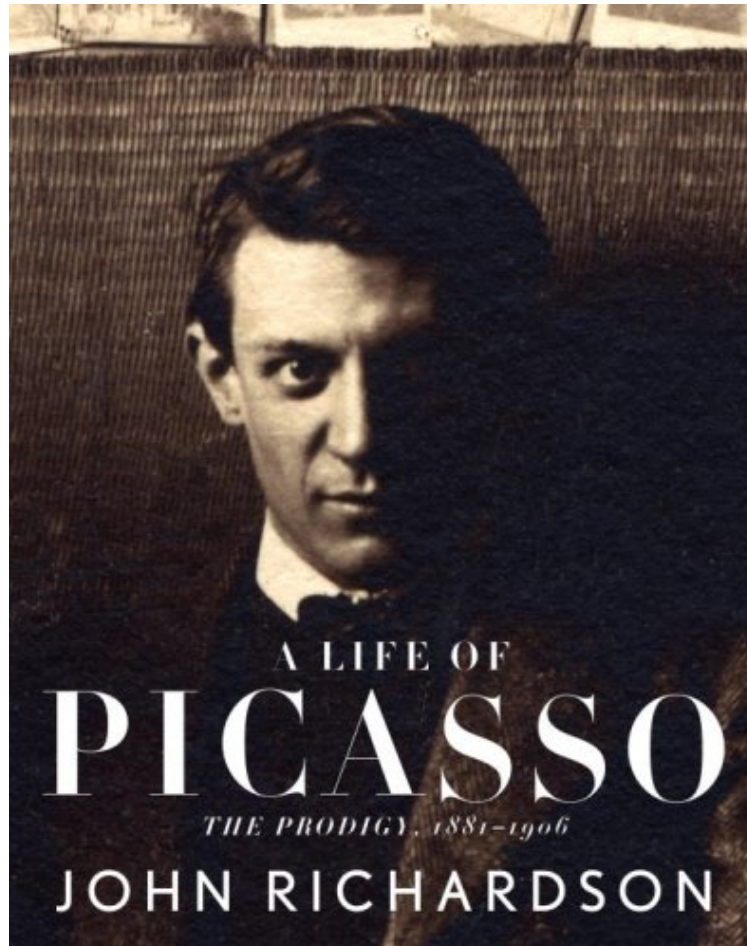


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A Life of Picasso: The Prodigy, 1881-1906

John Richardson

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John Richardson : A Life of Picasso: The Prodigy, 1881-1906 before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised A Life of Picasso: The Prodigy, 1881-1906:

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Outstanding Biography of an Artistic GeniusBy KitschedThis first volume of a series of three chronological biographies is extraordinary. Richardson presents a thorough history and analysis of Picasso's life and his artistic development. This book is illustrated throughout with black and white photos on nearly every page. Included are photos of Picasso's family and his contemporaries, as well as photos of his work. Also included are pictures of art which may have influenced Picasso's work. Although the illustrations are black and white (I suspect color would make the book cost prohibitive) they give the reader a very clear understanding of how the artist developed. There is much about Picasso that is the "stuff of legends", and Richardson tries to present an objective, factual biography. The author seamlessly weaves biographical, historic information, with an artistic analysis of Picasso's early work. Despite the tendency for normal mortals to be awestruck and dazzled by Picasso's rapid,

mercurial development during his early years, Richardson keeps a clear head and analyses Picasso's work in an objective manner. The author understands his subject and his art work. This is really a remarkable biography. I look forward to reading the second and third volumes. (I considered purchasing this on Kindle and am glad I purchased the actual book as there are illustrations on nearly every page. That sometimes does not translate so well on the Kindle.)³ of 3 people found the following review helpful. A Study in Greatness By Elio Lopez This first part to three part series Mr. Richardson has written on Picasso is a preview of the greatness of the volumes to come. Mr. Richardson has a flair for bringing to life the times and events that led to the greatest revolution in the art world that has yet to be matched to this day. Mr. Richardson's prose is very well written and brings to life the world at that time, (1881-1906). The book ends just at the eve of 1907 and Picasso standing at the brink of revolutionizing the whole of the entire Western Art world. The research is exhaustive and very well documented. The author shatters many myths and inaccuracies previously put forth by the artist, (Mr. Richardson was a personal friend and confidant), and previous biographers. What emerges is a very detailed analysis of this great artist and the events and links that led to what we call art today. If I have one negative criticism of Mr. Richardson's writing is that he, at times, will lapse into a phrase in either French or German that is not translated for the reader. However, in today's world this is a small issue with translators on the internet easily available. And to be fair, the instances of such are not the norm, but the exception. I highly recommend this and the two following books which I own. I, for one, eagerly await the fourth and perhaps final volume in the series. If you like Picasso, or you're just a student of art, do yourself a favor and buy this book.⁷ of 7 people found the following review helpful. The definitive Picasso biography By Reich Claude The first volume of John Richardson's monumental Life of Picasso (so far, three volumes have been published), this book is a thoroughly documented and elegantly written account of Picasso's early years in Malaga, Barcelona and Paris (up to 1907 and the inception of his masterpiece "Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J.)"). Following a strictly chronological pattern, the text is accompanied by numerous illustrations (all in black and white) of every single work quoted by the author (whether or not by Picasso; there are even small portraits by Picasso's mistress Fernande Olivier, who appears to have been more than a merely talented artist). A must-read and an unsurpassed biography of the Spanish master, as Richardson (himself a friend of Picasso's) had first-hand access to a trove of unpublished documents and a privileged relationship with Picasso's heirs.

As he magnificently combines meticulous scholarship with irresistible narrative appeal, Richardson draws on his close friendship with Picasso, his own diaries, the collaboration of Picasso's widow Jacqueline, and unprecedented access to Picasso's studio and papers to arrive at a profound understanding of the artist and his work. 800 photos.

"Richardson, it hardly needs repeating, is steeped in Picasso and his life (his own friendship with Picasso is the tacit bedrock of this biography) but the arguments he makes are always precise and cogent, never blithely assertive." -- William Boyd * The Spectator * About the Author John Richardson is the author of a memoir, *The Sorcerers Apprentice*; an essay collection, *Sacred Monsters, Sacred Masters*; and books on Manet and Braque. He has written for *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, and *Vanity Fair*. He was instrumental in setting up Christies in the United States. In 1993 he was made a Corresponding Fellow of the British Academy. In 1995/96 he served as the Slade Professor of Fine Art at Oxford University. He divides his time between Connecticut and New York City. Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. Chapter 1: Rome and the Ballets Russes (1917) Picasso's visit to Rome in February 1917 had originally been conceived as a wedding trip, but at the last moment his on-again off-again mistress, Irne Lagut, who had promised to marry him, changed her mind, as her predecessor, Gaby Lespinasse, had done the year before. Instead of Irne, Jean Cocteau accompanied him. In a vain attempt to set himself at the head of the avant-garde, this ambitious young poet had inveigled Picasso into collaborating with him on *Parade*: a gimmicky, quasi-modernist ballet about the efforts of a couple of shills to lure the public into their vaudeville theater by tantalizing them with samples of their acts. Cocteau had desperately wanted Diaghilev to stage this ballet in Paris. The meddlesome Polish hostess Misia Sert had tried to scupper the project. However, Picasso's Chilean protector and patron, Eugenia Errzuriz, had persuaded Diaghilev to agree, provided Picasso did the décor, Erik Satie the score, and Lonide Massine the choreography. Sets, costumes, and rehearsals were to be done in Rome, where Diaghilev had his wartime headquarters. Picasso's cubist followers were horrified that their avant-garde hero should desert them for anything as frivolous and modish as the Ballets Russes, but he ignored their complaints. After two and a half years of war, with its appalling death toll, its hardships and shortages, and above all the absence of his closest friends particularly Braque and Apollinaire at the front Picasso was elated at the prospect of leaving the bombardments and blackouts behind to spend a couple of months in the relative peace of Rome, which he had always wanted to visit. Besides working on *Parade*, he was determined to get married. Picasso and Cocteau arrived in Rome on February 19, 1917, a day later than they had intended. Cocteau, who had forgotten to get a visa from the Italian embassy, had lied when telling him that no reservations were available. Diaghilev had booked them into the Grand Hotel de Russie on the corner of the Via del Babuino and the Piazza del Popolo. So that Picasso could work in peace on the costumes and sets for *Parade*, he had also arranged for him to have one of the coveted Patrizi studios, tucked away in a sprawling, unkempt garden off the Via Margutta. Although most of the artists are now gone, the Patrizi studios are still as idyllic

as they were in 1917. "I cannot forget Picasso's studio in Rome," Cocteau later wrote. "A small chest contained the maquette for Parade, with its houses, trees and shack. It was there that Picasso did his designs for the Chinese Conjurer, the Managers, the American Girl, the Horse, which Anna de Noailles would compare to a laughing tree, and the Acrobats in blue tights, which would remind Marcel Proust of The Dioscuri." [1] From his window Picasso had a magnificent view of the sixteenth-century Villa Medici, seat of the French Academy, towering above the studio garden. As he well knew, the Academy had associations with some of his favorite artists. Velquez had painted the garden; Ingres had spent four years there as a fellow at the outset of his career and, later, six years as director; Corot had also worked there and caught the golden light of Rome and the campagna, as no other painter had done. "Rome seems made by [Corot]," Cocteau reported to his mother. "Picasso talks of nothing else but this master, who touches us much more than Italians hell bent on the grandiose!" [2] That Picasso infinitely preferred the informality of Corot's radiant views to the pomp and ceremony and baroque theatricality of so much Roman painting is confirmed by his sun-filled pointillistic watercolors of the Villa Medici's ochre faadeas original as anything he did in Rome. [3] Diaghilev insisted that Picasso and Cocteau share his passion for the city. Sightseeing was compulsory that very first evening. Since there was no blackout as there was in Paris, they were able to see the Colosseum all lit up "that enormous reservoir of the centuries," Cocteau said, "which one would like to see come alive, crowded with people and wild beasts and peanut vendors." [4] The following morning, Diaghilev picked them up in his car for another grand tour. In the evening he took them to the circus. "Sad but beautiful arena," Cocteau wrote his mother. "Misia Sert (or rather her double) performed on the tight rope. Diaghilev slept until woken with a start by an elephant putting its feet on his knees." [5] When he arrived in Rome, Picasso was still suffering from chagrin d'amour. Eager to find a replacement for Irne Lagut, he had promptly fallen in love with one of Diaghilev's Russian dancers, the twenty-five-year-old Olga Khokhlova. Although he courted her assiduously and did a drawing of her, which he signed with his name in Cyrillic, Olga proved adamantly chaste. Chastity was a challenge that Picasso had seldom had to face. Both Diaghilev and Bakst warned him that a respectable Russian woman would not sacrifice her virginity unless assured of marriage. "Une russe on l'pouse," Diaghilev said. Olga personified this view. She was indeed respectable: the daughter of Stepan Vasilievich Khokhlov, who was not a general, as she claimed, but a colonel in the Corps of Engineers in charge of the railway system. [6] Olga had three brothers and a younger sister. They lived in St. Petersburg in a state-owned apartment on the Moika Canal. Around 1910, the colonel had been sent to the Kars region to oversee railroad construction, and the family had followed him there. Olga stayed behind. Egged on by a school friend's sister, Mathilda Konetskaya, who had joined the Diaghilev ballet after graduating from the Imperial Ballet School, she decided to become a dancer. Olga had considerable talent. Despite starting late and studying briefly at a St. Petersburg ballet school, [7] she managed to get auditioned by Diaghilev. The Ballets Russes was having difficulty prying dancers loose from the state-run theaters and was desperate for recruits. A committee consisting of Nijinsky and the greatest of classical ballet masters, Enrico Cecchetti, as well as Diaghileva trio described by another dancer as more terrifying than any first-night audience put Olga through her paces and accepted her. Intelligence and diligence compensated for lack of experience. Nijinsky was sufficiently impressed to pick her out of the corps de ballet. Lonide Massine, who had taken Nijinsky's place in Diaghilev's company as well as in his heart, had chosen Olga to play the role of Dorotea in *Les Femmes de bonne humeur*, an adaptation of a comedy by the eighteenth-century playwright Goldoni, with sets by Lon Bakst and a heavily arranged score after Scarlatti. It was at a rehearsal for this ballet, which would have its premiere in Rome the following month, that Picasso spotted Olga and immediately set about courting her. To familiarize himself with the techniques of theatrical decor as well as watch his new love at work, he helped Carlo Socrate (the scene painter who would work on Parade) execute Bakst's scenery. So that he could join Olga backstage, Picasso even helped the stagehands at the ballet's premiere. [8] Eighteen months later he would marry her. Compared to her predecessors Bohemian models Picasso had lived with in Montmartre or Montparnasse Olga was very much a lady, not, however, the noblewoman biographers have assumed her to be. [9] She came from much the same professional class as Picasso's family. Don Jos, Picasso's father, may have been a very unsuccessful painter, but his brothers included a diplomat, a revered prelate, and a successful doctor, who had married the daughter of a Malagueo marquis. One of Picasso's mother's first cousins was a general more celebrated than Olga's parent, also the real thing. Indeed, it may have been Olga's lack of blue blood that made her so anxious to become a grande dame and bring up her son like a little prince. Arthur Rubinstein, the pianist, who had met Olga in 1916 when the ballet visited San Sebastin, remembered her as "a stupid Russian who liked to brag about her father, who she pretended was a colonel in the Tsar's own regiment. The other dancers assured me that he was only a sergeant." [10] This was an exaggeration, but Olga's pretensions were resented by other members of the company. Ten years younger than Picasso, Olga had fine regular features, dark reddish hair, green eyes, a small, lithe, dancer's body, and a look of wistful, Slavic melancholy that accorded with the romanticism of classic Russian ballet. Formal photographs reveal Olga to have been a beauty usually an unsmiling one although in early snapshots of her with Picasso and Cocteau in Rome, she is actually grinning. Later, she plays up to him, dances for him, takes on different personalities, which might explain the widely varying reactions to her. The celebrated ballerina Alexandra Danilova declared that Olga "was nothing nice but nothing. We couldn't discover what Picasso saw in her." [11] A Soviet ballet historian, the late Genya Smakov, found references to her in an

unpublished memoir by someone working for Diaghilev, where she is said to have been "neurotic." [12] On the other hand, Lydia Lopokova the most intelligent of Diaghilev's ballerinas was Olga's best friend in the company. Picasso fell for Olga's vulnerability. He sensed the victim within. She would have appealed to his possessiveness and protectiveness especially when the Russian Revolution cut her off from her family. Her vulnerability would likewise have appealed to Picasso's sadistic side. (The women in his life were expected to read the Marquis de Sade.) In the past year rejection by the two women he had hoped to marry had left him exceedingly vulnerable. Picasso's residual bourgeois streak should also be taken into account. He was thirty-five and wanted to settle down with a presentable wife and have a son. None of his father's three brothers had had any issue, and there was pressure from his mother to produce an heir. Sexual abstinence was something Picasso had seldom if ever had to face. His two previous mistresses may have shied away from marrying him, but they had been easy enough to seduce. Olga was as unbeddable as the "nice" Malagueña girls that his family had tried to foist on him. "Don't forget Olga who cares for you very much," she wrote on the back of a dramatic photograph of herself in *Firebird*. "Who neglects me, loses me." [13] (Cocteau could not resist using the phrase *qui me nglige me perd* as a caption to a caricature of Bakst he subsequently sent to Olga.) [14] Picasso must have been very much in love to put up with this ukase. Ernest Ansermet, Diaghilev's principal conductor, describes walking back to the Hotel Minerva, where he and the dancers were staying. Olga had the room next to Ansermet's. "I heard Picasso in the passage knocking at her door and Olga on the other side of it saying 'No, no, Monsieur Picasso, I'm not going to let you in.'" [15] Clearly, marriage was his only option. Diaghilev, who felt responsible for the genteel Russian girls in his company, advised Picasso against marrying Olga. Foreseeing problems with her parents, who were averse to their daughter marrying a mere painter, the impresario told Picasso that he had a much more suitable girl set aside for him. She was currently dancing in South America and would soon be returning to Europe. Picasso would not listen; he was obsessed by Olga. Not that this kept him away from the local brothels, to judge by an address noted down in his Roman sketchbook. [16] "In Rome of an evening," Picasso told Apollinaire, "whores ply their trade in automobiles at walking pace they accost their clients with smiles and gestures and stop the car to negotiate the price." [17] From Naples he would send Apollinaire a postcard: "In Naples all the women are beautiful. Everything is easy here," [18] and, sure enough, the sketchbook he took with him records the address of a Neapolitan brothel. For an Andalusian, regular visits to a whorehouse would have been an obligatory response to a fiancée's virtuous stand. Another option was an affair with a less virtuous member of the company. Picasso did that too. [19] Cut off by the war from Russia, Diaghilev and his company led a nomadic life. Their principal wartime base was Rome. Officially the impresario stayed in the Grand Hotel, but he spent most of his time in an apartment in the Marchese Theodoli's palazzo on the Corso that he had rented for Lonide Massine, the handsome twenty-one-year-old dancer, who had been his lover for the previous three years. So as not to compromise himself publicly, Massine had insisted that he and his employer live under separate roofs. That this hot-blooded heterosexual, who was also a cold-blooded operator, should have allowed himself to be captured and caged by the notoriously jealous and possessive Diaghilev is not surprising. In Russia it had been a standard career move for a dancer of either sex to have a rich, influential protector. To negotiate these arrangements, one of the company's dancers, Alexandrov, acted as pimp. Massine's predecessor in Diaghilev's life, the legendary Nijinsky, who was likewise heterosexual, had started off with his mother's blessing as the protégé of the rich, young Prince Lvov. The Prince had then handed him on to the Polish Count Tishkievitch, who gave him a piano. [20] Like Diaghilev's previous lover, Dimitri Filosofov, Nijinsky would leave the impresario for a woman; as would Massine. Exceedingly parsimonious and very ambitious, Massine had everything to gain from this arrangement. Diaghilev had already turned him into a star dancer, a choreographer of near genius and a major collector of modern paintings, including many Picassos and Braques. Sex with Diaghilev was part of the job "like going to bed with a nice fat old lady," [21] as he told one of his mistresses, when she asked how he could possibly have done it with Diaghilev. That Massine was a passionate Hispanophile would prove to be a great bond with Picasso. The previous summer in Madrid, the dancer had agreed to choreograph two ballets with Spanish themes, *Las Meninas*, which would be put on later in 1917, and *Tricorne*, which would not appear until 1919. A small, driven, Spanish-looking Russian with enormous eyes in some respects a younger version of Picasso Massine expected the artist to teach him about modern art. He proved so perceptive and imaginative and such a quick learner that over the next ten years he and Picasso would collaborate on four great ballets. Another bond between Picasso and Massine was a passion for women a passion that differentiated them from Diaghilev's largely homosexual entourage. Cocteau's presence in Rome made for more pique and intrigue than usual. In the face of Diaghilev's jealousy, Picasso was delighted to provide his fellow womanizer with an alibi for his amorous escapades. After failing to persuade Picasso to spy for him, Diaghilev hired a couple of detectives to take on this job. [22] At the slightest suspicion of infidelity on Massine's part, Diaghilev would have a temper tantrum, attack the furniture with his stick, tear the telephone out of the wall and smash it. NOTES [1] Jean Cocteau, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. IX (Lausanne: Marguerat, 1946-51), 246. [2] Letter from Cocteau to his mother, February 22, 1917, Cocteau 1989, 297. [3] Picasso sent one of these Villa Medici drawings to the dealer Andr Level, who wrote him on March 10, 1917 (Archives Picasso): "Merci du croquis de la villa Mdicis, dont vous serez peut être un jour le Directeur." Level goes on to say "Revenez-nous avec un tableau de Romaines, frere de celui des Hollandaises, ou, simplement avec des souvenirs agréables." [4] Letter from Cocteau to his mother,

February 20, 1917, Cocteau 1989, 296.[5] Letter from Cocteau to his mother, February 22, 1917, *ibid.*, 297. After living with Sert since 1908, Misia was known as Madame Sert, although she was not married to him until 1920.[6] Cocteau refers to Olga in a letter to Picasso, April 13, 1917 (Archives Picasso) as "La fille du Gnral Kloklov." [7] The school was run by Yevgenia Pavlovna Sokolova.[8] Carandente 1998, 37.[9] Penrose presumably believed that Olga was a general's rather than a colonel's daughter; otherwise he would not have described her as such (Penrose, 201). In her typescript, "A tale of brief love and eternal hatred," Natalia Semenyova, the only Russian art historian to write about Olga, likewise mistakenly claimed she was a noblewoman.[10] Rubinstein 1980, 150.[11] Menaker-Rothschild, 49 n. 8.[12] Genya Smakov in conversation with the author.[13] Baldassari 1998, 96.[14] Letter from Cocteau to "Mademoiselle Olga Koclowa" [sic], April 21, 1917, Archives Picasso.[15] Ernest Anserment, *Ecrits sur la musique* (Neuchatel: Langages, 1971), 26.[16] MP Carnets I, cat. 19 (MP 1867).[17] Postcard from Picasso to Gaullame Apollinaire, February 1917, Caizergues and Seckel, 144.[18] Postcard from Picasso to Apollinaire, March 10, 1917, *ibid.*, 145.[19] According to Laurence Madeline, former Conservateur, Archives Picasso.[20] Buckle 1971, 56-7.[21] Recounted to the author by Tatiana Lieberman.[22] Sokolova 1960, 170. From the Hardcover edition.