that covers my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law'"; "The literal sense of Writing is that envelope; and woe to him who takes this envelope for the Writing itself!" wrote Jean de Pauly in *Le Zohar.*

While Max Jacob was pursuing these arcane researches and experimenting with his first poems, two young men who would soon be his comrades in art and poetry were setting their sights on Paris. Wilhelm de Kostrowitzky, already signing some of the poems scrawled in his notebook "Guillaume Macabre" and "Guillaume Apollinaire," was twenty years old in 1900. The illegitimate son of Angelica de Kostrowitzky, a daughter of minor Polish nobility, and an unknown father (probably an Italian army officer, Francesco Flugi d'Aspermont), Guillaume Kostrowitzky, as he called himself in France, had been brought up in Rome, the city of his birth, until the age of seven, and then in Monte Carlo where his mother worked as an *entraîneuse* at the Casino, luring customers to spend money extravagantly. In the summer and early autumn of 1899 Guillaume experienced in reality one of the scapegrace adventures that would eventually fill his fiction. Mme. de Kostrowitzky and her companion, an Alsatian gambler called Jules Weil, had deposited Guillaume and his younger brother Albert in a *pension* in the little town of Stavelot in eastern Belgium, near the famous resort at Spa. With the adults off evidently trying to repair their fortunes, the boys were left for three months on their own with very little pocket money, increasingly ragged clothes and worn out shoes, and the *pension* bill mounting daily. It was here that Apollinaire began to create himself as a poet. In Stavelot he composed a good

deal of the haunting and subtly obscene Symbolist play about Merlin and Vivian he would publish in 1909 as *L'Enchanteur pourrissant*. The landscape lent itself to his purposes: the region of the Ardennes, misty, darkly forested, and associated with Arthurian legend, made the perfect backdrop for the play with its decomposing wizard and choruses of serpents, sphinxes, fairies, and prophets. In his poems of this period, Apollinaire shows his Symbolist apprenticeship: he has graduated from the Romantic alexandrines of his schoolboy notebooks to the fluctuating, rhyming *vers libérés* of Maeterlinck and the later Régnier.

The uncertain idyll at Stavelot concluded on October 5 when the boys, on written instructions from their mother, fled the *pension* at dawn, hiked through the woods, and caught a train to Paris from a small station nearby. Guillaume Apollinaire entered Paris as a criminal, wanted for fraud; along with his mother and brother, he was called before a magistrate in November, and it took some strenuous explaining for Mme. Kostrowitzky to succeed in having the charges dropped in return for a promise of payments to the *pension*.

And now Apollinaire, loose in the French capital for the first time, entered a period of odd jobs and poetic experimentation very like that which Max Jacob was enduring in the same time and place. He did miserably paid clerical work at an advertising office, he ghost-wrote part of a serial novel for the newspaper *Le Matin* (for which he wasn't paid), he took orders for a petty stockbroker, he took a course in stenography, he frequented the Bibliothèque Mazarine where he met a few elder writers, he knocked about the city with a few friends as footloose as he. Most significantly, he wrote. A play he thrust upon the director of a small theater, the Bouffes-Parisiens, never saw the light; but drafts of poems from 1900 and 1901 would wind up, revised, in his collection *Alcools* in 1912 and in posthumous volumes. He

developed a chanting alexandrine line, verging, at times, upon Ronsardian fullness.

In August 1901 Apollinaire left Paris as a tutor in the household of a German viscountess on the Rhine. A year later, he would return with a newly broken heart and a sheaf of poems which would gain him entry into one of the citadels of Symbolism, the magazine *La Plume* with its *soirées* in the cellar café le Soleil d'Or in the Latin quarter.

In 1900, Pablo Ruiz Picasso, who would drop the paternal surname Ruiz in a matter of months, was eighteen years old. In February he had his first serious show in Barcelona where his family was established, and he was already building a reputation as one of the forceful painters of Catalan *modernisme*. The show, consisting of three oil paintings and a group of charcoal portraits of motley local figures—bohemians, whores, dancers, beggars, and self-portrait heraldically entitled "Yo" (I)—had been held at the avant-garde café Els Quatre Gats. Even conservative critics had praised "the assurance of the drawing" and the "extraordinary ease in his handling of pencil and brush." Reviews were generally unfavorable, but quite a few of the drawings sold, and later in February Picasso scored a triumph by having his large work *Last Moments* chosen to be among the Spanish paintings sent to the Universal Exposition in Paris in the spring. Now the young artist had his heart set on the European capital of art. Throughout the spring and summer of 1900 he painted romantic Spanish bullfight scenes to sell in Paris where *Hispagnolisme* was still in fashion, and he scraped together money for the trip by doing illustrations for a *modernista* magazine, trying his hand at posters, and wheedling funds from his family and the parents of his traveling companion, the painter Carles Casagemas. In late October 1900 Picasso and Casagemas arrived at the Gare d'Orsay, and in a few days had settled in Montmartre in the studio of the Catalan painter Isidre Nonell, who let them take

over his place in his absence. Nonell's studio was high up on the Butte de Montmartre, nestled under the church of Sacré Coeur at 49 rue Gabrielle, the same narrow street where Max Jacob would occupy a room in the years to come.

In his first two months in Paris, Picasso lived in Nonell's cheerfully crowded studio, not only with Casagemas and Manuel Pallarès, another Catalan painter who soon arrived from Barcelona, but with three obliging models who attached themselves to the young men. The Spaniards explored brothels and the naughty cabarets on the rue de Clichy—Le Néant, Le Ciel, L'Enfer, La Fin du Monde, Les Quatz'Arts; they haunted galleries and museums and visited the Exposition; Picasso and Pallarès, at least, enjoyed the city's erotic liberties; and they painted. Picasso, who had just turned nineteen on October 25, painted with prodigious energy: in oils and pastels, with broad, powerful strokes and dramatic chiaroscuro, he recreated the embracing lovers, morphine addicts, dance halls, and street and bedroom scenes of the city of art and love. His sketchbooks from this period are full of rapid drawings of whores and cabaret dancers with sharp, angular features and legs aggressively thrust out: Paris was a city for the taking in more ways than one.

A form of earthly revelation occurred to Jacob in late June 1901, the meeting Jacob later called "the great event of my life." It rivaled in intensity only two other moments: his first sexual union with a woman in the only heterosexual affair of his life, and the apparition of Christ on his wall in 1909 that would lead to his conversion to Roman Catholicism. Picasso broke into Max Jacob's life with something like supernatural force.

Jacob refrained, on the whole, from writing major memoirs about this episode. To Picasso's annoyance, however, Jacob did publish oblique glimpses of the life they had shared, first in stories in *Le Roi de Boétie,* and then in several brief memoirs

published in magazines. It is to these that we must turn for the core of the story.* The painter had just returned to Paris from a visit to Spain in mid-May. "When I knew him in 1899 [sic], he was eighteen years old; he was beautiful to perfection, with a face like ivory, without a wrinkle, in which his eyes gleamed, much larger than now, with a black crow's wing of his hair across his forehead as across a jewel chest." In 1923 Jacob wrote, "He looked like a child. His large black eyes which have an expression so intense when he looks at you, so mocking when he speaks, so tender when he is moved, shone with life beneath his wide, low, categorical forehead. His hair was thick, unbrushed, glossy...One or two silver strands gleam in that black mass now. At that time, his face was of ivory and of the beauty of a young Greek; irony, reflection, and effort have added delicate lines to the waxen face of this small man who resembled Napoleon."

With a lover's acuity, Jacob remembers the physical impression made on him by the man who became his *daimon*. The contrast of black and white, the mesmerizing eyes, the forehead bespeaking genius, all contribute to the idealized portrait. The first vision he received, however, was not of a man, but of paintings. Jacob was in the habit of visiting Ambroise

* The relevant memoirs are: "The Early Days of Pablo Picasso," *Vanity Fair*, May 1923: 62-63, 104; "Souvenirs sur Picasso contés par Max Jacob," *Cahiers d'art*, 1927, 2.6: 199-202; "Naissance du cubisme et autres," *Les Nouvelles littéraires*, 22 April 1933: 1,2; "Le Tiers transporté: chronique des temps héroïques," *Les Feux de Paris*, nos. 7-8, 12 January 1937. The posthumously published memoirs are *Chronique des temps héroïques* (Paris: Louis Broder, 1956) and "L'Inédit de Max Jacob sur Picasso: Fox," *Les Lettres françaises*, n. 1051, 22–28 October 1964: 1,11. Anyone who works on Picasso these days owes a monumental debt to John Richardson's monumental biography of the painter, and anyone working on Jacob owes an equally large debt to Helène Seckel for her catalogue for the show at the Musée Picasso in Paris in 1994, *Max Jacob et Picasso*. Further documentation for this article can be found at littlestarjournal.com/jacob.

Vollard's shop from time to time ("One didn't yet say 'gallery,'" he later remarked), and this day in late June, at Picasso's show, "I was so amazed at the lyricism, the virulence, the blaze of colors that I left an enthusiastic note on a table." The art critic Félicien Fagus, in an article in *La Revue blanche*, noted how much Picasso owed to painters such as Steinlen, Lautrec, Vuillard, and Van Gogh. Jacob noticed the influences, but insisted on the young painter's powers of transformation, and on the shock his work administered even to the avant-garde modes in Paris: to the conception of painting as a hierarchy of values, darks to light, in the line of Corot; to the Impressionists, just beginning to gain success through Renoir and Degas; to the Pre-Raphaelite "imitators," the Symbolist painters Puvis de Chavannes and Maurice Denis. "I knew all about that scene," declares Jacob. "Picasso imitated everyone, a little, including the literary Lautrec, whose biting spirit had seduced Goya's compatriot. He imitated all that but his imitations were carried away in such a whirlwind of genius that in that whole exhibition of countless paintings, one felt only the explosive force of an entirely new and original personality. Ah! How far we were from the little painters seated on their scale of values, far from the scientific researches of the disciples of the physicist Chevreul. Far from all decorative pretension."

The dealer responded to Jacob's note with a visiting card and an invitation to meet Picasso at the studio apartment they shared on Place Clichy. Dressed up in his art critic outfit—top hat, elegant jacket, white gloves, and monocle—Jacob presented himself at the studio. Picasso, he said, welcomed him, "both hands extended, as if he had always known me, and showed me, jabbering half in Spanish and half in French, even more canvases than there had been at Vollard's. We clasped hands with that fire of friendship one no longer experiences after one's twentieth year." (Jacob was on the verge of his twenty-fifth birthday, but

evidently did not lack in ardor.) Ten or so fellow Spaniards were sitting around in the studio, and Jacob was invited to share their dinner of beans cooked over an alcohol burner, washed down with swigs of wine from a *gargolette*, a terracotta peasant jug. They stayed up late talking, singing, listening to the guitar. The next day, Jacob recounted, "the whole gang came to visit me, at 13 Quai aux Fleurs, and Picasso painted my portrait in the midst of my books and papers. I read to him all night long, not, certainly, pieces of art criticism, but the poems I had been scribbling since my childhood along with my crossings-out, and Picasso wept and embraced me and said I was the only French poet of the age."

However dramatic and touching, this scene of poetic consecration probably conflates a number of occasions on which Picasso affirmed his faith in Jacob's ability. In his account in 1927 in *Cahiers d'art*, Jacob mentions the painting of the portrait on that first night, but locates the poetic affirmation three years later when Picasso was settled in Paris and could understand French more easily. In symbolic terms, however, Max Jacob's account tells an essential truth: his recognition of Picasso's genius was accompanied by a reciprocal recognition of his own, if not genius, at least poetic destiny. In 1931, in the autobiographical sketch he wrote for a dictionary of contemporary artists, he said, "In 1898 [*sic*] I met Picasso; he told me I was a poet: it's the most important revelation of my life except for the revelation of the existence of God." Less histrionically, Jacob wrote in *Cahiers d'art* that around 1904 he was writing poetry "because Picasso found I had talent and I believed in him more than in myself."

After that night, Picasso and Jacob saw each other every day until December when Jacob went to Quimper, and Picasso, a little later, returned to Barcelona after a row with his dealer. Jacob may have felt small and poor when he compared himself to his Parisian cousins—Bloch the engineer; Gustave Gompel,

the owner of Société Paris-France; and Sylvain Lévi, the professor of Sanskrit. But in his vicissitudes and studies, he had been absorbing Parisian culture and by this time he had learned the city inside out. He could move like a chameleon from one social setting to another, adapting himself to each environment with his fabulous mimicry, passing from the salons of the *haute bourgeoisie* to the dives of Montmartre without missing a beat. Five years older than Picasso, he was elegant, worldly, shabby, fanciful, witty, malicious, tender, vulnerable, erudite, all in a flash. For Picasso, who until now had spent his time in Paris in the floating company of fellow Spaniards, Max Jacob was the first and intimate guide to France: French poetry, French lore, the French *comédie humaine*, and the world of the occult. Jacob showed him the streets and buildings, too, and some of their artistic fauna, like the satirical painter Willette, something of a star at the time, whose "Wagnerian profile" Jacob pointed out to Picasso, the "energetic little adolescent." Picasso's imagination was infinitely absorptive, Jacob unstintingly generous in entertaining and nourishing that imagination.

Picasso's friend from Barcelona, the failed sculptor and poet Jaime Sabartés, has described the sort of literary hi-jinks produced by Max Jacob for his young friend and the Spanish entourage. Not surprisingly, Verlaine is the poet whose work Jacob performs: Verlaine, whose sincerity, poverty, and self-laceration haunt his early work. Jacob's descriptions of Verlaine, launched in parody of high academic style, suit the drama of destitution beginning to enter Picasso's work at this period: "I recommend to you the working of the Idea of 'Remorse' in the brain of an imaginative auto-synthetic type. Observe...how the religious Idea, which we call the 'Mystic Psychosis,' is linked in this afflicted mind with the Idea of 'Remorse.' Observe how the Ideas 'Hospital, Convent, Prison, Remorse, Paul Verlaine' are scrambled and coexist easily in the sufferer [Victor Matorel,

a fictional projection of Jacob], doubtless the grandson of a tubercular patient or miser." The poem Sabartés remembers Jacob reciting, "Un grand sommeil noir" (A Great Black Sleep), rocks its melancholy music in dreamy, five-syllable lines ("Dormez, tout espoir,/Dormez, toute envie!"—Go to sleep, all hope,/Go to sleep, all desire!), calling up the mood Jacob and Picasso were both indulging and exorcising in these days of struggle, when Picasso was entering his Blue Period, painting the whores in the Prison of Saint-Lazare and beginning to have trouble selling these mournful works.

Meanwhile Jacob was beginning to publish bits and pieces in the satirical press. His little prose piece "La Prime de la Sarahmitaine" had just appeared in *Le Sourire.* In this vignette, a sentimental lithograph offered as a promotion in a department store reveals the petty greed, snobbism, and opportunism of a whole cast of characters, from the clerks to the bourgeois clients to their maid to the rag-pickers who live by recycling society's vanities. The aesthetic that would become known as Modernist is already visible in this bagatelle: "It's beside the point to describe a winter dawn. If you care to read a description of this type of meteorological phenomenon, you'll find it in any well-made novel of manners. In any case, it's useless to read a description of dawn when you've seen them, first because the citizens of Paris, all eager to conquer Paris, are well acquainted with the proverb 'Paris belongs to early risers' and get up early; secondly, because we were all seventeen years old once and at that age one sees plenty of dawns. It's even unfortunate to see dawns at that age; you'd be better off in bed than out in the street."

In a characteristic Jacobian word play, the title deranges the name of the famous department store La Samaritaine into a camp allusion to the aging Sarah Bernhardt and her mittens. "La Prime de la Sarahmitaine" is a slight piece. But by this time, Jacob had already used this sort of satirical material in strong,

original poems: dissonant, concentrated, and savvy in their relation to poetic tradition. The poets who would soon be his companions in arms, Apollinaire and André Salmon, were also beginning to publish their first poems and stories; while their work at this stage was still redolent of Symbolism, Jacob was making an edgy art of satire and social ventriloquism.

A good example of Jacob's direction at this time is "Invitation au voyage," written in 1903. Jacob saved it, and published it in his book *Le Laboratoire central* in 1921. Evoking and rejecting the *luxe, calme et volupté* of Baudelaire's canonical poem, Jacob's verses roughly hew to an eight-syllable line. His rhymes are equally disturbing, sometimes rhyming the same word (*couler l'eau/menthes à l'eau;* running water/mint in water) and often rhyming a Romantic word with a technological one: *rameaux/vélos* (boughs/bicycles); *machines/aubépine* (machines/hawthorn). The last stanza is a mini-critique of a whole Romantic literature of escape, seen here through the lingo of commerce and advertising that was, after all, Max Jacob's mother tongue:

> A vendre: quatre véritables déserts
> A proximité du chemin de fer.
> S'adresser au propriétaire-notaire
>   M. Chocarneau,
>   18, boulevard Carnot.

> For sale: four deserts, genuine,
> With easy access to the train line.
> See owner-agent of assign
>   M. Chocarneau,
>   18, boulevard Carnot.

Years before Picasso and Braque incorporated fragments of newspapers and advertising into their paintings, Jacob

had recognized the flotsam and jetsam of public language as material for poetry. He had recognized, also, the expressive value of distorting convention: the deliberately clumsy rhymes and syllable counts mock nineteenth-century mellifluousness as the poem's modern modes of transport—trains, cars, bicycles, flying machines—mock Romantic and Symbolist tropical seascapes and drunken boats. Jacob wittily dedicated "Invitation au voyage" to Louis Bergerot, about whom little is known except that he was a friend of both Jacob's and Picasso's, and worked in a train station. Picasso, writing the previous September from Barcelona, had asked Jacob to send his *bonjour* to the Bergerot family and had written to Bergerot at the same time asking for news of Max. Bergerot turns up, touchingly, in a note on a copy of another of Jacob's poems: on "Comme Marie Madeleine" Jacob has written, "copied by Louis Bergerot, now employed at the Gare de l'Est. My first fan." He lived on the Faubourg St. Denis near the railway station; his association with trains may have played a part in "Invitation au voyage."

The bond between Picasso and Jacob was cemented during this period by one pivotal early experience. Picasso returned from a trip to Barcelona in late 1902 to circumstances of humiliating poverty. He later remembered this as the darkest period of his life. He was holed up in a garret at the Hôtel du Maroc. The dealers were not biting, snubbing even saccharine pastels he produced as potboilers. Picasso's wretchedness shocked Jacob. The poet applied to his rich cousin Gustave Gompel for a job in his department store, Paris-France, and moved from the Quai aux Fleurs to a larger room he would share for some weeks with Picasso on the Boulevard Voltaire, far from the artistic communities of Montmartre and the Latin Quarter. Jacob supported Picasso with his own meager earnings from his job as a nanny while he waited to start work as a clerk in Paris-France, and the two took turns sleeping in the single

narrow cot, Picasso painting by night and sleeping by day. Jacob read to Picasso the poems he hardly showed to anyone else. It was a lonely time for them both, too poor to frequent cafés and cabarets. But they sustained each other. When Picasso returned definitively to Paris in April, 1904, to begin his conquest of the city in earnest, this mythic period was behind him and their friendship was inscribed within it.

He arrived on April 13, 1904, with his friend the Catalan painter Sebastià Junyer Vidal. They installed themselves in Montmartre in the studio just vacated by the Basque ceramicist and sculptor Paco Durrio in the ramshackle cluster of studios that came to be known as the Bateau Lavoir (The Washing Barge). Junyer Vidal paid the rent. This turned out to be Picasso's definitive move to France. The birthplace of Cubism, the Bateau Lavoir, this crazy building at 13 rue Ravignan has inspired an enormous literature of description. It is here that Picasso would live with his first great love, Fernande Olivier; here he drew together his gang of fellow-creators, *la bande à Picasso*: Jacob, Apollinaire, Derain, Salmon, Braque, Gris, Reverdy, painters and poets who would change the forms of art for the new century.

Called "La Maison du Trappeur" (The Trapper's House), later renamed Le Bateau Lavoir by Salmon or Jacob, this ex-piano factory and ex-locksmith shop converted to a congeries of studios in 1889 could be entered on the first floor from the rue Ravignan, but plunged in the rear down three storeys to the rue Garreau. Various Spanish artists had preceded Picasso in the building, including his older friends Ricard Canals and Joaquim Sunyer. In the 1880s it had been a popular haunt for anarchists, Gauguin had visited often, and the poet-dramatic Paul Fort had lived there while directing his Symbolist Théâtre de l'Art across the square. Max Jacob, who visited every day and later lived there for a while, evoked it often. In a lecture in 1937 he remembered: "Picasso returned with what the dealers

Montmartre, arranged in such a way, split up among so many steep and tortuous streets, that three of the four floors of this house were actually ground floors." Salmon describes the fruit and vegetable vendor, Sorieul, who sold mussels of mysterious provenance during the winter, and whose drunken son worked on and off as a sandwich ad-man and bawled out the Bohemian artists. "Oh! Strange nights of the rue Ravignan," remembers Salmon, "the terrifying house where we found hanged men and whose roofs opened up, hurling drunkards into mysterious wells. I wrote verses while caressing my cat Zamir, the wind lifted the Butte Montmartre right up, the planks of the ark groaned. Why didn't the wind carry off the boat while M. Picasso's huge dogs barked lugubriously, shaking their chains at night?"

Junyer Vidal returned soon to Barcelona, so during Picasso's first six weeks at the Bateau Lavoir Jacob had his friend very much to himself except for the company of Manolo and a Gypsy guitarist, Fabián de Castro, who slept on the floor. Jacob visited every day. The complex tone of their friendship, tinged with Jacob's adoration, irony, and self-abasement, can be gleaned from this memoir the poet composed in 1931:

> It's 1904, Picasso is already strong but his visitors are still only the picturesque Manolo and a poor little Jew (that's what Vollard called him) who doesn't believe he's a poet. I lived at Barbès. I arrived at 13 rue Ravignan early in the morning. To my own bare bed, and my dark little work table, I preferred this doorway that had pretensions to grandeur a hundred years earlier, and Picasso's narrow door decorated with bits of practical advice. It was at the end of a catwalk corridor, above the invisible cliffs of Montmartre geology, at the end of a cliff of stairs.
>
> I called out his name. Hardly awake, Picasso opened the door. I had arrived across all the stone steps of Montmartre and oceanic Paris seen from on high.

have called the Blue Period paintings, vaguely imitative of El Greco. He led me to the crown of the Butte Montmartre. We scorned all previous art and all the schools, and in the evenings, to amuse ourselves, we improvised plays, without spectators, which we never wrote down and which concluded in wild bursts of laughter. He lived at 13 rue Ravignan, today called the Place Emile Goudeau, a sort of hangar made of ill-fitting boards, at once cellar and attic, poised on a kind of cliff Montmartre still hardly conceals with its huge new apartment houses. Our neighbors were quasi-laundresses (*de vagues blanchisseuses*) and a fruit and vegetable vendor, and those poor people complained of the noise Picasso's bitch Frika made at night with her chain." In a memoir from 1933, Jacob gave even more detail: "A real barn, that studio of Picasso's, with exposed beams, walls made of ill-fitting boards, an unbelievable floor on which one couldn't walk without waking the neighbors...The admirable Mme. Coudray, the concierge, knew how to be kind when the rent was due, and how to put up with noise. Ah! Those dear old days of poverty, work, friendship, and joy. Many of the studios were cellars, and the stairs were never swept. Everything was made of wood."

Fernande Olivier, who had been living at the Bateau Lavoir since 1901 as the mistress and model of a sculptor named Laurent Debienne, recalled that the building was "an icebox in winter, a steam bath in summer." There was no running water; all the tenants had to share one toilet on the ground floor, and fetch their water either from the one faucet down there, or from the public fountain in the middle of Place Ravignan.

André Salmon made his way to the Bateau Lavoir later in 1904, brought there by the mischievous Catalan sculptor Manolo to meet Picasso. "Imagine a strange barracks made of boards," he writes in his drug-drowsy non-novel, *Le Manuscrit trouvé dans un chapeau* (The Manuscript Found in a Hat) published in 1919 with drawings by Picasso. "Four floors on the side of the Butte

Yet Jacob was far from craven in his relations with Picasso. Salmon remembers Jacob in the role of elder friend, initiator, and magus, calling the young painter *mon petit.* The friendship between Picasso and Jacob in this period left many relics in the drawings they did of themselves and of each other. An ink drawing of Picasso in profile by Jacob is annotated in Picasso's hand, "Retrato hecho por Max Jacob" (Portrait made by Max Jacob). It shows an exaggeratedly large head of dark hair—yet another homage to genius?—an intensely focused eye and thin mustache, a mustache that would soon disappear. Picasso's portrait of Jacob, on café note paper, shows the writer, also in profile, with a high, bald forehead; scruffy hair still adorning the back of his skull; a dark, intelligent gaze further darkened by a pince-nez; a firm, compressed mouth; and strong chin. This is a portrait of power, not of pathos, and reminds us that the bond between the two men was not simply a matter of subservience on the part of one and dominance by the other. There are also two self-portraits by Picasso from 1904 inscribed to Jacob. In these rapid profile sketches, Picasso has already shaved off the mustache and across his forehead falls the telltale wing of black hair.

Picasso's other close friend from 1904, Manolo, also turns up in drawings by Jacob owned by Picasso. Manolo—Manuel Martinez Hugué—was one of the most piquant of the characters who populated the Latin Quarter and Montmartre. Picasso had known him from the Quatre Gats tavern in Barcelona in 1899 and from his stay in Paris in 1901. An adventurer, not untalented artist, and occasional thief, Manolo surprised even the worldly-wise Parisians with his pranks. He turns up in most of the memoirs of the time. Not only did he provide material for endless comic sagas, but he was the go-between in some of the crucial encounters in the formation of *la bande à Picasso.*

In Jacob's drawing, Manolo looks slyly sidewise from shadowed eyes; his face is lined, his dark hair erupts in tufts over

his temples. As Salmon recounts it, Manolo was the illegitimate son of a Spanish general and of a mother Manolo never mentioned. He hardly knew his father, who was off oppressing Cuba during Manolo's youth. The boy grew up in the slums of Barcelona where he became an accomplished thief and storyteller. At some point he skipped across the border to France to avoid the draft, and stayed on in Paris, drawing, sculpting a bit, and living by his wits. He despised professional thieves: "I don't know anything stupider or sadder than professional thieves," he used to say, "those thieves who think they have to steal every day or every night. There they are, peacefully at a bistro or with a girlfriend, and the poor guys look up at the clock and say, 'Shit! Already eleven o'clock...Have to go steal.'"

Manolo stole only on inspiration. Once when he was staying in Paco Durrio's studio during the owner's absence, he sold Durrio's Gauguins to Vollard (who later returned them). He ran a chimerical lottery for sculpture he never produced. He once sold a pawnshop ticket for what was supposed to be a fancy camera to a stray acquaintance in a café: when the ticket was redeemed, it yielded a stinking old mattress, but Manolo was long gone. In spite of the Gauguin episode he rarely stole from friends, but he did pinch clothes from Max Jacob and Léon-Paul Fargue (returning Jacob's trousers as too disreputable to sell). On one occasion he carried off the wallet from Picasso's blue velvet vest that was hanging on a nail in the studio. Picasso crossed Paris by hackney cab, tracking him to his hole of a room in the attic of the old Hôtel du Maroc in the Latin Quarter, and menaced him with a revolver, though, in Jacob's account, Picasso was "wise enough to demand his property back without exacting vengeful humiliations" and drove him back to the studio to return the wallet to its pocket.

In the transition from Barcelona to a permanent life in France, Picasso was working his way through, and out of, his

Blue Period with its famished beggars and prostitutes. A typical work is the etching *The Frugal Repast*, which he had planned in Spain but carried out with the help of the painter and engraver Ricard Canals. He was still at work on it when Fernande Olivier first visited his studio in the summer of 1904. "At that time, " she writes, "Picasso was working on an etching which has now become famous: a man and woman are sitting at a table in a wine bar and from this starving couple emanates an intense feeling of poverty and alcoholism, strikingly realistic." Ever serviceable, it was Jacob who traipsed around to dealers to try to sell these visions of destitution. He writes: "The dealers who boast these days about having discovered Picasso called him a madman. 'Your friend has gone out of his mind,' M.V. [no doubt Vollard] said to me...One day when Picasso was sick and I had gone to try to interest this same M.V. in a landscape,...he said scathingly, 'The bell tower is crooked' and turned his back on me. Picasso sold drawings for ten *sous* to a mattress dealer on the rue des Martyrs, and the ten *sous* were gratefully received."

The rue des Martyrs was well named. A steep street heading up the Butte Montmartre from the boulevard de Clichy, its name seems emblematic for these years of struggle for artistic survival. The mattress salesman was le Père Soulié, a burly alcoholic who dealt in pictures on the side because so many of his clients were poor painters who couldn't pay cash. Fernande Olivier suspected him of acting as a front for the obnoxious editor, essayist, and underground art dealer Louis Libaude, called Henri Delormel in his literary persona; depicted as a prick by Picasso, Delormel was famous for cheating artists, and turns up later in the story when Max Jacob challenged him to a duel. Jacob would also knock on the door of Berthe Weill's gallery, and occasionally managed to sell a drawing or gouache of Picasso's to the tight-fisted Clovis Sagot who ran his Galerie du Vingtième Siècle on Vollard's street, rue Lafitte.

"I was no longer a store clerk," Jacob remembers. "I wrote verses because Picasso thought I had talent and I believed in him more than in myself. As for my prose poems that would be published and appreciated later, I was far from suspecting they would succeed. I also wrote children's stories; I lived in frightful poverty, but I didn't want any more jobs." Picasso plays the role, in this narrative, of liberating genius. Jacob told the memoirist Robert Guiette, "Picasso had come back from Spain and found Max desperate over the loss of his job. 'What kind of life is that?' Picasso asked. 'Live like the poets!'" The liberation, the imperative to follow a life of art, extended even to physical appearance. Jacob told Maurice Martin du Gard in 1920, "It's Picasso who changed my life...It was he who told me, 'Shave off your beard.' He who told me, 'Take off your pince-nez, wear a monocle. Don't be time-puncher. Live like a poet.'"

Jacob not only "lived like" a poet in 1904. He was writing groundbreaking poems. When he wrote Tristan Tzara in 1916 that it was only in 1905 that he had "become" a poet, he must have been referring to his first serious publication, the five poems in *Les Lettres modernes* in May 1905. But by now Jacob had been writing for years. "Écrit en 1904," which would appear in print for the first time only in 1921 in *Le Laboratoire central,* shows him already in command of sophisticated maneuvers which we recognize in hindsight as Modernist: a mobile geography, mobile and plural pronouns and centers of consciousness, discontinuities in tone and register, non-sequiturs, abrupt juxtapositions of reference and address, a dissonant prosody. "Écrit in 1904" is a fine example of an art of controlled discontinuity. Though there have been objections to the idea of Cubist poetics, the poem's disturbances do present a literary analogy to the disruptions Picasso and Braque would introduce in the depiction of objects in space—three years later. Some examples:

If I recall, the place of Pilate's tomb
Was in Vienna, or else in Draguignan
Abd-el-Kader's sons snapped photos there
To hang up as ex-votos in fresh air
Goddesses spun their silk from ocean foam
And fished for golden coinage in the ponds
Washerwomen beat the hours to pass the time
And the Loire revealed its soul at every bend...

...The sky contracts two atmospheres to one stair
...So patriarchs could prophesy from there

White sailors dressed in Oceanic blue
Offered Pilate's glove to lordly Baal
And telepathy in telegrams seeping through
Inspired in all the cult of Pilate's soul
The politicians and the men of Theodose
Had also taken of Pilate a mighty dose
Pantheons paralyzed for a hundred years
Are stirred by lightning and by blood besmeared.

"Écrit in 1904" not only veers wildly in time and space, from Draguignan to Vienna, from Biblical Jerusalem to the chic new American cocktails in Paris; it imagines the city of Paris itself in motion, like a barge moving up the river. Male and female identities blend: "Moi j'ai les plus beaux bras, toi les plus beaux tétons/A nous deux nous ferions une femme parfaite" (I have the handsomest arms, you the handsomest tits/Together we'd make a perfect woman). What keeps this centrifugal poem coherent is the abstraction of poetic form: the kitsch alexandrines and rhyming couplets of the opening and closing passages provide the grid that allows the poem's psychic vagrancies. "Écrit en 1904" comments comically on its own

deformation of inherited form. On the one hand, "Double-six! À moi la pause!" (Double sixes! My turn to pause!) refers to a throw of the dice, an image taken from Mallarmé's radical work *Un Coup de dés* (A Throw of the Dice) which Jacob would recall in the title of his collection of prose poems in 1917, *Le Cornet à dés* (The Dice Cup). But it also describes, saucily, the classical, twelve-syllable alexandrine, complete with the central caesura: "À moi la pause!" In "Écrit en 1904," the dismantling of a single center of consciousness, the social satire, the jangling of high diction with slang, the hallucinatory geographies, the puns ("Amer" means both "bitter" and "American"), all set the stage for an interpenetration of natural and supernatural realms, and the liberation of the soul from the social self. The poem maintains a comic relation to Christianity—it depicts, after all, a world devoted to Pilate—but Jesus does appear as an opening between realities, a force which compels a change of route ("Jésus barre la route entre les boulingrins"; Jesus obstructs the path between the bowling greens), and the poem concludes in a vision of sacrifice, worldly glory exploding in lightning and blood. Whether or not that blood might redeem is a question this poem leaves open.

A definition of modernity in poetry that Jacob gave to Marcel Béalu in 1939 describes the principles at work in his poems from 1904: "complexity in form; dominance of interior harmony over meaning; speed in the association of images, ideas, and words; love of words; surprises, willed or not; the appearance of dream or dream itself; invisible rhythms." The disjunctive method permitted exploration of his perpetual themes, *humour/amour* (humor and love, a generative pun in French, with humor correcting and protecting love), and his descent into the unconscious where, he came to feel, he led the way for other poets.

As Jacob retreated to Quimper for the summer of 1904,

though, he could not know that one phase of his friendship with Picasso was closing and a new one about to open. Jacob retrospectively struck the right note, the fairy tale note, in his account of the crucial encounters that would occur in Paris that autumn: "One morning as I arrived, as usual, from my lodgings on boulevard Barbès, Picasso, whom I hadn't seen the night before, told me that he'd spent the evening in a bar on the rue d'Amsterdam with an astonishing man, Guillaume Apollinaire, and that he'd take me to meet him that very night."

Two impish characters prepared the meeting of Picasso and Apollinaire, which was the meeting not only of two darkly inspired emerging masters, but of two worlds: Apollinaire's Right Bank of late Symbolist poetry, and Picasso's Left Bank Montmartre of experimental painting. Jean Mollet, ever since the evening of Apollinaire's first reading at the Soleil d'Or in 1903, had orbited around the poet to such an extent that he was jokingly called his "secretary." Manolo was one of Picasso's closest companions. First occurred the meeting of the two go-betweens. Mollet got to know Manolo in the Closerie des Lilas, the bastion of Symbolism where Paul Fort and Jean Moréas presided. Manolo inveigled the baron—Apollinaire's nickname for Mollet—up on the Butte with a promise of a free meal; Frédé, who had recently taken over the seedy Lapin Agile (or Lapin à Gill, after the cartoonist André Gill who had run it in the 1880s), often fed his artist friends for free if they turned up hungry and penniless after 1 a.m., as Manolo and Mollet did one night. During that first visit, Mollet was so entranced by Frédé's singing and guitar-playing that he drank late, passed out, and woke next morning in a strange bed with a pretty young woman asking him if he'd like some cocoa. No wonder he became a habitué. On the walls of this dark, smoky haunt, which the local thugs (*apaches*) and their girls shared with the Montmartre artists, Mollet saw paintings by Picasso—though

perhaps not yet the stark, Lautrec-like *Au Lapin Agile* which Picasso would later paint to celebrate Frédé's taking over of the tavern.

Not long after that first visit, Mollet met the artist himself in the *grande salle* of the Lapin Agile. Manolo's surprise and joy at seeing Picasso suggest that the meeting took place in the spring of 1904 when the artist had just returned from Barcelona: "When we arrived, Manolo let out a cry, 'Pablo,' and when the effusions and embraces had calmed down, Manolo introduced me. Before me stood Pablo Picasso, about whom he had so often spoken..." Once again, an encounter with Picasso transforms the life of the observer: "This man was not large, but thick-set, very dark, and his physiognomy expressed overwhelming force of will; but his eyes, especially his eyes, had a fascinating expression; they were somewhat hard, but became extremely soft when he smiled. Everything in him drew one to him, and one felt that one must attach oneself to him, that forever after one's life would be linked to his...I have had only one other great emotion in my life; it was when I heard Guillaume Apollinaire recite his poems."

Mollet's gifts, one can see from this passage, were his perception of genius and his capacity for devotion. It was he who arranged the meeting of his idols. Apollinaire, who had by this time drawn Mollet and Salmon into his first editorial adventure, the *Festin d'Esope* (which lasted from November 1903 to August 1904), had taken to holding court in Austin's Fox and the Criterion, two English bars on the rue d'Amsterdam near the Gare Saint-Lazare where he would catch the last train home to his mother's rented villa in Le Vésinet. In one of these bars—Mollet and Picasso remembered it as Austin's, Jacob as the Criterion—Mollet one evening presented his prize, Picasso, to Apollinaire. Picasso described the scene to Brassaï: "It's through him [Mollet] that I got to know Guillaume Apollinaire...He

brought me one day to a bar near the Gare Saint-Lazare—Austin's, rue d'Amsterdam—where the poet used to go often. And it was in that same bar that I in turn introduced Max Jacob to Guillaume Apollinaire...Mollet was an honest-to-God marriage-broker...He loved to make matches."

Picasso made the next match. A day, perhaps a week later, he brought Jacob to Austin's. In 1937, the details of the meeting were still vivid in Jacob's memory: "Apollinaire was smoking a short-stemmed pipe and expatiating on Petronius and Nero to some rather vulgar-looking people whom I took to be jobbers or some sort or traveling salesmen. He was wearing a stained, light-colored suit, and a tiny straw hat was perched atop his famous pear-shaped head. He had hazel eyes, terrible and gleaming, a bit of curly blond hair fell over his forehead, his mouth looked like a little pimento, he had strong limbs, a broad chest looped across by a platinum watch chain, and a ring on his finger. The poor boy was always being taken for a rich man because his mother—an adventuress, to put it politely—clothed him from head to toe. He was a clerk in a bank in the rue Lepeletier. Without interrupting his talk he stretched out a hand that was like a tiger's paw over the marble-topped table. He stayed in his seat until he was finished. Then the three of us went out, and we began that life of three-cornered friendship which lasted almost until the war, never leaving one another whether for work, meals, or fun."

Jacob often emphasized the tripartite structure of the initial group: "Picasso, Max Jacob, Apollinaire," he told Guiette. "It was then [1905] that was created—but only for a few initiates—the new aesthetics. Picasso made a modern poet out of Apollinaire, who was still immersed in Symbolism. From that point on, the trio determined the poetic climate." In 1927 Jacob again describes Apollinaire's handshake: "He put out his hand to me, and in that instant began a triple friendship that lasted until the death of Apollinaire."

Apollinaire had, in every sense, a tiger's paw. Physically imposing, immensely imaginative, protean, restless, already a published poet and founder of a magazine with a reputation among the Symbolists, Apollinaire dominated while Jacob could only amuse, intrigue, and seduce. To Tzara, in 1916, Jacob described Apollinaire as resembling "at the same time, a Farnese Hercules and an English aesthete." Apollinaire also had an exuberant sexual appetite, mainly heterosexual, with a taste for sophisticated perversities that delighted Picasso. In a year or so Apollinaire would compose two witty pornographic novels (*Les Onze mille verges*, The Eleven Thousand Rods/Virgins, and *Les Exploits d'un jeune Don Juan*, The Exploits of a Young Don Juan) and with his friends Fernand Fleuret and Louis Perceau would surreptitiously catalogue the locked collection of erotica in the Bibliothèque nationale. Apollinaire would also, in the next few years, pick up extra money editing selections of the Marquis de Sade, translating Aretino, and writing anonymous potboiler porn novels for the publisher Briffault. This erotic erudition not only amused Picasso; it opened darker worlds to him that called to forces in his own nature. With Apollinaire, Picasso could share fantasies unappealing to Jacob; it is to Apollinaire that the painter gave the steamy 1905 gouache of lesbians making love, *The Embrace*, which the poet kept by his bed. It is to Picasso that Apollinaire wrote in 1906, with manly brutality, about a girlfriend: "Maybe I'll come to Spain, but without Yette whom I've liquidated because she really laughed too much." What complex motivations and *blague* (tomfoolery, tease) one wonders, lay behind Jacob's early note to Apollinaire announcing that he couldn't keep a rendezvous because he had to attend "an engagement dinner—yes! My own engagement, I will marry in two or three months. Let this note serve as an invitation."

Jacob's insistence on the triumvirate Picasso, Apollinaire, Jacob raises questions about what we might call psychological math. From Jacob's point of view, an original pair (Jacob and Picasso) expanded to become a mythic threesome. But three

is an unstable number. In histories of the period written now, one pair yields to another: Apollinaire is seen as replacing Jacob as the poet of Picasso's imagination. It is also the case that Picasso and Apollinaire won worldwide fame, whereas Jacob never had more than a specialized notoriety. Jacob's friendship with his massively talented and more worldly-wise rival would develop, in the ensuing years, in rhythms of affection, jealousy, hurt, resentment, and admiration. "Poor Famulus before his Faust," Jacob imagines himself in relation to Apollinaire. He was grateful to Apollinaire for opening up new reaches of the Bibliothèque nationale, including the sinister racist Gobineau who was rather innocently appreciated in those days. "He taught me Gobineau," wrote Jacob, "Bayle's Dictionary, the Japanese dictionary, where one little word opens up fifteen lines of signification (and laughter!)" In some moods, he recognized Apollinaire, as he wrote in a letter in 1923, as the one "who invented the poetry we use." But he also knew that he, Jacob, had brought to the banquet of French poetry another offering, one that Apollinaire could never have composed. The full measure of Jacob's offering—and the full measure of French poetry of the twentieth century—could only be taken many years after Apollinaire's death. In hindsight, one can argue that Jacob was not wrong to identify the founding forces of artistic Modernism in France as emanating from three figures, not two.

Picasso and Apollinaire, at any rate, were in no hurry to leave Jacob out. Picasso's first poem seems to have been addressed to Jacob after the fateful meetings. Picasso writes from Apollinaire's house; in witty reciprocity, the painter writes a poem to thank Jacob for a drawing, alludes to Jacob's favorite food of poverty (rice), and signs himself "Moses" in a nod to a poem by Alfred de Vigny which Jacob and Picasso had admired together on boulevard Voltaire. Apollinaire is given the code name "Stendhal":

Poem to thank you for your drawing
It's Sunday I'm at Guillaume's
And I've put on my white velvet pants
My big red sweater
And my black vest
I'm by the fire with my pipe in my hand
And I think of you of the rice the other night of your
logical lines

—*Moses and Stendhal*

Now the communal life of the Bateau Lavoir went into full swing. Cooking was difficult in the studios, so the gang would often rollick down the Butte to eat at the grubby little restaurant run by le Père Vernin on rue Cavalotti, near the Place de Clichy. Vernin sometimes charitably forgot the bills his artist clients ran up, and they could usually count on a coarse but robust meal there. Actors as well as painters and writers turned up, and Fernande Olivier remembered the young Christiane Mancini memorizing her lines from the play propped up against her carafe of *rouge*. Gallivanting down the hill for yet another greasy meal at Vernin's, the companions would chant Jacob's ditty:

Ça m'embête d'aller chez Vernin
Mais il faut y aller tout d'même,
Parce qu'on y mange des verres nains
Et des fromages à la crème...

I'm tired of eating at Vernin's
But that's where everybody goes
Because they serve wine in thimblefuls
And helpings of cream cheese...

When they weren't eating at Vernin's, they stayed closer to the Sacré Coeur and went to Azon, who ran a little bistro called Les Enfants de la Butte. A meal there cost only 90 *centimes*, and Azon, susceptible to the idea of literary glory, often extended credit to writers, trusting he'd be paid back when their books appeared. He broke with Salmon, however, when he discovered his client really hadn't written the articles signed Paul Adam, Maurice Maeterlinck, and René Maizery, as he had claimed. Some nights—not often, because Picasso usually painted from 10 P.M. until dawn—the gang turned up at Le Lapin Agile, where Frédé's wife Berthe served a hearty meal which cost two francs, but which Picasso and his friends could sometimes wangle for less. Dancing, at least, was provided by Jacob, famous for his jigs on the tabletop. Nobody needed to pay admission to a nightclub when Max Jacob could fly into his impersonation of a barefoot female entertainer, his trousers rolled up to expose his hairy legs; his vest tossed aside; his shirtsleeves flapping and his shirt unbuttoned over his thick, crinkly, dark chest hair; his bald head and his pince-nez gleaming as he wriggled, dipped, sashayed, and pointed his toes. Or he would snatch a woman's hat and place it on his head, wrap himself in a shawl, and warble lyrics of sentimental ballads and comic opera, most memorably Hervé's "Langouste atmosphérique," until the room collapsed in laughter. Yet all this entertainment had its desperate side. "How often," said the poet Henri Hertz, "have I seen Max acting the clown with the eyes of a man in despair."

Frédé kept a guest book. On one of its pages, one can chart the progress of the evening in Jacob's improvised verses:

9 P.M.

Trouver la rime à Frédéric
Voilà le hic!
J'aime mieux attendre d'être ivre
Pour m'inscrire à bord de ton livre.

2 A.M.

A bord! Piano A. Bord.
Livre de bord!
Paris, la mer qui pense, apporte
Ce soir, au coin de ta porte,
O Tavernier du quai des Brumes
Sa gerbe d'écume.

9 P.M.

Finding the rhyme for Frédéric
There's the "hic"!
I prefer to wait to be drunk
Before I write aboard your book.

2 A.M.

On board! Piano A. Bord.
Ship's register, bored,
Paris, the pensive sea will bring
Right to your door this evening
O innkeeper of the Misty Quai
Your sheaf of spray.

Le Lapin Agile had its miserable side. The local *apaches* sometimes provoked fights and even wounded or killed each other, and Jacob was once attacked by two young thugs outside the tavern. A rival for a woman's affections killed Frédé's son Victor with one shot, right at the cash register. Years later, Jacob—no longer dancing on tables—described the Lapin Agile as "a very dusty, dark lair for poverty, pathetic songs, silence, and the noise of drunks. Some have tried to defend this sad and pretentious bistro, but you won't find me doing it."

At least one of the artists mimicked this violence. Picasso was famous for carrying a Browning revolver; he used it not only to menace street thugs and his friend Manolo, but, more often, to terrorize bores. Once, in a café, when some chatterbox spoke slightingly of Cézanne, Picasso placed his revolver on the marble tabletop and said, "One word more and I'll shoot." Another time, outside the Lapin Agile, he fired in the air to scare away three Germans who had just visited his studio and wanted him to "explain his aesthetics." Fernande Olivier remembers him firing shots in the air as he came home with his *bande* at dawn, all of them drunk, singing, cursing, and shouting "Down with Laforgue!" The revolver had, however, a more symbolic than practical significance. It stood for the revolutionary force of Picasso's art, and Jacob devised a mythological genealogy for the weapon, spreading the story that it had passed ceremonially to Picasso from Alfred Jarry.

John Richardson has shown that Picasso never met Jarry. It is true that through his friendship with Apollinaire and Salmon, who knew and admired the inventor of Ubu Roi, Picasso imbibed much of Jarry's spirit and probably came close to meeting him. (The one time he and Apollinaire went to visit Jarry, he said, the master was out). Jarry was already very sick in 1905 and spent long periods in his native Brittany being cared for by his sister. We must take as a fable, then, Jacob's story in the memoir "Jeunesse" in 1933 and later in *Chronique des*

temps héroïques that Picasso and Jarry met in Jacob's presence at a dinner given by Maurice Raynal, that the "psychic pope Jarry" had passed on his powers to Picasso in the gift of the revolver, "the new distinguishing mark of the papacy," and that "the revolver was really the harbinger comet of the century." Like any enduring myth, it contains a core of truth. Jarry would haunt Picasso's imagination, both visually in his roughly elegant drawings and woodcuts, and literarily; as Richardson recounts, Picasso, many years after Jarry's death, drew on his spirit in composing his own plays, and could recite Jarry's lines by heart.

Although Picasso at this time sometimes had no money for paint, not to mention food, his reputation was growing. If Jacob was useful as an unofficial agent, Apollinaire turned out to have a knack for art journalism. He published an appreciative piece on Picasso in the first issue of *La Revue immoraliste*, the new journal he launched in April 1905 on funds provided by the shady *littérateur* Henri Delormel. Responding to Charles Morice's reference, in the *Mercure de France*, to the "sterile melancholy" of Picasso's early work, Apollinaire announced robustly, "It has been said of Picasso that his paintings display a precocious disillusionment. I maintain the contrary." He praised "the mixture of the delightful and the horrible" in Picasso's work, and the plebeian grace of his characters. A month later, in *La Plume*, he devoted a longer article to celebrating Picasso's revelation: "Picasso has observed the human images which floated in the azure of our memories, and participate in divinity to bring forth metaphysicians." Metaphoric, dithyrambic, Apollinaire's homage hardly qualifies as art criticism and it registers few visual facts about the paintings. But he does communicate the mood and the dramatis personae of Picasso's imaginary worlds with such enthusiasm one feels it is the poet's own inner world he is describing. As indeed it is: at this point, the poet and painter of harlequins were inspiring one another daily.

Max Jacob, in 1905, was hardly known as a poet. He held

aloof from the Symbolist gatherings at the Soleil d'Or, and he hadn't yet appeared at the Closerie des Lilas. But through his friendship with Apollinaire he was about to gain a modest public. In May, the second issue of *La Revue immoraliste*, rebaptized more soberly *Les Lettres modernes*, carried five poems by Max Jacob: "Nombril dans le brouillard" (Bellybutton in the Fog); "Bielles" (Tie-Rods); "La Gale" (Scabies); "Calvitie de la Butte Montmartre" (Baldness of the Butte Montmartre); and—dedicated to Picasso—"Le Cheval" (The Horse). Jacob included none of these in any book, and for good reason: they are minor, exploratory poems, interesting mainly in indicating the ferment of language and themes from which Jacob's better poems would spring.

Indeed Jacob was writing far stronger poems in 1905 than the ones Apollinaire printed in *Les Lettres modernes*. Much of this work came into public view only in 1912 in *Les Oeuvres burlesques et mystiques du Frère Matorel, mort au couvent* (The Burlesque and Mystical Works of Brother Matorel, Deceased in the Convent), with illustrations by Derain, which Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler published as a sequel to Jacob's prose narrative *Saint Matorel* (1911). Matorel is a fictive alter ego for Jacob, and the three sections of poems interspersed with commentaries constitute a veiled poetic autobiography. The book opens with a group of parodies ("Quelques chants vraiment nationaux"—A Few Really National Songs), expert pastiches of traditional genres (*complainte*, *romance*, patriotic anthem, children's ditty), and the hilarious "Grand récitatif pour salons": "Damnation! Damnation! Cursed Hilda! Die!" Jacob had composed these early in 1904 after losing a job at Paris-France department store, with the idea of selling them to a songbook publisher. The publisher sent him away, saying, "You aren't cut out for this work, Sir. You're too good for this." Parody, in varying ratios, would always be intrinsic to Jacob's method, a way both of acknowledging and attacking conventions, popular and literary, and a way of being both a private and a public poet.

In the section entitled *Pièces burlesques*, the "national songs" are followed by four nonsense poems akin to the Allais-like pieces in *Les Lettres modernes.* In their decomposition of surface sense, with whole lines forming rhyme units in the homonymic games Jacob found in Hugo as well as in Allais, these poems play havoc with social as well as with semantic order. The detached voice of the fictive editor of *Les Oeuvres burlesques et mystiques*, added in 1911 when Jacob prepared these poems for publication, keeps interfering, and adding yet another layer of disguise. Here, he notes, "It's pointless to insist on the vulgarity of these exercises. We are accustomed to more dignity in our bards. Let the reader remember that these humble rhymes were cobbled together in one of the grimmer districts of Paris, one farthest from intellectual centers." "La Leçon de musique" (The Music Lesson), which follows immediately, diagnoses a "dead art": the French classic sonority of Racine and Corneille expanded into Romantic afflatus, then attenuated in Symbolism and the Parnasse. At this stage, both in verse and in prose poems, Jacob's contribution is one of de-composition, in a cerebral art conscious of its relation to tradition. To watch Jacob mature as a poet will be to watch him risk humanizing his voice, allowing it to assume vulnerability and the weight of personal experience.

La Leçon de musique

Rebec d'Altesse! Oh! les déclins d'Armorial!
Chétif, il grince. Art mort!
La nacre à plein verre, verse l'aile
Sur la tige! écoute le grêle dièze!
Lui que n'enivrent point les sites d'atonie
Susceptible, guillotine le rythme, il nie
Le génie!
Litige! Par le sceptre métis! L'écrit y sert.
Oh! Music! music! qu'y faire?

Her Highness's viola! Oh! the decline of heraldry!
Puny, he squeaks. Dead art!
Mother-of-pearl in a full glass, pours the wing
On the stem! Listen to the high-pitched sharp!
He, who doesn't swoon at the sites of atony
Sensitive, guillotines rhythm, refuses
Genius!
Contest! By the half-breed scepter! Writ will serve.
Oh! Music! music! what to do?

"La Leçon de musique," in its wounded alexandrines and puns, invokes a high art ("Rebec d'Altesse": Her Highness's Viola) and its decline: "Oh! les déclins d'Armorial!" (Oh! The waning of heraldry!) The central pun smuggles in autobiography: "Art mort" (dead art) chimes with "armorial" (heraldry) but can also be heard as Armor, the old name for Brittany. Already, in the first line, the excitable exclamation points play off the grandiloquence. The second line contracts to half an alexandrine as it introduces the anonymous "he," the poem's consciousness associated with this dissonant modern art: "Chétif, il grince. Art mort!" (Puny, he squeaks. Dead art!) Untranslatable because embroiled in puns, "La Leçon de musique" works by contraction: the shrinking of the alexandrine, the cramming of plural senses into puns, the refusal of nineteenth-century grandiosity. The word *vers* (verse) presides, but only phonetically, through its homonyms *plein verre* (full glass) and the verb *verse* (pours). The dead armorial art is seen and heard in its forms of decadence: mother-of-pearl, the high-pitched sharp note (*grêle dièze*), the "sites of atony." "Atony" tells the story: on the one hand, a medical term for weakness, lack of muscle tone; on the other, a prosodic term for lack of stress. The actor in this poem, squeaking defiance, "guillotines rhythm" and rejects the patrimony of eloquence in

a triple rhyme, *atonie* (atony), *il nie* (he refuses), *génie* (genius). Weakness gives birth to strength, as the poetical flower stem *la tige* engenders contest: *litige*. The new power is a half-breed, a mongrel: "Par le sceptre métis!" (by the half-breed scepter). The writing that is its instrument, "l'écrit y sert" (the writ serves), suggests, if pronounced as a whole, the neologism *les criticères*: the anti-Romantic critical intellect, derived from *critère* (criterion), *critérium*, and *critiqueur* (critical). The fact that the new music called for in the last line is enunciated in English ("Oh! Music! music! Qu'y faire?") accentuates its resistance to French codes, as does the fact that this predominantly alexandrine poem ends in a harsh *vers impair* (line of uneven number of syllables).

In crying out "Oh! Music! music! what to do?" Jacob shares the restlessness of a *fin-de-siècle* that recognizes that certain hands have been played out, but does not yet have a new game. This tone of exasperation was audible, in prose, in Gide's *Paludes* in 1895, which presented Parisan literary *salon* life as a swamp. While some writers went on recycling Symbolist or Parnassian pieties, like Louis Le Cardonnel still plucking his "profound, drowsy lyre" in 1908, others were making a music out of their disaffection. Jacob's friend Henri Hertz asked, in 1912, "Nous les premiers nés d'une époque mort-né/Quel sera notre souvenir/Quand l'avenir/ Sera formée?" (We the new-borns of a still-born age/How will we be remembered/When the future/Will have taken shape?) It is a note still sounding in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," and Eliot, who learned so much from French poetry, may well have recognized something of his own state in "Commentaire-Epigraphe," a free verse poem of genteel paralysis and impotence by Charles Vildrac published in *Pan* in April 1909. Suffocating in his room, Vildrac's speaker recalls the grand roles he has played all day, "how bored they are, how humiliated/In this armchair theater/How they yearn to go out into life." Resting his elbows on the windowsill, he asks:

O vous, quels homes sommes-nous?
Nous sommes habillés de noir
Nous allons à notre bureau
Et quand le temps n'est pas très sûr
Nous prenons notre parapluie.

Oh you, what kind of men are we?
We dress in black.
We go to the office,
And when the weather is uncertain
We take our umbrellas.

Vildrac's impatience led to his founding in 1906, with Georges Duhamel and René Arcos, the realist and free verse group called "l'Abbaye" in Créteil, outside of Paris, a movement with which Jules Romains would be associated. A similar malaise produced Whitmanian expansiveness in Claudel's *Cinq Grandes Odes* (1905) and in Valéry Larbaud's poems of *A.O. Barnabooth* (1908). Jacob's impatience took the more private, analytical turn evident in "La Leçon de musique." The fictive editor in *Saint Matorel* comments on that poem, "This piece and the ones following it are all stamped with the Symbolist spirit: it appears that Matorel thinks of literature with chimerical hopes, and that he has studied the contemporary masters. Matorel is seeking his way as a poet." It isn't clear what the editor means by the "contemporary masters." The word games in "La Leçon de musique" owe something to Allais, Franc-Nohain, and perhaps to Jarry and Fargue, but the poem is unlike anything else being written in France at that time. Matorel/Max Jacob was "seeking his way," but he was also beginning to find it. One form it took, already in 1905, was the prose poem.

Since the obscure publication in 1842 of Aloysius Bertrand's collection of prose poems, *Gaspard de la nuit*, this

hybrid genre had offered French poets a laboratory in which to experiment with the very idea of verse. Pictorial in Bertrand, anecdotal and allegorical in Baudelaire and Mallarmé, the prose poem was characterized from its inception by brevity and by its critical position *vis à vis* both verse and prose. It evolved in Symbolist practice alongside *vers libre*, influenced by the versets—unlineated verse paragraphs—of the early French translations of Whitman in the 1880s. In Rimbaud's *Illuminations*, published in 1886 in *La Vogue*, one can observe the first French free verse poems, "Marine" and "Mouvement," crawling to shore out of the tidal pool of prose poems like new amphibious creatures. By 1905 Rimbaud was exerting an enormous influence on experimental French poets. For Claudel he had opened a door into the supernatural and the spiritual; for Paul Fort, the saints were Verlaine, Mallarmé, Villiers, and Lautréamont, but Rimbaud was a god. Jacob, however, considered Rimbaud's art a symptom of Romantic disorder, and he worked to define a kind of prose poem that would be coolly objective, self-contained, and—at some level—abstract. Rimbaud, he thought, was too "subjective"; Jacob's own prose poems "had nothing to do with Rimbaud, who had the source of his imagery within himself, not outside himself."

By this time, Jacob had initiated his walking discipline: in rambles throughout the city, he forced himself, in each interval between lamp posts, to come up with a new image or poetic idea or "relationship to a subject, whether a person, an object, a poster, a billboard, a postcard." If no idea appeared, he halted at the lamp post until something occurred to him and he jotted it down (sometimes on telegraph blanks filched from a post office). These exercises contributed to the concentrated form of the poems. "Poème simultané avec superposition simple" (called simply "Poème" in *Le Cornet*) already has full control of pace and tone. It also has Jacob's characteristic disorientation of

narrative line, speaker, and personae; his teasing game between truth and falsehood; his ironic relationship to a classical past; and the geometric abstraction imposed by the title.

Poème simultané avec superposition simple

"Que veux-tu de moi, dit Mercure.
—Ton sourire et tes dents, dit Vénus.
—Elles sont fausses. Que veux-tu de moi?
—Ton caducée.
—Je ne m'en sépare point.
—Viens l'apporter ici, divin facteur."

Il faut lire cela dans le texte grec; cela s'appelle *Idylle*. Au collège, un ami, souvent refusé aux examens, me dit: "Si on traduisait en grec un roman de Daudet, on serait assez fort après pour l'examen! Mais je ne peux pas travailler la nuit. Ça fait pleurer ma mère!" Il faut lire aussi cela dans le texte grec, messieurs; c'est une idylle, petit tableau.

Simultaneous Poem with Simple Superposition

"What do you want of me?" says Mercury.
"Your smile and your teeth," says Venus.
"They're false. What do you really want of me?"
"That rod of yours."
"I can't be parted from it."
"So bring it over here, heavenly postman."

You should read this in the original Greek: it's called *Idyll*. At school a friend of mine, who was always failing his exams, told me, "If you translated one of Daudet's novels into Greek, you'd be pretty clued up when it came to the exam! But I can't work at night.

It makes my mother cry!" You should read that in the original Greek as well, gentlemen; it's an idyll too, *eidullios*, a moving little scene.

—TRANSLATION BY CHRISTOPHER PILLING AND DAVID KENNEDY

In the fall of 1905 appeared Picasso's first great patrons, the Steins. Leo Stein had been living in Paris since 1902. His sister Gertrude had joined him the following year, and Michael Stein and his wife Sarah had also set up a Parisian household. Leo, his eyes just opened to Cézanne and to modern art, bought Matisse's *Woman with a Hat* out of the Salon d'Automne, and in late October he bought Picasso's *Harlequin's Family with an Ape* from Clovis Sagot and—after quarreling with Gertrude, who didn't want it—Picasso's nude *Girl with a Basket of Flowers.* In short order, Leo visited the Bateau Lavoir and invited Picasso for dinner at 27 rue de Fleurus where Picasso and Gertrude recognized one another as equals. Their artistic friendship ignited immediately, and the first form it took was Picasso's proposal to paint her portrait. Through the Steins, Picasso would meet his major rival, Matisse, the following spring, and through Gertrude's long portrait sessions in the Bateau Lavoir, which went on all through the winter of 1906, she became familiar with *la bande à Picasso.* They, in turn, often visited the rue de Fleurus, which was rapidly becoming a center for modern art as Gertrude and Leo crowded their walls with works by Bonnard, Matisse, Cezanne, Renoir, Toulouse-Lautrec, and—not least—Picasso.

The October 1907 issue of *Poliche*, a new literary gazette in Reims founded by Jean-René Aubert and co-edited by the ailing but indefatigable Mécislas Golberg, ran a prose poem and a poem in verse by Jacob. The prose poem, "Métempsychose," would appear in *Le Cornet à dés* in a tightened version whose revisions reveal the careful economies Jacob brought to the

genre. The first version retains, in its repetitions and extensions of phrase, a certain *fin-de-siècle* preciosity; the later one is pared down to an elemental swiftness.

> *Metempsychosis (1907 version)*
>
> Shadows! an open door! The pools of blood are shaped like clouds. Bluebeard's seven wives are no longer in the darkroom. This organdy *coiffe* is the only relic of their destinies. But over there, ah! on the Ocean, there are seven slave ships, seven!...they're gliding now in the mountain's shadow. Seven slave ships whose rigging drags topsails in the sea, like women's braids on their shoulders. The ones in front approach as if to show off the thousand details of their huge, hollow sails.

"For me," argues Jacob in a letter of the period, "a work of art must be estranged from its author. I do not mean by the word 'estranged' a synonym for the word 'exteriorized,' as that goes without saying, nor a synonym for the word 'impersonal'; a work estranged from its author is a work which, since it does not reflect him, cannot be substituted for him, if I may say so, as a core of force, but which *truly* adds to the cosmic patrimony. I don't claim that my prose poems fulfill this ideal, but they lean in that direction, and their author expects soon to succeed in stepping outside himself. From a purely artistic standpoint, works estranged from their author gain in 'perspective,' in 'mystery,' and in 'aerial arabesque.'"

The verse poem in *Poliche*, "Hallucination," explores a sacrificial and transformative scene similar to that in "Métempsychose." In jouncy rhyming couplets and crude alexandrines (often extended to 13 or 14 syllables), "Hallucination" envisions Saint Denis appearing on a tram in

the midst of a flock of sheep being driven across Paris to the slaughterhouse (not an unfamiliar sight in the city in 1907). The mixture of modern and familiar elements (the tram, the sheep) with the miraculous (the saint holding his own severed head), the tenderly awkward, even primitive feel of the poem, and its rapid transitions, by now correspond to a vision we can call Jacobian. Central to this vision is the desire for transformation, and the spiritual inflection of that desire:

> ...Move along, sheep, to the slaughterhouse of La Villette!
> Saint-Denis! Saint-Denis! We're riding toward Opéra
> With our old clothes, our old souls, etcetera
> Sheep of the fold!
> Sheep for butchery...

Like all the members of *la bande à Picasso* at this stage, Jacob sometimes cultivated his visions chemically. Hashish and opium were their favored drugs, but Jacob preferred ether, which could be bought cheaply and whose distinctive odor sometimes hung about his clothes. At least once, he pushed his quest into a dangerous terrain when he wanted to see the Devil and drank a strong brew of wormwood. The story, by the time Jacob narrated it years later to Roger Secretain, who in turn told it to Louis Emié, had assumed mythic proportions: "For three days, lying on his bed in the dark, Max suffered genuine torment and saw extraordinary things impossible to relate, for they would burn the tongue and yank the pen from the fingers. And when the door to his room finally opened, those who sought him saw the Demon and fled. Max fled also. He ran across the city like a man possessed (as indeed he was). Crowds shrank back from him to let him pass. Even policemen drew back in spite of their uniforms, and the church where he tried to take refuge emptied out in the snap of a finger. 'Now,' says Max, 'I'm looking for the

herb which helps you see heaven. But I've forgotten its name and I'll never find it...'"

Picasso and Fernande had been smoking opium since they had met in 1904; it was partly through opium, she said, that he seduced her. Once in a while they transformed the studio into a shabby opium den, and in the flickering light of the opium lamp drank lemon tea and lounged with members of *la bande* in a drowsy intimacy. But there is no evidence that Picasso ever let drugs interfere with his work: he was much too driven for that. It was not until the German painter Wiegels committed suicide in the Bateau Lavoir in 1908, through a combination of an overdose and hanging, that Picasso and Fernande became frightened and swore off drugs. Apollinaire, for his part, used opium and hashish frequently without becoming addicted. Salmon describes the rather boring opium-induced erotics of a night at a *fumerie* in the chapter "Nuit d'opium" of *Manuscrit trouvé dans un chapeau*, and in his memoirs recounts how René Dalize (Dupuy), Apollinaire's school friend from Monaco, used to pop up at Salmon's lodgings on the rue Soufflot on leave from the navy and pull out his opium pipe for a shared ritual before proceeding on the second day to a more serious session with Paulette Philippi, an "intellectual courtesan" who had a *fumerie* in Montmartre frequented by Braque, Apollinaire, Mollet, Salmon, and others. Experience in Asia in the navy had initiated quite a few Frenchmen to the use of opium, and Picasso's gang also smoked occasionally at the improbably named "Union Marine de la Butte Montmartre," a "yacht club" run by the painter Georges Pigeard, where nautical discussions (and Jacob's renditions of Breton sea shanties) accompanied nights of reverie. Apollinaire was as experimental with drugs as with sex; Paul Yaki first met the poet, probably around 1904 in his Symbolist-Decadent days, "in a bizarre attic on boulevard St. Germain where Apollinaire would later live. These lodgings consisted of

one large, dark room, a sort of cave for Black Masses, gathering place for the most curious assortment of etheromanes, pederasts, morphine addicts, opium smokers, and hashish eaters you can imagine..." This "mortuary chapel" was lit by wax tapers and dominated by a crucifix on which the place of Christ was taken by a naked woman with a Satanic smile, opening her arms and her sex.

Jacob had no taste for such stage props. With a cheap dose of ether, he was happy to withdraw into his room and let his fantasy roam. Though he later claimed not to have taken ether before 1909, wanting to preserve his sacred vision of that year from the taint of drugs, it is fairly clear that he participated earlier than that in the experiments of the whole *bande*. On days when he was penniless and wild for a dose, Fernande remembered lending him small change: "He suffers so much from lack of ether; he suffers from it as another would suffer from an abscess, a toothache, a broken heart. The morning after one of his sessions, when he's picked up unconscious on the rue Ravignan, knocked out with ether, I swear never to give in again."

In late August 1907 Fernande wrote to Gertrude Stein to announce that she and Picasso were parting, on his instigation. He was not, he said, "cut out for this kind of life." By mid-September, Jacob had moved from his lodgings on boulevard Barbès, which he still shared with his brother Jacques, the tailor, and rented a lair of a room a few doors down from the Bateau Lavoir at 7 rue Ravignan, "to be nearer Picasso."

On rue Ravignan Jacob established a domain that was inimitably his own. It was on the ground floor, with a window opening on the inner courtyard where the tenants of the whole building tossed their garbage. Hardly any sunlight penetrated from this courtyard into Jacob's room. Of the many descriptions of this central laboratory, Olivier's stands out; she had not left

the neighborhood, and anyway she moved back in with Picasso in early December. Of Max's room, she writes: "Max welcomed visitors on Monday. You could meet strange people there, silent, motionless, sitting quietly in dark corners. All sorts of people, which made the atmosphere heavy, sometimes suffocating, but truly mysterious. It was like being among conspirators. And why not? Weren't they conspiring against everything established in art?"

Max did his own housekeeping, she said. "But this room, in spite of its poverty, was not in the least sad. It was personal, unique; one felt that intelligence had taken refuge there. Its odor, a mixture of cigarette smoke, oil, and incense, of old furniture and ether, condensed into a heavy perfume, inexplicable but evocative for anyone who had once breathed it..." An idiosyncratic order reigned. Roland Dorgelès didn't know where to sit during his first visit: clothes were on the bed, books on the chairs; "the table was covered with flasks, mugs, and tubes of paint; a bag of roasted chestnuts was stuffed into a shoe, a gouache was drying in front of the coal stove. The disorder extended even to the walls, where signs of the zodiac mingled with bizarre maxims and the addresses of friends." Here, Jacob created his world, which reached beyond the room into the whole neighborhood where he knew all the concierges, housewives, and shopkeepers, kept track of the gossip, collected stories, and read horoscopes.

Alfred Jarry, who had already bequeathed his revolutionary revolver to Picasso—in myth if not in fact—had come back to Paris that fall, still ill, still alcoholic, and still outrageous. "We will pass away precisely on All Saints Day," he had announced in his lugubrious Père Ubu voice, and that is what he did, dying of tubercular meningitis in the Hôpital de la Charité. "It was the wicked Père Ubu who killed the charming Alfred Jarry," thought Salmon, who had known Jarry well in his last

years. He was buried in the Bagneux Cemetery on November 2, followed by a cortège that included much of literary Paris: Alfred Vallette, Rachilde, Octave Mirbeau, Jules Renard, Valéry, Thadée Natanson, Paul Léautaud. . . His death, like Cézanne's, could be felt not so much as an absence as an affirmation, an enduring presence: a set of energies, possibilities, and openings in art.

La bande à Picasso was now in full flower of youth, vigor, fantasy, and *esprit de corps*, and their energy often spilled over from art into pranks. This joyous and hermetic society lived by the *blague*, at once an expression of irreverence for any code outside its own, delight in disorder, and a studied and stylish nonconformity, like Picasso's workman's garb or Braque's and Derain's proletarian chic of garish ties and checkered jackets. The young painter Jacques Vaillant, still chimerically enrolled in the Beaux-Arts with an eye on the Prix de Rome, had given up to Braque his studio at the bottom of the steps to Sacré Coeur, and early in 1907 had taken Van Dongen's studio in the Bâteau Lavoir. Happy-go-lucky, a *bon-vivant*, more than a bit lazy, Vaillant was easily won over to the avant-garde esthetics of Picasso's entourage, though for whatever reasons—his "phlegm," his bourgeois upbringing—his hand couldn't quite carry out his purpose. With his middle-class parents hovering in the background, Vaillant was a perfect butt for *blagues*. His mother sent her maid over twice a month to clean up his studio; word spread over the Butte, and in vain Vaillant would bluster and order his friends "to leave Mother's maid in peace." Once, when she rolled his sofa on castors out into the Place Ravigan to do a more thorough sweeping, Braque got hold of it and led a group "tobogganing" down the steep narrow streets of Montmartre, with two little girls aboard, shrieking in glee; the next day Vaillant was nearly summoned to the commissariat for attempted debauch of minors. Another day, when the maid had

moved almost all his furniture out onto the sidewalk to do a particularly serious cleaning, Vaillant returned to find his pals conducting a mock auction, with Jacob playing the auctioneer: "What do I hear? Twenty-five francs for this wardrobe, in genuine Norway pitch pine, twenty-five francs, fifty—any bids?" When Vaillant stormed in to repossess his belongings, he almost had to fight one vexed buyer who thought he had purchased a mattress, while Jacob remonstrated, "But Sir, you see perfectly well that M. Vaillant has returned to redeem his possessions. The sale is cancelled. Goodnight, ladies and gentlemen."

In late November or early December 1908, *la bande* gathered for an elaborate but serious *blague*, a dinner celebrating the Douanier Rousseau. So complex were the levels of humor and homage at the Bateau Lavoir, and so contradictory the opinions about Rousseau, that the controversy engendered by the banquet continues to this day. Fernande's first paragraph in her chapter "Le Banquet Rousseau" in *Picasso et ses amis* embodies the contradiction: "A little afterwards [after Picasso and Fernande had met Rousseau and attended one of his *soirées*], Picasso decided to organize, at his own expense, in his studio, a banquet in honor of Henri Rousseau. The project fired up *la bande*, delighted to play a joke on the *douanier*." As many memoirs of Rousseau make clear, his naïve dignity and innocence made him the target of many jokes, some of them cruel. But Picasso, in search now of versions of the primitive, had been truly intrigued by Rousseau's large painting *The Snake Charmer* at the Salon d'Automne the year before, and had just bought from le Père Soulié Rousseau's portrait of Yadwigha, which he would keep all his life. It was partly to celebrate this purchase that he organized the banquet, which was both exuberant *blague* and serious homage. Not all were convinced of Rousseau's genius. Derain, who stayed away, asked Salmon, "So what's going on? The triumph of the imbeciles?" But for Picasso, Salmon, Uhde, and Robert Delaunay, among others, Rousseau was a giant,

though a naïve one; and Jacob remembered that Apollinaire wouldn't join Jarry in mocking the old man, "because Picasso wouldn't have allowed it." Salmon took Raynal to task in his *Souvenirs sans fin* for an impertinent account that presented the banquet as a malicious joke rather than homage. In the Bateau Lavoir, the bestowing of honor often took an ambiguously comic form.

Jacob was not present for the dinner itself, being in a huff with Picasso, but he lent his room as an adjunct kitchen, and his curiosity overcame him at the end so he joined the party in its last, drunken stage. Picasso had decorated the studio with green drapes and lanterns to resemble the Douanier's own ceremonial evenings of art, music, and poetry; the portrait of Yadwigha held pride of place on an easel; a banner proclaimed "Honor to Rousseau," and the artist himself was seated on a raised dais, so pleased at this elevation that he scarcely noticed the hot wax that dripped on his head all night from a taper fixed to the wall. Jacob wasn't there to witness the scurrying around to replenish provisions when the catered food didn't arrive, or Apollinaire's tipsy girlfriend Marie Laurencin falling into the pies on the sofa and being sent home, and he probably didn't hear Apollinaire's and Salmon's recitations of their poems to Rousseau. He may have been there after the delighted and sleepy old man had been sent home in a horse-drawn cab his admirers paid for, when Salmon and Vaillant simulated attacks of delirium tremens, writhing on the floor and foaming at the mouth with soap bubbles (to the consternation of Gertrude Stein, who took it seriously). "Rousseau was charming in his weakness, his naïveté, his touching vanity," writes Fernande. "For a long time he remembered, with deep emotion, this reception, which the good man took in good faith as an homage to his genius." Picasso later told Geneviève Laporte, "You know, it was really a joke. Nobody believed in his talent. He was the only one who took it seriously, he cried with joy. We couldn't turn back." But Picasso

had watched every stroke of Rousseau's brush when he visited his studio and found him painting the portrait of Apollinaire and Laurencin, *The Muse Inspiring the Poet*, and had absorbed this magical and monumental vision. Salmon was probably not far off the mark when he concluded, "In organizing the banquet of the rue Ravignan, Picasso, Fernande Olivier and their friends wanted to please Rousseau who was to die two years later, and for whom this was one of the last joys of his life."

Adhesive as the friendship may have been, cracks eventually appeared in the tight little world of the Bateau Lavoir. Fernande Olivier would feel the fracture in 1912 when she and Picasso separated for good and when, she says, the artists became successful and began taking different directions. But a preliminary dispersal occurred in 1909: Apollinaire had already moved to Auteuil-Passy to be near Laurencin. On July 3, Salmon, who had been working as a journalist for *L'Intransigeant* for several years, married and moved out of Montmartre with his bride to the Left Bank: Apollinaire celebrated the day in a fluid, full-voiced free verse poem, "Poème lu au mariage d'André Salmon," honoring both Memory and the Future (which rhyme in French: *souvenir* and *avenir*), and evoking his meeting with Salmon in the "infernal cellar" of the Caveau de Soleil d'Or where they had read their youthful poems: "We left then pilgrims of perdition," he romantically recalled. The poem praises love, friendship, and poetic solidarity, but the day-to-day reality would be that from now on neither Apollinaire nor Salmon could breeze so easily in and out of the Bateau Lavoir.

The harsher blow fell in September when Picasso and Fernande returned from Horta and moved from the Bateau Lavoir to a large, bourgeois apartment on the top floor of 11 boulevard de Clichy. Jacob skips over this move in a one-

sentence paragraph in his memoir from 1927: "Around 1910, Picasso had become very well off; he went to live at boulevard de Clichy, 32 or 24." (Jacob gets the address wrong.) In his memoirs for Guiette, he suppresses the move entirely. Fernande says that Picasso made up his mind to move on his return from Spain "reluctantly, because he left behind in that house on the rue Ravignan the few most beautiful memories of his life. And he felt this deeply."

The excitement of the move was accompanied by an artistic event. Picasso and Fernande had barely unpacked in boulevard de Clichy when Picasso held a *vernissage* there to show his summer's work from his summer in Horta, paintings and drawings which were by now frankly Cubist: boxy landscapes, mountainous cleft portraits of Fernande and anthropomorphic cleft mountains. His admirers approved: the Steins bought three pieces, Kahnweiler bought gouaches and drawings, and Vollard purchased most of the paintings that were left.

Left alone on the rue Ravignan, separated from the figure who, he said, had been the great encounter of his life, and the figure who "is not, but [who] creates himself, as Vico said of God"—Max Jacob had the one greater encounter possible in his life. One afternoon late in September, he came back from the Bibliothèque nationale. He put down his briefcase and looked for his slippers. When he raised his head, a sacred figure was glowing against the red cloth hanging on his wall. "God came," he told Guiette. "It was the great event of his life," said Guiette. "He told the story, in prose of blood, tears, and love." With that Jacob became, improbably, a vital poet at once of intense religiosity and irreverent modernism. His eventual books *Le Cornet à dés* (1917), *Le Laboratoire central* (1921), *Le cabinet noir* (1928), and *Cinématoma* (1929) pioneered new languages, embracing verse and prose, comedy and exaltation, an art that helped to create and define its era and maintains its radical freshness today.