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## Origins and Youth (1881-95)

In our time the arts have been in a state of revolution, a battlefield in which tradition has slowly yielded to the onslaughts of a vanguard of innovators who have acted with the conviction of visionaries. Already in the second half of the twentieth century it is difficult for the present generation to understand the violence of this struggle in its early days, the courage of those who led the attack, and the reasons why the battle was fought with such vigour, against such odds. The day has gone in favour of the enlightened, since it is those who had vision, those who were scorned, who have now become the accepted heroes of our age. Among them Pablo Picasso stands out as a leader of undisputed brilliance.

Many factors have combined to make him the most widely known painter today and already his life and achievements are clothed with legends. Paradoxes are so frequent in any statement made about him that the public are bewildered and imagine that he was either a strange and evil monster or an oracle whose wisdom had occult significance. Though he was a Spaniard he lived less than a third of his life in Spain; in his old age he was more vigorous and agile both in mind and body than many men are in their youth; though he persistently outraged the most serious critics by work that seemed incomprehensible, they had to admit their admiration for his talent; though his fame has spread throughout the whole world and his wealth was incalculable he did not change his manner of living. His main desire was to continue his work and, though surrounded by friends and companions whose love for him was great, his magnitude was such that among them he was a solitary figure.

Although Picasso lived as an expatriate for more than fifty years he

was still essentially Spanish. To understand him it is necessary to know something of the country of his birth; a land of strong contrasts, brilliant sun and black shadow, extreme heat and cold, fertility and barrenness. It is a country notorious for violent passion in love and fanatical ruthlessness. Its people have a capacity to exteriorize their emotions and display in a vivid light the drama of human life. Their love of gaiety is accompanied by an insistence on suffering and the macabre, and they find consolation for misery, and relief from anxiety in the arts. Whether it be in the poetry of Góngora, the flamenco music of the gipsies, the bullfight or the painting of Zurbarán, there is always sorrow in the depths of their expression. Tragedy is a reality which must be expressed, and the artist's task is to find a form of realism capable of making it felt acutely. To achieve this, no people know better than the Spaniards that the tragic should be balanced by the comic, and an equilibrium established between the two moods. By giving them equal importance it becomes possible to indulge more profoundly in both extremes.

The work of Picasso is a revelation of the immense variety with which he was able to display this drama between two opposite poles. His life, however, was monolithic in character because of his dedication to a single purpose, his art. The extraordinary vigour, both mental and physical, of Picasso at the age of ninety was a phenomenon similar to the prodigious speed with which he developed in childhood. His progress was so rapid that he denied ever having drawn like a child. Indeed the earliest examples of his work are drawings that contain ideas which preoccupied him all his life. At the age of nine he was already able to paint a scene of a bullfight in which a lively sense of characterization appears in the figures of a *picador* seated on his nag, and of the spectators (Plate I, 1). A composition which is skilful and mature shows also the unselfconsciousness and the originality of a child. The naïve disregard for scale and perspective, the insistence on the main image at the expense of detail, and the arbitrary use of colour - qualities that are typical of the imagination of a child - are to be found. These elements were to be fostered by Picasso rather than disregarded so as to serve him in his work and help him in his discoveries.

On the 25 October 1881, at 11.15 at night, Pablo Ruiz Picasso was

born at Malaga. At that moment both the moon and the sun approached the nadir, and the light that shone on the white houses of the city from the midnight sky came from a strange combination of planets and major stars, whose conjunctions and oppositions have been the cause of much speculation on the part of astrologers. Many attempts have been made by experts to find relationships between these occult influences and the life and character of one so richly endowed with rare talents. Until recently, however, it was inevitable that their calculations should be to some degree erroneous, since none had had access to his birth certificate to verify the hour of his birth. They had all readily believed his own picturesque story that he was born at midnight.

### *Malaga*

Although the plaza de la Merced, where Picasso was born, is the larger of the two squares in Malaga, it is not the more central. In the past it owed its importance to its position outside the gateway to Granada. On the south-eastern side, it is shut in by two steep hills on which stood the citadel, Alcazaba, and the castle, Gibralfaro, two Moorish fortresses which dominate the city and harbour. Little that happens in the narrow streets, paved with cobbles arranged in ornamental design, could pass unnoticed from these formidable ramparts. They had been built on the foundations of a Phoenician fortress. Relics of the Phoenicians and Romans show that the site had been coveted by foreigners long before its conquest in 711 by the Moors, for whom it became the principal port of the Moorish capital, Granada. From the summits above the city a grandiose panorama stretches inland over a plain covered with vineyards to the mountains, while to the south the plain meets the sea in a graceful curve, and out across the Mediterranean can be seen the snow of the Atlas Mountains, a reminder of the nearness of Africa, and of influences much stronger in the past than they are today.

By the end of the nineteenth century the rocky heights that separate the plaza de la Merced from the port had been covered for generations with buildings made from stones pillaged from the Moorish citadel. The terraced gardens and courtyards with their fountains had become unrecognizable. They had degenerated into little more than a huddle of

ruins inhabited by gipsies, the heirs of Moorish music and dancing if not of their splendour. In later years Picasso described this region to Sabartés. 'It is known,' he said, 'as the "*chupa y tira*"' - which is Spanish for 'suck and chuck' - because the people who inhabited this slum were so poor that they lived solely on a soup made of shellfish. The ground was covered with the empty shells which the inhabitants had chucked out of the windows after sucking them clean. From the sordid hovels that spread down the hillside almost to the tidy gardens of the plaza de la Merced, the night would be enlivened by the sound of guitars and voices singing '*canto hondo*', passionate love songs based on very ancient themes and adapted by the individual singers to the joys and pains of their own hearts.

### *Ancestry*

The sources from which Picasso sprang have now been determined with some certainty, thanks to the work of genealogists, in particular his old friend Jaime Sabartés. The paternal branch of the family tree is not lacking in distinguished ancestors, including men honoured in civic life, on the battlefield and in the Church. It can be traced back to the noble figure of Juan de León, a knight whose lands were at Cogolludo, near Valladolid. Records of 1541 state that his father before him was exempt from all taxes, 'not by a concession from the king, nor because of bearing arms as a knight, not because of his farm lands, nor for any other reason than that he was a gentleman of well-famed nobility'.<sup>1</sup> Chronicles also state that Don Juan set forth 'in good harness as was fitting in his position as a hidalgo' for the war of Granada and Loja, from which he never returned.

Towards the end of the sixteenth century, the descendants of Juan de León left Castile to settle at Villafranca de Córdoba. Spanish usage in the matter of surnames may cause some confusion, for it is customary to add the surname of the mother to the paternal name, and some such explanation probably accounts for the sudden appearance of the surname 'Ruiz' in this family during the seventeenth century. There is

<sup>1</sup> Sabartés, *Picasso: Documents Iconographiques*.

no doubt, however, that they were in direct descent from the illustrious Juan de León and well known in Cordova until the end of the eighteenth century. It was about 1790 that José Ruiz y de Fuentes settled in Malaga and married a lady of the noble family of de Almoguera. His son, Diego, married María de la Paz Blasco y Echevarria; together they became the grandparents of Picasso. There has been a persistent myth that the origins of the family on this side were predominantly Basque, but Sabartés points out that the name 'Blasco' is Aragonese, and if there is any tendency in that direction it can only be through Picasso's grandmother, María de la Paz Echevarria, a name which is probably Basque.

The ancestors on the side of Picasso's great-grandmother, Maria Josefa de Almoguera, had among them two distinguished priests. The first, the Venerable Almoguera, descendant of a 'very noble' family from the mountains of León, was born in Cordova in 1605 and died in great poverty but in 'the odour of sanctity' in 1676, having in his time been appointed Bishop of Arequipa, Archbishop of Lima, Viceroy and Captain-General of the Kingdom of Peru. The second was Brother Pedro de Cristo Almoguera, who flourished some two centuries later and died in 1855 at the age of eighty-one, having lived for sixty-two years as a hermit in the Sierra de Córdoba. He was a man of faith and courage, who dedicated his life to meditation and to the relief of suffering.

Twenty years after the arrival of Don José Ruiz y de Fuentes in Malaga, an incident occurred. His eldest son, Diego, one day half in play, half wilfully, threw stones at the French soldiers then occupying the city, as they marched by. He was caught by a trooper and nearly beaten to death. Throughout his life Don Diego, Picasso's grandfather, remembered the event, not from shame, but from pride that he had held up the parade. From his photo as an elderly man, tall and thin, with a sour frown and heavy eyebrows, it would be easy to misjudge his real nature, which, we are told, was 'restless, nervous and intelligent, a tireless worker, witty, jovial, with sudden bursts of enthusiasm'.<sup>2</sup> He was ingenious and tactful in overcoming difficulties, and although his

<sup>2</sup> Sabartés, *Picasso: Documents Iconographiques*. p. 294.

business was manufacturing gloves, a trade which kept him at work without respite to provide for his family of eleven children, he managed to indulge his passion for music by playing the double bass in the orchestra of the Municipal Theatre. Also he enjoyed drawing.

Don Diego Ruiz had married María de la Paz Blasco in 1830. Their eldest son, Diego, became a diplomat who at one time travelled in company with the Spanish Ambassador to Russia. He also appears to have become known for his talent in making likenesses of his friends. But the son who took the brunt of caring for the less fortunate members of the family after their father's death was the fourth child, Pablo. He had become a Doctor of Theology and a Canon of the Cathedral of Malaga. He made it his duty not only to look after his four unmarried sisters, but to help to provide for his unbusinesslike younger brother, José, the ninth of the family and the future father of Pablo Ruiz y Picasso.

José, to make matters worse, had decided to become a professional painter, but, unlike his elder brother Diego, he was no dilettante, and his contact with society came with less ease. Since a painter dedicated to his art alone was according to conventional standards a ne'er-do-well, the loyalty and generosity of his elder brother Pablo were factors of great importance to him in early days. However this situation came abruptly to an end with the death of the Canon, after which José was forced to take over his brother's responsibilities towards the unmarried sisters.

Such was the ancestry of Picasso on his father's side. Devotion, tenacity, courage, appreciation of the arts and sincerity in religion were characteristics which recurred among his ancestors, and which could be expected to form part of the inheritance of their descendants. We might hope to trace reinforcements for these virtues on the maternal side, were it not that this branch is less certain of its origins. The name 'Picasso' is not common anywhere, but in Malaga it had attained fortuitous notoriety, not because of its rarity but through an incident that had happened when General José Lachambre, a native of Malaga, in obedience to a higher command, bombarded the city from the near-by hills in order to quell a political disturbance. Such events were not uncommon in the early part of the nineteenth century, but this time the indignation of the citizens was aroused when cannon balls began to fall

in the plaza de la Merced, and on their way lifted some tiles off the house where the Picasso family lived. In popular songs they at once became heroes at the expense of the general.

The family had lived in Malaga for at least two generations. Don Francisco Picasso, maternal grandfather of Pablo, was born there, and was sent to England for his education. Later he became a civil servant in Cuba, where in 1883 he disappeared and was said to have died of yellow fever (*vomito negro*) on the eve of his return to Malaga. This became known to his children only after fifteen years of inquiry.

Little is known of the exact origins of the family, and speculation has centred mainly round the source of the name, which in its spelling appears to be Italian rather than Spanish. This fact has led various writers to believe that the family is linked with the artist Matteo Picasso, a native of Recco near Genoa, who made a reputation as a portrait painter. He was born in 1794 and is best known by a portrait he painted of the Duchess of Galliera, now in the Gallery of Modern Art in Genoa. Picasso himself owned a small portrait of a man painted by Matteo in a pleasing but commonplace style. Recently evidence has come to hand that the grandfather of Doña Maria Picasso was born in a small village near Recco; this would lead to the supposition of a connection between the families.

Sabartés, who has in the past been eager to explode the myths of a Basque origin for the paternal branch and an Italian origin on the maternal side, has however traced a hypothetical source which originates in Africa. He holds this to be a plausible theory and one which would help to offer an explanation for Picasso's feeling of kinship with nomads and gipsies. The chronicles of King Don Pedro, son of King Don Alfonso of Castile, dating from 1591, give an account of a battle fought in 1339 between Gonzalo Martinez de Oviedo, commander of the armies of the King of Andalusia, and the Prince Picaço, son of the Moorish King Albuhaben, who had arrived from Africa at the head of ten thousand knights. The battle went against the fortunes of the prince, who was defeated and slain by the Spaniards.

Since the character of Picasso is one so rare and so original, it is understandable that we should naïvely expect to find extraordinary influences in his ancestry. Spain is a country that owes much of its

inspiration to the Moors and the gipsies, and more than one biographer has suggested that a distant strain either of North African or of Jewish blood is present on his mother's side. A Catalan writer seeks to establish his origin among the gold-workers of Majorca who were Moorish immigrants, and discovers, in the arabesques of their engravings and filigree, the origin of the flourishes and calligraphy that we find in the versatile hand of Picasso.<sup>3</sup> A Castilian poet and early friend, Ramón Gomez de la Serna, has written: 'In the great nation of the gipsies of art, Picasso is the most gipsy of all.'<sup>4</sup> This may be taken figuratively, but there still remains an affinity between the autonomous life, the spontaneity and insight of the gipsies and the Olympian independence, the inspiration and the vision of the great artist.

But leaving conjecture and the implication that we may hope to deduce from heredity, it is safe to say that the ancestors of Picasso on both sides are predominantly Andalusian and sufficiently Spanish from sufficiently far back for us to pay attention, above all, to the characteristics of these people. The artistic tastes and the talent of his father's family were well known locally. In addition, a portrait has recently been discovered of a certain Manuel Harerra of Velez Malaga, seated in a chair, holding in one hand a key and in the other a scroll of verses dedicated to his son. It is signed 'Picasso-Juan' and dated 1850, which suggests that on Picasso's mother's side the family also had leanings towards painting independent of the achievements of the Genoese Matteo Picasso.

### *Don José Marries*

The meeting of José Ruiz Blasco and María Picasso Lopez was not by chance. The Picasso family had lived for many years in the plaza de la Merced in Malaga, a large square enclosing a public garden not far from the centre of the town, whereas José had been living with his elder brother, the Canon Pablo, in the calle de Granada near by. All ten brothers and sisters were agreed that the time had come for José to

<sup>3</sup> A. Cirici-Pellicer, *Picasso avant Picasso*, Cailler, Geneva, 1950, pp. 21-3.

<sup>4</sup> R. Gomez de la Serna, 'Le Toréador de la peinture', *Cahiers d'Art*, Paris, 1932, Nos. 3-5.



marry, partly because no male issue had yet been born to any member of their generation, and partly because they wished to see him settle down and abandon the doubtful life of a young painter, dependent on the charity of his reverend brother. The Canon, in spite of his tolerance, had begun to think 'that the sins of youth towards which a whimsical humour' drew his younger brother had lasted long enough.<sup>5</sup> Having selected a suitable young lady, known to be esteemed by him, they insisted that he should propose to her. But José showed no desire to commit himself, and after keeping the family in suspense, he decided suddenly to marry not this girl but her cousin, whom he had met in her company and who shared the same surname, Picasso. Even after the decision had been made, the suspense was again prolonged by the sudden death of his brother Pablo, and it was not until two years had passed that José Ruiz Blasco and María Picasso Lopez were married in 1880.

In the autumn of the following year, a son was born to them. With due ceremony he was christened in the near-by church of Santiago, and in accordance with tradition the child received the names: Pablo, Diego, José, Francisco de Paula, Juan Nepomuceno, María de los Remedios, Cipriano de la Santísima Trinidad. Sabartés explains that in Malaga it was customary to endow children with a rich choice of christian names, and gives the sources of them all: the only one that has been remembered, however, Pablo, was given as a tribute to his recently deceased uncle.

The tall white block of flats into which Don José Ruiz Blasco moved with his bride was on the eastern side of the plaza de la Merced. His young wife was small and of delicate build. She had the black eyes, sparkling with vivacity and wit, and blue-black hair of the Andalusians, in contrast to her husband, the tall, gaunt painter, whose reddish hair and distinguished reserve caused his friends to call him 'the Englishman'. The jibe was apt in other ways, for he appreciated English customs and English design, especially in furniture. In proof of this, two of a set of Chippendale chairs, which had come to Malaga by way of Gibraltar, were used by Picasso in his house at Mougins until the end of his life.

<sup>5</sup> Sabartés, *Picasso: Documents Iconographiques*.

The new block occupied the site of the ancient Convent of Our Lady of Peace. It had been built by a patron of the arts, Don Antonio Campos Garvin, Marqués de Ignato, who also lived in the same square and enjoyed entertaining the group of poets, painters and musicians of which Malaga could boast at that time. Generous and benign, he collected pictures bought from his friends the artists, and when a crisis arose he was willing to accept paintings in lieu of rent from those who had become his tenants. Thus on more than one occasion Don José had reason to be grateful to his landlord. Life had never been easy, and additional cares such as his new responsibility for his unmarried sisters and his mother-in-law, as well as the arrival of his first child, forced Don José to take on an administrative post in order to add to his scant income as a painter.

Don José exchanged his freedom for a post in the School of Fine Arts and Crafts of San Telmo, and accepted the curatorship of the local museum, which was housed in the Town Hall. These duties should have secured for him an income sufficient to support his family to the end of his days, had not municipal politics caused him to lose his job within a year or two. However, understanding the fickle nature of local government, he held on to his post unpaid until the swing of the pendulum returned again to his favour.

In spite of adversity, the birth of Pablo was the cause of great rejoicing in the Ruiz family. He was the first male heir to have been born to any of the eleven descendants of Don Diego Ruiz de Almuquera, and therefore a triumph over destiny. The birth had been made all the more dramatic by a misjudgement, nearly fatal, on the part of the midwife. The child appeared to her to be stillborn and she abandoned it on a table, so as to give all her attention to the mother. It was due only to the fortunate presence of mind of Don Salvador, one of his uncles and a qualified doctor, that the infant was saved from asphyxia before life had begun. This story, often told to him during childhood, of how death was so forcefully present at birth, lurked in Picasso's imagination throughout life.

*An Earthquake*

Three years after the birth of Pablo, one evening in mid December, Malaga was shaken violently by an earthquake, and Don José, out gossiping with friends in a chemist's shop, broke off his conversation to race home to his family. On the way he decided that he must evacuate them immediately to the house of a friend, believing that its position, backed by the rock of the Gibralfaro, would make it a safer refuge than his flat on the second floor. Sabartés tells how Picasso, some fifty years later, described to him their flight: 'My mother wore a handkerchief on her head, I had never seen her like that before. My father seized his cape from the coat-stand, threw it round his shoulders, took me in his arms and rolled me in its folds, leaving my head exposed.'<sup>6</sup> They had not far to go to reach the house of Antonio Muñoz Degrain, a painter and an intimate friend. Taking shelter there, Pablo's mother gave birth to her second child, a daughter called Lola.

*Local Painters and Painting*

Muñoz Degrain had come to Malaga to decorate the new Cervantes Theatre. He was one of a group of painters whose work now hangs in the local museum. In his academic canvases the subject matter, whether it be historical, religious, maritime or picturesque, is all-important, though now seriously in retreat beneath heavy coats of varnish. Although he is best known by his conventional scenes from Spanish history, there are traces of influences from abroad in some of his Andalusian landscapes which show an inclination to use colour in a less conventional way. Blue began to find its way into the shadows. The search for light of the Impressionists, and the symbolism of the Romantic painters of the north, were beginning to make themselves felt, replacing historical pastiche even in these remote parts of the peninsula. Degrain had gained a considerable reputation in Spain, which had earned him some limited fame abroad. A story, which was the delight of Picasso for many years, is told of how on one occasion Degrain was returning with a friend from Rome where they had

<sup>6</sup> Sabartés, *Picasso: Portraits et Souvenirs*.

achieved some renown. On their arrival they found the city of Malaga gaily decorated, and their friends at the station in ceremonial dress to meet them. The two painters, overwhelmed by the display, were brought home in triumph, covered with laurels and convinced that all had been specially arranged in their honour. But to spoil their ecstasy the King arrived by the next train on a compassionate visit to the areas ruined by the earthquake which had coincided with Lola's birth.

In the small museum where Don José worked, he had the use of a room for restoring pictures. Here he could paint undisturbed, for, it is said, the museum was scarcely ever open. He was a dull though competent painter with a limited range. Dining-room pictures were his speciality: fur and feather, pigeons and lilac, together with an occasional landscape, completed his repertoire. He was happiest when he could make his feathered models symbolic of moral or sentimental drama, as in his painting of a happy couple perched on the threshold of their pigeon house, while a third party ruffled with jealousy spies on them from below. Recently, when a small collection of his work was unearthed in the possession of the de Ignato family in South America – some of those paintings that had been accepted in payment of rent – it was found inappropriate to organize a public exhibition owing to their banality. Don José proved however to be a teacher whose lessons were never forgotten by his son. In spite of his traditional outlook and his unimaginative style, he had inherited the Spanish passion for realism, and was willing to make experiments that a more restrained and conventional temperament would have considered to be in bad taste. The experiments were not always successful, as could be seen from one which used to hang at the house of his daughter Lola in Barcelona. Don José had bought a plaster cast of the head of a Greek goddess whose classical beauty he had transformed into an image of Our Lady of Sorrows by painting the face with the utmost realism, sticking on eyebrows and adding golden tears.<sup>7</sup> He then draped the hair and shoulders in cloth dipped in plaster, so that it stuck to the cast. The head was finally set up on a small eighteenth-century table, which he repainted periodically with shiny paint, varying the colour according to

<sup>7</sup> See *L'Œil*, No. 4, 15 April, 1955.

his mood. In spite of this it was always very ugly, according to Picasso.

Other useful tricks were observed by the watchful eye of his son. In his passion for painting pigeons Don José would often attempt ambitious compositions. In order to arrive at the happiest solution in their arrangement, he would first paint individual birds on paper, then having cut them out, he shifted them round until the composition took shape. In fact, from his childhood Pablo became acquainted with the possibilities of using material in unconventional ways, borrowing from any source that came to hand, and making the newly discovered substance obey his wishes. Brushes and paint were by no means the only tools of the trade; knives, scissors, pins and paste all played their part.

One passion above all others dominated Pablo from infancy. His mother was fond of telling how the first noise he learned to make, 'piz, piz', was an imperative demand for '*lapiz*', a pencil. For hours he would sit happily drawing spirals, which he managed to explain were a symbol for a kind of sugar cake called '*torruella*',<sup>8</sup> a word formed from a verb which means to bewilder or entangle. He could draw long before he could speak, and many of his first pictures took their ephemeral shape in the sand where the children played in the plaza de la Merced.

The square itself is spacious, and laid out in a formal way with plane trees, which shelter a crowd of inventive and noisy children from the violence of the sun. Even more numerous than the children in the square are the pigeons. Throughout his life these birds were Picasso's constant companions. Gentle and elusive, they became the symbol of his most tender feelings and utopian desires. The dove of peace drawn by his hand has appeared on the walls of many cities and has been welcomed as a symbol of new hope. From the windows Pablo, encouraged by his father, could watch the movements of these birds in the branches of the plane trees and listen to their crooning. A picture painted by Don José that remained vivid in Picasso's memory was described by him as 'an immense canvas representing a dovecote crammed with pigeons sitting on perches. . . millions of pigeons'. But Sabartés, who had unearthed this picture in Malaga, was able to count

<sup>8</sup> Further checking with pastry cooks in Malaga reveals that *torruella* was the name traditionally used in the last century for a small cake that is now known by the more descriptive name *caracola* meaning 'snail'.

only nine in the whole composition.

Memories of the first decade of his life in Malaga tend to become confused or incomplete, but often they contain some allusion to later life which seems to give them prophetic significance. Sabartés<sup>9</sup> tells the story of how, sixty years later, when watching a child learning to walk, Picasso said, 'I learnt to walk by pushing a tin of Olibet biscuits, because I knew what there was inside', and he continued to insist on the importance of this motive, priding himself on his artfulness at such a tender age. This early appreciation of simple geometric shapes combined with an interest in what lies hidden beneath is highly appropriate to the future inventor of Cubism.

Visually Picasso's memory always remained extraordinarily clear concerning things both big and small that impressed his imagination. He has described to me in detail the amazing Baroque interior of the church of La Victoria, and on a photograph of himself at the age of four, reproduced by Sabartés, he wrote for me descriptions of the colour of his clothes. They consisted of a vermilion jacket with gold buttons, a kilt, bronze boots and a white collar and bow. On another portrait of himself with Lola, in which he is dressed up as a sailor, with button boots and black stockings, he wrote, 'Lola's costume, black, belt blue, collar white. Me, suit white, overcoat navy blue, beret blue.'

What remained of these early years, more permanent than fragmentary memories, was the hereditary and traditional influence that lay mysteriously deep and well-rooted in Picasso. Qualities that he never forgot are the boisterous wit of the Malaguenians, their passionate love of the glamorous parade of the bullfight or the religious processions of Holy Week. He also understood their fear of the act which completes an object or finishes an event, bringing with it an unbearable finality resembling death. It is symbolized by the unfinished cathedral that dominates the city, which is known as the '*Manco*' (one-handed) because it raises one tower into the air like a one-armed man, its twin never having been completed. Strong contrasts inherent in the environment have had their indelible effect; the comparison between the fertile plain and the arid rock, intense light and heat in the open contrasted with the coolness of shaded avenues and the interiors of

<sup>9</sup> Sabartés, *Picasso: Portraits et Souvenirs*.

buildings, the stench of slums with the sweet perfume of tropical flowers, the dust and grime of the earth with the purifying freshness of the sea. All these influences were present in the heredity and the environment of this child, whose responses to the world of the senses were unusually acute.

### *Bullfights*

The traditional centre of popular entertainment in all Spanish cities is the bull ring. At Malaga it is so close to the southern slopes of the citadel that those who cannot afford seats can get a distant view by sitting on the sun-scorched hillside. Throughout the summer the arena is filled nearly every Sunday with amateurs who come with their families and their friends to applaud the prowess of their champions in the art of tauromachy. Though superficially the crowd may resemble the spectators at a football match their interest is profoundly different. The performance they have come to see is a rite rather than a sport. Its ritual can be traced to early Mediterranean civilizations such as that of Crete; but the continuity of this aspect in Spain, when in other European countries the bullfight has died out or become merely a test of agility, is a sign that it supplies something necessary to the Spanish character. Its pageantry displays to them in a form that they enjoy the fearful drama of life and death. The sacrifice of the bull becomes the symbol of the triumph of man over brute force and blind instinct. Courage and skill are balanced against the tempestuous onslaught of exasperated fury. In the wake of this encounter follow suffering, cruelty and death. The festive costume of the toreador endows him with the qualities of the priest and the athlete. By his courage he becomes the hero admired and revered by all; he can equally earn their merciless scorn should he show himself cowardly or incompetent in his dangerous task. In his skill he bears a resemblance to the artist.

Like most Spanish children Picasso was taken to the bullfight at an early age. Don José had a keen appreciation of every detail and took a pleasure in explaining the subtleties of the fight to his son. In Pablo there seemed to be a natural propensity for the '*corrida*' which Ramón Gomez de la Serna ascribes to his possible hereditary connection, or at

least to affinities, with gipsies. 'In Malaga, his native town,' he writes, 'I found an explanation . . . of what Picasso is and I understood to what degree he is a *torreador* - gipsies are the best *torreadors* - and how, whatever he may do, it is in reality bullfighting.'<sup>10</sup> The child watching the display imagined himself accomplishing the daring movements of his heroes within inches of the murderous horns of the bull, and saw with envy the victorious matador in his splendid clothes carried high in triumph by the crowd.

In the centre of the square in sight of the flat where the Ruiz family lived stands a tall elegant obelisk in white stone. It was set up in memory of those who fell in two unsuccessful uprisings during the nineteenth century against the implacable absolutism of Spanish rule. Although Picasso played in its shadow as a child, he has no memory of any gesture on the part of his relatives that would suggest that they were particularly interested in the reformist activities which made themselves felt from time to time in Malaga, or that politics of any description were their concern. The early education he was given was normal for a child in his circumstances; his first school was an ordinary infants' school opposite the museum. His memories confirm the impression given by the family photographs that in politics, religion and their way of living they were a conventional, law-abiding, provincial family.

### *Departure for Corunna*

Ten years after the birth of Pablo, Don José was forced to admit that his struggle to provide for his family was not succeeding. The family had been increased in 1887 by the birth of another daughter, which made the overcrowding at home almost intolerable. Finally the day came when disillusioned and temporarily defeated by financial burdens, he sadly decided to leave his native city and accept the post of art master at the Instituto da Guarda, a school for secondary education in Corunna. This brought to an end the quiet life of well-established habits that he had enjoyed, and severed contacts on which he had come to depend for help and advice. In particular, he was to suffer from leaving his young

<sup>10</sup> Ramón Gomez de la Serna, 'Le Toréador de la peinture', *Cahiers d'Art*, 1932, Nos. 3-5.