

Picasso, Dalí, and Apollinaire: A triangulation

By Dr. Hank Hine



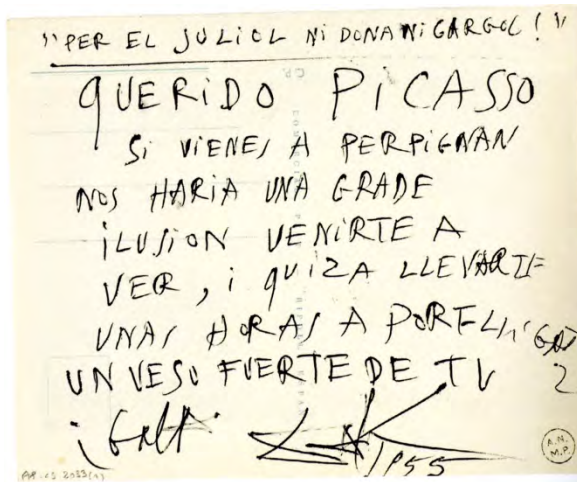
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Dalí's 1952 *Portrait of Picasso in the 21st century*, 1947, develops an iconography as complex as Dalí's apparent relation to his subject, the Spanish artist 23 years his senior and his persistent referent as an artist and a Spaniard. This painting was loaned by the Fundació Gala Salvador Dalí and was displayed in the exhibition *Picasso/Dalí, Dalí Picasso*.

As the painting's title proposes Picasso's countenance as it will appear in the future, an evolution of Picasso's features is expected. In order to measure the extent of anticipated alteration in his portrait, we can examine the genesis of those changes in the face he presented to Dalí and to others in the era they shared.

We desire to know who were these men who were shaped by similar currents and events and whose artistic responses were remarkably similar. The tide of modernism, the impact of Freud, Catalan language and Spanish identity, the wars and women, mark these artists equally. They each made allegorical responses to war. Yet the commerce between Picasso and Dalí was ardent and asymmetrical. Picasso generously provided Dalí and Gala passage to the United States in 1934. Picasso was already the leading avant-garde artist of his day when Dalí made his first trip out of Spain to meet the famous artist at his studio in 1926. There are stories of dinners in Paris. They shared friends, were photographed by the same photographers, and worked at times in the same idiom.

Dalí wrote postcards such as this



year after year with a taunting reminder of Picasso's summer in Cadaques: *per el Julio ni dona ni cargol*.¹

The reference is to July of 1910 when Picasso was given separate quarters from Fernande by his host Ramon Pixot so that he could concentrate on his work. Thus, just as sea snails were off the menu, so was mingling with Fernande. Dalí exhorted Picasso, if impudently, to return to Spain after the second war which implied his desire for mutuality equally with his sense of competition.

Dalí followed Picasso in his cubist work of the 1920s charged with psychological import bridging to Surrealism, and decades later followed his lead in taking [Las Meninas](#) as subject. They employed different strategies of representation while similarly building contradiction into their images.



Female Bather, 1928

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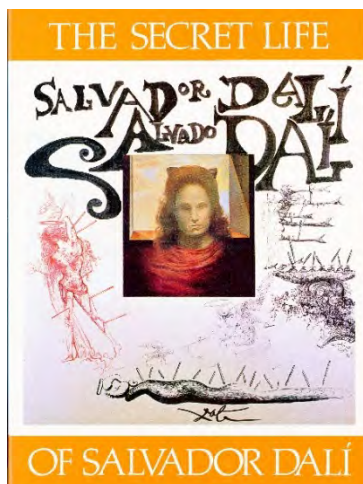
If Picasso spoke rarely of Dalí he responded to the younger artist's works as with [Large nude in a red armchair](#), and *Female Bather* of 1929 and 1928 respectively.

As Elizabeth Cowell has remarked, Breton in *Le Surrealisme et la peinture* had declared of Dalí that he miraculously possessed "the facility to give materiality to what has hitherto remained in the domain of pure fantasy...." She continues, "perhaps Picasso was piqued by the implication that he had been surpassed."²

Yet Picasso would have that morphologically distressed figure after his own manner. Even as Picasso imitates Dalí, attempting still to give materiality to what is hitherto fantasy, he confines the figure to an interior while Dalí after his own manner places the bather on the beach and conflates the body with the landscape.

In the long extent of their mutual awareness, one looks for a device to reckon more keenly the complexity of the relationship and the variable terrain between them.

One of the symmetries between Dalí and Picasso is their engagement with writing. Dalí remarked, perhaps with sincerity, that he would be better remembered as a writer than as a painter. In fairness, he wrote consistently and persuasively throughout his life, whether or not he contributed to the advance of the literary art of our era, in his formal, appositionally constructed discourse, using never, as his translator wrote, one word where two would do as well.³



From *The Secret Life of Salvador Dalí*:

After having transformed the wigs of the sirens into Spanish moss, I used my scissors, which were but the cutting symbol of the vengeance of my personality, to cut, snip, puncture and annihilate everything, sticking them finally right into

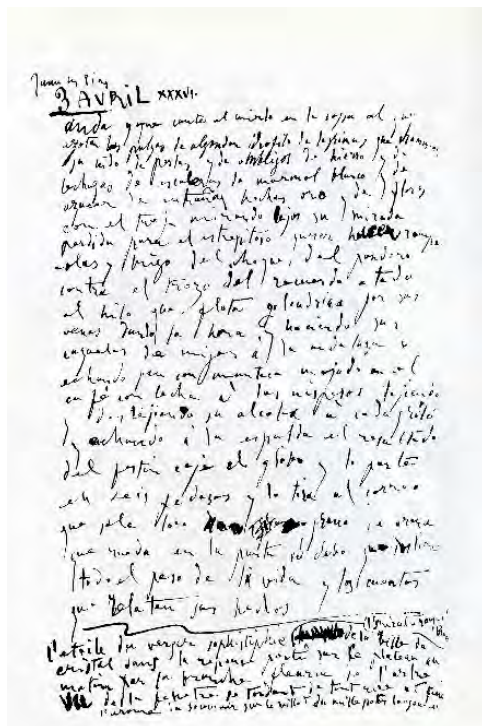
the ear of the ‘anonymous’ corporation, which in the end cried ‘Ay!’ and raised its arms in sign of surrender.⁴

Picasso for his part, who distrusted the surrealist approach to writing, finding that the manuscripts of Eluard’s “automatic writing” to be full of revisions and corrections, wrote in a high pitch of imagistic displacement and revelry such as this passage from Christmas 1939:

Claque à la fenêtre oubliée sur le vide
Le drap noir déchiré du miel
Glacé des flammes du ciel
Sur la peau arrachée à la maison
Dans un coin au fond du tiroir
L’aigle vomit ses ailes⁵

Picasso composed in an expressive calligraphic style forming handsome pages of expressive marks that at once convey energy and compositional integrity.

This page is from April 3, 1936:



From *Picasso: Collected Writings*

Like Dalí, Picasso considered his own writing important. “Et moi je suis poète,” he wrote, exasperating Gertrude Stein and Paul Eluard.⁶

Michel Leiris says of Picasso's writing, "Picasso played the truant, advancing where he would, drifting with the flow of words as with that of ideas..."⁷ He says that Picasso's language eats and drinks heartily, fabulous interior monologues, sprinkled here and there with echoes of bullfights and other memories of Spain, an insatiable player of words.⁸

In his first published writing of 1935 Picasso writes, "I can no longer bear this miracle, that of knowing nothing of this world and to have learned nothing, to love things and to eat them alive."⁹ What strains of Dalí and of sea urchins and mixing of senses we hear in this.

We find entry into their mutual world of reference and association through literature. Logically, Paul Éluard, who accords both personally and professionally with Picasso and Dalí, offers a link to them both. Each collaborated with Éluard. Both made his portraits and celebrated Éluard. Gala was a common force for all three.



Apollinaire recovering from his head wound in 1916

Yet the drift and flow that Leiris describes in Picasso is more akin to the method of writing of Guillaume Apollinaire. This method his translator, Donald Revell, describes as "an aimlessness, the total surrender of language to the immediate moment."¹⁰ And if our issue is their contribution to modernism, the imagination and the relation of art to life that so deeply engaged both artists, Apollinaire is more fundamental.



Portrait of Apollinaire by Laurensin

Apollinaire who used the phrase “esprit modern” to describe a fundamental new approach and possibility in all of the arts. And as the author of the term *surrealism*, he is deserving of abundant attention in a consideration of artists contributing productively to that project.

One uses triangulation to determine the distance to what might be a remote or unapproachable object. Thales in the 6th century b.c.e. determined the height of the pyramids by comparing his own height and shadow to the length of shadow of the pyramid. So let us triangulate with Apollinaire to reckon their relation and the uncertain distance between them.

In Apollinaire’s “Introduction to the poetical work of Charles Baudelaire,” he observes the relation of spatial reckoning to moral reckoning:

1782 is the memorable date of the publication of *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* in which, as an artillery officer, Pierre Choderlos de Laclos tried to apply to morals the laws of triangulation which serve soldiers, as is widely known, as well as astronomers.”

And the astonishing contrast! The infinite life which gravitates to the firmament obeys the same laws as artillery which is intended by men to distribute death.¹¹

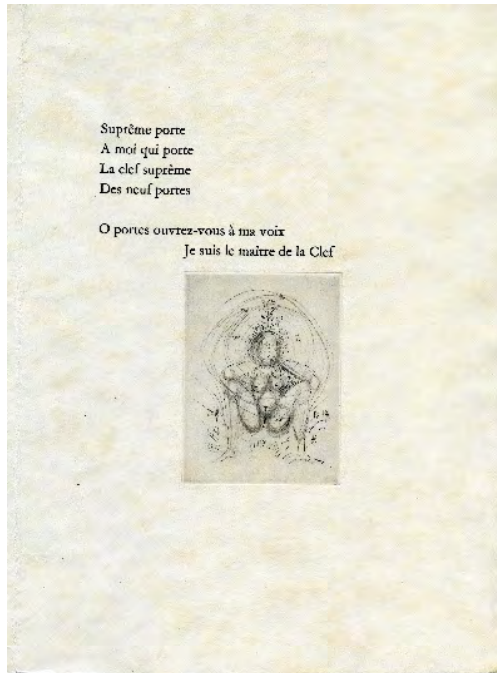
From the angular measurements, which Laclos calculated, was borne the modern literary spirit. And as well, we might infer, the dangerous social milieu that was modernism.

Picasso was championed by, and championed, Apollinaire. And while Dalí craves and reviles Picasso, he embraces Apollinaire. Thus, a triangle is established if not a trinity: three inventive imaginations of the 20th century.

Dalí chose the poems of Apollinaire for a *livre de luxe* he made in 1967 consisting of the poems of Apollinaire and Dalí’s eighteen drypoints published in an edition of 380 with the publisher

Argillet, entitled *Poèmes Secrètes d' Apollinaire*. The poems are derived from Apollinaire's remarkable letters and poems sent to his fiancée Madeleine Pagès during World War I.

Dalí's etchings recycle earlier themes and manners yet the book places Dalí and Apollinaire in an embrace of sensibility where the lyrical and the ecstatic of each are pressed in the same felted paper.



Apollinaire died nine years before Dalí's first trip to Paris, and the two never met. Roger Shattuck, another of Apollinaire's translators, writes of his compelling and contradictory characteristics: "boldness, iconoclasm, buffoonery, curiosity, sentimentality, assertive leadership, shamelessness...",¹² characteristics of Dalí's persona, as well.

Apollinaire wrote in 1908 a piece of prose and verse called *Oneirocriticism* (the critique of dreams) dated February 15, 1908. The work is a series of outrageously fanciful images and descriptions of disparate actions, with a kinesthetic interplay. An inserted poem tells a coherent narrative about a ploughman wanting to enter the city to marry, and a vagabond wanting to exit. The ploughman brings his heart to marry and the vagabond leaves his heart. The sentries of the City remark that the road the vagabond seeks is dull and the love the ploughman seeks is just as sad. A repeated phrase in the prose section of the piece states "I was conscious of the different eternities of man and woman,"¹³ raising the interest in gender and the conflation of genders, as well as the realm of dream, that we find in Dalí.

The analysis of dreams, proposes a connection to the underpinnings of Freudian psychology, the interests and the methodology of Surrealism, and was of great interest to Dalí and his system of oneiric mining of images. Dalí, who is recorded saying, "the more confusion, the

more better,”¹⁴ would have been delighted by Braque’s critique of Apollinaire’s book on Cubism: “the only value ... is that, far from enlightening people, it confuses them.”¹⁵

In a further triangular connection, both Apollinaire and Dalí were first embraced by Breton as quintessential, then later as extraneous to his dogmatic projects.

Of Apollinaire’s deep connections to Picasso:

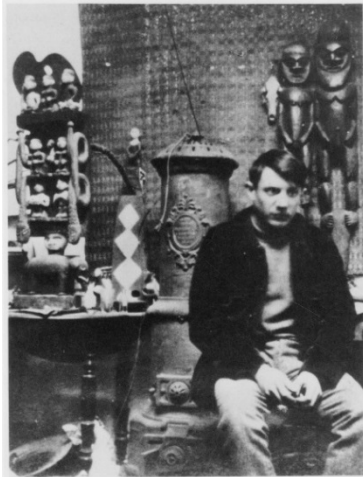


Image of Picasso in his studio

In 1907 Apollinaire was a dynamic element in *Le Bande de Picasso*, an artistic posse that also included Max Jacob and André Salmon. Later this band, or perhaps more properly a Spanish tertulia at the Bateau Lavoir, expanded to include Ramon Pixot, Manolo, and at times Marie Laurencin.

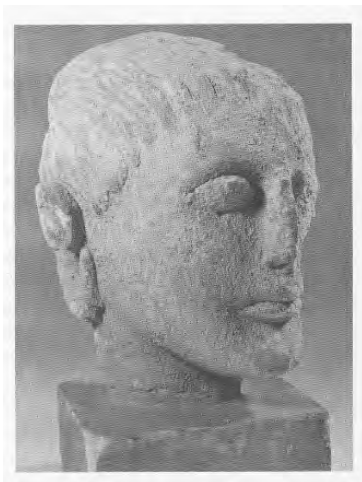


Le Bateau Lavoir

Apollinaire was a fixed apex at the base of Picasso’s relations, bringing new contacts and provocative ideas. He introduced Derain to Picasso 1907. Richardson describes Apollinaire as Picasso’s closest friend.¹⁶

What Picasso admired about Apollinaire was the amazing range of his imagination, the perversity of his wit, the dazzle of his genius, and his miraculous way with words.¹⁷ Picasso's favorite work of Apollinaire was *Les onze mille verges*, a novel based in provocation and scatology. Apollinaire writes *La femme assise* – a description of the persons and process of Picasso's frequent posings.

Apollinaire met a flamboyant scoundrel, Honoré-Joseph Géry Pieret, whom he variably admired, hired, lived with, and distanced himself from. Pieret had stolen Iberian stone heads from the Louvre and sold them to Picasso.



One of the stolen stone heads

Both Picasso and Apollinaire are questioned by police in this theft, and implicate each other under questioning.



Image of Apollinaire in handcuffs

In February, 1907 Picasso met Marie Laurencin. With an interest in disengaging Apollinaire from Pieret, Picasso introduced her to Apollinaire. Their ensuing romance is tumultuous. They make love fully-dressed in an armchair at one of Picasso's tertulias. To spur her polymorphic interests Apollinaire asks her to read Sacher-Masoch.

Determined to remain the center of artistic innovation in Paris Apollinaire presses logical constraints to gather all elements of the Avant-garde into one. This synthetic impulse was influenced by Robert Delaunay to consider the poetic possibilities of Simultaneism, which Apollinaire discussed with Picasso and which he calls Orphism. "An orphist painter or poet could metamorphose images into words, words into images – with musical overtones if need be."¹⁸

He writes for Delaunay's catalog for the Sturm show:

Windows
From red to green the yellow fades
...The window opens like an orange
The beautiful fruit of light.¹⁹

In this spirit Apollinaire created a book of poems – *Et moi aussi je suis peintre*, which was finally titled *Caligrammes*.

Similarly, Dalí's synthetic impulses led him to engage as set designer, lyricist, and costume designer for ballet and opera. Apollinaire and Dalí viewed their role as prophetic.

In 1915 while in a hospital in Paris recovering from an operation on a head injury he sustained in the trenches of WWI, Apollinaire wrote the novel, *Le Poète Assassiné*. Its central characters: Croniamantal, who is Apollinaire, Tristouse Ballerinette, who is Marie Laurencin; and the Bird of Benin who is Pablo Picasso. The character of Marie Laurencin, as Tristouse Ballerinette, abandons Croniamantal, as indeed did Marie Laurencin leave Apollinaire. Picasso and Apollinaire shared in the excoriation of the faithlessness and devouring quality of women.

In the play, Picasso, as *The Bird of Benin* constructs for Croniamantal a memorial. Unlike traditional memorials it is not bronze, or marble. This memorial is "made of nothing, like poetry and glory."²⁰

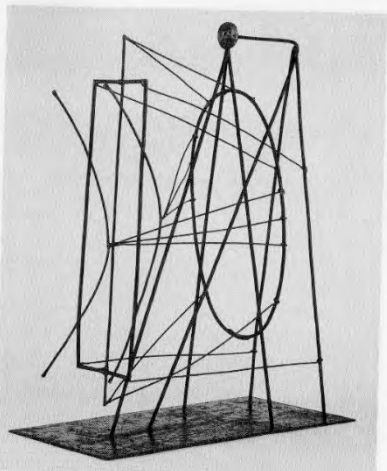
In June 1914, Picasso sent Apollinaire a postcard from Avignon of a sculptural memorial, the *Apotheosis of Mistral*, a monument to the celebrated Provençal poet,



Apotheosis of Mistral

on the back of which had written, “I will do an apotheosis of you.”²¹ After Apollinaire’s death, Richardson relates that Picasso looked forward to fulfilling his promise.²² Richardson relates that following a premonition of Apollinaire’s death, Picasso drew a series of grief-stricken self-portraits.²³ The fear of death and the assertion of immortality by Dalí, may be alternate expressions of a similar emotion.

After Apollinaire’s death, a monument to him as the spirit of the age was first suggested in Dec 1920, when the magazine *L’Esprit Nouveau* announced the formation of a *comité Apollinaire* to raise contributions to pay for a memorial in Père-Lachaise Cemetery for the poet. A pamphlet also had been issued by the journal *L’Action*, listing subscribers and identifying Picasso as the sculptor. Picasso proposed to the committee a maquette of this sculpture made, as it seems, of space itself, fulfilling Croniamantal’s desire for a memorial made of nothing at all, only emptiness like poetry.



Study for a Sculpture, 1928



The Apollinaire memorial at Pere-Lachaise

Among Apollinaire's last writings was an introduction to the multimedia collaboration between Picasso as set and costume designer, Cocteau as writer, Massine as choreographer, Satie as composer, for Diaghalev's Ballet Russes – *Parade*. In this piece he coins the term “sur-realism” and says of the work, “Massine has produced something totally new – a marvelously appealing kind of dance, so true, so lyrical, so human and so joyful... a kind of surrealism.”²⁴ This is his concept as an exemplary work of the “esprit nouveau.” In the introduction to his play *Les Mamelles de Tirésias*, subtitled *une Drame surréaliste*, Apollinaire elaborates on the nature of his vision and uses the word *surrealism* to describe it. The play was put on just months after *Parade*, in June 1917, at the Conservatoire Maubel.



Conservatoire Maubel [Théâtre Montre-Galabru]

Les Mamelles de Tirésias follows the myth of Tiresias, exploring the transformation of gender and its related experience and identity.

Apollinaire, in coining the term *surrealism*, refers to the invention of a parallel reality. That parallel condition is a tool, a vehicle, that is ontologically related to reality but is completely distinct.

As Apollinaire defines the term surrealism:

Quand l'homme a voulu imiter la marche, il a créé la roue qui ne ressemble pas à une jambe.

Il a fait ainsi du surréalisme sans le savoir.

When man wanted to imitate walking, he created the wheel which does not resemble a leg.

Thus he created surrealism without knowing it.²⁵

The play has resonated through the decades of the 20th century, with its theme rising again in Dalí's portrait of Picasso.

Picasso executed a *livre d'artiste* edition of thirty etchings, and the text of Ovid, published by Skira in 1931. The myth of Tiresias is from the third book of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. The figure below depicts the Tiresias as represented by Johann Ulrich Krauss' illustrations for Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.



An illustration of Tiresias by Krauss from *Die Verwandlungen des Ovidii* (*The Metamorphoses of Ovid*), c. 1690.

The copy of Picasso's *livre d'artiste* exhibited in our galleries was given to the Museu Picasso in Barcelona by Gala and Salvador Dalí.

From the judgment of Tiresias:

They say that [Jupiter](#), expansive with wine, set aside his onerous duties, and relaxing, exchanging pleasantries, with [Juno](#), said ' You gain more than we do from

the pleasures of love.’ She denied it. They agreed to ask learned [Tiresias](#) for his opinion. He had known [Venus](#) in both ways.

Once, with a blow of his stick, he had disturbed two large snakes mating in the green forest, and, marvellous to tell, he was changed from a man to a woman, and lived as such for seven years. In the eighth year he saw the same snakes again and said ‘Since there is such power in plaguing you that it changes the giver of a blow to the opposite sex, I will strike you again, now.’ He struck the snakes and regained his former shape, and returned to the sex he was born with.

As the arbiter of the light-hearted dispute he confirmed Jupiter’s words. [Saturnia](#), it is said, was more deeply upset than was justified and than the dispute warranted, and damned the one who had made the judgment to eternal night. But, since no god has the right to void what another god has done, the all-powerful father of the gods gave Tiresias knowledge of the future, in exchange for his lost sight, and lightened the punishment with honor. ²⁶

Let us return to Dalí’s *Portrait of Picasso in the Twenty-first Century*, 1947 with Apollinaire’s *Les Mamelles de Tirésias* in mind, and examine the figure on its pedestal, presented as an object of adoration.



A red carnation, *dianthus caryophyllus*, somewhat gone, has been placed in offering. A flower of diverse symbolism, it has been used to indicate devotion and as well in sympathy with socialism in demonstrations on the International Workers Day.



In the above detail we see the breasts, at once a sign of nourishment and growth. The jasmine flower rising between the breasts was used by Dalí to represent the perfect form at the base of nuclear power, as in [Santiago El Grande](#), his work of 1957 where the atomic maelstrom spins from a single blossom.

But their drooping state indicates depletion and obsolescence. The breasts are without nipples, and so cannot suckle. We are reminded of Tiresias and his second condition as a woman.



Tiresias has been defined by serpents.



And he has brought on his own fate of blindness by entering into a debate among gods.

But recall the recompense that he is given for his loss: that of prophesy.



Recalling Picasso's bicycle-headed goat, the spiraled horns of a goat comprise his head. Or is Dalí quoting the Lady of Elche with her coiled hair and her Catalan heritage, that sculpture which has become so contested between Catalonia and Madrid? Is it a barb at Picasso's purchase of the stolen Iberian heads from the Louvre?



Lady of Elche sculpture

Or we may think of this form as a celebration of Picasso's mind, as the form is that of the Fibonacci curve, a form based in a formula of eternal expansion and growth.

The words prophesy, or soothsaying, describe the ability to see and speak an unseen truth. But what issues from Picasso are not words – in fact the tongue is limp like the breasts – but a liquid metallic spoon – perhaps Dalí had seen Picasso's poem about devouring the world – or perhaps the spoon is an offering to others. In the spoon's shallow cup is a lute, and, we recall the Orphic promise of art and music giving rise to one another.



And what is the crown that Picasso carries? Is it one of the Costa Brava stones so sacred to Dalí? Or is it the burden of nationality or the burden of tradition? He is crowned with a memorial wholly unlike that which he promised to Apollinaire— a memorial of emptiness, like the wind, like poetry.



If the *Portrait of Picasso in the Twenty-First Century*, 1947, seems mocking, it is also full of adulation. We are shown in Picasso veneration, prophesy, culture, continuity, and nourishment, as well as blindness and aridity. But finally, perhaps the painting evidences a profound sympathy for the sometimes discordant and contradictory elements of one's life and extends that sympathy to others. Dalí may, with this work, put aside his competitive spirit toward Picasso. The long asymmetry of relationship may at last come to balance as the years progress. The struggle to make art is a struggle with the self. After a long career a mutuality may be recognized, not only of nation and profession, but of the inevitable insufficiency of time, and from that arises a sympathy. This sympathy echoes that plea Apollinaire makes in his poem "La Jolie Rousse," a plea for all of the avant-garde:

Pity us who fight always in the front lines

Of the limitless and of the future

Pity our errors pity our sins.²⁷

- ¹ *Dali: Lettres à Picasso*, Paris, Gallimard, 2005 p. 92-94, 100-101, 108-109, 117, 121, 128-129, 132-133
- ² Elizabeth Cowling, *Picasso Style and Meaning*, New York, Phaidon Press, 2002, p. 519.
- ³ Haakon Chevalier, in the Translator's Foreword of *Hidden Faces*, New York, Dial Press, 1944, p.xi
- ⁴ Salvador Dali, *The Secret Life of Salvador Dali*, Barcelona, DASA Edicions, S.A., 1986, p.377
- ⁵ Michel Leiris, *Picasso: Collected Writings*, New York, Abbeville Press, 1989, p.210
- ⁶ John Richardson, *A Life of Picasso: 1907-1917*, vol 2, New York, Random House, p.219
- ⁷ Michel Leiris, *Picasso: Collected Writings*, New York, Abbeville Press, 1989, Preface entitled, "Picasso Writer, or Poetry Unhinged," by Micahel Leiris, pg.viii
- ⁸ Michel Leiris, *op. cit.*, p.ix - x
- ⁹ John Golding, *Visions of the Modern*, Berkley, University of California Press, 1994, p. 86
- ¹⁰ Apollinaire, trans. Donald Revell, *Alcools: Poems*, Middletown, Wesleyan University Press, 2011, p.xi
- ¹¹ Roger Shattuck, *Selected Writings of Guillaume Apollinaire*, New York, New Directions Publishing, 1971, p.242
- ¹² Roger Shattuck, *op. cit.*, p.10
- ¹³ Roger Shattuck, *op. cit.*, p.247
- ¹⁴ In Albert Field's *The Official Catalog of the Graphic Works of Salvador Dalí*, New York, The Salvador Dalí Archives, 1996, p.5.
- ¹⁵ John Richardson, *A Life of Picasso: The Triumphant Years, 1917-1932*, Volume 3, New York, Knopf, 2010, p. 341
- ¹⁶ John Richardson, *A Life of Picasso: 1907-1917*, vol 2, New York, Random House, p.342
- ¹⁷ John Richardson, vol. 2, *op. cit.*, p.341
- ¹⁸ John Richardson, vol. 2, *op. cit.*, p.276
- ¹⁹ Roger Shattuck, *op. cit.*, p.142
- ²⁰ Roger Shattuck, *op. cit.*, p.246
- ²¹ John Richardson, vol. 3, *op. cit.*, p.340
- ²² John Richardson, vol. 3, *op.cit.*, p.340
- ²³ John Richardson, vol. 3, *op.cit.*, p.340
- ²⁴ John Richardson, vol. 3, *op.cit.*, p.40
- ²⁵ Guillaume Apollinaire, *Les Mamelles de Tirésias: Nouvelle édition augmentée*, Paris, Arvensa editions, 2014, p.8, Translated by Hank Hine
- ²⁶ From *Metamorphoses*, Book III:316-338, Gleeditions, <http://www.gleeditions.com/metamorphoses/students/pages.asp?pg=90>
- ²⁷ Roger Shattuck, *op. cit.*, p.195