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THÉODORE AUBANEL'S *LES FILLES D'AVIGNON* AND PICASSO'S "SUM OF DESTRUCTIONS"

IRVING LAVIN



nyone who has looked even cursorily at the material concerning Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger* (O. J. R. 111) will be aware of three facts that (fig. 1) stand out almost immediately. Firstly, no work of art of the twentieth century, and perhaps none before, has generated such a vast, complicated, and often polemical bibliography.¹ This veritable embarrassment of riches makes it very difficult for anyone, especially a nonspecialist such as myself, to say anything new about the picture, or even to determine whether what one has to say is really new or not. I have been contemplating and collecting material on the topic I am addressing today for a good number of years but, apart from wondering if the suggestion I am offering has real merit, I am not even very sure that it is new, although I am surprised not to have found it in the literature so far.

The second salient fact about the *Femmes d'Alger* material concerns Picasso's own work in creating the picture: I cannot think of another painting in the whole history of art that engendered so much anguished and desperately searching labor by the artist, all the more disconcerting since this veritable paroxysm of creative energy exploded like a great fireworks display over a few months in the first half of 1907.² Picasso produced literally hundreds of studies of all sorts. I know of no other artist who has produced anything like it: not Michelangelo for the Sistine ceiling or the *Last Judgment*, not Leonardo da Vinci for the *Last Supper*. And I do not believe the difference is due simply to chance preservation. Picasso was not

An earlier version of this essay was published in German, "Les filles d'Avignon. Picassos schöpferische Summe von Zerstörungen," in Steingrim Laursen and Ostrud Westheider, eds., *Picasso und die Mythen*, exh. cat. (Hamburg: Bucerius Kunst Forum, 2002), 42–55.

simply opening new avenues in an accepted tradition; he was rethinking in a deep and serious way the very foundations of art. And the agony he went through, the sheer expenditure of blood, sweat, and tears, is perhaps the most moving effect conveyed by this vast body of often excruciatingly systematic experimental fits and starts.

THE METHOD

An equally striking fact is that, within the corpus of Picasso's studies for the (fig. 2 and *Demoiselles*, one group stands out from all the others.³ The group is, first of all, p. 184) very small: a half-dozen single figures standing stiffly, frontally, with hands joined at the groin, part of a longer series of figures in this pose that seems to have had a special, independent significance for Picasso: the series began before he actually (fig. 3) began work on the *Demoiselles*, and the pose was never included in the studies for the composition as a whole. The figures are also relatively unpretentious as drawings—faint, rapidly executed, outline sketches that were clearly not intended, as were most of the other figure studies, to investigate ways of organizing and rendering form and/or movement. Their relative unimportance from a formal point of view is also evident from the physical fact that they are not executed on proper sheets of drawing paper, but on scraps of torn tracing paper.

Despite their modest informality in all these respects—or rather, I am tempted to say, because of it—I believe these extraordinary sketches are among the most important of all Picasso's planning for the *Demoiselles*, perhaps even among the most important of his career; they are, as far as I know, unique of their kind in Picasso's entire oeuvre. Their significance lies in the unexpected insight they provide into Picasso's intellectual mindset in perpetrating the great "sum of destructions," to borrow his famous phrase, that constitutes the *Demoiselles* revolution.⁴ For it is evident that the sketches are records of a mental process in which Picasso was working out—"calculating" might be a better word—a scheme or schemes of proportions for the human body. This is in itself a surprise, since it counterbalances the meaning usually attached to Picasso's phrase, renewing the equilibrium it expresses between the idea of destruction (of the past) and that of summation (for the future). To my mind, the sketches stand at the very core of the whole enterprise of the *Demoiselles*, revealing that the underlying motivation was to create out of the *dissecta membra* of the past a new image of humankind.

Perhaps the best evidence for this view is the equally surprising fact that Picasso was conducting this experiment in the context and with the methodology of the very tradition of high European art-culture that he was supposed to be hell-bent

1. The most comprehensive monographic treatments on the *Demoiselles* is the two-volume catalogue for the exhibition *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, Hélène Seckel et al. (Paris: Musée national Picasso, 1988) (volume 1 contains all the relevant preparatory studies, and volume 2 the scholarly studies), and William Rubin, Judith Cousins, Hélène Seckel, *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon: Studies in Modern Art 3* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1994). Other notable recent monographic studies include Klaus Herding's *Pablo Picasso. Les Demoiselles d'Avignon. Die Herausforderung der Avantgarde* (Frankfurt: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1992); Christopher Green's *Picasso's "Les Demoiselles d'Avignon"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); and Wayne Andersen's *Picasso's Brothel: Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* (New York: Other Press, 2002).

2. See Rubin et al., 1994, 13.

3. Seckel et al., 1988, vol. I, 94, cat. nos. 73–75; 184, ill. 4–5; 185, ill. 6. Closely related are several sketches on the blank pages in an exhibition catalogue dated April 15–May 6, 1907 (*ibid.*, 183, 185, ill. 6). Picasso developed the type as shown in these drawings in two paintings that include faces whose physiognomies approach the "African" heads in *Les Demoiselles* (*ibid.*, 93, 185, ill. 7; see also 314, 315).

4. Christian Zervos, "Conversation avec Picasso", *Cahiers d'art*, Picasso special issue, 1935, 173: "With me, a picture is a sum of destructions." I examined this idea from another perspective, in Irving Lavin, *Past–Present: Essays on Historicism in Art from Donatello to Picasso* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 224ff. Picasso's phrase is also the subject of a book by Natasha Staller, *A Sum of Destructions: Picasso's Cultures and the Creation of Cubism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), which focuses on the *Demoiselles*.



FIG. 1



FIG. 2A

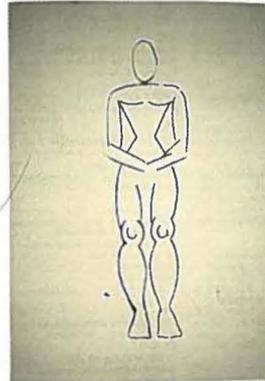


FIG. 2B

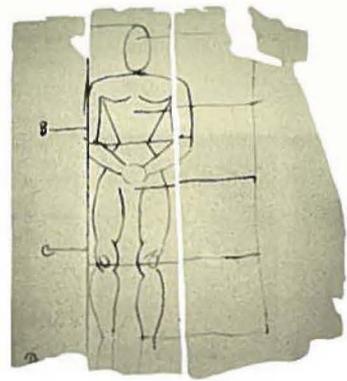


FIG. 2C



FIG. 3

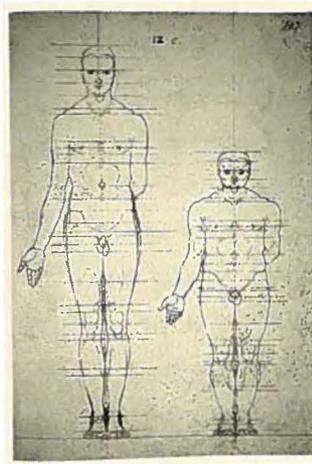


FIG. 4

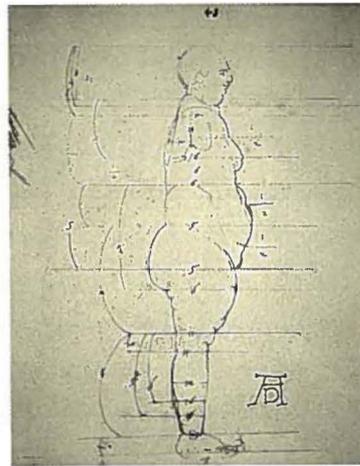


FIG. 5

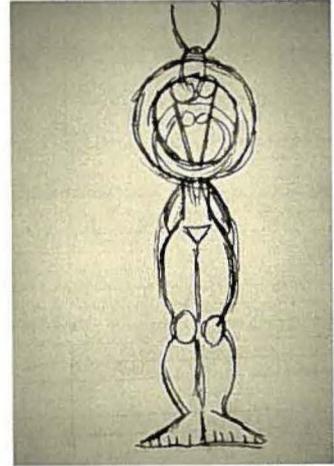


FIG. 6

FIG. 1
Pablo Picasso, *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J.)*, 1907,
oil on canvas, 96 x 92 in. (243.9 x 233.7 cm).
The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

FIG. 2A, 2B and 2C
Pablo Picasso, Three studies of nudes with hands joined,
ink on tracing paper. No. 891, 10 1/2 x 7 1/2 in. (27 x 19 cm);
No. 892, 10 1/2 x 7 1/2 in. (27 x 19 cm); No. 894,
no dimensions given. Succession Picasso.

FIG. 3
Pablo Picasso, *Nude with Clasped Hands*, 1905-06,
gouache on canvas, 37 3/4 x 29 3/4 in. (96.5 x 75.6 cm).
Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. Gift of Sam and Ayala Zacks, 1970.

FIG. 4
Albrecht Dürer, A tall and short man,
proportion study, Dresden sketchbook, fol. 103r.,
11 1/2 x 7 3/4 in. (29 x 19.8 cm).
Sächsische Landesbibliothek, Dresden.

FIG. 5
Albrecht Dürer, Stout woman,
proportion study, Dresden sketchbook, fol. 150r.,
11 1/2 x 8 in. (29.3 x 20.6 cm).
Sächsische Landesbibliothek, Dresden.

FIG. 6
Pablo Picasso, Study for the Demoiselle with raised arms,
Carnet No. 7, fol. 59r. 8 3/4 x 6 3/4 in. (22.5 x 17 cm).
Private collection.

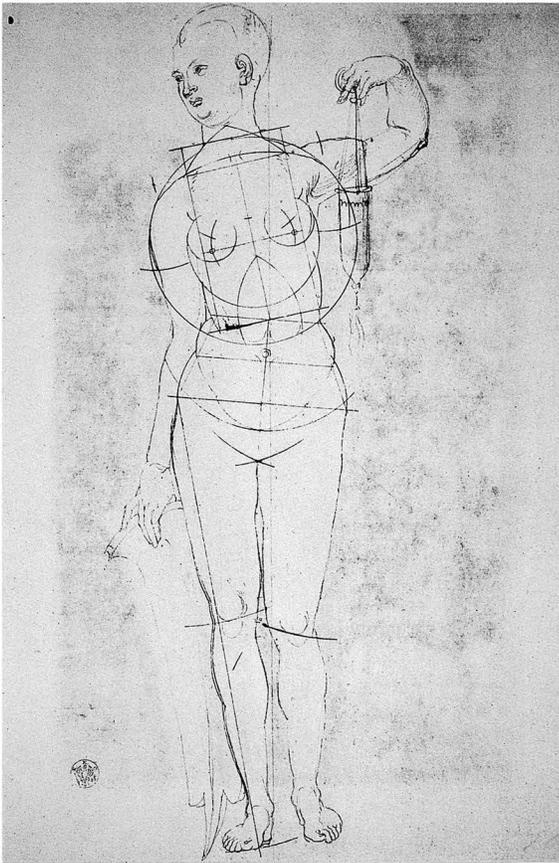


FIG. 7
Albrecht Dürer,
Nude woman holding
shield and lamp,
drawing, 30.3 x 20.5 cm.
Berlin,
Kupferstichkabinett

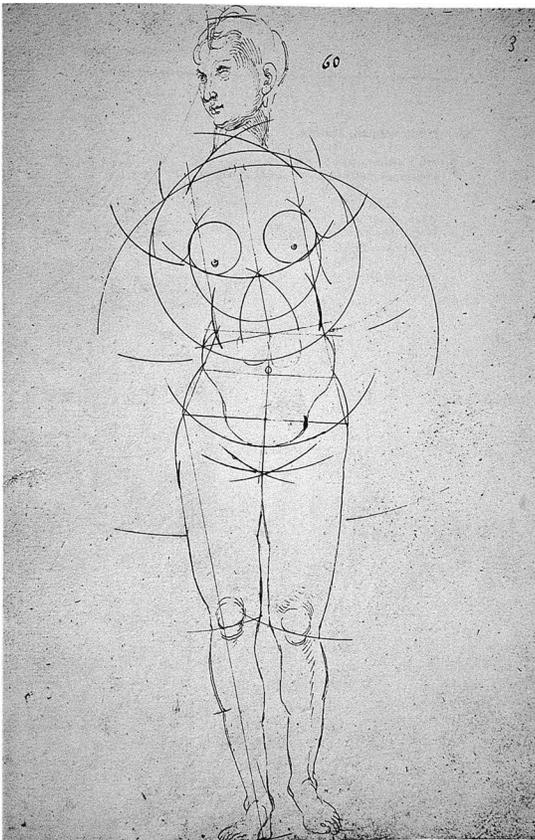
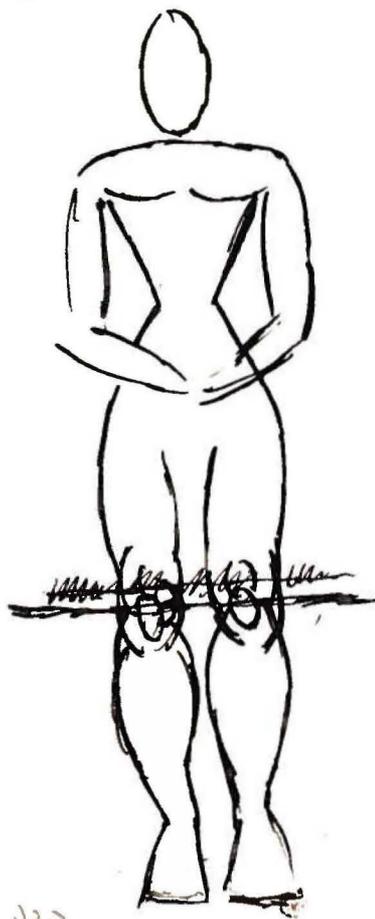
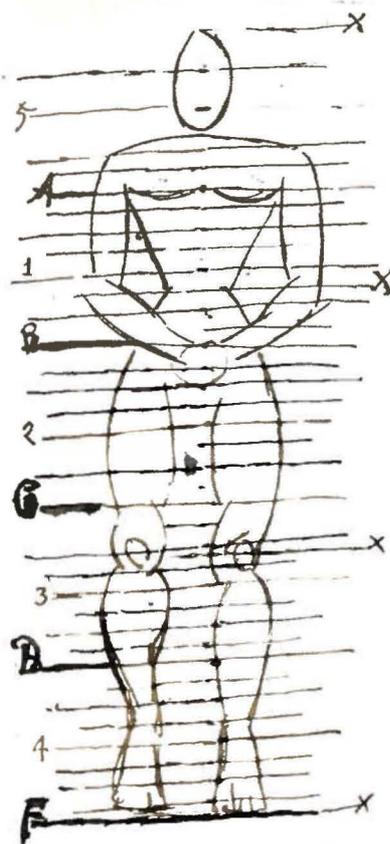


FIG. 8
Albrecht Dürer,
Nude woman constructed.
Dresden sketchbook,
fol. 163r., 29 x 18.8 cm.
Dresden,
Sächsische landesbibliothek



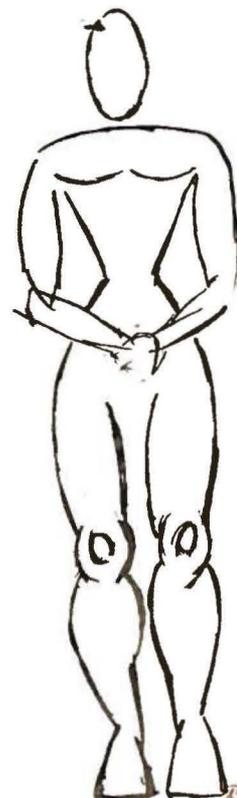
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STUDY FOR LES DEMOISELLES D'AVIGNON:
STANDING NUDE, SPRING 1907, [PARIS],
PEN AND INDIA INK ON TRACING PAPER,
9 X 4 3/4 IN. (22.7 X 12.2 CM).
MUSÉE NATIONAL PICASSO, PARIS, PABLO PICASSO
INHERITANCE-TAX SETTLEMENT, 1979, MP 537.



207/2
3

STUDY FOR LES DEMOISELLES D'AVIGNON:
STANDING NUDE, SPRING 1907, [PARIS],
PEN AND INDIA INK ON TRACING PAPER,
12 1/4 X 5 IN. (31 X 12.6 CM).
MUSÉE NATIONAL PICASSO, PARIS, PABLO PICASSO
INHERITANCE-TAX SETTLEMENT, 1979, MP 535.



2/207
3

STUDY FOR LES DEMOISELLES D'AVIGNON:
STANDING NUDE, SPRING 1907, [PARIS],
PEN AND INDIA INK ON TRACING PAPER, 10 X 4 3/4 IN.
(5.5 X 12 CM). MUSÉE NATIONAL PICASSO, PARIS,
PABLO PICASSO INHERITANCE-TAX SETTLEMENT, 1979,
MP 536.

on destroying. The study of human proportions and the search for principles that would assure ideal relationships among the parts of the body was a central theme in the development from antiquity onward, one with which Picasso must have been all too familiar from his earliest childhood. Many artists before Picasso had made studies of this kind, and it is clear that Picasso is not rejecting the tradition but appropriating and exploiting it to his own purpose. His precise purpose eludes us, since the full meaning of the calculations has yet to be deciphered. But we have learned from a brilliant insight of Werner Spies another fact, no less astonishing than everything else in the genesis of *Les Femmes d'Alger*, that Picasso did have before him the work of one particular predecessor in the pursuit of ideal beauty, Albrecht Dürer.⁵ Dürer made detailed studies of human proportions all his life—and published treatises on the subject, which Picasso not only knew, but profoundly understood. It is well known that Dürer's interest and method evolved over time, starting with an "empirical" system of increasingly minute and precise measurements, and then shifting toward a principle of proportions based on numerical ratios and geometric configurations.⁶ Picasso was clearly drawn to Dürer's later method, with which he produced not only the ideal classical physiques of Adam and Eve and Apollo, but also the "ideal" proportions of grossly malformed antitypes. In Dürer, Picasso saw the possibility of a reasoned, measured approach to a new canon of beauty, to which the nonclassical heritage of primitive and provincial art that he was exploring at the same time could be assimilated.

Dürer also explored another avenue that propelled Picasso forward, indeed beyond, the horizon of a path he had taken earlier, in the direction of abstraction.

We noted that the classically modeled standing figure with hands joined had already entered the picture during the previous summer at Gósol. Spies made another brilliant comparison, between one of a series of abstracted versions of this figure Picasso made while working on *Les Femmes d'Alger*, with one of Dürer's studies of geometric schemes for human proportions, a sheet in the Kupferstichkabinet

in Berlin. We can take the point an important step further, however, since we can be certain that what Picasso actually had before him was a closely related but significantly different drawing in Dürer's famous sketchbook in Dresden.⁷ Here, Picasso found that Dürer had designed a figure in which the concentric circles he had used to relate the shoulders and torso could—by an amazing leap of the imagination—be understood as also defining the arms and hands, in one revolutionary sweep of perfect shapes in which abstract thought and physical reality

meld in an existential continuum. I am no expert, but this must surely be one of the first, if not *the* first instance in Picasso's art of such a complete, supremely

5. See Werner Spies, "L'histoire dans l'atelier", *Cahiers du musée national d'Art moderne* 9 (1982): 60–71, see Natasha Staller in *Picasso: The Early Years 1892–1906*, exh. cat. Marilyn McCully (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1997), 78f. and 84, n. 65 (where she references Yve-Alain Bois, "Painting as Trauma", *Art in America* 76 (1988): 140, and David Lomas, "A Canon of Deformity: *Les Femmes d'Alger* and Physical Anthropology", *Art History* 16 (1993): 426f., two texts reproduced in Green, *Picasso's "Les Femmes d'Alger"*, op. cit.). Natasha Staller (*A Sum of Destructions*, op. cit., 248, 264, 387, n. 131, and 391, n. 171) further notes that Dürer's studies in the Dresden sketchbook had been related to Cubism generally as early as 1912–13 (Thomas 1913, including, on 133, an illustration of the woman with circular arms). Evidently unaware of Spies's reference to Dürer, Lomas relates Picasso's drawings to contemporary anthropometric studies in the emergent field of physical anthropology, intent upon defining "scientifically" the characteristics of the world's racial types. The reference to Dürer is incontrovertible, however, in the woman with circular arms noted below. In any case, the graphic methods of the anthropologists were clearly derived from and, as they asserted, relevant to, the artistic tradition, except that it is doubtful if Dürer's ideal proportional systems were based on actual body measurements, while the anthropologists in Darwinian fashion regarded the white race as the apogee of human development. Neither sought, as did Picasso, to synthesize the ideal and the anthropological enterprises into what Braque defined as "a new sort of beauty" (Gelett Burgess, "The Wild Men of Paris," *Architectural Record*, XXVII, 5 (May 1910): 405 reporting a visit to Braque's studio in 1908). I plan to enlarge upon this point in another context.

6. This development in Dürer's thought is a fundamental theme of Panofsky's classic essay, "The History of the Theory of Human Proportions as a Reflection of the History of Styles," in *Meaning in the Visual Art: Papers in and on Art History* (Garden

(figs. 4 and 5)

(fig. 3)

(figs. 4 and 5)

(figs 6 and 7)

(fig. 8)

City: Doubleday, 1955), 55–107. Leonard Barkan (“The Heritage of Zeuxis”, in *Antiquity and Its Interpreters*, Alina Payne et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, 104) follows this point in discussing the heritage of the story of Zeuxis and the maidens of Croton.

7. On this point and on Picasso and the Dresden sketchbook generally, see Lavin *Past–Present*, 1993, 253, 312, n. 63.

8. *Das Skizzenbuch von Albrecht Dürer in der königlichen öffentlichen Bibliothek zu Dresden*, presented by Robert Bruck (Strasbourg: Heitz & Mündel, 1905). An English edition was subsequently published: *The Human Figure: The Complete Dresden Sketchbook*, presented and translated by Walter L. Strauss (New York: Dover, 1972).

9. Wilhelm Uhde, *Von Bismarck bis Picasso, Erinnerungen und Bekenntnisse*, Zurich, Oprecht, 1938, 140f.; *De Bismarck à Picasso*, translated from the German by Barbara Fontaine (Paris: Éditions du Linteau, 2002). See also Rubin et al., 1994, 255.

10. On Picasso and Uhde, see the index reference to Uhde in Rubin et al., 1994, and John Richardson, with the collaboration of Marilyn McCully, *A Life of Picasso* (Random House: New York, 1991).

11. On Wilhelm Uhde, see Heinz Thiel, “Wilhelm Uhde. Ein offener und engagierter Marchand-Amateur in Paris vor dem Ersten Weltkrieg”, in *Avant-garde und Publikum. Zur Rezeption avantgardistischer Kunst in Deutschland, 1905–1933*, under the direction of Henrike Junge, Cologne, 1992, 307–20.

12. I am indebted for this information to Ursula Lochner, archivist at the University of Munich.

13. Berthold Riehl, *Von Dürer zu Rubens. Eine geschichtliche Studie über die deutsche und niederländische Malerei des 16 Jahrhunderts* (Munich: Verlag der Königliche Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1900). When Uhde wrote in his autobiography (*Von Bismarck bis Picasso*, 84) that he had enrolled in classes in the history of art, he was referring to Riehl’s classes.

elegant, imperceptible interflow between natural and geometric form, between flatness and three-dimensionality.

I am convinced, in fact, that Dürer’s Dresden sketchbook itself played an important role in Picasso’s development at this time, perhaps even inspiring his own monumental series of sketchbooks, which became the arena of his struggle with the new vision epitomized in the *Demoiselles*. The Dresden sketchbook was indeed a revelation to the whole art-historical world when it was published as a magnificent album of plates, in 1905.⁸ The “Woman-of-Circles” drawing in particular was a dramatic demonstration of Dürer’s relentless rigor and logic in the pursuit of ideal perfection. It is possible, I think, to suggest precisely when and how Picasso became aware of the Dresden sketchbook, that is, in the person of the German art historian and critic Wilhelm Uhde. Well known to students of modernism, Uhde was one of the first to appreciate and propagate the new aesthetic of cubism. He recalled his discovery and conversion in his autobiography, *Von Bismarck bis Picasso: Erinnerungen und Bekenntnisse*, published in 1938. There he tells of his chance meeting with Picasso in the Lapin Agile in 1905, just after he had bought a painting by Picasso in a shop—he was one of the first people to do so—without ever having heard of the artist.⁹ Subsequently they became friends—Picasso later made a portrait of him (1910)—and Uhde’s references to *Les Demoiselles* during and following its creation are among the earliest and most important that have come down to us.¹⁰

Uhde was a remarkable character, a restless and free spirit who, having started to study law, soon became bored and turned to the humanities and art.¹¹ Important for us is that in 1899 he matriculated in the art history program in the University of Munich.¹² There he followed a course on “The History of German and Netherlandish Painting from Dürer to Rembrandt,” given by Berthold Riehl, a specialist in German art, who published a book on the same subject the following year.¹³ Whether or not Uhde learned of the Dresden sketchbook then, he must have been aware a few years later of the publication of the *editio princeps* of Dürer’s immense labor, in which he sought to reconcile the variable relationships between natural and abstract form. And it was no doubt Uhde who brought the work to Picasso’s attention, just as he was contemplating *Les Demoiselles d’Avignon*.

The importance of the Dürer connection in the development of *Les Demoiselles* lies in the revelation it provides that, beneath the radical break with the entire European tradition of fine art for which the picture is normally touted, there lay an entirely different motivation, not to destroy but to disassemble the past—all of it—in order to reconstruct a new canon, the very notion of which incorporated the classical tradition, not inevitably but voluntarily, and not as a foil but within its very essence.

THE SUBJECT

This bivalent, complementary relationship to the classical heritage, both a challenge and a link, embedded visually in the relationship with Dürer, is the idea I want to pursue now with respect to the theme of *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*. No subject concerning the picture is more vexed than its title. I cannot even begin to retail here the many reports, theories, and explanations that have been offered of the subject and how it came by its now commonly accepted name.¹⁴ The sources frequently contradict one another, and this includes Picasso himself, who was, as usual, maddeningly elusive and ironic. However, two themes do run consistently and conspicuously through the barrage of anecdotes, claims, and disclaimers. One is that the women represented are prostitutes, hence the famous phrase, "*Bordel philosophique*," evidently suggested by Guillaume Apollinaire to capture the coincidence of opposites by which the viewer of the picture is irresistibly traumatized: beauty and the beast, the repulsive and the sensuous, the earthbound and the sublime. Whether or not an actual whorehouse was involved, which I seriously doubt, the idea seems to suit the unabashed, gross brutality of the figures and the challenge they represent to conventional mores—aesthetic and social transgression coincide. This is also the implication of *Les Demoiselles* (invented by André Salmon when he exhibited the picture for the first time in 1916), which is a rather proper, archaic term, commonly and ironically applied to ladies of ill repute.

The second association that has been attached to the work from the outset is with Avignon, the fabled capital of Provence, a reference for which many explanations have been given. After all, every city, especially Paris itself, had brothels: why Avignon? Picasso himself joked about it. Kahnweiler later recalled a conversation in which Picasso complained that he hated the title *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* and reminded him that at the beginning the picture was called "*Le Bordel d'Avignon*," whereupon he recited, with tongue in cheek, a variety of associations he had with the city: "You know why? Avignon has always been for me a very familiar name, connected to my life. I was living around the corner from Avignon Street. It is there that I bought my paper, my watercolor supplies. And, as you know, Max's [Max Jacob's] grandmother was from Avignon. We joked about the painting. One of the women was Max's grandmother. One was Fernande, another was Marie Laurencin, all of them in a brothel in Avignon."¹⁵ While there may be elements of truth in this name-of-the-game game, it does not satisfy me, any more than it did William Rubin in his magisterial monograph on the picture.

14. The most comprehensive accounts are those of Rubin et al., 1994, 17–19, and in Andersen, *Picasso's Brothel*, 17–32.

15. Conversation from December 2, 1933, cited by William Rubin in Rubin et al., 1994, 18.

I have another explanation for the title, and ultimately for what I believe to be an important aspect of the picture's significance. I must assert from the outset that my suggestion is almost pure hypothesis. I have found no direct evidence for my suggestion in the sources, and I have found no direct connection between Picasso himself and the cultural and social developments I shall discuss. It's just an idea. But I am convinced that it opens an important, if somewhat distant, vista on the ambience in which the picture was created.

THE GODDESSES OF AVIGNON

16. Francis Carco, *De Montmartre au quartier Latin* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1927), 36 (cited by Staller, *A Sum of Destructions*, 105, 248, and 387, n. 130), as Staller notes, Picasso's comment was in French, with a Catalan inflection: "*C'est plusss bô!*".
17. The same may be said with respect to another of Picasso's impassioned altercations with the classical tradition, to which, in his own way, he remained deeply committed: "Academic training in beauty is a sham. The beauties of the Parthenon, Venuses, Nymphs, Narcissuses, are so many lies. Art is not the application of a canon of beauty but what the instinct and the brain can conceive beyond any canon. When we love a woman we don't start measuring her limbs. We love with our desires—although everything has been done to try and apply a canon even to love." From a conversation between Christian Zervos and Picasso in 1935 (Zervos 1935, 136, translated in Barr 1946, 272–274, cf. 273). As we have noted, his early drawings related to *Les Demoiselles* were not in fact measurement but proportion studies.
18. See the relevant texts and discussion in the Chronology by Judith Cousins and Hélène Seckel, in Rubin et al., 1994, 163f., 172f., 231f., 250f.
19. Although still largely regional, the literature on Aubanel is by now quite substantial. An excellent précis of Aubanel's life and work, with bibliography, will be found in the complete English translation of his poetry, by David Streight, *Théodore Aubanel: Sensual Poetry and the Provençal Church*, with poems in Provençal and in English (Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer: Éditions d'ou Gregau, 1996).

I begin by citing another of Picasso's famous pronouncements about his work in relation to *Les Demoiselles*: that African sculptures were more beautiful than the *Venus de Milo*.¹⁶ Despite its provocative disparagement of the paragon par excellence of ancient beauty, this remark must be understood in light of the several beautiful, indeed loving drawings of the Venus that Picasso had made early on. These facts suffice, at least for me, to indicate that the paradoxical conception of feminine pulchritude evident in the picture was present in Picasso's mind from the outset. He sought to find a way to conflate—in a quasi-mystical union—earthy, exotic reality with sublime, classical beauty; in the search for this conflation, as we have seen, Picasso actually did emulate the classical canons, in his own way, with the help of Albrecht Dürer.¹⁷ One further detail sheds an incisive, if inadvertent, light on our subject: a visitor to the studio in 1916, that is, after Salmon's exhibition, suggests that when Picasso showed the picture, he called it *Les Filles d'Avignon*.¹⁸

The two words for girl or maiden may seem interchangeable, but the difference, to me, is a dead giveaway, for the word "*fille*" is much less burdened by pejorative or duplicitous associations than "*demoiselles*." Without for a moment rejecting the many other ingredients that went into the picture, I submit that the name and important aspects of its significance spring from another, altogether unsuspected source, which specifically coincided with the classical tradition in a way that anticipates Picasso's attitude in more than name only. I refer to a large cycle of verses composed during the third quarter of the nineteenth century by Théodore Aubanel (fig. 7) (1829–1886), a now largely forgotten but once famous (in part tragically so) poet, who lived and wrote in Avignon, and whose name had a special, internationally diffused resonance with the city.¹⁹

Aubanel's great work, first published in 1891, was called in French precisely *Les Filles d'Avignon*, and offers, as far as I have been able to determine, the one and only precedent for the title of Picasso's painting. And although, as far as I can

discover, it has never been cited in this connection before, in my opinion the resonance between the title of Aubanel's work and the title Picasso himself used for his picture cannot be coincidental. The phrase captures the painting's qualities much more subtly and precisely than does Salmon's rather crude, unambiguous emendation. My conviction, however, stems not only from the homologous title—of which, I repeat, I have found no other instance—but from the analogous substance of Aubanel's work and the circumstances in which it was produced and received.

Of central importance, to begin with, is the fact that although his work was published accompanied by French translations, Aubanel's language as a poet was proudly and deliberately Provençal, the native tongue of his native land. He was thus truly a native speaker of the *langue d'oc*; but he was anything but a *primitif*. On the contrary, he had an extraordinarily literate heritage, his great-grandfather having founded in 1744 the distinguished, still-flourishing Avignon publishing house, known to all book lovers, that bears the family name. As a young man Aubanel became a dedicated poet and was caught up in the great Romantic revival of regional culture that was sweeping all of Europe. In France and also elsewhere this fiercely aggressive, often politically charged, cultural "provincialism" (the term proudly used by the movement's protagonists) was spearheaded by Provence, alongside the equivalent Catalan and Iberian resurgence in Spain. In 1854 the movement took shape in an organization formed by seven writers, mainly poets, who adopted the name, famous in the annals of French literary culture, Félibrige (from a medieval Occitan tale about the young Jesus disputing in the temple with Seven Doctors of the Law—"li sét felibre de la lèi"). Aubanel was one of the seven, but the leading light was perhaps the most famous of all regionalists, Frédéric Mistral (1830–1914), who devoted his long and hugely productive life to the resurrection and reanimation of all aspects of Provençal culture, from street festivals and peasant furniture to the glorification of the great tradition of troubadour poetry and study of Provençal language, of which he compiled a vast and still standard dictionary.²⁰

Mistral energetically promoted neo-Provençal literature, especially poetry, which was his own *métier*. Dubbed the Homer of Provence, Mistral was awarded the Nobel prize in 1904 for his great Provençal epic, *Mirèio*. (He used his share of the prize to found and endow the wonderful, also still-flourishing ethnographic Museon Arlaten at Arles, devoted entirely to Provençal history and culture.) Significantly, *Mirèio* is not a medieval story: it takes place in the present in Mistral's birthplace, Les Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer, where Mirèio, the daughter of a rich farmer, thwarted by her parents in her love for the son of a poor basketmaker,

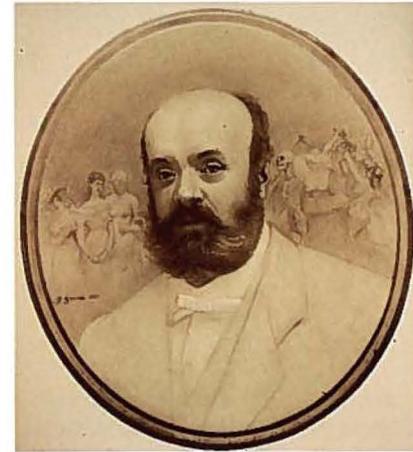


FIG. 9
Théodore Aubanel, after a portrait by Pierre Grivolos
(reproduced as frontispiece of *Theodore Aubanel,
la vie et l'homme, le poète*, Avignon, Aubanel Frères,
1924).

20. Frédéric Mistral, *Lou tresor dóu felibrige, dictionnaire provençal-français* (Aix-en-Provence: Remondet-Aubin, 1882–86).

suffers and ultimately dies in the local church—itsself still famous for the annual gathering of gypsies from all over Europe who come to worship their black patroness, Saint Sarah.

With Mistral's Nobel prize in 1904, the Provençal movement and the Félibrige became world renowned, exactly at the time that Picasso moved from Barcelona to Paris where, in the center of high style par excellence, he began his own explorations of "provincial" art. Although the fact is well known, it is worth emphasizing that the cultures of Provence and Catalonia were closely related from the Middle Ages, when the two languages were mutually intelligible.²¹ The Nobel committee gave full and celebrated recognition to this Franco-Iberian connection by awarding the prize *ex aequo* that year to the Murcian mathematician, statesman, and dramatist, José Echegaray y Eizaguirre (1832–1916), who went to school in nearby Murcia and whose plays we know Picasso saw as a boy in Malaga. These notable events in a regional and cultural context in which Picasso was deeply, one might say congenitally, imbued cannot have escaped his attention; nor can I believe he was unaware of a notorious scandal that had shaken that world a generation earlier and was brought back into the limelight—along with the Félibrige and the whole Provençal movement—when Mistral received the prize.

It is fundamentally important to bear in mind that, at the end of the Middle Ages, Provençal had been a leading force in the whole process of the emergence of modern vernacular languages: "from the troubadours, through Dante and Petrarch, and running in parallel currents with other national literatures."²² But in the wake of the Renaissance, as the standardized versions became identified with national identities, the regional versions were relegated to the status of local dialects, despised and suppressed as "provincial." As was frequently the case with minority languages, Provençal had been disdained by the government for years, especially since the time of Napoleon; children were punished for using it at school, and its use in any official meeting or documents was forbidden. By the mid-nineteenth century, a majority of Provençal speakers had come to believe that what they were speaking was an "inferior" form of language, a "patois." Provençal was by no means a dead language, however. It had long since been replaced by French as the language of government, commerce, and high culture, but it continued to be used—as it still is—on the street and at home: the true, authentic language of the people. The Félibrige sought to restore the Provençal language and the culture it represented to the glory it enjoyed in the late Middle Ages.²³

Avignon had become the center of that glorious efflorescence when it became the seat of the papacy during the so-called "Babylonian Captivity" of the

21. Catalonians were closely involved with the Félibrige from the outset, and the famous Coupo Santo, a kind of cultural Holy Grail, given by the Catalonians as a gesture of solidarity, became one of the organization's prime symbols. See René Jouveau, *Histoire du Félibrige (1876–1914)* (Nîmes: Imprimerie Benne, 1970), 33f. and passim; and Elio [Élie] Bachas, *Lou simbeù de la coupo, discours de Santo Estello 1967 pèr lou centenari de la coupo catalano següi dóu discours d'Avignoun* (Toulon: L'Astrado, 1968).

There was also a strong branch organization in Paris: see Albert Tournier, *Les Félibres de Paris* (published minus the preface in the collection *Li Souleiado*) (Paris: L. Duc, 1904).

22. Streight, 1996, 33.

23. *Ibid.*, 24.

church (1309–78). The city remained under papal rule and the house of Aubanel prospered with papal patronage, especially after it was named exclusive publisher to the Holy See by Pius VI (Braschi) in 1780. Avignon was ceded to the French republic, also by Pius VI, only in 1797, and a current of religious conservatism continued to run through the social hierarchy of the city. All this by way of background for the shock that awaited the good people of Avignon when the young Théodore, a quiet, studious, self-effacing, devout, happily married man from one of the city's most respected families, produced his *Li Fiho d'Avignoun*. The result was a veritable cause célèbre, and Théodore became a veritable *poète maudit*, as one of his biographers has called him.²⁴ Partly no doubt from an innate wellspring of amorous passion, partly enthralled by the new enthusiasm for his native culture and the rapturous ideals of the troubadour poets, Aubanel began to write poetry that fairly burned with ecstatic, sensuous pleasure of feminine pulchritude. When Paul Valéry pronounced Aubanel the only true Provençal poet, I believe he was not simply appreciating the quality of his verse, but referring precisely to the lyrical passion of his love poetry that stood squarely in the tradition of the medieval troubadours, who were also viewed as unredeemed sensualists, but who are now often seen as harboring lofty, even spiritual meaning in complex allegories.

Aubanel's troubles had begun years before when he fell madly but it seems entirely chastely in love with a local girl, whom he called Zani, and poured out his feelings in a long Provençal poem whose title alone, *The Half-Open Pomegranate* (*La Midugrano entre-duberto*), was provocative enough to raise the eyebrows of the genteel Avignon society to which they both belonged. The love story of Aubanel and Zani acquired mythic proportions when she heeded an inner call to spirituality and became a nun, leaving behind the secular life and her suitor, with whom she pleaded in a very moving farewell letter to give up his infernal pursuit of poetic licentiousness. But for Aubanel it was indeed a matter of poetic license, for while he never denied and constantly indulged his amorous passions in the great tradition of Provençal lyric poetry, he was also a deeply religious man and saw no contradiction between these two aspects of his persona—his religious beliefs and his calling as a poet. He never forgot his beloved Zani, but there ensued a succession of such “affairs of the (poetic) heart,” all of them at a distance, even after he married and with the full knowledge of his devoted wife. In general, Aubanel was a provincial in his choice of subjects as well as of language—he assimilated the charming young girls of everyday, contemporary Avignon to the legendary beauties of Provençal lyric poetry.



FIG. 8
Venus of Arles, copy from a cast made before restoration.
Musée de l'Arles Antique, Arles (postcard).



FIG. 9
Venus of Arles, restored by Girardon, marble.
Musée du Louvre, Paris (postcard).

24. Claude Liprandi, *Théodore Aubanel, poète maudit* (Avignon: Aubanel, 1955).

The crisis arose when Aubanel took as his subject another Provençal maiden of a different sort, a famous marble figure of Venus, the ancient goddess of beauty and love, that had been excavated in the seventeenth century in the theater of Arles. The authorities presented the work to Louis XIV, who had it restored by Girardon. Displayed in the Louvre, the *Venus of Arles*, as she is popularly known, has ever since been admired alongside the *Venus de Milo* as a paragon of her sex, and as a symbol of the city deprived of its cultural heritage by the central government.²⁵ Aubanel's poem *The Venus of Arles* caused an immediate sensation, eliciting violent letters to the local newspapers, and the condemnation of the church authorities, notably the powerful archbishop. What made *The Venus of Arles* particularly irksome to many people was the fact that the figure was nude to the hips, and most of Aubanel's rather long poem consists in elaborate, rhythmically repeated perorations on the goddess's glorious body parts, which he then proceeded to conflate with the Avignon girls of his own time.

25. On the sculpture and its vicissitudes, see the literature cited in *Lexicon iconographicum mythologicae classicae (LIMC)*, ed. Nikolaos Gialouris, vol. II, 1 (Zurich: Artemis, 1984), 63, no. 526.

26. Streight, 1996, 270.
Li Fiho d'Avignoun, from *La Venus d'Arle*:
Mostrote touto nuso, o divino Venus!
La bèuta te vestis miés que ta raubo blanco,
Laisso à ti pèd toumba l
a raubo qu'à tis anco
S'envertouio, mudant
tout ço qu'as de plu bèu:
Abandouno toun vèntre
i poutoun dóu soulèu!
Coume l'èurre s'aganto
à la rusco d'un aubre,
Laisso dins mi brassado
estregne en plen toun maubre;
Laisso ma bouco ardènto
e mi det tremoulant
Courre amourous pertout
sus toun cadabre blanc!
O douço Venus d'Arle! o fado de jouvènço!
Ta bèuta que clarejo en touto la Prouvènço,
Fai bello nòsti fiho e nòsti drole san;
Souto aquelo car bruno,
o Venus! i'a toun sang,
Sèmpe viéu, sèmpe caud.
E nòsti chato alerto,
Vaqui perqué s'envan la peitrino duberto;
E nòsti gai jouvènt, vaqui perqué soun fort
I lucho de l'amour, di brau e de la mort;
E vaqui perqué t'ame,
—a ta bèuta m'engano,—
E perqué iéu crestian, te cante,
o grand pagano!
 (Avignon: Aubanel, 1980), 107–09

Uncover your naked arms, your naked breasts and sides;
 Present yourself all naked, O Venus most divine!
 Better are you clothed by your beauty than white robes;
 Let fall to your ankles the cloth which 'round your hips
 Is wrapped and mutes the beauteous form that's truly yours.
 Free your waist and stomach to the kisses of the sun!
 And as ivy clings to the bark upon a tree,
 Oh, let my arms surround and hold your marble form;
 Grant that my burning lips and my trembling fingers
 Might lovingly caress your white surface, everywhere!
 O sweet Venus of Arles, the sprite of all our youth!
 Your beauty radiating throughout Provence gives
 Splendor to our daughters and makes our sons so strong;
 Beneath their bronzed skin your blood is in their veins
 Still living, O Venus, and warm. And our gay girls,
 That's why they're seen with chests not fully covered,
 And our bright young men, that's why they're so strong and brave
 In contests of love, with the bulls, and facing death.
 That's why I love you, — and your beauty has me dazed—
 And why I, a Christian, sing to you, O great pagan!²⁶

Apart from the sheer sexuality that underlay the scandal and that was surely intended—his protestations to the contrary notwithstanding—as a provocative challenge to the aesthetic mores of his contemporaries, it seems to me that Aubanel's work embodied three principles that together were of fundamental importance. His love poetry assimilated the ideal, classical past to the unabashedly sensual present, in a self-consciously provincial idiom that was itself, by noble academic standards, a crude and inelegant, indeed barbaric degeneration the language

of antiquity. (Provincial and Provençal are, after all, derived from the same root.) Aubanel also wrote another poem dedicated to the love goddess, this one titled *The Venus of Avignon*. It was the leading piece of the series, again a provincial version of the classical theme, but this time not in reference to an ancient statue but more generally to an imagined, abstract paragon of local beauty.

Oh! Who will free me from the thirst
For girls? . . . She's wearing no corset:
Her proud and pleatless dress, clings 'round
Her firm young breast, which trembles not
When she walks, but rather firms up
So nice and tight that what trembles
Is your heart before her beauty.

Don't pass back by, it tortures me,
I'd cover you, and happily,
With kisses!

As she walks you'd think her floating:
Beneath the grace and the swing
Of a white petticoat you sense
The lines of firm hips, divine legs,
In short, her whole majestic body;
But your eyes see only the feet
And the ankles of that beauty.

Don't pass back by, it tortures me,
I'd cover you, and happily,
With kisses!²⁷

The essential point here is that Aubanel conceived of the poems as pendants, contrasting but complementary versions of the same theme, two forms of beauty and two forms of love, neither of which is sufficient, both of which are necessary to define the heavenly and earthly duality of our human nature. Aubanel himself said as much in a letter to Zani of January 17, 1869, explaining his reverential ideas in response to her plea, "You sing so well of the Virgin Mary, do not sing of Venus."²⁸ "One of these poems, the Venus of Arles is a hymn to pure beauty, antique beauty . . . and in these times of general debasement I believe it is an act of good taste and true morality to raise the spirit to these high masterpieces of the Greek chisel." The other guilty poem, the Venus of Avignon, he says, is "a hymn to living beauty, to those perfect types that appear to you on occasion in a crowd and pass, as in a dream, leaving you completely breathless [*ébloui*]. There is in Avignon an admirable young girl of the people, white as a lily, of a marvelous beauty and an

27. Ibid. 218. *Li Fiho d'Avignoun*, from *La Venus d'Avignoun*:

Oh! quau me levara la set
De la chato?... A ges de courset:
Sa raubo, fièro e sèns ple, molo
Soun jouïne sen que noun tremolo
Quand marchò, mai s'arredounis
Tant ferme, que subran fernis
Voste cor davans la chatouno.

*Passesplus, que me fas mouri,
O laissome te devouri
De poutouno!*

*Camino, e la creirias voulant:
Souto la gràci e lou balans
Dóu fres coutihoun, se devino
Anco ardido e cambo divino,
Tout soun cor ufanous enfin;
Mai se vèi que si petoun fin
E si caviho de chatouno.*

*Passesplus, que me fas mouri,
O laissome te devouri
De poutouno!*

(Avignon: Aubanel, 1980), 4–7

28. Théodore Aubanel, *Ce coeur qui ne change pas, lettres à Marie Jenna*, ed. Claude Liprandi (vol. VII of Aubanel's complete works) (Avignon: Aubanel, 1987), 23.

29. Ibid., 24–26.

30. On the beauty of the women of the region, and the great "myth" of "L'Arlésienne" see the splendid exhibition and catalogue *Arlésienne, le mythe*, ed. Dominique Sérèna-Allier (Arles: Museon Arlaten, 1999).

51. Rubin 1994, 19, 124, nn. 49ff.; also 122, n. 35.

52. Georges Catroux, *Condition des courtisanes à Avignon du XI^e au XIX^e siècle*, Lyon, A. Rey, 1925. As in the previous note, Rubin discusses the associations between prostitution and places in Barcelona, Rome, and Paris named after Avignon.

55. The poem is in fact a powerful, nightmarish lamentation on the abuse of the beautiful young maidens, after sunset:

The wolves venture forth from their lairs,
Yawning in painful hunger;
Poor fate for the lambs! Matrons lead
Their virgins to the panderers.

Beautiful virgins, naked, fresh,
Clean young flesh, bodies so lissome!
As the male avails himself of them,
The angels weep in paradise.

'Let's go! Undo those braided tresses;
Quick, unbutton your youthful gown:
You shall have a coin for this time,
My lassie, your mother is hungry.'

The vulture falls upon his prey,
Like thunder upon the nest;
With his beak and sharp claws he rips
Into the flighty, trembling prey.

*Li loup sorton de sis androuno,
D'un orre ruscle badaiant;
Malur is agnèu! Li mandrouno
Menon li piéucello au roufian.*

*Bèlli piéucello fresc e nuso,
Car touto novo, cors tant lisc!
D'éli quand lou mascle s'amuso,
Plouron lis ange au paradis.*

*An! desnouso ti lônqui treno;
Lèu! desfai ta raubo d'enfant:
Auras un escut pér estreno,
O piéucello! ta maire a fam.*

*Lou duganèu, la tartarasso,
Coume un tron toumbo sus lou nis,
De soun bè, de sis arpo, estrasso
Li pàuri pichot vouladis.*

(Avignon: Aubanel, 1980), 39
Streight, 1996, 234–37.

infinite grace. People say she is very wise. I do not even know her name; but what I know very well is that, each time—too rarely—that I meet her, it is for me a supreme charm. Whence the title of this piece, which might equally be called something else."²⁹

It is clear from all this that what Aubanel had in mind was nothing less than a redefinition of the traditional high-culture themes of ideal versus carnal beauty, Sacred and Profane Love, in modern terms; that is to say, in terms of sometimes impassioned endearment, expressed directly, simply, without affectation, in a language rooted in the native spirit of the people and unfettered by the accreted rules of conventional decorum. Aubanel says that his poem might well have had another name than Venus, but no other name would have conveyed as well the lofty, aspirational aspect of his meaning.

The other, confrontational aspect was conveyed by the title he gave to the cycle of poems that constituted what he hoped would be his second volume of work, of which the Venus poems would be the *pièces de résistance*. On the one hand, *Li Fiho d'Avignoun* embodied the indigenous, popular, and provincial aspect of Aubanel's agenda. But the title was also ambiguous, and its very ambiguity must be counted as part of his not-so-ulterior meaning. (Incidentally, with respect to Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger*, in the studies for which male and female forms frequently intersect, it is interesting that in Provençal feminine nouns end in the letter O, which is the masculine ending in all the other Romance languages.) Partly because of the Provençal troubadour heritage, the women of Avignon were certainly fabled for their beauty.³⁰ But their image was also tarnished by the plague of corruption that permeated the city during the Babylonian Captivity. This notorious reputation for loose morals was made famous in history by Petrarch, who described Avignon as "the sewer where all of the earth's impurities have come together"; the city's chroniclers refer to it as "the cesspool of all iniquity and infamy."³¹ Conditions of prostitution had not much changed in 1925, when a dissertation on the history of the "*filles d'Avignon*," as the ladies of the street were called, was published by a medical student at the university of Lyon.³² Something of this association surely echoes in Aubanel's title; he made the point explicitly in one of the poems, *Sunset*, later suppressed, about procurers of prostitution in the city, which may also have contributed to his own work's unsavory reputation.³³

SUPPRESSION

Needless to say, the efforts of the *félibres* were of great interest to the Provençal-literate public, and many of Aubanel's poems had circulated informally for years.

The Venus of Arles, in particular, has become widely known in this way. But in 1879, just as he was getting the volume ready for the publisher, a Parisian newspaper, *Hommes d'aujourd'hui*, printed a pirated French translation of *The Venus of Arles* without his permission. The poem now had a national audience, and the real trouble began. In a letter of December 7, 1879, Aubanel writes: "Copies of the article were spread among the clergy and religious families in Avignon . . . whence a great scandal, I am regarded as a renegade, impious, obscene."³⁴ He thought of abandoning the book, but in a letter of December 19 to the publisher Paul Arène he agreed to proceed, on condition of suppressing altogether *The Venus of Arles*, the first sonnet of *Torment*, and the offending strophes of *Sunset*.³⁵ But plans for the book were then dropped. In 1885 the *Revue de la Société des Langues Romanes* refused to publish *Sunset* because of its "pornography."

The whole long, notorious *histoire* reached a climax in January of that year when a few copies of *The Venus of Avignon* were printed privately for Aubanel's friends, not for sale. A copy nevertheless reached the infuriated Archbishop of Avignon, who called in the poet and threatened to cancel the exclusive papal privilege that the family publishing firm had enjoyed for more than a century, unless the printing was stopped and all the copies destroyed.³⁶ Aubanel, who in any case was a devout Catholic and faithful member of the church, had no choice but to accede, pro forma. He never actually destroyed the copies, but he was now, finally, a depressed, broken man. Ten months later (October 31, 1886) at the age of 57, he died of a stroke, brought on, it was said, by the trauma attendant upon his life's work.³⁷ In fact, *Li Fihò d'Avignoun* was never published during Aubanel's lifetime. The whole collection of seventy-five poems finally saw the light under that title in 1891,³⁸ whereupon it became, along with Mistral's *Mirèio* (1859), one of the cornerstones of the great popular cultural revolution spearheaded by the Provençal Renaissance.

I cannot prove that Picasso knew of Aubanel's *Li Fihò d'Avignoun*, or connect him in any direct way with these developments in the south of France. But given his well-documented interest, during the creation of *Les Femmes d'Alger*, in early Iberian sculpture, in El Greco, and ultimately in the medieval art of Catalonia, he can hardly have been unaware of them. Not long afterward, however, Picasso began spending long periods of time in Provence, and the picture changes radically. At that point one can make direct connections with the Provençal traditions we have been following, of which I want to mention two in conclusion. The summer of 1914, which Picasso spent in Avignon, was the *annus mirabilis* in this respect.



FIG. 10
Folco de Baroncelli on horseback, c. 1900.
Photographic archives of the Palais du Roure, Avignon.



FIG. 11
Édouard-Antoine Marsal, *L'Apothéose de Frédéric Mistral*,
oil on canvas. Museon Arlaten, Arles.

34. René Dumas, "Pour l'histoire des Fihò d'Avignoun de Théodore Aubanel", *Lou prouvençau a l'escolo*, no. 4, 1985, 3.

35. *Ibid.*, 3.

36. René Dumas, *Études sur Théodore Aubanel, le poète ligoté et Avignon au XIX^e siècle*, Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, Centre de recherches et d'études méridionales, 1987, 141-61.

57. Liprandi, *Théodore Aubanel*, 28–31.
58. René Dumas, "Ludovic Legré, Frédéric Mistral et les éditions posthumes de Théodore Aubanel", *Revue des langues romanes*, LXXXII (1977): 115–48; and Dumas, *Études sur Théodore Aubanel*, 163–81.
59. This remarkable man still awaits an adequate biography. Meanwhile, see Jean de Vallières, *Le Chevalier de la Camargue: Folco de Baroncelli, Marquis de Javon* (Paris: Éditions André Bonne, 1956), and Henriette Dibon, *Folco de Baroncelli*, (Nîmes: Imprimerie Bene, 1982). On Picasso and Baroncelli, see Richardson, 1991, vol. II, 330.
40. On Picasso and Buffalo Bill, see William Rubin, *Picasso and Braque, Pioneering Cubism*, New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1989, 48–51. "Miss Alice B. Toklas said that young Braque in his picturesque, colorful workman's clothes, reminded her so much of an American cowboy that she always had the impression he could understand English, and so was careful in what she talked about. He also made Picasso and Apollinaire think of the Wild West. They called him 'notre pard,' a term they had picked up from American Adventure stories they were fond of—*Les Histoires de Buffalo Bill*, in which Colonel Cody called a friend 'my pard'." (Janet Flanner, *Men and Monuments*, New York: Harper & Bros., 1957, 148, partially cited in Rubin 1989, 374). In 1911, Picasso painted a cubist portrait titled *Buffalo Bill*, reproduced in Rubin 1989, 179.
41. Bernard Bastide, "Le marquis et le cinéma. Folco de Baroncelli, ambassadeur du cinéma en Camargue (1906–1943)", *Archives* (cinémathèque de Perpignan, institut Jean Vigo), no. 56, November 1993.
42. Picasso/Apollinaire, *Correspondance*, ed. Pierre Caizergues and Hélène Seckel (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), 112. On the painting by Marsal, see *Arlésienne, le mythe*, 27, no. 2.
- During that summer Picasso met one of the younger members of the Félibrige, a dashing Romantic aristocrat, the Marquis Folco de Baroncelli (1869–1943), scion of a family of Florentine bankers that had migrated in the fifteenth century to Avignon, where Folco was born.³⁹ Poet, lover of art, and of horses, Folco became (fig. 10) a devoted member of the organization and a close collaborator of Mistral. Having moved to the Camargue, the region around Les Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer famous for its native wild white horses, he became a pioneering rancher and breeder of horses and fighting bulls. In 1905 he arranged for a visit by William F. Cody, alias Wild Bill, alias Buffalo Bill, to give a performance of his famous show of cowboys and Indians.⁴⁰ At Les Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer the Native Americans baptized Folco with an Indian name, Zind Kala Wasté, the faithful bird. In the wake of this experience Folco was instrumental in promoting early experimental French productions of Western-style cowboy movies, on location in the Camargue.⁴¹ Picasso and Folco became great friends, often attending corridas together. Mistral died at Les Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer in March 1914 and, shortly after arriving in Avignon in June, Picasso took note of the event by sending Apollinaire in Paris a postcard labeled "Apotheosis of Mistral," with a grandiloquent allegorical painting commemorating the poet displayed in Mistral's Museon Arlaten at Arles. On the (fig. 11) postcard Picasso inscribed the words, "I will paint the Apotheosis of you."⁴²