Mater Infirma: Merging Pariah and Madonna in Pablo Picasso's Blue Paintings of Prostitute-Mothers

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April 2021

A thesis submitted to McGill University in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts in Art History

Abstract

Between the years 1901 and 1904, Pablo Picasso composed monochromatic canvases of shades of blue in what came to be known as his experimental Blue Period. Among the destitute social outcasts that he represented emerged a series of recurrent scenes of quiet tenderness: his images of syphilitic prostitute-mothers and their children, imprisoned within the hospital-prison of Saint-Lazare in Paris. This thesis examines three representations of these mother-child dyads: *Motherhood (La Maternité)* (1901), *Mother and Child* (ca. 1901) and *Desemparats (Mère et enfant au fichu)* (1903). By departing from the strictly biographical framework of many Blue Period Picasso scholars, I instead situate these paintings both within the history of art and within the historical context of fin-de-siècle Paris, when theories of hereditary syphilis, degeneration, and depopulation seized the national psyche. I argue that Picasso's figure of the prostitute-mother encapsulates these swelling anxieties, as she appears simultaneously as a sickened sex worker and the ideal of a virtuous, devoted housewife and mother. Rather than portraying sex workers as debased and diseased in these compositions, Picasso erased overt signs of immorality and utilized religious iconography and the colour blue to raise the reviled *égout seminal* into humble, secular Madonnas. By incorporating Renaissance *Mater Amabilis* portraits, Impressionist paintings of motherhood and fin-de-siècle French literature into my discussion, I examine the dichotomous conception of female sexuality. I argue that Picasso's quiet images of prostitute-mothers paradoxically occupy both positions of "prostitute" and "mother," thus blurring the line between social threat and societal ideal, between Whore and Madonna.

Résumé

Entre les années 1901 et 1904, Pablo Picasso compose des toiles monochromes nuancées de bleu dans ce qui est devenu sa période bleue expérimentale. Parmi les parias démunis qu'il représente surgit une série de scènes munis d'une douce tendresse, c'est-à-dire ses images de mères-prostituées syphilitiques et de leurs enfants, emprisonnés à l'Hôpital Saint-Lazare de Paris. Cette thèse examine trois représentations de ces dyades mère-enfant: *Motherhood (La Maternité)* (1901), *Mother and Child* (ca. 1901) et *Desemparats (Mère et enfant au fichu*) (1903). En m'écartant du cadre strictement biographique utilisé par de nombreux spécialistes de la période bleue de Picasso, je situe ces peintures dans l'histoire de l'art et dans le contexte historique de la France, fin dix-neuvième siècle. C'est à cet époque que les théories d'hérédosyphilis, de dégénérescence, et de dépeuplement se sont emparé de la psyché nationale. Je soutiens que la figure de mère-prostituée reprit par Picasso incarne ces angoisses croissantes ; elle apparaît à la fois comme travailleuse du sexe syphilitique, et comme mère au foyer vertueuse et dévouée. Plutôt qu'illustrer ces travailleuses du sexe comme avilies et malades, Picasso efface tout indice manifeste d'immoralité et utilise plutôt une iconographie religieuse et la couleur bleue pour élever « l'égout séminal » vilipendé en Madones humbles et laïques. En intégrant dans ma discussion les portraits de *Mater Amabilis* de la Renaissance et les peintures impressionnistes qui illustrent la maternité, ainsi que la littérature française provenant de la fin du siècle, j'examine la conception dichotomique de la sexualité féminine. Je soutiens que ces images délicates de mères-prostituées peint par Picasso occupent paradoxalement les deux positions de « prostituée » et de « mère », brouillant ainsi la frontière entre menace sociale et idéal sociétal, entre putain et madone.

Acknowledgements

The following pages have been made possible by the countless incredible bonds that I have been fortunate enough to forge both in my academic and personal life – without these people, the initial scattered seeds of my research would never have been able to grow into the finished thesis that I am able to present today.

First and foremost, I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Mary Hunter, for her invaluable insight and guidance in the preparation of this thesis. As the first art history professor whom I encountered in my undergraduate degree at McGill five years ago, she has greatly influenced my appreciation of modern art, and her own research and writing continue to reflect an exemplary standard that I hope, one day, to emulate. Special thanks also to the second reader of this thesis, Professor Cecily Hilsdale, for her constructive comments and enthusiastic encouragement at the – occasionally daunting – outset of the program. Her concerted commitment to students has greatly helped me in developing academic confidence.

I am also grateful to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for funding this project, and to the Department of Art History and Communication Studies at McGill University. I cannot begin to express my thanks to all of the incredible professors from whom I have had the unparalleled opportunity to learn and grow, as well as the intelligent peers and friends that I have made throughout this two-year enterprise – Tara Allen-Flanagan, Leighton Fenske, Hana Nikčević, and Andrea Valentine-Lewis, you have made my time at McGill all the more exciting and enjoyable.

Finally, I am forever indebted to my incredible support network of family and friends behind the scenes – thank you to my dear friend Divi Lagendyk for her profound belief in my work and abilities, and for never failing to bring a smile to my face. Many thanks also to Alex Johnston, for opening my eyes to a world of bright possibilities and for providing unconditional support. A million thanks must lastly be reserved for my grandparents, Andreas and Béatrice Liesegang, and for my loving parents, François Gilbert and Nadine Liesegang, who have and continue to fiercely fuel my artistic interests and creative pursuits with boundless love and dedication. It is to you that I dedicate this thesis.

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Mater Infirma: Merging Pariah and Madonna in Pablo Picasso's Blue Paintings of Prostitute-Mothers[1]

INTRODUCTION

Between the years 1901 and 1904, a young Pablo Picasso composed monochromatic canvases of shades of blue in what came to be known as his experimental Blue Period. Far from the muted grey and brown tones and geometric dissections of form for which the artist would subsequently become known, particularly during his Analytical Cubist phase a mere three years later, these earlier compositions are notable for their broad application of blue and highly emotive subject matter. At the turn of the century, just years before his radical departure from figuration, Picasso began populating his canvases with an array of lowly, indigent figures, thereby fashioning paintings that reflect the Romantic theme of *Weltschmerz* and the pathos of existence. He drew upon Symbolist notions of suggestion that rejected realism in favour of fantasy and abstraction, and soon began to drastically simplify his form and use of colour.[2] In these early tragic tableaux, Picasso represented the calamitous misfortune of a variety of marginal types: blind beggars, emaciated families, and absinthe-glazed sex workers function as parables of adversity. By bringing these social outcasts to the fore, the young artist revealed the

[1] Since language is a powerful tool in fights for social equality, I would like to acknowledge the politics surrounding the term "prostitute," which is often criticized for its historical connotations of immorality, dishonour and criminality. The label "sex worker," coined by Carol Leigh ("The Scarlot Harlot") at a Women Against Violence in Pornography and Media conference in the late 1970s, is often today perceived as more appropriate in its ability to move global understandings of sex work towards a labour framework. For this reason, I limit my use of the term "prostitute" throughout my thesis to the hyphenated amalgam "prostitute-mother," retaining the word in this context in order to better encapsulate the oxymoronic juxtaposition of social threat and societal ideal that is embodied in the same figure. For more information on both sides of the prostitute/sex worker debate, see Noémi Katona, "Political Representation and Spokespersons in the Prostitution vs. Sex Work Debate: Reflections on the Hungarian Discourse in a Global Context," *Intersections: East European Journal of Society and Politics 6*, no.1 (2020): 139-163.

[2] Jonathan Perkins and James G. Ravin, "Representations of Blindness in Picasso's Blue Period," *Archives of ophthalmology 122*, no.4 (2004): 636.

heavy turmoil of fin-de-siècle paupers who found themselves increasingly imprisoned in an industrialized world that was plagued by anguish and isolation.[3]

Among the throngs of atrophied and skeletal protagonists he portrayed, however, emerged a series of recurrent scenes of quiet tenderness: his images of mothers and children. In stark contrast to the gaunt, lonely female sex workers who are depicted as isolated in nebulous reverie in paintings such as *Buveuse assoupie (Sleeping Drinker)* (1902, fig. 1), the women in such works as *Motherhood* (1901, fig. 2) are entirely consumed by their small infants, appearing undeniably devoted as they cradle their offspring in gestures of tender maternal affection. Arching forward to plant a loving kiss on her toddler's head, the mother in this latter colour lithograph from 1901 is represented as harmoniously united with her child as a single being. In addition to her lips caressing his forehead, her hands simultaneously cradle the back of his head and press his shoulder into her chest, thereby physically connecting his small frame to her maternal body at multiple points of contact. The draping blue fabric of her cloak echoes her embrace and yawns open to further nestle him into her curved frame, and their two connected bodies form an ambiguous triangle in which only the differing shades of their blue clothes mark them apart. Despite the domestic atmosphere, complete with the mother's wooden chair and the haphazard knitting supplies discarded at her left-hand side to suggest absentminded mending, what at first glance may appear to be a private scene of devout motherly love in fact unveils a much bleaker reality. As art historians, including Michael Leja and John Richardson, have argued, mother and child are not shown comfortably enclosed in the safety of their homes. Rather, as I will explore in this thesis, Picasso depicted these figures within the imposing walls

[3] Anne Borsay, "Picasso's Bodies: Representations of Modern Society?," *Medical Humanities 35,* no.2 (2009): 90.

of the Saint-Lazare hospital-prison, an institution for sex workers in Paris afflicted by venereal diseases such as syphilis.[4]

Throughout the four years of his formative Blue Period, Picasso spent a considerable amount of time in Paris, where he embarked on a macabre and pessimistic investigation of detained Parisian sex workers.[5] Among the artist's earliest fascinations with despondent subjects at the turn of the century, the confined women that he encountered at the Saint-Lazare prison, after having been granted access to the prison by the chief venereologist in 1901, especially captured his attention. Scholars often conjecturally argue that Picasso was simultaneously drawn to the easy availability of free models, as well as by their condition that appropriately embodied his view of sex as "ecstatic and tender, but also guilt-inducing and bound up with suffering, even death."[6] In this hospital-prison, syphilitic and sick sex workers were grouped together in deplorable conditions. They were permitted to give birth and care for their children until the age of four, provided they still required nursing. Special dormitories were constructed for these mothers and their children, and the overcrowded, communal rooms were equipped with *crèches* for the babies placed at the center. These infant bedfellows included both those brought into the prison upon their mothers' detention, as well as those who were delivered within its very walls,

[4] While he acknowledges the difficulties involved in definitively discerning at which point references to sex work and syphilis cease, Michael Leja persuasively argues that these early mother-child compositions can be viewed contextually as fusing prostitution, venereal disease and motherhood. See Michael Leja, "'Le vieux marcheur' and 'Les deux risques': Picasso, Prostitution, Venereal Disease, and Maternity," *Art History 8*, no.1 (1985): 72.
[5] Ibid., 67.
[6] John Richardson, *A Life of Picasso: The Prodigy, 1881-1906* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), 219. Richardson also notes Picasso's self-proclaimed identity as "*pictor en misere humane*," or "painter of human misery," as well as the artist's own possible venereal disease at the time. Since Picasso had been a frequent client of brothels since a young age and was well-acquainted with Dr. Jullien, one of France's chief venereologists, Richardson speculates that he might have been one of his patients.

with the average number of babies born in the penitentiary reaching a minimum of twelve a year.[7]

The impoverished prostitute-mothers and children in Picasso's maternal scenes rapidly became important dyads that he revisited throughout his Blue Period. Dressed in flowing, modest garments that evoke a secular equivalent of the rich ultramarine robes donned by the Virgin Mary in Early Renaissance paintings, these nurturing mothers are simultaneously shown as sickened "women of ill repute," confronted with the two fundamental perils of nineteenth-century sex work: involuntary motherhood and venereal disease. In Picasso's somber paintings, sex work, motherhood and syphilis become inextricably intertwined. The latter affliction was especially subject to strong condemnation and perceived by nineteenth-century French society as a reprehensible outcome of the momentary, immoral lapses of sexual release and decadence. Far from the Virgin Mary's chaste, immaculate conception of Jesus, the bodies of French sex workers at the turn of the century were repeatedly penetrated, torn and infected. However, rather than highlighting the grotesque signs of syphilis that were frequently foregrounded in fin-de-siècle literature, such as alopecia, missing teeth, putrefactive secretions, sores and foul smells, Picasso humanized these women as more than society's detrital excess.[8] Gone are the corrupt bodies that are visibly marked as agents of contamination and social danger in works such as Edvard Munch's *The Inheritance* (1897-1899, fig. 3), a juxtaposition that will be explored further in this thesis. Instead, Picasso depicted quiet, blue Marian figures that exude warmth and benevolence towards their young offspring, no longer physically branded as harbingers of degradation and disease.

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[7] Eugène Pottet, *Histoire de Saint-Lazare (1122-1912)* (Paris: Société française d'imprimerie et de librairie, 1912), 84.

[8] Encarnación Juárez-Almendros, *Disabled Bodies in Early Modern Spanish Literature: Prostitutes, Aging Women and Saints* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2019), 72.

My thesis will examine three of Picasso's early Mother and Child paintings: *Motherhood (La Maternité)* (1901, fig. 2), *Mother and Child* (ca. 1901, fig. 4), and *Desemparats (Mère et enfant au fichu)* (1903, fig. 5). Much focus has already been placed on the cataclysmic events, mental illness and difficult financial circumstances that inform Picasso's collection of early monochromatic works painted in Barcelona and Paris. Similarly, attention has often been directed to the artist's personal relationships with named women, mistresses and wives. In order to better shed light on the realities of the nameless women depicted in these three chosen works, I will depart from the strictly biographical framework of many Blue Period Picasso scholars and instead situate these paintings within the context of fin-de-siècle Paris, when paranoid syphilophobia and debates regarding the increased regulation of sex work were rampant. In her study of nineteenth-century French paintings of sex workers, Hollis Clayson claims that the subjectivities and voices of the women depicted in most paintings by male artists are notably absent and unable to be reclaimed.[9] I would argue that the women who Picasso, himself a young, Catholic, Spanish man, portrays are also imagined adumbrations of these sex workers. They are ephemeral figments that have been filtered through the visual vocabulary that he inherited through his classical training in painting and religion, as well as through his own experience as a male artist who socialized in avant-garde circles in Paris. While real prostitute-mothers were undeniable points of reference for the artist, the painted scenes cannot be unequivocally conflated with the lived realities of individual nineteenth-century sex workers. For this reason, it is especially conducive to the present study to turn to the surrounding social context and to examine the state of Parisian sex work from which the works were borne. Michael Leja points to the conspicuous erasure of contextual specifics and precise meanings in

[9] Hollis Clayson, *Painted Love: Prostitution in French Art of the Impressionist Era* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2003), xix.

many of Picasso's ambiguous early works.[10] Since the artist pointedly expunged minutiae and did not include incontrovertible contextual signifiers in these paintings, it is ultimately fruitful to flesh out readings of these Blue Period compositions by considering not only Picasso's own biography, but the broader social atmosphere through which he was living as well.

The end of the nineteenth century in France was a tumultuous period that witnessed important ideological revisions, including changing understandings of conventional bourgeois conjugality. It was a time that was notably stirred by the birth of the New Woman, the rebellious and independent female stock figure who stood in for shifting gender roles. For some "new" women, this was expressed through the rejection of the traditional domestic path of wife and mother, and for others it was fighting for the right to divorce and the right to education.[11] The fin-de-siècle society also experienced the dawn of "voluntary sterility" in the form of birth control – most commonly in the form of *coitus interruptus* or female contraceptive devices, such as safety sponges or spermicidal agents – thus leading to a decisive ideological break between sexual practice and reproduction by releasing the former from the stringent necessity of the latter.[12]

While sex work had long been socially and culturally justified as a means for men to fulfill their "natural" sexual needs, it played a fundamental role in this fin-de-siècle shift by challenging traditional notions of domesticity and biological reproduction in a nation that found itself in desperate need of bolstered population censuses. Sex workers were viewed as providing young men with an acceptable, alternative avenue for sexual pleasure that was liberated from the

[10] Leja, "'Le vieux marcheur' and 'Les deux risques'," 76.
[11] For a comprehensive source on the appearance of this figure in nineteenth-century France, see Mary Louise Roberts, *Disruptive Acts: The New Woman in Fin-de-Siècle France* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002).
[12] R. H Guerrand, "Contraceptive Devices in France in the 19th Century," *PubMed 7*, no. 5 (1979): 381-385.

confines of connubiality. However, an increase in sex work concurrently meant an increase in dreaded venereal diseases, such as syphilis. The nineteenth century is often termed "the golden age of the venereal peril," since it witnessed high rates of syphilis, as well as higher rates of infant polymortality that were causally linked to mothers' syphilitic infections.[13] Notions of *hérédité* were diffused following 1830, as scientists and physicians increasingly recognized a cross-generational force and link between parents and offspring. This accrued knowledge culminated in Mendel's particulate understanding of heredity in 1865, which purported that certain recessive particles and phenotypic traits could reappear in later generations.[14]

Widespread beliefs in *hérédosyphilis* were thereupon propagated, including the medical theories expounded by Dr. Louis Jullien, a surgeon at Saint-Lazare, who claimed that venereal diseases were hereditary and passed on to children without external contamination.[15] While largely lacking in scientific rigor, such suppositional theorizations, paired with the burgeoning anxieties that arose from ideological clashes between traditional attitudes to sex and new insights, were accompanied by erroneous medical beliefs that foretold imminent national degeneration and depopulation. The birth rate of France markedly declined following 1861, and alarm ensued in 1895 when births were even exceeded by deaths by 18,000 figures.[16] The country's defeat in the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1) was thus rapidly aggravated by notions of depopulation and biological degeneration, and soon the demise of France appeared inexorable. *Finis Galliae!* These deafening convictions instilled an unshakable fear in the populace, leading the masses to admonish unfit mothers and relegate the figure of the sex worker and her

[13] Alain Corbin, *Women for Hire: Prostitution and Sexuality in France after 1850* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 262-263.
[14] Matthew Cobb, "Heredity Before Genetics: A History," *Nature Reviews 7* (2006): 957.
[15] See Louis Jullien, *Hérédo-Syphilis: Descendance des Hérédo-Syphilitiques* (Paris: Baillière, 1901).
[16] Karen Offen, "Depopulation, Nationalism, and Feminism in Fin-de-Siècle France," *The American Historical Review 89*, no. 3 (1984): 658.

contaminated body to the shunned outskirts of society. While these sex workers were often perceived as malicious vectors of disease, their children were subsequently transformed into physical embodiments of the looming degradation of French society. Believed by some, such as Dr. Jullien and other proponents of *hérédosyphilis*, to have inevitably inherited the flawed fate of their mothers, these children did not supply the nation with a path to salvation or atonement of sins. Instead, they were received with apprehension and uncertainty: they acted paradoxically as remedies to the suffering population censuses through the statistics of their birth, and yet were surrounded by a halo of foreboding moral and biological dissolution through their inherited infection. Against this backdrop of growing unease, the prostitute-mother-child amalgams that Picasso represented encapsulate their society's swelling anxieties, appearing simultaneously as diseased sex workers and the ideals of the virtuous, devoted housewife and mother.

Over the course of my thesis, I will argue that by utilizing religious iconography and colour, specifically images of the Madonna and blue, Picasso drew conceptual parallels between these sickened sex workers and the Virgin Mary. In this manner, he raised and transformed the diseased and reviled *égout seminal* into humble, secular Madonnas. Throughout the history of Christianity, the image of the Virgin Mary, regularly depicted as young, radiant and adorned in blue robes, rapidly came to stand in for unconditional love and the compassionate protection of humanity.[17] A prototype of female perfection, she continues to be exalted by some religious groups as paramount intercessor, saviour and Queen of Heaven. With the Immaculate Conception proclaimed an official dogma by the Vatican in 1854, the Virgin Mary's perpetual virginity was heralded as she was once again declared to be the Great Mother of all.[18] Freed

[17] Kyra Belán, *The Virgin in Art* (New York: Parkstone International, 2018), 7.
[18] Ibid., 181.

from the original sin and preserved from the stains of male penetration, the Virgin could thus be separated from the carnal and reprehensible entrapment of lust. In this manner, both religious and secular conceptions of femininity were confined within in the bounds of motherhood, contained within what contemporary feminist philosopher Julia Kristeva calls the *Maternal*. For Kristeva, the capitalized and italicized *Maternal* denotes "the ambivalent principle that derives on the one hand from the species and on the other hand from a catastrophe of identity which plunges the proper name into that 'unnameable' that somehow involves our imaginary representations of femininity, non-language, or the body."[19] Conceptions of femininity continue today to be confronted with maternity and haunted by spectres of Christianity, and the Virgin Mary looms large as the prodigious exemplar of Motherhood in the West. The cult of the mother humanized Christianity, fashioning the Madonna as the epitome of maternal humility who was distinguished from the human race and extracted from its descent into vice and death.

My discussion of what I'd like to term Picasso's "secular Madonnas" will examine both early Marian images, such as Renaissance *Mater Amabilis* portraits, as well as secular mother and child compositions produced in fin-de-siècle France that celebrate what was believed to be the gentle essence of motherhood. By situating Picasso's mother and child paintings within the history of art and also within the historical context of fin-de-siècle Paris, I will argue that there is a tension between the hypersexualization and asexualization of the prostitute-mothers in these works. I will demonstrate that while there is an inherent ambivalence encapsulated in Picasso's images of this figure, she ultimately emerges as ultimate icon of sacrifice. By both surrendering their bodies to clients for their rapacious pleasure and devoting their existence to young offspring, the prostitute-mothers in fin-de-siècle France bridged sexuality and maternity.

[19] Julia Kristeva, "Stabat Mater," *Poetics Today 6*, no.1/2 (1985): 134.

Capable of both satisfying male desire as well as procreating and bearing new life, sex workers' very corporeality embodied both the fetishized, abject and diseased menace of society on the one hand, and the virtuosity and generative hope exemplified by the Virgin Mary on the other.

Picasso's renderings of the strikingly tragic figure of the prostitute-mother will be the focus of my thesis. I will examine the ways in which tensions between maternity and sexuality are given visual form during Picasso's Blue Period by drawing on historiographical and medical reports from fin-de-siècle France, alongside concurrent French literary and painterly representations of this equivocal figure. My discussion will be divided into two chapters. I will begin with a study of Madonna iconography and themes of maternal virtuosity in fin-de-siècle French art and society, before concluding with an in-depth examination of sex work and pervasive fears of degeneration and syphilis. Reconciling the Freudian split between Madonna and Whore, I will argue that Picasso's quiet images of motherly love simultaneously embody fin-de-siècle conceptions of the diseased and feared sex worker, as well as ideals of the mother as revered nurturer and maternal body. While the Virgin Mary and baby Jesus have come to be understood in Christian thought as symbols of eternal hope and the salvation of humanity, I contend that Picasso's syphilitic, imprisoned prostitute-mothers and their infected children reflect nineteenth-century French society's fears of prognosticated demise, particularly following debates of depopulation and degeneration. However, by employing religious iconography and colour, Picasso complicated these scenes of sickened prisoners. He erased overt signs of immorality by transforming the stereotypical image of sex workers as profane and hysterical into selfless and devoted Madonnas. Depicted in loving rapture, Picasso's portrayals of prostitute-mothers paradoxically occupy both positions of "prostitute" and "mother," thus blurring the line between social threat and societal ideal, between *eros* and *storge*, between Whore and Madonna.

CHAPTER 1: MATER AMABILIS – The Devoted, Secular Madonna

While notably scarce in contextual specifics, many of Picasso's Blue Period compositions of prostitute-mothers foreground the affecting bond between mother and child. By visually uniting their bodies and representing the infant as a corporal extension of its maternal anchor depicted in a tight embrace, Picasso stresses the child's early dependence on the mother-object. He also constructs the breadth of the mother's feminine benevolence. In *Mother and Child*, for example, the small infant remains swaddled in his mother's embrace – he is positioned at the threshold between the safety of her womb and the external world. Although his head peeks out above the crook of her elbow, the rest of his limbs and small frame are entirely engulfed in her cloak, which itself forms undulating waves and ripples recalling an amorphous space of gestation. The background of this work is inscrutable and two-toned, distinguishing only between the blue wall and a brown floor, thereby allowing the intimacy between the two figures to dominate the composition. The result is a painterly rendition of the consummate prototype for the love relation, or what Julia Kristeva terms *maternal passion*.[20] According to Kristeva, motherhood transcends instinct and function. It is a passion in which initial emotions of attachment or aggression are sublimated into idealized and dedicated love, thus allowing for an instinctual impulse to be diverted into a socially higher and accepted endeavour.[21]

In the three mother-and-child works that I examine throughout my thesis, Picasso's prostitute-mothers are depicted as mothers first and foremost, with the "prostitute" aspect of their identity remaining obscured until one considers these images in relation to the lived experiences of sex workers at the time. The close bond between the two figures is indisputable, and what emerges in the paintings is a distilled essence of gentle maternity. This chapter will examine the

[20] Julia Kristeva, "Être mère aujourd'hui," *Revue Française de Psychosomatique 40*, no. 2 (2011): 1.
[21] Ibid., 8.

ephemeral quality of motherhood by juxtaposing Madonna paintings from the Renaissance onwards for their depictions of sacred maternity in the form of the Virgin Mary's maternal ideal, with the more secularized conceptions of the mother figure in fin-de-siècle France as bearing the weighty responsibility for the vitality and strength of the nation. Oscillating between religious feeling and patriotic duty, Picasso's prostitute-mothers reflect both deeply ingrained art historical iconography, as well as broader contemporary discussions of a woman's place in society.

1.1 The Iconography of the Madonna throughout History

Throughout the history of Christianity, the Virgin Mary has been venerated as the universal Mother who transcends class, culture and race to provide divine protection and forgiveness for all. For adherents to the Christian faith, she functions as the paramount intercessor between the earthly and spiritual realms of divine Creation.[22] Redeeming the female gender since the fall of Eve, she is often viewed as syncretic saviour and Queen of Heaven, and thus metamorphoses into a supernatural and idealized icon of Motherhood that is far removed from the messy and fleshy realities of a living and bodily maternity. Throughout the theology of the Virgin's intercession, in which she is often prayed to for redress and to bestow graces, she is frequently portrayed as a human mother brimming with only a mother's endless love for her own child – as well as for mankind as a whole.[23] Through Christ, all men are namely transformed into her children, each fortunate enough to bask in her qualities of gentle mercy and loving absolution. As a figure who looms larger than life in the teachings of Christianity, the Virgin Mary appears multifaceted, with her composite identity encompassing that of bride, virgin,

[22] Belán, *The Virgin in Art*, 22.
[23] Jane Silverman van Buren, *The Modernist Madonna: Semiotics of the Maternal Metaphor* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 132.

mother and intercessor.[24] Having witnessed countless artistic tributes over the centuries, she became the personification of a feminine ideal and was declared a Queen by Pope Pius XII in 1954.

In the various artistic representations that range from early Byzantine icons to Renaissance *sacre conversazione*, she is most frequently portrayed in flowing blue robes, with her head modestly shrouded by a blue or white veil. This veil often symbolizes her humility and reverential submission to Christ, as well as her obedience to the Catholic Church.[25] Following the twelfth century, the colour blue became one of the Virgin Mary's principal attributes.[26] Since it was interpreted as a colour of space, light and eternity, comprising both the limits of sea and sky, it was deemed only fitting that the mantle of the Queen of Heaven be rendered in this evocative pigment.[27] Ultramarine blue, later termed "Marian blue" for its subsequent prevalence in Mariolatry, was an especially expensive pigment in medieval art that was obtained from the crushed lapis lazuli imported from Afghanistan. Once considered as valuable as gold, this precious stone was later reserved almost exclusively for elevated subject matter, particularly as a blazing tribute to the Mother of God.[28]

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[24] Marina Warner, *Alone of all her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary* (New York: Knopf, 1976), xx.
[25] "But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a woman is her husband, and the head of Christ Is God. Any man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head, but any woman who prays or prophesies with her head unveiled dishonors her head – it is the same as if her head were shaven." See 1 Corinthians 11:3.
[26] Prior to the appearance of the luminous twelfth century blue pigments, the colour was often perceived as unsettling due to its rarity. A dark hue that more closely resembled gray or violet, it played a relatively modest role early on in the cultures of antiquity, in which it was perceived as a sign of barbarity and often associated with death or the underworld. The shifting role of blue can be traced back to the brighter hue that was subsequently applied in miniatures, as well as in the stained-glass windows of churches. These instances helped solidify the colour's associations with heaven, the Virgin and royalty. While her robes were previously rendered in black, gray, brown, or green shades to convey her suffering, the Virgin Mary was soon clad almost exclusively in blue, which became the primary signifier of her mourning. Following the twelfth century, this colour thus rapidly acquired its connotations of divine illumination and obtained an elusive value that was increasingly prized. See Michel Pastoureau, *Blue: The History of a Color* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).
[27] Warner, *Alone of all her Sex*, 266.
[28] Ibid.

In his tender depictions of mother and child, Picasso draws upon and subverts these longstanding chromatic significations of transcendental spirituality and associations with affluence. Rather than selectively highlighting the Virgin's robes with accents of costly precious pigments, the artist instead lavishly applied an industrialized and far less expensive blue pigment: Prussian blue. Upon its accidental 18th-century discovery – one that catapulted the industrial history of pigments – this deep colour was immediately characterized by its affordability and high tint power. As the first synthetic blue pigment able to most closely resemble that of crushed lapis lazuli, Prussian blue cost only a tenth of the price of ultramarine, thereby rendering it a far more attractive option to artists of the time.[29] By using this new synthetic pigment borne of chemical experimentation, Picasso dominated his monochromatic Blue Period canvases with broad swatches of blue, thus submerging his destitute figures in an azure bath and symbolically destabilizing earlier connotations of lapis lazuli and ultramarine. Evolving from a symbol of luxuriance and religiosity to a sweeping tonality applied in the depiction of lowly figures such as sex workers, Picasso's use of this blue marks a descent into secular despair that is only slightly lifted with the rosy breath of life infused in his subsequent Rose Period. This subversion of traditional chromatic connotations is rendered especially visible in his *Mother and Child*. In this composition, Picasso experiments with differing shades of blue, ranging from the rough surface of muted cobalt in the background, to the light teal undertones of the mother's skin. The amalgamation of these various hues shifts attention away from the classic ultramarine mantle of the Madonna, rendering the female protagonist more ambiguous and accessibly human. The viewer is left wondering whether this mother-child dyad is but a mere

[29] Helen Skelton, "A Colour Chemist's History of Western Art," *Review of Progress in Coloration and Related Topics 29*, no. 1 (1999): 52.

secular representation of maternal affection, or whether the draping blue cloak and modestly veiled head denotes a surreptitious sacred motif retaining a subtle hieratic quality.

In her 1897 study of the Madonna in art, Estelle M. Hurll asserted that "so long as we have mothers, art will continue to produce Madonnas."[30] Indeed, the history of art has been indelibly marked by the enduring imprint of Madonna iconography. Traces of this can be discerned in Picasso's early portrayals of mother and child, as well as in concurrent modern treatments of maternal themes by other French artists, which will be further examined in later sections. Originally set up by orthodox churches as a theological symbol for the formalization of their creed and as evidence of their belief that the Virgin was the mother of God, the grouping of the Virgin and Child only later became a recurrent, intelligible representation in art.[31] Hurll largely differentiates between three of the historically depicted relationships of the Madonna and infant Jesus: Mater Amabilis (Madonna of Love), Madre Pia (Madonna in Adoration), and Madonna as Witness.[32] While the first type focuses on the Madonna's pure maternal absorption and the affectionate love that she bestows upon her child, the second sees her placed in a subjugated stance of obedient humility, as she gazes at her infant in rapture and wonderment. The final type fixates almost exclusively on the mother's important individuality, allowing her identity as Christ-bearer to dominate.

Initial portraits of the Madonna predominantly offer simplified backgrounds that frame the Virgin and Child's half-length figures with ascetic restraint and reverence. Following the Byzantine empire, these images were soon eclipsed by the preferred, and more elaborate, enthroned Madonnas and Madonnas in the sky. Although the portrait Madonna fell out of favour

[30] Estelle M. Hurll, *The Madonna in Art* (Boston: L.C Page, 1909), xiv.
[31] Anna Jameson, *Legends of the Madonna* (Boston: Mifflin, 1895), 10.
[32] Hurll, *The Madonna in Art*, xvii-xviii.

following the Italian Renaissance, it notably regained popularity in the Spanish school of style a century later.[33] This resurgence can particularly be noted in the works of Alonso Cano and Bartolomé Esteban Murillo. In the former's *Virgin of Bethlehem* (1635-1637, fig.6) and the latter's *Madonna with a Napkin* (c. 1665-1666, fig.7), one can discern compositional similarities with Picasso's modern Spanish *Desemparats*, in which he employs a comparable portrait style to more closely apprehend the intensity and affinity that radiates between the two figures. This mother and child pastel retains all the simplicity of these Spanish portrait Madonnas; in it, Picasso expunges unnecessary details that would otherwise detract from the scene and renders the pair with a sense of hierarchical ambiguity.

This work, alongside the other two Picasso mother-child paintings under discussion, are redolent of the poignant category of Mater Amabilis. Examples of such canvases depicting the unconditional maternal infatuation of the Virgin Mary include Raphael's *Tempi Madonna* (1508, fig.8) and Sassoferrato's *Madonna with Child* (mid-17th century, fig.9). Both instances evince kinesics and mannerisms which can be attributed to the intimate rapport between mother and child. Just as Raphael's Madonna fondly clasps her child to her chest and nuzzles his rounded cheek against her face, rapturously delighting in her maternal cares, so too does Picasso's *Motherhood* capture a scene of undeniable motherly softness, complete with a markedly similar gesture of affection. In like manner, Picasso's *Mother and Child* recalls the embrace of Sassoferrato's luminous Madonna, as both women rest their right cheeks upon their infants' head in a mode of quiet pensiveness. In each of the three Picasso works in question, the mothers' hands occupy an especially protrusive position. The incorporation of two visible hands in *Motherhood* both visually frames the infant's physique as well as functions as a corporal buttress

[33] Ibid., 32.

to steady him between her arms. The ghostly hand in *Desemparats* similarly operates as a protective shield and reinforces the pervading sense of wary maternal defensiveness. Conversely, in *Mother and Child*, the mother's fingers are elongated, limp and bony, appearing distorted and disproportionately long as they extend downward. Rather than acting as a supportive lever, this hand is slackened, all the while drawing the viewers gaze in its central position within the composition. Touch is thereby particularly underscored in each of these works through the central placement of caressing or resting fingers. This physical contact functions as a visual, nonverbal intimation of the nourishing and supportive maternal love into which the infant can retreat.

Within the expansive body of early Madonna paintings, the Virgin Mary has consistently been portrayed as chaste and humble, enticing viewers to contemplate her exemplary qualities of mercy and softness. Constructed by the patriarchy of the early Church as the pinnacle of womanhood, she is notably perceived as being endowed with an untainted body and immortal soul. In Christian thought, the purity of her feminine essence is additionally underscored by her impregnation by the Word, which entirely suppresses her sexuality, rendering her inherently asexual and removing her from the initial act of copulation.[34] Virginity soon came to be seen as an essential aspect of her identity, placed in stark contrast with her maternal facet – in Christian symbolism, sex, sin and death were namely intricately intertwined, with spiritual or moral depravity seen as accompanying bodily dissolution.[35] By declaring the Immaculate Conception an Ineffabilis Deus in 1854, Pope Pius IX preserved the Virgin from original sin, further underscoring her status as a Great Mother that was far beyond the reaches of the more lustful

[34] Van Buren, *The Modernist Madonna*, 132.
[35] Warner, 51.

procreative process.[36] In the minds of the likes of Augustine, Ambrose and Jerome, the mother of God had to necessarily be pristine and inviolable by the stains of passion.[37] This proclamation of virginity allowed the Church to firmly conquer the fatal flaw of humanity, i.e. that of sexuality, in a theoretical manner, thereby allowing the Virgin Mary to circumvent the postlapsarian encumbrance of Adam and Eve and remain pure in the eyes of all men and women.

Throughout the gradual consolidation of the Great Mother's virginity, she came to be increasingly posited as the antithesis of Eve. It is in the biblical figure of Eve that "woman" was reduced to the function of her womb, which was then staunchly equated with the evils of sex by the patriarchy of Christianity. In this manner, the perceived grave danger of sexuality was gendered female, encapsulated in the image of Eve as a wicked temptress who was responsible for the ultimate demise of mankind through her taste of the forbidden fruit, a choice which cursed her with the pain of childbirth and condemned her to subordination to her husband.[38] While Eve embodied transgression, sex and mortality, Mary epitomized qualities of yieldingness, faith and withdrawal. Placed in stark contrast to the maligned seductress, the Virgin Mary inhabited the paragon of femininity, outwardly performing a form of inverse, second Eve who could provide salvation and release humanity from the sins of the first.[39] It is through her unspotted and unbroken virginity, as well as through her qualities of submissiveness, gentleness and tolerance, that Mary was ultimately heralded as a goddess. Eve and Mary thus formed the

[36] The Immaculate Conception was one of the only two apostolic constitutions that were pronounced by drawing upon papal infallibility. This process involved the Pope defining a doctrine concerning faith, which was intended to subsequently be upheld by the whole Church. Belán, 181.
[37] In the words of Jerome: "Death came through Eve, but life has come through Mary. And thus the gift of virginity has been bestowed most richly upon women, seeing that it has had its beginning from a woman." See Warner, 54-55.
[38] Ibid., 58.
[39] Ibid., 60.

two axes within Christian views of womanhood, each greatly influencing subsequent perceptions and treatments of the female gender.

Liberated from concupiscence and tendency to commit fleshly sins, the figure of the Virgin Mary is instead characterized by gentleness and the purest form of love, continuing to drastically oppose the curious and carnal self-indulgence signified by Eve. I argue that in his early mother-and-child works of incarcerated sex workers, Picasso unites both sides of the Christian correlation between sin, flesh and women. He juxtaposes the opposing female attributes of Mary and Eve – of disobedience and pruriency on the one hand, as well as spiritual ascendancy and devoted motherhood on the other. By referencing a colour and iconography that were historically associated with the Queen of Heaven, Picasso complicates a time-honoured motif in his portrayals of sickened sex workers. He utilizes perdurable Christian iconography, such as ultramarine robes, veiled heads and cradled infants, to raise his female figures to the status of secular Madonnas. While there is an implied father in the Renaissance Madonna portraits of Bellini and Raphael through their depictions of the Son of God, Picasso's children are shown fatherless, perhaps pointing to the clandestine practices of sex work. In contrast to images of the Virgin Mary, who was shown as exempt from all physical processes that encompassed penetration and labour, the women portrayed by Picasso are cemented, in fact imprisoned by their very corporeality. Indeed, it is through the female anatomy of fin-de-siècle prostitute-mothers that their children were created, carried and born – it is conversely also through their bodily work that they contracted the diseases that led to their institutionalization. The figures that Picasso depicts thus paradoxically encompass both the contempt directed to women as bearing responsibility for the Fall, as well as the idealization of their submissive maternal instincts. By interlocking conceptions of "good" and "bad" women, and by making use

of religious iconography to blur sacred and secular boundaries, Picasso visually highlights his prostitute-mothers' identities as mothers, first and foremost.

As will be demonstrated in the following section, the contested and scrutinized identity of "the consummate mother" witnessed important shifts in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, influenced both by religious and secular beliefs. In the fin-de-siècle France in which Picasso painted his mother-child dyads, this evolution had long resulted in the relegation of the ideal Catholic mother to the home. The belief that there was an inherently feminine essence and the focus on the simple joys of motherhood were solidified by the ever-circulating image of the Madonna as a sacrificial mother of sorrows who was entirely devoted to her child.[40] It was also, as we will see, sustained by medical thought, political decisions and bourgeois norms. As historian and mythographer Marina Warner states in her comprehensive study of the Virgin Mary: "By defining the limits of womanliness as shrinking, retiring acquiescence, and by reinforcing that behaviour in the sex with praise, the myth of female inferiority and dependence could be and was perpetuated."[41]

1.2 *L'éternel féminin et la femme nubile:* The Status of Motherhood in Fin-de-Siècle France

Throughout the nineteenth century, the France in which Picasso found himself sporadically living and moving was the national backdrop of an evolving narrative of motherhood as the primary source of moral education and integral center of the family unit. [42] This shift was especially exacerbated by depopulation anxieties and the birth of pronatalist

[40] Eileen Janes Yeo, "The Creation of 'Motherhood' and Women's Responses in Britain and France, 1750-1914," *Women's History Review 8*, no. 2 (1999): 206.
[41] Warner, 191.
[42] Picasso spent the final three months of 1900 in Paris. He then travelled through Spain, only to once again end up in Paris, where he remained for nine months in 1901. See Leja, 67.

policies. From the 1700s onwards, population size had come to be seen as a signifier of a nation's prosperity. Under the rule of Louis XIV, and later Louis XV, France's finance ministers proposed edicts to bolster human and animal population increases, thereby rewarding large Catholic families by exempting fathers of more than ten children from all taxes for life, and setting up schools for midwives.[43] Later, during the French Revolution, several initiatives were proposed to penalize and deter men from celibate life.[44] Following the 1798 publication of Reverend Thomas Robert Malthus' *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, however, a Malthusian paradigm began to paradoxically dominate the French political economy between 1840 and 1860, thereby allowing political economists to view the gloom of industrialization as a failure to control excessive population expansion, and to interpret fertility decline as an inherently positive development.[45]

Such beliefs were nonetheless overturned at the end of the nineteenth century, a period that was characterized by French-Prussian enmity, struggles for hegemony and mutual revanchism. Largely due to this trend of mutually hostile modern nationalism, population size was continuously linked to the nation's security, particularly in comparative studies that pitted France against other countries, such as Prussia or the United States. This comparison of military prowess fuelled eugenic anxieties regarding the competitiveness of the national race and added a

[43] Yeo, "The Creation of 'Motherhood' and Women's Responses in Britain and France, 1750-1914," 203.
[44] Nikolas Dörr, "'As far as Numbers are concerned, we are beaten' *Finis Galliae* and the Nexus between Fears of Depopulation, Welfare Reform, and the Military in France during the Third Republic, 1870-1940," *Historical Social Research 45*, no.2 (2020): 70.
[45] Malthusianism is a theory deriving from the political and economic thought of Reverend Thomas Robert Malthus, who postulated that without moral restraint and positive or indirect checks, populations would quickly outstrip their resources and means of subsistence. See Joshua H. Cole, "There Are Only Good Mothers": The Ideological Work of Women's Fertility in France before World War I," *French Historical Studies 19*, no. 3 (1996): 649. For a comprehensive overview of Malthusian thought throughout nineteenth-century France, see Yves Charbit, *Economic, Social and Demographic Thought in the XIXth Century: The Population Debate from Malthus to Marx* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2009).

military dimension to the social and moral fears of French extinction.[46] Following France's defeat to Prussia in the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1), anxieties regarding the nation's eventual collapse escalated, as the demographic factor was increasingly scrutinized alongside the continuously disheartening population census results. By 1895, the absolute number of births had namely radically declined, and the same year was marked by a distressing excess of 852,000 deaths, compared to 834,000 births.[47] Attention was thus shifted to the figure of the mother, who was singlehandedly capable of either turning the country into a depopulated wasteland through her selfish and excessively individualistic ego, or into a fertile land of flourishing citizens through her selfless maternal devotion. Physicians began examining parenting practices more closely, denouncing the French mother as irresponsible and capricious for either inhibiting pregnancy in the first place through contraceptive methods, or neglecting her infants once they were born.[48] Motherhood was soon perceived as a sacred national duty and social debt that women had to fulfill – just as men were expected to pay taxes and complete obligatory military service, so too were women expected to fulfill an obligatory maternal duty.[49]

During this time, measures were proposed to provide incentive in the form of financial aid to families with numerous children. Additionally, efforts to fund hygiene and health programs, as well as assistance to mothers, greatly increased in the hopes of reducing infant mortality.[50] In 1896, a prominent pronatalist association was founded by the demographer Jacques Bertillon, along with other physicians and politicians, that was later called "Alliance nationale pour l'accroissement de la population française," of whom Émile Zola was a

[46] Dörr, "'As far as Numbers are concerned, we are beaten'," 70.
[47] Offen, "Depopulation, Nationalism, and Feminism in Fin-de-Siècle France," 658.
[48] Ibid., 652.
[49] Rachel G. Fuchs, *Poor and Pregnant in Paris: Strategies for Survival in the Nineteenth Century* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 62.
[50] For more information regarding measures implemented to stimulate population growth, see Paul Leroy-Beaulieu, *La Question de la population* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1913).

member.[51] This lobbying organization advocated for a three-child family and placed focus on the military repercussions of a continued fertility decline. Pronatalist discourse and a populationist ideology ultimately became deeply entrenched in French social policy and psyche, and the figure of the mother became coterminous with a path to hopeful French redemption. Just as the Virgin Mary's dormition and assumption linked female procreation to salvation, so too did secular conceptions of maternal reproduction underscore its indispensable role in national restoration.

Prior to the mid-eighteenth century, mothers were principally seen by philosophers and in dominant civic attitudes as productive and deferential auxiliaries to the man of the house, as well as reproductive vehicles who were biologically destined to conceive and give birth.[52] It was common for lower-middle and working-class French parents from medieval times until the 1700s to then send off their newborns to be nursed and cared for by external, rural wet-nurses, who would often neglect the infants by swaddling them and hanging them on hooks as they went about their work.[53] Worse still were the cases disclosing parents' brutal indifference with regard to their child's welfare, as well as manifold forms of clandestine infanticide. By the nineteenth century, upper-class urban families increasingly preferred to recruit live-in nurses, while rural cottage wet-nursing remained a predominant practice for lower classes.[54] In her controversial study challenging the belief of motherly love as a biologically determined instinct, Élisabeth Badinter notes that in the year 1780, fewer than 2,000 out of the 21,000 babies born in Paris were

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[51] "National Alliance for the Growth of the French Population." This Alliance met regularly and sought to provide statistical reminders of declining fertility. They also lobbied for the assistance of pregnant women and for prizes and privileges to be awarded to larger families. However, very few of these proposals were actually passed into law. See Dörr, 76.
[52] Yeo, 201.
[53] Jennifer J. Popiel, *Rousseau's Daughters: Domesticity, Education, and Autonomy in Modern France* (Durham: University of New Hampshire Press, 2008), 5.
[54] George D. Sussman, *Selling Mothers' Milk: The Wet-Nursing Business in France, 1715-1914* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 2.

kept at home in the care of their own mothers or live-in wetnurses.[55] The remaining infants were deported to foster homes, where they could suffer from malnourishment and diseases, with over half perishing before the age of two.[56] This example of an ostensibly apathetic motherhood was however drastically altered by the nineteenth century, when the formerly upheld conception of mothers as merely responsible for a successful pregnancy and birth subsequently experienced revisions, which were largely informed by the political, socio-moral and scientific climate of the time. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, the hitherto private and sacred sphere of domestic maternity was progressively brought into public awareness, transformed into a matter of nation-state building and middle-class formation. The figure of the archetypical mother soon found itself bound up with demographical anxieties and medical debates. Motherhood was viewed through the scrutinizing social prism as an indispensable repository for subsequent generations, and the prototypical mother was reduced to her domestic and reproductive capacity to bear the heavy weight of the nation's prosperity and survival in her fertile womb. It rapidly became the bourgeois mother's obligation to care for the welfare of the nation's future, as she was entrusted with the bifold charge of caring for and educating her children.[57] It was she who bore the paramount charge of equipping her children with proper tools and molding them into exemplary citizens that would help further the nation. In the words of Jules Simon, a senator for life in the French Third Republic from 1875 to 1896:

> A qui appartient l'enfant? à la patrie, ou à la famille? Quelques républicains, peu soucieux de la liberté, viennent de reprendre l'ancienne doctrine de Platon, qu'ils n'ont jamais lu: l'enfant est à a patrie. 'Non, il est à moi,' dit la mère. Elle a raison. C'est elle

[55] Élisabeth Badinter, *Mother Love: Myth and Reality – Motherhood in Modern History* (New York: Macmillan, 1981), x.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Popiel, *Rousseau's Daughters*, 5.

qui le donnera à la patrie.[58]

The mother's role in the secular politics of the early Third Republic was thus expanded from the short-term focus on pregnancy to include the far-reaching and long-term duty of mothering – a duty which involved a lifetime of selfless devotion, and which would only reach its logical conclusion once a rational, fully developed adult was introduced to society. By the end of the nineteenth century, both maternity and domesticity were the staunch ideals and physiological destiny of women. Motherhood was seen as consubstantial with femininity, with Simon affirming: "Qu'est-ce qu'une femme? C'est une mère; une mère en réalité, ou une mère en herbe."[59]

The ideological shift in the prominence of motherhood in French society was largely influenced by both an altering public conception of childhood and children, as well as by the philosophical and literary endeavours of prominent writers, such as the Genevan philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) and the French writer Émile Zola (1840-1902). While the child was prior to the mid-eighteenth century often seen within religious thought as a beastlike creature steeped in the original sin, he gradually morphed into the beloved symbolic recipient of institutionalized care.[60] Throughout much of the seventeenth century, Augustinian thought namely continued to prevail in educational theory, reminding parents of the power of evil, lust and sin that was seen as inherent to the capricious stage of childhood, but that could be redeemed through proper instruction. Maternal affection was thereby criticized for its encouragement of

[58] "To whom does the child belong? To the nation, or to the family? Certain republicans, little concerned with liberty, have begun to reapply the ancient doctrine of Plato, which they have never read. They claim that the child belongs to the nation. 'No, he is mine,' says the mother. And she is right. It is she who will hand him over to the nation." (*my translation*) in Jules Simon, *La femme du vingtième siècle* (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1892), 193.
[59] "What is 'woman'? She is a mother; a mother in reality, or a mother in the making." (*my translation*) in ibid., 189.
[60] Philosophers and theologians such as Pierre de Bérulle and François de Sales spoke of childhood as "a beastlike state deprived of reason and judgment," "the most vile and abject state of human nature, second only to death." See Badinter, *Mother Love: Myth and Reality: Motherhood in Modern,* xii.

natural vice, with coldness and severity extolled as preferrable parenting techniques.[61] However, framed by the writings of John Locke and Rousseau, a degree of sensitivity to children appeared in the late eighteenth century, and childhood was soon celebrated as a valuable stage of life, characterized by innocence, freedom and emotion, that could be shaped by the doting mother.[62]

Rousseaunian rhetoric proved especially convincing in the evolving cultural expectations of women as affectionate caretakers. The 1762 publication of *Émile, ou De l'éducation* played a crucial role in relegating women to domestic spaces, as it presented an educational tract that removed the natural man from the increasingly corruptive influences of society. This involved firmly situating Sophie, the female counterpart to Émile, close to the hearth. Addressing all mothers, Rousseau implored: "C'est à toi que je m'addresse, tendre et prévoyante mère, qui sus t'écarter de la grande route, et garantir l'arbrisseau naissant du choc des opinions humaines! Cultive, arrose la jeune plante avant qu'elle meure: ses fruits feront un jour tes délices."[63]

In a similar vein, Zola published a staunchly pronatalist novel in 1899 appropriately titled *Fécondité*, which was seen as an ode to natality that sharply denounced voluntary sterility as a moral and social tragedy. In this didactic opus at the turn of the century, the protagonist couple have twelve offspring, thereby encapsulating a pure and sanctimonious form of joy that markedly contrasts with the misery of those who elect to inhibit their reproductive capacities. The novel ends by extolling the praises of the fertile, selfless couple who have chosen to conceive a large family and ultimately help further the nation: "Maintenant, ce n'était pas seulement la famille accrue, la patrie refaite, la France repeuplée pour les luttes futures, c'était encore l'humanité

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[61] Ibid., 32-33.
[62] Hugh Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western Society Since 1500* (London: Routledge, 2020), 45.
[63] "It is to you that I appeal, tender and provident mother, you who knew to remove yourself from the highway and shield a young tree from the force of social convention. Cultivate and water it before it dies: its fruits will one day reward your care." (*my translation*) in Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile, ou De l'éducation* (Ottawa: EBooks Lib, 2005), 15.

élargie, les déserts défrichés, la terre peuplée entièrement. […] Après la famille, la nation, puis l'humanité."[64] It was soon believed that only domestic education and the mother's capacity to inculcate virtue and train her children's souls through her virtuous example could result in true social change.[65] By perpetuating a familialist ideology, the affectionate and hygienic mother in fin-de-siècle France replaced the hardened, stern father as the exemplar of parenthood, thereby cementing the woman in her domestic sphere and further underscoring the biological incommensurability of the sexes. Family thus became synonymous with a natural locus of infallible values, with child-rearing and moral discipline resting exclusively on the mother's shoulders.

Within the belief that of motherhood was a patriotic function of the female sex, maternal "instinct" and love were heralded as indispensable "natural" attributes.[66] Politicians and priests alike argued that mothers couldn't merely half-heartedly adhere to their obligations – they had to entirely commit and sacrificially devote themselves to their children, as well as thoroughly embrace the role that they played in society. Jennifer J. Popiel concisely sums this up by stating: "More than simply obedient, the new mother obeyed the dictates of her heart, or at least those of the literature that surrounded her, finding fulfillment in her home."[67] The notion of the "eternal

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[64] "Now, it wasn't just the family that was able to grow, the homeland that was rebuilt, or France that could be repopulated and prepared for its future battles – it also meant the expansion of humanity, the fertilization of deserts, and the population of land. […] After the family comes the nation, which is then followed by humanity." (*my translation*) in Émile Zola, *Fécondité* in GrandsClassiques.com, *Émile Zola: Intégrale des Œuvres* (Primento Digital, 2016), 467-468.

[65] Jennifer J. Popiel, "The Hearth, the Cloister, and Beyond: Religion and the Nineteenth-Century Woman," *Journal of the Western Society for French History 37* (2009): 192.

[66] Marion Thomas persuasively demonstrates how France witnessed various debates regarding maternal instinct under the Third Republic, with several key scientists shaping feminine identities according to the evidence that they collected in the natural world, particularly in entomology. These naturalists' political views on womanhood and maternity largely influenced their scientific discourses – certain figures, such as Alfred Giard, controversially called into question the notion of maternal instinct, while others, such as Edmond Perrier, sought to staunchly defend the naturalness of maternal devotion and keep it in line with solidaristic ideals. See Marion Thomas, "Are Women Naturally Devoted Mothers?: Fabre, Perrier, and Girard on Maternal Instinct in France Under the Third Republic," *Journal of the History of the Behavioural Sciences 50*, no. 3 (2014): 280-301.

[67] Popiel, *Rousseau's Daughters*, 20.

feminine" reigned in French social thought, anchoring woman in the essentialist, immutable role of mother and wife.[68] As this cult of domesticity proliferated, the institution of family functioned as a cornerstone in the development of new civic ideals, and *les femmes nubiles* were seen as key players who held the future of the nation in their hands.[69] In a similar vein, conjugal heterosexual couplings were lauded for reproducing labour power and providing a plug in the perceived drain of French military power. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the same time that Picasso was making his adoring mother and child themed compositions, France was the backdrop of ever-evolving debates about motherhood. As the recipient of a persistent rhetoric of incitement and admonishment, the figure of the mother soon developed into a symbol of national regeneration and hope.

1.3 The Birth of the Modern Madonna: Female Impressionists and the Maternal Ideal

In fin-de-siècle France, debates about the maternal ideal were embodied in Impressionist images of mothers with children. Throughout the Impressionist era, women were represented in divergent ways, which ranged from the dignified metropolitan *Parisiennes* in fashionable clothing and nonchalantly twirling parasols to hardened *petit bourgeois* homely matrons that were safely enclosed in the routines of their homes. In contrast to Auguste Renoir's *plein air* depictions of modern, naturalistic and sun-mottled Venuses, or Manet's images of women as pleasing ornaments, women Impressionists often omitted the voyeuristic appetence displayed by

[68] The archetype of the *éternel féminin* involves a conception of women as immutably tied to the private, domestic sphere, responsible for acting as moral guardians of their families. Certain qualities, such as purity and modesty, were especially heralded as inherently feminine, thus further cementing notions of gender essentialism. See Thomas, "Are Women Naturally Devoted Mothers?," 282.
[69] *Les femmes nubiles* refer to women of child-bearing age, generally falling between 15-50, who were seen by Louis-Adolphe Bertillon as crucial figures in calculating fertility indexes. For more information regarding the discussions of *fécondité* vs. *fertilité*, see Cole, "There Are Only Good Mothers," 652.

many of their male counterparts. Instead, artists such as Berthe Morisot and Mary Cassatt consciously forewent nudes, as well as depictions of the less salubrious aspects of modern society like brothels and bars, in order to better preserve their social standing and respectability.[70] Rather than venturing into the streets to render the likenesses of women of questionable standing, such as *demimondes* or other ambiguous seductresses, these artists often converged inwards to illuminate sanctioned domestic motifs by providing glimpses into the intimate moments of everyday life, thereby selectively placing focus on the feminine paragon of motherhood. In her examination of mother-child paintings by female Impressionists, Sidsel Maria Søndergaard begs the important question: "Can it be that the intonation of the tactile and the physical proximity is a salient part of an intrinsically *female* universe and that this intonation testifies to a specific empathy with the subject, a reflection of a shared congenial understanding of the life being lived in the private realm?"[71] In other words, is there a level of sensuousness and intimacy that exudes from the mother and child paintings by female artists, that cannot be grasped as effectively in similar works put forth by their male counterparts?

This question looms especially large in the present discussion of Picasso's oeuvre, as he was a Spanish male artist who was influenced by the notion of the artist as *l'homme maudit*, i.e., a troubled, Bohemian "man apart" that was simultaneously severed from ordinary life while also remaining superior to it.[72] Picasso displayed a distinct fascination with the plight of female existence. In many of his Blue Period works representing women, he sought to underscore the darker side of the *éternel féminin*, as he contemplated the metaphysical essence of languishing

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[70] Sidsel Maria Søndergaard, "Women in Impressionism: An Introduction," in *Women in Impressionism: From Mythical Feminine to Modern Woman*, edited by Sidsel Maria Søndergaard (Milan: Skira, 2006), 51.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Anthony Blunt and Phoebe Pool, *Picasso, the Formative Years: A Study of his Sources* (Greenwich: New York Graphic Society, 1962), 18.

women.[73] However, his identity as independent male artist obstructed his entry into medical maternal spaces, such as Saint-Lazare, and prevented him from immediately identifying with the impoverished prostitute-mothers that he examined cradling their children. He had never been pregnant, nor had he given birth. He was additionally free to remove himself from the confined premises, as well as from the crying children, whenever he desired, capable of meandering through the public as an unconstrained man on the other side of the bars – or in a comparable vein, as a sovereign working man outside of the domestic sphere. Picasso thus temporarily peered from the outside in, attempting to capture a fleeting instant of the charged, visceral bond that he observed, or imagined, between mother and child. Nonetheless, a distilled essence of maternity prevails in his simplified compositions. This consideration subsequently invites the question – to what degree are his depictions of mother and child comparable to those fashioned by his contemporary female peers? In which ways do his "modern Madonnas" diverge from the bourgeois mothers that were captured by the likes of Berthe Morisot and Mary Cassatt?

Throughout his Blue Period, during which he lived in poverty and struggled to generate interest in his artistic practice, Picasso reserved his canvases for depictions of the inner turmoil of ordinary people, with particular focus on the socially outcast.[74] In stark contrast to his renditions of destitute and hemiplegic subjects, Morisot and Cassatt were far removed from the asperities of poverty. Morisot was born in 1841 to an *haute bourgeois* family in Bourges, where she was provided with the education of *les arts de femmes*.[75] Similarly, the American Impressionist painter Mary Cassatt was born in 1844 to a comfortably upper-middle-class

[73] Victoria Charles and Anatoli Podosik, *Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) – Volume 1* (New York: Parkstone International, 2018), 57.
[74] Borsay, "Picasso's Bodies: Representations of Modern Society?," 90.
[75] Kathleen Adler and Tamar Garb, *Berthe Morisot* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), 9-11. For a comprehensive source devoted to the artist's biography, see also Margaret Shennan, *Berthe Morisot, the First Lady of Impressionism* (Gloucestershire: Sutton Pub., 1996).

family, receiving an early education in languages, drawing and music.[76] Apart from displaying their modern works at Impressionist exhibitions, neither artist strayed far from their social standings, electing to draft portraits of their immediate peers and remaining firmly rooted within their bourgeois social circles. While the theme of the cradle was undertaken in certain concurrent renditions by male Impressionist painters such as Claude Monet, Morisot's *The Cradle* (1872, fig.10) evinces a distinctive sense of familiarity and a deep communion. This observation might be attributable to the fact that the painting may show Morisot's sister Edma, gazing at her daughter Blanche in a scene that was painted around the same time that Edma was recovering from the exhaustion of childbirth.[77] In Morisot's painting, the mother's mouth is slightly agape as she rests her right hand, contorted in tense curvature, upon the fashionable cradle. She appears to be holding her breath, anticipating her infant's waking cry, while she stretches her plump left arm upward as though finding herself teetering on the brink of wakefulness. The instant of repose is charged and conditional, appearing as a fleeting state that threatens to be immediately ruptured. Morisot thus represents the mercurial essence of maternity, complete with its scarcity of sleep and careful attentiveness.

While presenting her interpretation of this image, psycho-analyst Elinor Kapp reads in this work the moment in which a mother realizes that she will never again be free, and that "she is changed irrevocably; nothing and no one can alter the fact that she is a mother."[78] Having given birth, motherhood is now eternally and inexorably woven into the fabric of her identity as a woman. In contrast to the physical proximity and fondling palpation of Picasso's prostitute-mothers, Morisot's paintings of mother and child are frequently painted at a remove, arising as

[76] Griselda Pollock, *Mary Cassatt* (London: Chaucer, 2005), 13.
[77] Hugues Wilhelm, "*The Cradle*, or the Intimate World of the Impressionists," in *Women in Impressionism: From Mythical Feminine to Modern Woman*, edited by Sidsel Maria Søndergaard (Milan: Skira, 2006), 290.
[78] Elinor Kapp, "The Cradle, Berthe Morisot," *Psychiatric Bulletin*, no. 19 (1995): 358.

delicately genteel and proper depictions of fashionable upper-class maternity. Although Edma is not shown as physically embracing her baby like the mother in Picasso's *Motherhood*, instead preferring to utilize bassinets and the comforts of modern luxuries, she remains ever present and does not recoil from her maternal duty. The basinet is shown in the mother's bedroom — despite her temporary convalescent leave, Morisot does not paint the woman neglecting what was believed to be her physiological destiny.

A couple of years following the inauguration of this painting, Morisot gave birth to her own child in 1878, thereby expanding her own identity from woman-artist to artist-mother. Throughout the artistic career that followed her daughter Julie's birth, she subsequently became infatuated and engrossed with painting each stage of her child's life. As Anne Higonnet has argued, she became an exemplar of maternal absorption that exceeded her painterly practice.[79] In contrast, American Impressionist Mary Cassatt never married or had children of her own, yet was dubbed the "painter of mothers and their children" by the poet Achille Segard.[80] In her work, she focused on la *première enfance*, i.e. the first five years of the child's life, and was particularly enticed by scenes of spoiled and joyous childhoods that markedly differ from the dismal conditions of infancy in Picasso's early oeuvre.[81] Cassatt rendered her child protagonists with transcendental idealism, swaddling them in bourgeois affluence and representing them as pure and untouched by hereditary blemishes. In her painting entitled *Mother and Child (The Oval Mirror)* (ca. 1899, fig. 11), she draws attention to the naked infant who drapes his arm around his mother's neck. It is he who faces the viewer in a contrapposto stance, while his mother is depicted in profile view, almost appended as a secondary, supportive structure to the

[79] Anne Higonnet, *Berthe Morisot's Images of Women* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 213.
[80] Achille Segard, *Mary Cassatt, Un peintre des Enfants et des Mères* (Paris: Librairie Paul Ollendorff, 1913), 171.
[81] Ibid., 174.

standing child, who will very soon be able to confidently walk on his own. The scene appears to transpire in a bathroom – perhaps it follows a warm bath that has flushed the infant's rosy complexion and softened his delicate skin. The undeniable religious reference to the iconography of the Madonna and child has been noted by feminist art historian Griselda Pollock, who points to the work's alternative religious title of *The Florentine Madonna*, remarking also upon the decorative shape of the oval mirror that frames the child's head like an angelic halo.[82] Unfolding within the closed and protected world of upper-class womanhood, Cassatt's painting may at first glance seem to be a mundane and uncomplicated portrayal of simple subject matter. However, upon further examination, the enclosed space of femininity that she captures falls directly in line with the dogmatic fin-de-siècle political and socio-moral debates previously outlined: the scene evinces maternal affection and pure, natural and malleable childhood that rejects the doctrine of Original Sin. Displaying a sense of gratified joy and a voluptuous enjoyment of her child's unsullied innocence, Cassatt depicts an ideal Rousseaunian Madonna who discloses a distinctly nineteenth-century valuation of a mother's sentimental attachment to her children and family.[83]

The enclosed arena in which the dyad is planted remains contextually ambiguous and is merely reduced to its broader signifiers of a Western "domestic space," situating them safely within their home. The mother and her child are enfolded together within their own private sphere, neatly tucked away from the fast-paced, patriarchal realm of action and authority – a space that feminist art historian Linda Nochlin sees as suggesting the presymbolic, psychoanalytic maternal position.[84] Psychoanalysis is an especially interesting theoretical model

[82] Pollock, *Mary Cassatt*, 122.
[83] Popiel, *Rousseau's Daughters*, 20.
[84] Nochlin presents the notion that some of Cassatt's depictions of women, such as the painting of her own mother titled *Portrait of Katherine Kelso Cassatt* (1889), simultaneously represent feminine spaces as sites of intellectual

through which to examine works appearing concurrently with its emergence at the end of the century. Nochlin argues that it is in the house that mother and child can symbiotically and synergistically coexist. The home functions as the locus in which the child gradually acquires motor skills and language, experiencing cognitive developments and thereby embarking upon the slow process of disentangling himself from the maternal anchor in preparation for his venture into the public realm. In works such as *Mother and Child*, Cassatt captures what Jane Silverman van Buren recognizes as the "attachment phase" in which the child is "protected by the membrane of maternal concern."[85] Before the infant is capable of complete individuation, he relies entirely upon his mother, who takes care of him physically, emotionally and intellectually for as long as he remains in the ever-evolving exploratory and bodily reality of infancy. The maternal buffer can thereby be likened to a form of isolated maternal paradise, with the act of growing up subsequently equated with a fall from grace that results in the inevitable expulsion into the postlapsarian life from which the child has formerly been sheltered.[86] In her tactile and intimate depictions of maternal care, Cassatt thus fashions scenes of bonding and reciprocity, with mother and child equally dependent on one another in the formation of their individual identities – just as the child implicitly relies on his mother's guidance for his self-conception, so too is the mother only labelled as such through his very existence.

While Picasso's renditions of mother-child dyads lack the robust three-dimensionality of Cassatt's Rubanesque cherubs, or the delicate, graceful reserve of Morisot's genteel mothers, he likewise succeeds in picturing the notion of an "environmental mother" who finds herself caught

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and creative production, as well as political militancy. In these cases, the psychoanalytic maternal position often functions as the space in which the child learns to grow before accessing the symbolic order of reason and power. See Linda Nochlin, *Representing Women* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1999), 194.

[85] Van Buren observes that Cassatt's mothers are very attentive to their infants' budding sense of being. These mothers are seen as providing a continual presence that functions as a comforting postnatal shelter to protect the child's emerging identity and sense of a broader environment existing past the domestic home. See van Buren, 134.

[86] Higonnet, *Berthe Morisot's Images of Women*, 213.

in the throes of the early attachment phase.[87] Although his prostitute-mothers are depicted confined within the walls of a hospital-prison, rather than burrowed in a comfortable domestic space, the tender affection that he portrayed between mother and offspring retains a similar sense of sacred maternal rapture as Cassatt and Morisot's doting mothers. Shown detained in the prison for an indeterminable period of time, Picasso's afflicted and impoverished mothers are unable to enjoy leisurely bath times or the luxuries of ornate cradles. Yet these paintings show an imperative facet of their maternity: the relinquishment of their very corporeality through simple embraces, which notably underscores the significance of their physical maternal touch during the early stages of infanthood. If one reads these works through a psychoanalytic lens, Picasso could be seen to depict the tactility and caressing palpation that is especially critical in early parent-child relationships, recalling in this manner Cassatt's sensuous portrayals of mothers and their children.

Current medical studies have shown us that attachment systems in the form of corporal proximity to a parent-figure particularly work to provide security and regulate the emotional experiences of the infant, thereby engendering a recovery of homeostasis and balance upon entry into the world.[88] Epidermic contact proves especially important in the proprioception of newborn babies, who acquire the notion of proximity primarily through touch. This elemental understanding of spatial relations is only later supplemented with visual, olfactory, gustatory and auditory cues, with touch being the earliest form of sensory experience for a developing individual that mimics the prenatal sensation of being carried for nine months in the womb.[89]

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[87] Attachment theory, developed by John Bowlby, posits that human beings display a propensity for close affective relationships involving behaviours of proximity, distancing and contact with their carers. Involuntary separation from loved ones early on is ultimately believed to result in emotional disorders and personality alterations. See Jorge Ulnik, *Skin in Psychoanalysis* (London: Karnac, 2007), 131.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Darcia Narvaez et. al., "The Importance of Early Life Touch for Psychosocial and Moral Development," *Psicologia: Reflexão e Crítica 32*, no. 16 (2019): 1.

While parental touch was not understood this way in fin-de-siècle France, it is interesting to note the comparable manner in which Picasso foregrounds physical contact in these works.

By depicting his prostitute-mothers resting their cheeks or lips against the foreheads of their infant children, a move that is especially rendered visible in *Motherhood*, in which mother cradles the head of her child with one hand while simultaneously clasping his shoulder with the other and caressing his forehead with her lips, Picasso highlights skin-to-skin contact. Postnatal maternal touch is visually equated with the suspended support of the womb, as each of the prostitute-mothers enclose their offspring within their cloaks, fashioning a secondary, postliminary stage of gestation. Rather than selecting scenes of everyday tasks or the warm, sumptuous comforts of upper-class motherhood, Picasso strips his mother-child dyads from expendable amenities and material superfluities. His flattened compositions of elongated and bony bodies contain a distilled essence of fin-de-siècle understandings of a maternal ideal that transcends class, exemplifying a concise, yet poignant, prototype of motherly devotion. In Picasso's works, mother and child find themselves in a deep communion that functions at a level beyond speech. From a psychoanalytic perspective, they find themselves engaging in a prelinguistic and inherently sensual mode of communication, conferring in a form of intense language before language.[90] This semiotic and elemental understanding that exists between parent and newborn infant can be found in Picasso's *Mother and Child*, a quiet scene of intimacy in which the mother closes her eyes and mouth, thus removing herself from both the visual and verbal realms to further plunge herself into the tactile and sensual presence of her child. They are thus participants in the discourse of pre-verbal significance.

[90] Julia Kristeva terms this prelinguistic language between mother and child "*le sémiotique*." This form of primitive communication occurs during the child's attachment to his mother, preceding the symbolic order and acquisition of language. It is a transitional structure that functions as the underpinning of language. See van Buren, 18.

In contrast to the easeful sumptuousness of the works by Impressionists such as Morisot and Cassatt, one of Picasso's mother and child scenes perhaps most markedly resembles the compositions of a woman Realist painter of the same period. Despite modelling all three of his prostitute-mothers on the sex workers of Saint-Lazare, the singular, modest composition of *Desemparats (Mère et enfant au fichu)* dramatically departs from the other two under examination in both tone and detail, evincing a palpable sense of anxiety through the psychological expressions, close-cropped framing and darker palette. This notable difference in atmosphere is likely attributable to the differing circumstances of conception. *Desemparats* was namely created two years later than the other two works, either during or immediately following the artist's catastrophic third trip to Paris characterized by degradation, extreme poverty and a pervasive sense defeat, all of which inspired particularly dark, doleful and pessimistic pieces.[91] This rustic and sorrowful pastel work especially bears notable similarities with Elizabeth Nourse's *À l'abri (mère et bébé)* (ca. 1897, fig.12). Nourse, an American Realist painter who moved to Paris in 1887, painted predominantly rural themes involving the lives of peasant women between 1894-1900.[92] For her, the relationship between mother and child symbolized an essential truth of life. As a member of the Third Order of Saint Francis, a lay order of the Franciscans in which Christian values of charity, giving and sharing were highly praised, such virtues can in turn be noted in her frequent portrayals of the venerable purity and universality of maternal tasks.[93] The compositional framing of *À l'abri* markedly resembles Picasso's haunting portrait, which was painted six years later, yet also in Paris. Both mothers are delineated with a

[91] Richardson, *A Life of Picasso: The Prodigy, 1881-1906*, 267. Richardson notes that these humiliating three months in 1902 did not deter Picasso from later creating a life in Paris: after remaining in Barcelona for over a year, he returned to his beloved France, where he would spend most of his adult life.
[92] Mary Alice Heekin Burke, *Elizabeth Nourse, 1859-1938: A Salon Career* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1983), 114.
[93] Ibid.

muted blue background that evokes cold frigidness and austerity, and both are clad in modest brown cloaks, as their darkened morose eyes peer imploringly outside of the frame. Their long faces are pale in contrast with their ebony hair, and a sense of solemnity and intentness blurs the threshold between sacred and secular themes. These two works evoke humanized religious paintings, such as Artemisia Gentileschi's *Madonna and Child* (1613) with its tense scene of breastfeeding, thus further underscoring the reverential bond between mother and child. In contrast to Nourse's peasant mother, Picasso depicts his model as withering away and fading into the background. Her plain brown peasant garments and sullen eyes reveal a tormented soul who protectively guards her infant by bundling him in her cloak, placing her wraithlike hand against his chest as if to distrustfully fend off the outside world. She visibly suffers from the cold, the effects of which can be discerned on her mottled, blue-gray hand that suggests frostbite or peripheral cyanosis. Yet rather than using her cloak to shield herself from inclemency, she is portrayed with her head exposed, perhaps to better spare the thin material that she wraps over her infant in an act of ultimate abnegation. Maternal devotion and instinct are thus shown as transcending class, persisting in a woman's constitution and *élan vital*, irrespectively of material and superficial exigencies.

Although finding himself excluded from the feminine spaces of motherhood often knowingly rendered by female Impressionists, Picasso nevertheless portrayed the emotion and passion believed to be inherent to maternal adoration in the nineteenth century by likening it to religious feeling through his use of Madonna iconography. He painted children with a sense of hope that recalls the Rousseaunian cult of childhood, which perceived children as close to God and a source for good. Just as Edma Morisot is depicted almost as confronting the realization of her inescapable identity of "mother," gazing down upon her sleeping infant, so too does Picasso

show his prostitute-mothers as encountering their newfound title with devotion and care, bestowing upon their offspring a shower of loving caresses. Rather than visually representing these women as sex workers (he does not show them with the stereotypical visual signs of sex work, such as in a provocative state of undress, sipping absinthe or coquettishly seducing clients), Picasso chiefly highlights their status as mothers, while also stressing their ill health. He shows mother and child linked in the thralls of intimate communion, evoking the pure love and rapture of the *Mater Amabilis*. However, history tells us that lurking behind the appearance of dutiful and devoted mothers lies a hardened modern reality that is plagued by poverty and disease. While the mothers portrayed by Picasso can initially be seen as paradoxically bolstering the social need for children and fulfilling their physiological destiny, they retain a lingering presence of a sexual past. Prostitute-mothers of the nineteenth century often bore children in an unconventional manner that rested upon illicit sexual activity and exacerbating infections. Far from conclusively embodying the Virgin's role in the economy of human salvation, these women instead preserve traces of threatening sexuality, as they were increasingly viewed and feared by their society as agents of French degeneration and decline.

CHAPTER 2: MATER DOLOROSA – The Immoral, Diseased Pariah

Placed in stark opposition to the fin-de-siècle exaltation of middle- to upper-class mothers – those dutiful patriots who were applauded for their selfless maternal consecration and concerted efforts at fortifying the French nation with strong, vigorous and educated citizens – Picasso's depictions of prostitute-mothers paradoxically belong to an antithetical and deprecated classification of woman. While assuming the visual guise of caring progenitors in the artist's tender portrayals of mother and child, these painted figures are simultaneously rooted in the

vilified social category of "prostitutes." Although prostitute-mothers at the turn of the century empirically satisfied the role of mother through the reproductive functions of their female anatomy, a second consideration often trounced this first matter, thereby expelling them from the virtuous pedestal of Rousseau's Sophie and liberating them from the restrictive tyranny of the maternal body. It was the active and flagrant sexuality required by their chosen profession that removed them from considerations of "virtuous women;" this very fact directly countervailed the chastity of the Virgin Mary, as well as the careful relegation of secular mothers to the domestic sphere of bourgeois connubiality. Instead, these public women found themselves deconstructing and disentangling the upheld ideal of the integrity of the female body, threatening male embodiment and espousing patriarchal anxieties with regard to the polluted flesh of women.[94]

Picasso's renditions of these ambiguous figures resist any definitive reading, thus reflecting fin-de-siècle anxieties regarding the erosion of clear distinctions between honest and venal women. In this second chapter, I argue that Picasso's prostitute-mothers are complex and contradicting portrayals of femininity that refuse any cursory reduction to either sacrosanct maternity or illicit sexuality. These controversial figures rather embody conceptions of the dichotomous woman who is understood as oscillating between the two poles of "prostitute" and "mother," resisting any form of decisive categorization. When examined against a backdrop of increasing social paranoia surrounding clandestine forms of what was perceived to be debased sexual release, the notion of *Moral Mother*, extolled for building up the nation, crumbles to give way to conceptions of an *Immoral Pariah*, who was closely scrutinized as the agent of hereditary degeneration and social decline.

[94] Encarnación Juárez-Almendros, *Disabled Bodies in Early Modern Spanish Literature*, 57.

2.1 The Hôpital Saint-Lazare: Imprisoning the Prostitute-Mother

At the same time that bourgeois mothers were encouraged to bear increasingly more children, the topic of sexuality was approached in a mode of careful delimitation. Once men had married and forgone their bachelor forays into pre-marital relations, sexual urges were to be constrained and directed into the parents' domestic bedroom, where they were viewed as a utilitarian and fertile obligation.[95] However, this restraint proved, in reality, to be ineffectual. The institution of marriage, along with the hygienic domesticity it entailed, found its immediate inversion in the illicit practices of sex work. In order to prevent an overflow of what was understood as abject filth that would sully 'impressionable' women, sex work was deemed by government regulators as an inescapable need; it was perceived as a necessary evil and fact of life that had to be properly addressed in order to better preserve the chastity of the virtuous women by channeling an excess of male desire into more suitable channels. Fin-de-siècle Paris was thus caught in the throes of a modern, capitalistic sexual marketplace in which it confronted increasing erotic phenomena, ranging from a surge in the publication of salacious novels to a rise in controversial pictures of sex work, such as Edgar Degas' brothel monotypes. It was widely believed that certain men inherently required an alternative mode of sexual relief. Yet instead of censuring men for excessive wantonness, political and bureaucratic figures painted those who offered bodily services as immoral, fallen women who necessitated further examination, categorization and exclusion from the trappings of a functioning society.[96] In her oft-quoted book titled *The Second Sex*, French philosopher Simone de Beauvoir notes: "The prostitute is a scapegoat: man unloads his turpitude onto her, and he repudiates her. Whether a legal status puts

[95] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality – Volume 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 3.
[96] Foucault especially notes how women were increasingly regulated "in the name of the responsibility they owed to the health of their children, the solidity of the family institution, and the safeguarding of society." See Ibid., 146.

her under police surveillance, or she works clandestinely, she is in any case treated as a pariah."[97] Indeed, the figure of the French female sex worker throughout the nineteenth century found herself subject to endless, exhaustive police surveillance.

A crucial figurehead in the encyclopedic systematization and initiation of the modern discourse on sex work, Alexandre Jean-Baptiste Parent-Duchâtelet was a French medical hygienist. He worked as a disciple of the French public health specialist Jean Noël Hallé, before being appointed as the vice-president of the *conseil d'hygiène publique et de salubrité* (i.e., the council of public hygiene and cleanliness) of Paris. Having previously dedicated himself to an examination of the state of Parisian sewers – for which he provided manifold reports advising the most efficient ways of cleaning, disinfecting and designing them in order to best protect people's health and safety – Parent then turned his attention to a second, in his mind no less subversive, form of potential social and biological degeneration: the figure of the sex worker.[98] In 1836, the year in which he died, he published an expansive anthropological study of sex work entitled *De la prostitution dans la ville de Paris*. As Alain Corbin and Charles Bernheimer have demonstrated, this documentation of the world of registered sex work was conducted concurrently with his investigations on sewers and cadavers, a consideration which conceptually linked female sexuality with excrement and disease.[99] Parent believed sex workers to be an inherent part of society, seeing them as physiological *égout séminal*. He wrote that they were "as inevitable in an agglomeration of men as sewers, cesspits, and garbage dumps," thereby meriting stricter survey and requiring civil authorities to "relegate them to the most obscure corners, in a

[97] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (New York: Vintage, 2011), 1251.
[98] Charles Bernheimer, *Figures of Ill Repute: Representing prostitution in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 11.
[99] Ibid., 15.

word to render their presence as inconspicuous as possible."[100] In this spirit, the medical hygienist embarked upon a considerable classificatory investigation: he examined the various *maisons de tolerances* (the licensed brothels that were state controlled and legalized); attended the police inspections and weekly medical visits to which these women were subjected; visited the hospital-prisons in which the sickened sex workers were confined; and, most extensively, noted the plethora of particularities of individual sex workers' personal lives, ranging from a list of determining cause to former arrest records.[101] Through this far-reaching study, replete with impressive statistical reports of even the most minute details, it was surmised that the figure of the female sex worker could more readily be possessed, classified and removed from quotidian visibility.

The beliefs that Parent propounded further solidified views held by officials of the July Monarchy (1830-48), reinforcing the notion that a legalized form of "tolerated prostitution" was in fact in the best interest for the preservation of social order.[102] By the time of Napoléon III's regime during the Second Empire (1852-70), a lenient moral climate reigned. The government appeared, at this time, to advocate forms of immoral self-indulgence to domesticate its people, utilizing sex and debauchery as instruments of power and a remedy for social unrest. Of all figures within nineteenth-century French social thought, the sex worker's body – although

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[100] "Les prostituées sont aussi inévitables, dans une agglomération d'hommes, que les égouts, les voiries et les dépôts d'immondices; la conduite de l'autorité doit être la même à l'égard des uns qu'à l'égard des autres, son devoir est de les surveiller, d'atténuer par tous les moyens possibles les inconvéniens qui leur sont inhérens, et pour cela de les cacher, de les reléguer dans les coins les plus obscurs, en un mot de rendre leur présence aussi inaperçue que possible." See A-J-B Parent-Duchâtelet, *De la prostitution dans la Ville de Paris, considérée sous le rapport de l'hygiène publique, de la morale et de l'administration: ouvrage appuyé de documens statistiques puisés dans les archives de la préfecture de police: avec cartes et tableaux* (Brussels: Société Belge de Librairie etc. Hauman, Cattoir et Ce., 1836), 626.

[101] Bernheimer, *Figures of Ill Repute*, 16. Parisian regulationism, or *réglementation*, was a police-administered system that held sway from 1800 to 1946, designed to survey and control a legally tolerated population of sex workers. This regulatory structure required the official enrollment of all sex workers as *soumises*, subjecting them to frequent compulsory medical examinations and obliging them to carry health cards.

[102] Jann Matlock, *Scenes of Seduction: Prostitution, Hysteria, and Reading Difference in Nineteenth-Century France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 4.

purportedly consigned to obscurity and hidden from view – became the site of persistent contestation and observation, thereby paradoxically anchoring her supposed "concealed" existence within social thought. This sexualized female corporeality was human, both a biophysical fact as well as a cultural construct, viewed in fin-de-siècle France as bearing transgressive potential. Through her deviant sexuality, the sex worker linked debauchery, poverty, disease and prurience. She was rapidly stripped of all civil rights and self-determination under the Penal Code, placed at the disposal and mercy of a system of men who were increasingly able to pierce into the most intimate aspects of her interior world.[103] Despite finding herself relegated to supposedly invisible corners of the city, she was expected to continue to serve the very city that discounted her existence as a merely servile and subjugated one.

In his expansive four volume study titled *The History of Sexuality*, French philosopher Michel Foucault states that within bourgeois methods of sexual control, power anchored the very pleasure that it unearthed.[104] He goes on to juxtapose the "pleasure that comes of exercising a power that questions, monitors, watches, spies, searches out, palpates, brings to light; and on the other hand, the pleasure that kindles at having to evade this power, flee from it, fool it, or travesty it."[105] This modality is particularly applicable to the realities that lie behind utopic dreams of a true, self-regulating complicity between deviancy and the very networks that were put into place to police it. By enclosing sex workers within a never-ending panoptic system of surveillance, they were expected to comply with the moral economy that sought to contain them. However, still many sex workers remained anonymous as *insoumises*, as insubordinate sex

[103] Ibid., 24.
[104] "The medical examination, the psychiatric investigation, the pedagogical report, and family controls may have the over-all and apparent objective of saying no to all wayward or unproductive sexualities, but the fact is that they function as mechanisms with a double impetus: pleasure and power." See Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 45.
[105] Ibid.

workers who refused to submit to policing and conventional morals.[106] These women evaded forms of control and exacerbated public anxieties regarding the insidious spread of sex work across all classes. Rather than restrictively forming a source of sexual outlet for single working-class men, the glittering courtesan or *demi-mondaine* infiltrated the ranks of higher classes, evolving notions of sex work and further heightening pre-existing tensions regarding the indistinguishability of honest and venal women.[107]

Despite such examples of independent sex workers evading police control, those who worked within the *maisons de tolérance*, or *maisons closes*, were expected to adhere to distinct stages of the regulationist processes. If, following routine inspections, they were found to have been infected with syphilis, the subsequent phase of regulation involved detainment within hospital-prisons. These symbiotic mergers of hospitalization and incarceration included the Hôpital Saint-Lazare, in which Picasso's prostitute-mothers are shown imprisoned. Having previously served as an institution for lepers from the eleventh until the seventeenth century, the Hôpital Saint-Lazare subsequently underwent many disparate phases. It functioned first as a charitable Christian convent, followed by its role as a harbour for depraved young men, before transforming into a waiting-room for those destined for the guillotine during the Revolution of 1789.[108] Following 1794, it was converted into a prison for women. By 1850, the hospital-prison had constructed an infirmary to treat those suffering from venereal diseases, thus commencing its institutional segregation into a law section and a quarter reserved for "debauched" women. This milestone addition initiated its eventual progress into a center for the

[106] Émile Richard, *La Prostitution à Paris* (Primento Digital Publishing, 2016), 60-62.
[107] For more information regarding the figure of the *demi-mondaine*, see Lola González Quijano, "Performer un mauvais genre : la demi-mondaine au XIXe siècle," *Criminocorpus* (2017): 1-27.
[108] Paul Blum, "The Hôpital Saint-Lazare in Paris: Its Past and Present History," *The British Journal of Venereal Diseases 24*, no. 4 (1984): 151.

treatment of venereal diseases among the *femmes de moeurs légères*, with the prison section only demolished in 1935.[109]

Several well-known French medical professionals and abolitionist philanthropists stood in staunch opposition to the inhumane treatment of the syphilitic sex workers as criminals, rather than sick patients in need of medical attention. Alfred Fournier, one of the foremost syphilologists in France, notably launched strident anathema upon the manner in which sickened sex workers were treated and transferred in the same conspicuous vehicles designed to transport murderers and thieves, an act which immediately branded them with a humiliating stigma of infamy before they had even reached the penitentiary. He elucidated:

> Cette femme malade, simplement malade, à qui la société n'a (pour l'instant, du moins), d'autre délit à reprocher que celui d'une affection contagieuse, cette femme, dis-je, va franchir le même seuil, va passer sous la même porte, va être confinée dans les mêmes murs que les prévenues, les voleuses, les criminelles! C'est là une confusion qui révolte le bon sens et l'équité.[110]

Within the imprisoned population of sex workers, the majority were very young. In the year 1884, out of the 4200 women who were brought in for venereal diseases, 918 were between 16 and 20 years of age, while 1639 were between 20 and 25.[111] These girls often awaited their parents to return them home. The imprisoned sex workers were kept on average for twenty days, with the maximum sentence reaching 250.[112] This statistic was seen by many critics as notably

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[109] Ibid., 152.
[110] "This ailing woman, who is merely ailing, and to whom society has not (for the instant, at least) reproached any other infraction than that of a contagious infection, this woman will cross the same threshold, will pass beneath the same door, and will be confined within the same walls as the accused thieves and criminals! This here is an utter bafflement that goes against all common sense and equity." (*my translation*) Quoted in Richard, *La Prostitution à Paris*, 129.
[111] Ibid., 133.
[112] Auguste Corlieu, *La prostitution à Paris* (Paris: Librairie J.-B. Baillière et Fils, 1887), 69.

insufficient for thorough treatment. The shorter stays resulted in many recidivist cases, unlike other non-prison institutions that were entirely dedicated to providing more focused medical treatment. A typical day spent at the hospital-prison involved eleven hours of hard work that was conducted under the constant threat of draconian punitive measures, such as solitary confinement. Furthermore, the dietary plan was bleak and paltry, unsuitable for women seeking to ameliorate their condition: the girls were allowed only to two servings of tepid vegetable slop a day, and two small pieces of boiled beef per week.[113] Thrown together in quarters that remained unheated during the coldest and most humid of winters, and lacking showers or washbasins with which to properly wash themselves, they were also often treated in a stricter and more abusive manner than other prisoners by the nuns who were in charge of the general surveillance, due to preconceived notions of their debased sexual morals.[114]

In the hospital-prison, those patient-prisoners who gave birth to babies within its walls (the number of which reached an average of twelve children born every year at the Saint-Lazare), were allowed to care for them until the age of four.[115] Criminals and sex workers were also authorized to bring their nursing children in with them from the outside. Richardson notes that some inmates even went so far as to plan their arrest in time to give birth in the relative security of the prison walls, a desperate situation that demonstrates the extremes of poverty and instability to which many were subjected within Parisian society.[116] More than half of the women imprisoned at the Saint-Lazare had at least one child, while many raised up to six.[117] All of the children gathered within

[113] Richard, 135.
[114] Ibid., 136.
[115] Pottet, *Histoire de Saint-Lazare*, 84.
[116] Richardson, 219.
[117] De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 1258.

the institution were provided with modest toys and carefully dressed by the nuns, who found great pleasure in caring for them. They also generally received their mothers' undivided attention. Eugène Pottet, the chief clerk of the police prefecture of Paris, noted of the maternal instincts of imprisoned sex workers at the Saint-Lazare: "Les attentions maternelles ne leur font pas défaut, la femme, si coupable qu'elle soit, perd rarement ses sentiments maternels."[118] In a different vein, the French journalist Jules Hoche saw in maternity one of the reasons for which many of these women had initially fallen into sex work:

> C'est par misère qu'elles ont 'aimé,' c'est parce qu'elles ont eu faim et froid qu'elles se sont vendues, c'est, chez quelques-unes mêmes, la maternité et ses dures obligations, la maternité, cette gloire et cette bénédiction des riches et des régulières, qui les a livrées aux souillures dont leur triste rhétorique populacière résume les péripéties en proclamant qu'elles 'font la noce.'[119]

The motherhood of imprisoned prostitute-mothers was thus either presented as a causal factor for their immoral descent, or as an enduring reminder of their innate humanity and femininity.

It was within this hospital-prison that Picasso ultimately discovered his new trope of prostitute-mother subjects. John Richardson remarks of the artist's frequent visits to the hospital-prison that he obtained permission from the venereologist Dr. Jullien in the summer of 1901 to enter and paint the women free of charge, noting also that Picasso himself, having been a frequent adolescent client of brothels, had caught an undisclosed venereal disease early in his

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[118] "These women do not lack maternal attention – however culpable a woman may be, she rarely loses her maternal sentiments." (*my translation*) See Pottet, 84-86.

[119] "It is out of misery that they have 'loved;' it is because they were hungry and cold that they sold themselves. Among some of them, it was maternity and its hard obligations – the very maternity that provides glory and benediction to the rich and regular women – that has led them to debasement, which their wistful, destitute rhetoric merely justifies as 'making love'." (*my translation*) See Jules Hoche, "Une Visite à la Prison de Saint-Lazare," *La Grande Revue 16* (1901): 703.

life.[120] Saint-Lazare models were quite common at the time in French artistic circles, popular for their easy availability and free cost; Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, for example, drew a Saint-Lazare inmate for the cover of *Le Mirliton* (1886, fig.13), and Jean Béraud fashioned a large painting entitled *La Salle des Filles à Saint-Lazare* (1886) that was prominently hung in the building's vestibule.[121] In Lautrec's portrayal of an imprisoned sex worker writing a letter to her pimp, one immediately notes the conspicuous white bonnet that she wears, which sets her apart from regular subjects or other criminals, immediately identifying her through a flagrant symbol of the time – patient-prisoners who were brought to the Saint-Lazare for venereal diseases, such as syphilis, were namely clad in a recognizable uniform and white cap, called a *bonnet d'ordonnace*, that bore the function of marking them apart.[122]

Picasso proved fascinated by this syphilitic white cap and soon fashioned manifold compositions in which the inmates' bonnets are placed in noteworthy evidence, as seen, for instance, in his *Women at the Prison Fountain* (1901, fig.14). Departing from this faithful depiction of the stiff cobalt blue women's uniforms and the helmet-shaped, white cap neatly tied beneath their chins, Picasso gradually turned these headdresses into draping, stylized shawls. As Richardson notes, he transformed the "hideous hospital jackets (of black-and-blue striped drugget) into elegant, dark blue El Greco-like habits."[123] The sprawling blue fabric that clothes their bodies looks thick and weighty, with the profusive, deep folds departing from the form-fitting drapery that clings to women's curves and reveals exposed backs and limbs in Picasso's *Two Women Sitting at a Bar* (1902, fig.15). Instead, the shawl that enwraps the head and

[120] Richardson speculates that the depression into which Picasso had fallen at the same time of his Saint-Lazare visits may indicate that he had found out that he was himself infected. See Richardson, 219.
[121] Ibid., 219-220.
[122] Corbin, *Women for Hire*, 94.
[123] Richardson, 222.

shoulders of the maternal figure in *Motherhood* lends her a pious Madonna-esque quality. It decisively and modestly conceals the woman's female anatomy, further removing her from a profession that is otherwise steeped in seduction and discharging her from an environment that rests upon lustful enticement and a tantalizing exposure of flesh.

Picasso visually effaces any trace of sexualization in his ascetic compositions of prostitute-mothers, electing to focus on the sex workers who were enclosed within the walls of the Saint-Lazare prison, rather than those soliciting their bodies in the eroticized, gustatory displays of seedy Parisian brothels. He frames these women in ambiguous, austere blue environments that markedly lack distinctive details, and renders them asexual by punctuating the compositionally dominating maternal bond that is visually correlated with Marian iconography. These prostitute-mothers are shown as momentarily escaping the bodily demands of their sexual trade. Instead, they more thoroughly slip into the bodily demands of motherhood, with the prison walls assuming a hardened variant of the secure, domestic bourgeois sphere from which they have been excluded. In these compositions, Picasso sublimates an existential emotion, purposefully foregoing individual, recognizable features and expunging social minutiae. By remaining rooted in muddy indeterminism, he was more concerned with extracting the metaphysical, languishing essence and darker side of the *éternel féminin* than he was with empirical accuracy and attention to detail.[124] Within his simplified depictions of mother and child, he erased overt details to instead identify and reconstruct traces of humanity amidst the manifold bodies that passed through the systematic regimentation of the Saint-Lazare hospital-prison.

[124] Charles and Podosik, *Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) – Volume 1*, 57.

2.2 *Hérédosyphilis*, Degeneration Theory and Art

When placed under closer scrutiny, Picasso's prostitute-mother dyads are, however, marred by a sense of uneasy ambiguity. While he portrays both mother and child with equally plump, smooth skin tones in *Motherhood*, fashioning them with rounded forms and softened, blurred edges, *Desemparats* conversely depicts a tired mother in a noticeably more sober and realist manner, complete with a delicate and haunting commitment to detail. This latter mother has sullen eyes and a pallid complexion that differs from the warmer tinge of her infant's cheeks. Her face is bare and natural, not bearing any traces of makeup or dissimulation. Although she noticeably resembles her son, the grey tone of her lips and blue-tinged fingers, compounded with sparse eyebrows and eyelashes, render her features languid and feeble, visually suggesting underlying lassitude or deficiency. Similarly, *Mother and Child* discloses a somber atmosphere and represents the pair in a flattened, almost two-dimensional manner, executed in plastic forms and outlined with thick, black lines. In this third work, the mother is emaciated and shows signs of ill health: her colouring is sickly, her cheeks sunken, and her extremities elongated and deformed. Upon closer examination, the entirety of her exposed left ear is curiously rendered in a bruised red hue that is only faintly echoed by the bright orange of her child's hair and the brown undertones of the floor on which she sits. This red ear may be interpreted as a subtle indicator of syphilitic infection, since ears were often viewed as betraying the physical ravages of the disease. Art historian Mary Hunter notes, for instance, that the Hôpital Saint-Louis contained a collection of wax models of deformed and discoloured ears that exhibited syphilitic infection, with sex workers' ears portending potential sites of disease transmission.[125] The

[125] Mary Hunter, "The Waiting Time of Prostitution: Gynaecology and Temporality in Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec's Rue des Moulins, 1884," *Art History 42*, no. 1 (2019): 90.

blueness of this mother's body markedly counteracts this jolt of red, betraying a breath of life, albeit tainted, across a face that appears to have otherwise been drained from living colours.

The figure of the sex worker in nineteenth-century French thought was often perceived as a diseased body first and foremost, one that would molder the French social body if not properly attended to. Parent-Duchâtelet unequivocally equated sex workers with disease, as he viewed them as "inseparable from a numerous population, where they always exist under forms that vary according to the climate and national manners, resembling a congenital disease, which medical treatment fails to cure, and the ravages of which may be limited."[126] Indeed, the medical treatment at Saint-Lazare largely failed to cure and proved far from sufficient; the imprisoned sex workers were often expeditiously "healed" for appearance, frequently making use of makeup to disguise open sores, only to be thrown back into circulation where they remained an active agent of contamination.[127] By the dawn of the late nineteenth century, syphilis had been increasingly understood as a life-threatening scourge that could diffuse into all levels of society, thus threatening French society with its oft invisible, but insidious, affliction. The figure of the sex worker played a vilified role in the spread of this disease. Historian Jill Harsin notes the paradox that existed between the frequent, arbitrary examinations and hospitalizations of French sex workers on the one hand, and the alarmingly inadequate treatment of respectable middle-class women on the other.[128] Wives whose husbands had contracted syphilis often remained ignorant and unaware, since their spouses retained authority over the knowledge that they were

[126] "J'aime mieux me ranger de l'avis de ceux qui les regardent comme inséparables d'une nombreuse population réunie sur un même point. Sous des formes qui varient suivant les climats, les mœurs nationales, la prostitution reste inhérente aux grandes populations; elle est et sera toujours comme ces maladies de naissance, contre lesquelles les expériences et les systèmes ont échoué, et dont on se borne à limiter les ravages." See Alexandre Jean-Baptiste Parent-Duchâtelet, *De la Prostitution dans la Ville de Paris* (Paris: J.-B. Baillière et Fils, 1857), 625.
[127] Corlieu, *La prostitution à Paris*, 72.
[128] Jill Harsin, "Syphilis, Wives, and Physicians: Medical Ethics and the Family in Late Nineteenth-Century France," *French Historical Studies 16*, no. 1 (1989): 72.

allowed to receive – frequently in the selfish hopes of preserving their marital or employment prospects. Syphilis did not selectively distinguish between lower- and upper-class women; instead, it was an impartial force that permeated all sectors of society. Rather than merely signifying a deprecated, illegitimate sexuality, it also infiltrated the bedrooms of bourgeois ranks, thus staining "legitimate" heterosexual contact with the specter of venereal disease.[129]

Moreover, medical professionals noted with alarm the difficulties involved in distinguishing the genital parts of sex workers from those of "virtuous" women, a feat that especially provoked anxiety in its erasure of (much desired) overt and detectable signs of licentiousness. Anatomical differences between honest and venal women remained murky, and the somatic similarities between the two were proven to equally conceal all history of male penetration.[130] This approximation of women of both ostensibly loose and proper morals in the eyes of science was received as a scandalous attestation to the insidiousness of female sexuality. The only potential sign of differentiation – which would continue to uphold the entrenched regulatory processes of sex work – was a *syphilitic* sexual organ. In this manner, the disease could subsequently be treated as an incontestable marker, with sex workers increasingly bearing the blame for their indirect contamination of virtuous married wives. Through their infection with syphilis, a woman's sexual organs could more easily fall within the male discourse of social control. Charles Bernheimer concisely observes that "the fact of syphilis is the cornerstone of the entire regulatory edifice. Fear of the spread of syphilis justifies treating prostitution as a public health problem."[131] The figure of the sex worker – moving between clients, contracting and spreading the disease, acting as both passive recipient and active vector through her polluted,

[129] Ibid., 75.
[130] Bernheimer, 24.
[131] Ibid., 25.

recycled flesh – was excoriated for her purported culpability, likened to a form of putrefaction that gradually ascended from the lowest classes of society to progressively infest the entire social organism.[132] She became a scapegoat branded with a stigma of degeneracy that was further compounded by the so-called "empirical evidence" disseminated in the field of anthropometry, a field which at the time progressively sought to paint the fallen woman as visibly marked by grotesque deformations and facial anomalies.[133]

During the fin-de-siècle, medical conceptions of syphilis were broadened. New understandings of how syphilis could affect subsequent generations, both by ravaging unborn fetuses or producing a slew of infirm, diseased progeny, began to trickle down from medical circles to the public.[134] Alain Corbin notes that the decades between 1890 and 1910 especially witnessed the dawn of a "golden age of the venereal peril," in which syphilis was seen as simultaneously more severe, contagious and resistant than previously thought.[135] Within this time frame, medical professionals such as Alfred Fournier and his son, Edmond, spewed fervid rhetoric against syphilis with greater intensity. Fears of depopulation and nationalist anxieties of an extinguishing French nation were thus exacerbated by broadly suppositional conceptions of a concurrent biological and demographic weakening.

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[132] Corbin notes how certain exaggerated reactions to sex workers were comparable to those directed to a "gangrene rising from the lower depths of society and invading the entire social body during the Second Empire." See Corbin, 21.

[133] Within nineteenth-century anthropologists' attempts at legitimizing the moral and physical superiority of the West, techniques and inquiries were equally levelled at deviant subgroups to uncover clues regarding social decadence and decline. Sex workers figured prominently in such discussions, as criteria of beauty and proportion were placed in contrast to asymmetry and deformity. Dr. Pauline Tarnowsky notably conducted an anthropometric study of sex workers in 1889, in which she further entrenched existing stereotypes by presenting "empirical evidence" of sex workers' degeneracy, ranging from prognathism to moral deficiency. See David Lomas, "A Canon of Deformity: Les Demoiselles d'Avignon and Physical Anthropology," *Art History 16*, no. 3 (1993). See also Robert Nye, *Crime, Madness and Politics in Modern France: The Medical Concept of National Decline* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

[134] Harsin, "Syphilis, Wives, and Physicians," 72.

[135] Corbin, 262.

In 1857, Bénédict Morel introduced the notion of "degeneration," examining underlying somatic causes of psychiatric conditions and propounding fears of the decline of civilization.[136] Morel had noted a significant increase in crimes, diseases and mental disorders within nineteenth-century French society. This observation led him to utilize laws of progressivity and attribute this phenomenon to inherited abnormalities that would continue to progressively worsen through subsequent generations. The notion of *dégénérescence* was thus seen as functioning as an etiological factor in mental disturbances, believed to diagnose the French populace with an irreparable, inherited predisposition to madness.[137] Speaking of the atavistic regression to a pre-civilized state of imbecility and sterility, Morel highlighted both its physical and *moral* origins by stating: "Les dégénérescences ne peuvent donc être que le résultat d'une influence morbide, soit de l'ordre physique, soit de l'ordre moral."[138]

Within this broader discussion of degenerative regression, the erroneous concept of *hérédosyphilis* soon seized the nation's psyche. In this theoretical model that lacked rigorous scientific proof, the venereal disease was viewed as hereditary and transmitted at the moment of conception, rather than through the contamination *in utero* and at birth that characterizes today's understandings of congenital syphilis. Figures such as Alfred Fournier began stressing the dangers of the disease to infants and newborns. According to Fournier, syphilitic kids would suffer from a permanent inferiority, marked by an ambiguous "unfitness for life."[139] The influential syphilologist's son, Edmond, further entrenched the notion of a hereditary syphilis, underlining abnormalities and malformations that he understood to be inherited from infected

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[136] Anna Katharina Schaffner, *Modernism and Perversion: Sexual Deviance in Sexology and Literature, 1850-1930* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 66.
[137] Lomas, "A Canon of Deformity: Les Demoiselles d'Avignon and Physical Anthropology," 433.
[138] "Types of degeneration cannot be but the result of a morbid influence, either arising from the physical order or the moral order." (my translation) See Bénédict Morel, *Traité des dégénérescences physiques, intellectuelles et morales: de l'espèce humaine et des causes qui produisent ces variétés maladives* (Paris: J. B. Baillière, 1857), 4.
[139] Harsin, 74.

parents. These theories aggravated the already heavy dread of a nation that was jointly haunted by lingering notions of impending degeneration foretold by certain scientists.[140]

In a similar vein, Dr. Louis Jullien, the same surgeon of Saint-Lazare who granted Picasso access into the hospital-prison, published a book dedicated to the examination of case studies involving the transmission of the disease.[141] By the year 1901, it was believed that seven to eight percent of all children conceived in Paris would succumb to syphilis contracted from their mother.[142] Although largely lacking in scientific grounding, the contagion of "hereditary syphilis" was thus deemed a catastrophic plight. Medical and scientific circles proclaimed that it robbed parents of the state's much needed citizenry, while simultaneously entailing a continual demographic weakening, a higher risk of sterility, and the diminishing strength of French children – all aspects that convictions regarding an already "depopulated" landscape of the nation were hardly equipped to bear. Alongside worrying notions of debased morals, alcoholism, and sex work, the prospect of a dystrophic, corruptive and degenerative *hérédosyphilis* was feared to be diagnosing the French population with a slow, but inevitable, degeneration that was further compounded by the failing fecundity and decline of the French birth rate. In the words of Paul Strauss, the influential solidarist national senator between 1897 and 1936: "The future is in the children, the little martyrs."[143]

Notions of a pernicious hereditary syphilis besetting children, and beliefs regarding the mother's culpable role in her offspring's' infections, are especially visualized in Edvard Munch's *The Inheritance* (1897-1899, fig. 3). In this morbid Symbolist painting, which Munch composed

[140] Corbin, 263.
[141] This book was titled *Hérédo-Syphilis: Descendance des Hérédo-Syphilitiques* (Paris: Baillière, 1901). For a concise review and critique of Jullien's confusion of *hérédosyphilis* and parasyphilis, see George Ogilvie, "Hérédo-Syphilis," *British Journal of Dermatology 13*, no. 6 (1901): 221-224.
[142] Corbin, 263.
[143] Quoted in Fuchs, *Poor and Pregnant in Paris: Strategies for Survival in the Nineteenth Century*, 70.

when he was living in Paris, a young, lachrymose mother is seated in what appears to be a doctor's waiting room, wiping her tear-streaked face with a handkerchief and balancing a diminutive, naked infant on her lap.[144] Her face is painted in a blotchy scarlet red, save for a grey shadow that spans the bottom of her face, much resembling the shady equivalent of a man's beard. She bears traces of an ambiguous or androgynous gender: her femininity is complicated not only by the whisper of facial hair, but also by her broad shoulders, muscular arms and the lack of visible locks of hair concealed by her large hat. Such details can be seen as pointing to certain fears, arising in some medical and anthropometric literature, that immoral and degraded sex workers could become more masculine through their "absorption" of semen. In these cases, physical anthropologists frequently sought out clues disclosing atavistic regression and closely inspected the "coarsened" female body, which through consistent, insalubrious sex work was believed to eventually exhibit male characteristics that ranged from excessive body hair to deep voices.[145]

Perched on the lap of his grieving mother, the child's head houses wide, almost lifeless eyes, and is abnormally large – likely denoting hydrocephalus. It is disproportionate to his miniaturized legs that hang limply, as well as to the frail arms that are contorted into a resting pose, guiding the viewer's gaze to the exposed, scarred rash or erythematous eruption that covers his pale white chest.[146] Completed in somber tones of green and black, this grotesque inversion of the Madonna and Child evokes maternal sorrow, as Munch visually transformed the mourning mother into a secular pietà or *Mater Dolorosa* who weeps while holding the near lifeless corpse

[144] R.S. Morton, "Syphilis in Art: An Entertainment in Four Parts. Part 4," *Genitourin Med 66*, no. 4 (1990): 286.
[145] Lomas, 436. For a fin-de-siècle anthropometric study of female delinquency, see also Pauline Tarnowsky, *Étude anthropométrique sur les prostituées et les voleuses* (Paris: E. Lecrosnier et Babé, 1889).
[146] Antonio Perciaccante and Alessia Coralli, "The History of Congenital Syphilis Behind *The Inheritance* by Edvard Munch," *JAMA Dermatology 154*, no. 3 (2018): 280.

of her naked child. In this composition, Munch captured a visceral sense of shame, guilt and grief, thereby apprehending widespread fears of the transference of mothers' sins. Although the painting's initial title of *The Syphilitic Child* immediately and unequivocally diagnosed the dying child with the venereal menace, the altered title remains suggestive, instead also calling attention to the mother's role in her child's blighted fate. Was it she who was responsible for his ineluctable hereditary infection, damning him to suffer a prematurely shortened life marked by illness and agony? Did the contamination of her maternal body render her reproductive capacities so sterile and impotent, her uterus so biologically incapable of bearing life that it instead expelled it as waste? One thing remains visually legible through the painting's composition and title: the child has been infected by his mother, thus embodying an example of the "syphilis of the innocents."

Apart from the red ear, sunken eyes and emaciated cheekbones of Picasso's figurations of prostitute-mothers, they do not display any of the commonly held symptoms of primary and secondary syphilis as overtly as those depicted in Munch's painting. Their hairless skin rather appears blemish-free, unmarked by chancres, rashes, papules, tubercules or other cutaneous stains.[147] Yet a sense of fermenting disquiet remains – perhaps these painted women find themselves in a period of latency that has followed visible outbreaks. Perhaps their anatomy deceptively conceals a lurking infection. Or perhaps they suffer from the tertiary stage of the disease, characterized by frequently invisible, yet severe, symptoms that affect internal organs, ranging from blindness resulting from the destruction of the optic nerve, to a form of neurosyphilis that afflicts the central nervous system, at times culminating in general paralysis.[148]

[147] Harsin, 75.
[148] Ibid., 76.

The three Picasso works in question demonstrate aesthetically and compositionally disparate treatments of the same trope of syphilitic prostitute-mothers. While *Motherhood* appears most thoroughly cleansed of the specter of the syphilis scourge in its selective underscoring of maternal affection, as well as in its portrayal of healthy skin tones in both mother and coddled infant, Picasso's *Mother and Child*, though created in the same year, tells an imperceptibly different story. Although both works at first glance employ markedly similar formal elements, ranging from the mothers' closed eyes and tender embrace, to the curvature of their backs and the billowing blue robes, a number of minute details merit further examination. In addition to the immediately recognizable signifiers of ill health in the figure of the mother in *Mother and Child*, the infant that she clutches to her chest also exhibits certain syphilitic symptoms, such as facial and cranial aberrations. Where the child in Picasso's *Desemparats* engages the viewer through his active gaze, appearing in relatively good health and aware of his spatial surroundings, the offspring in *Mother and Child* stares blankly at the ground. His skin is translucent and sickly pale, verging on yellow tones that may indicate jaundice. Moreover, his cranial structure bears semblance to the dying infant in Munch's work – it, too, is substantially large, with the protruding forehead comparably hinting at hydrocephalous. The features on his face seem strangely distorted in comparison with his broad forehead, conveying the impression of a smaller nose and asymmetrical, feeble eyes. Among the symptoms of "hereditary" syphilis in children, Jill Harsin lists opaque corneas, deafness and deformed permanent teeth, all of which cannot be definitively read in the sketched anatomy of this child.[149] However, "saddle nose," i.e., a nose with a sunken bridge, and other musculoskeletal deformities are also noted, with children often developing more obvious facial deformities as they age.[150]

[149] Ibid., 78.
[150] Ibid.

In contrast to the rosy cheeks of healthy cherubs in Cassatt's pure celebration of a robust infanthood, Picasso's portrayal of this child is flattened and distorted. The artist depicts the child firmly tucked within his mother's arms, thus showing that the baby still requires maternal support. Peeking out from the folds of his mother's cloak, his frail face betrays a wan and limpid complexion that leaves viewers wondering what ails him – perhaps even wondering whether he has inherited his mother's illness. Is this mother capable of raising exemplary soldier-citizens, or is she giving life to infirm progeny, who will grow up to infest society, both morally and medically? When confronted with this dismal blue image of an imprisoned prostitute-mother and her sickly child, the viewer may have speculated upon the mother's unfit condition, as well as her precarious position within a society that many feared was regressing. This particular composition of mother and offspring especially embodies contemporary discourse regarding the threat of syphilitic degeneration engendered by the diseased, profane body of the sickened sex worker and her children. Since syphilis was erroneously thought to hold the potential of remaining dormant and skipping a generation, only to reappear in the next, the role played by infected sex workers in its progressive spread soon gained an additional layer of foreboding: it was now understood to affect children, both directly and indirectly. Within this fin-de-siècle climacteric plagued by an atmosphere of medical and social crises, venereal diseases were thus considered evidence of the incipient degeneration of France, further entrenching and supporting notions of the intrinsic danger and immorality of sex work.

2.3 Picasso's Motherhood: Rethinking the Virgin-Whore Dichotomy

The complex figure of the prostitute-mother in nineteenth-century France embodied an irreconcilable paradox at its core, namely that of a voracious, gratuitous and unproductive

sexuality on the one hand, and an asexual, fertile maternal reproductive sexuality on the other. The literature of the time helped cultivate the notion of the dichotomous woman, as authors were largely unable to conceptually bridge identities of "Whore" and "Madonna." They frequently fragmented womankind by validating one quality over the other, whilst demonstrating the disastrous consequences of any cross-over.[151] The novella titled *Yvette* (1884) by the French author Guy de Maupassant (1850-1893) is one of the few instances in which a female character is cast in the simultaneous role of mother and sex worker. In it, the story follows Yvette, the young and naïve daughter of a high-class courtesan, as she attempts to navigate the budding interests of suitors, all the while unaware of her mother's profession and motives. Although Yvette may have been illegitimately borne of royalty, she is left without a place in society, belonging neither to lower nor higher ranks.[152] Shelley Thomas notes that at the time, daughters of sex workers were viewed as morally sick, destined to inherit the same fate as their profligate mothers and to be treated as novel products, sold as unique attractions to men.[153] The French poet Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867) constructed a sense of an irremediable, hereditary sex work, proclaiming of the daughters of sex workers: "Elle appartient par sa mère … par son hérédité … à la prostitution dorée."[154] In Maupassant's story, Yvette's mother is characterized as a horrible mother first and foremost, who puts her rapacious sexual appetite and selfish intentions before her maternal obligations. This literary representation, in which the prostitute-mother's name is never mentioned and in which she plays but a secondary role, further reveals the underlying Madonna/Whore bifurcation that was popular in the nineteenth-century

[151] Shelley Thomas, "The Prostitute/Mother in Maupassant's 'Yvette'," *L'Esprit Créateur 39,* no. 2 (1990): 74.
[152] Ibid., 76.
[153] Ibid.
[154] "Because of her mother and through her heredity, she belongs to golden prostitution." (*my translation*), quoted in ibid.

imagination. By presenting the prostitute-mother as engrossed with her own sexuality and choosing her lover over her daughter, Maupassant's narrative suggests that there existed no avenue for the libidinal within considerations of a desexualized maternal virtue.[155]

Reinforcing such conceptions of a dichotomized female body were the theories of the Austrian founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud (1856-1939). Having spent much time in fin-de-siècle Paris, Freud created a theory that was typical of his historical moment, which, as we have seen, had increasingly found itself divided into binary conceptions of morality/immorality, purity/impurity, health/sickness. Within the male unconscious, Freud united a split between the asexual, idealized woman as "Madonna," on the one hand, and the sexualized, debased "Whore" on the other, viewing this compartmentalization as a form of defense against the merging of the sexual and the maternal within the unconscious. In his Madonna-Whore complex, Freud cleaved the two currents of love, which he saw as "tender" vs. "sensual" dimensions, thereby formulating the axiom that "where such men love, they have no desire and where they desire, they cannot love".[156] According to him, this mother/whore split originates in the Oedipus Complex, occurring in the male child's mind as a way to sublimate the desire for his mother into a form of pure idealization. However, upon the realization of his parents' own sexual coupling, this difference eventually collapses, resulting in both an unconscious unity of the female body as well as a conscious splitting into figurations akin to the mother vs. the sex worker.[157] The sexual aspect of the mother is thus firmly displaced unto the sex worker.

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[155] Ibid., 75.
[156] Uwe Hartmann, "Sigmund Freud and His Impact on Our Understanding of Male Sexual Dysfunction," *Sexual Medicine History 6* (2009): 2335.
[157] Shannon Bell, *Reading, Writing and Rewriting the Prostitute Body* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 71.

The Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Carl Jung (1875-1961) perceived a duality in Picasso's Blue Period depictions of women, stating: "As the day is woman to him, so is the night; psychologically speaking, they are light and the dark soul (anima). The dark one sits waiting, expecting him in the blue twilight, and stirring up morbid presentiments. With the change of colour, we enter the underworld."[158] Within Picasso's dizzying descent into blue despair, his prostitute-mothers can be seen as embodying Manichean conceptions of "good" and "evil," of lightness and darkness, of morality and immorality that reflect the broader sociomoral and political trends of the Paris in which he found himself living and working. As we have previously seen, the artistic and literary representations of women that were emerging in nineteenth-century Paris alongside concurrent discourses regarding maternity and sexuality presented heterosexual, middle- to upper-class men with two mutually exclusive images: the ideal virtuous wife vs. the deviant woman with loose morals. While the reality was far more nuanced, this conceptual partition forged a libidinal quandary for some single fin-de-siècle men, as they were instructed to utilize their sexual *needs* within a productive, marital context, while being informed that sexual *pleasure* often lay in the extra-conjugal beds of immoral women.[159]

Women in fin-de-siècle France were increasingly defined according to class-related polarities, which were frequently constructed in discourses placing the urban poor in relation to bourgeois classes, to differentiate between health/sickness, cleanliness/filth, morality/depravity, civilization/animality, virtue/service.[160] Historically, sexuality and maternity had once been seen as coterminous. The two appellations of "prostitute" and "mother" were namely generatively

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[158] Carl Jung, *Collected Works of C. G. Jung, Volume 15: Spirit in Man, Art, and Literature*, edited by Gerhard Adler and R. F. C. Hull (Princeton University Press, 1971), 210.
[159] Clayson, *Painted Love: Prostitution in French Art of the Impressionist Era*, 11.
[160] Frank Mort, "Hygiene, Morality, and Class," in *Sexuality* edited by Robert A. Nye (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 97.

merged within the figure of the "sacred prostitute," a temple sex worker in ancient societies of Babylonia, Cyprus and the Near East, who joined fertility and eroticism into a spiritual-sexual unity by engaging in sexual relations with the ruling monarch in order to effect fertility for the land.[161] By the classical age of Greece, however, this amalgamation of sexuality, fertility and spirituality had been decisively severed in Solon's legal code, which began identifying women, according to their strictly reproductive or sexual function, as mothers or sex workers.[162] Fin-de-siècle France proved to be a modern extension of this theoretical schism, as it fused legal, social and medical discourse, complete with regulationist fervor and compartmentalization, to further entrench the factions of "honest" and "loose" women. However, as Hollis Clayson has noted, such regimented distinctions of the time were paradoxically less stable than ever before, as clearly demarcated boundaries were increasingly blurred to give way to the obsessive question "is she or isn't she [a sex worker]?"[163] Despite intensive medical study and classification by the likes of Parent-Duchâtelet, women's sexuality remained less perdurable, and more elusive and slippery. Its categorization and systematization attempted to negate realistic deviation, with government regulators immediately branding sex workers as inherently aberrant – a treatment that resulted in their virulent exclusion from the idealized social body.

Yet, as scholars have shown, the binary opposition created a system of mutual dependence, in which each polarity was fashioned in such a manner to reinforce the other – the handling of the stigmatized "others" at the margins of the law (i.e. the sex worker) thus also worked to inscribe the reality of ones constrained within its bounds (i.e. the mother).[164] The

[161] Bell, *Reading, Writing and Rewriting the Prostitute Body*, 24.
[162] Ibid.
[163] Clayson, 7.
[164] Andrew McCann, "Walter Benjamin's Sex Work: Prostitution and the State of Exception," *Textual Practice 28*, no. 1 (2014): 102.

creation of this sexual/asexual antithesis relies on the mutually enforcing, interdependent categories of determining site of presence (i.e., "Madonna" and virtuous mother) and determined site of other (i.e., "Whore" and illicit sex worker).[165] Philosopher Shannon Bell argues that the former produces the latter by establishing those who require exclusion; yet this excluded "other" likewise generates a presence – just as the figure of the wife/mother requires an antagonist for its identity construction, so too is the sex worker only defined in relation to the former.[166] Both sites contain traces of one another, infiltrating either category with ambiguous remnants that collapse notions of identity, autonomy and distinction.

Created between 1901 and 1903, Picasso's representations of prostitute-mothers visually encapsulate the complexities and futility of fin-de-siècle categorical demarcations of "lower class sex worker" vs. "bourgeois mother." Rather than decisively belonging to either group, these painted figures exist in the dynamic tension and interplay between opposites. The prominent addition of young offspring and tender embraces immediately suggest maternal devotion – yet the stark, ambiguous environment, sickly undertones and somber spirit create an atmosphere of syphilitic ailment and despair. Picasso ultimately played with the existing stereotypes that were increasingly propounded and heralded by medical and political professionals, instead highlighting the slippage that was occurring between honest and venal women in reality. The boundary between sex worker and non-sex worker in fin-de-siècle France was inherently porous, with many women at the time viewing their sex work as a transient phase before subsequently reintegrating into society to be reabsorbed as a mother and wife.[167] Additionally, the reproductive reality underlying the parental act of copulation was far removed from illusions of

[165] Bell, 40.
[166] Ibid.
[167] Ibid., 72.

chastity and virginity; not unlike the bodily activity of sex workers, married bourgeois mothers, too, engaged in intimate, procreative sexual relations. Picasso's figures thus dismantle assumptions of normative female bodies and behaviour. They are both "prostitutes" and mothers, embodying a multifaceted, nuanced and mutable identity that diverges from the images that were largely disseminated within the reigning socio-moral, literary and artistic imagination of fin-de-siècle France.

CONCLUSION

The end of the nineteenth century in France was a tense and anxious epoch in which the nation was continuously confronted with rhetoric cautioning against the twin risks of depopulation and degeneration. Although often termed *la belle époque* for its flourishing artistic and scientific developments, it was also a time of a cultural crises, filled with discussions of a drain in military power, dwindling national vitality, and a population threatened by degenerative illness and depravity.[168] In 1901, the year in which Picasso painted *Motherhood* and *Mother and Child*, a group of medical specialists founded the *Société française de prophylaxie sanitaire et morale*, recommending two fundamental courses of action to stimulate the growth of a healthy, vigorous population: the implementation of hyperregulatory regimes to police sex work on the one hand, and the creation of a rigid code on the other, through which sexual activity would be reserved for motherhood and marriage – thereby fashioning maternity as a patriotic duty.[169] While the sex worker was policed, the mother was championed. Against this backdrop, the figures of *mother* and *sex worker* were thus both subject to stringent scrutiny and debate, with

[168] Nye, *Crime, Madness and Politics in Modern France: The Medical Concept of National Decline*, 132.
[169] Ibid., 163.

the former perceived as a likely avenue towards a possible redemption and regeneration of the French nation. In stark contrast, positioned within a context abounding with syphilophobia and anxieties surrounding the clash between women's reproductive and licentious capacities, the latter sex workers' evasive, diseased corporeality blurred boundaries and entrenched a sense of social disorientation and degeneration.

As I have argued, Picasso's portrayals of prostitute-mothers capture elements of the lived realities of these nineteenth-century mothers and sex workers. Although visually similar to images of caring secular Madonnas, which were often depicted with heavy blue robes and quiet gestures of maternal deference, these women represented by Picasso retain a lingering presence of a sexual past, markedly departing from the portrayals of the Virgin Mary that stress the economy of salvation. This slippage of the women's identities from Madonna to Whore allows Picasso's prostitute-mother paintings to move more readily between what Jennifer Musial terms the embodied *state* of pregnancy or motherhood and the embodied *desire* of sexuality.[170] Imprisoned within the Hôpital Saint-Lazare for their broken, contaminated corporality, the models on which Picasso based these compositions were viewed by their contemporaries as sources of pleasure, contagion and depravity. Their ostensibly defective female body bore the blame for the dark, venereal pall that was feared to be spreading over the nation; after spending five years in the trade, approximately 75% of sex workers were found to have contracted syphilis.[171] Through their pathologized bodies, which were emblematic of the increasingly capitalistic turn in economic life, these women reflected broader anxieties about depopulation and degeneration, thus embodying national fears of France's prognosticated demise. As

[170] Jennifer Musial, "From 'Madonna' to 'Whore': Sexuality, Pregnancy, and Popular culture," *Sexualities 14*, no. 4 (2014): 397.
[171] De Beauvoir, 1272.

Shannon Bell cogently puts it, through the figure of the modern sex worker, "Eros is subjugated by Thanatos; the prostitute body is written as the death body, the putrefied body, the profane body."[172] By depicting this so-called *égout séminal* as humble Madonnas, Picasso's prostitute-mothers oscillate precariously between the temptation of Eve and the abnegation of Mary. They exist in a liminal space between concupiscence and parturiency, crossing the spirit/flesh divide and thereby resisting any form of categorization and systematization put forth in religion, medicine and sanitary science.

[172] Bell, 44.

Plate List

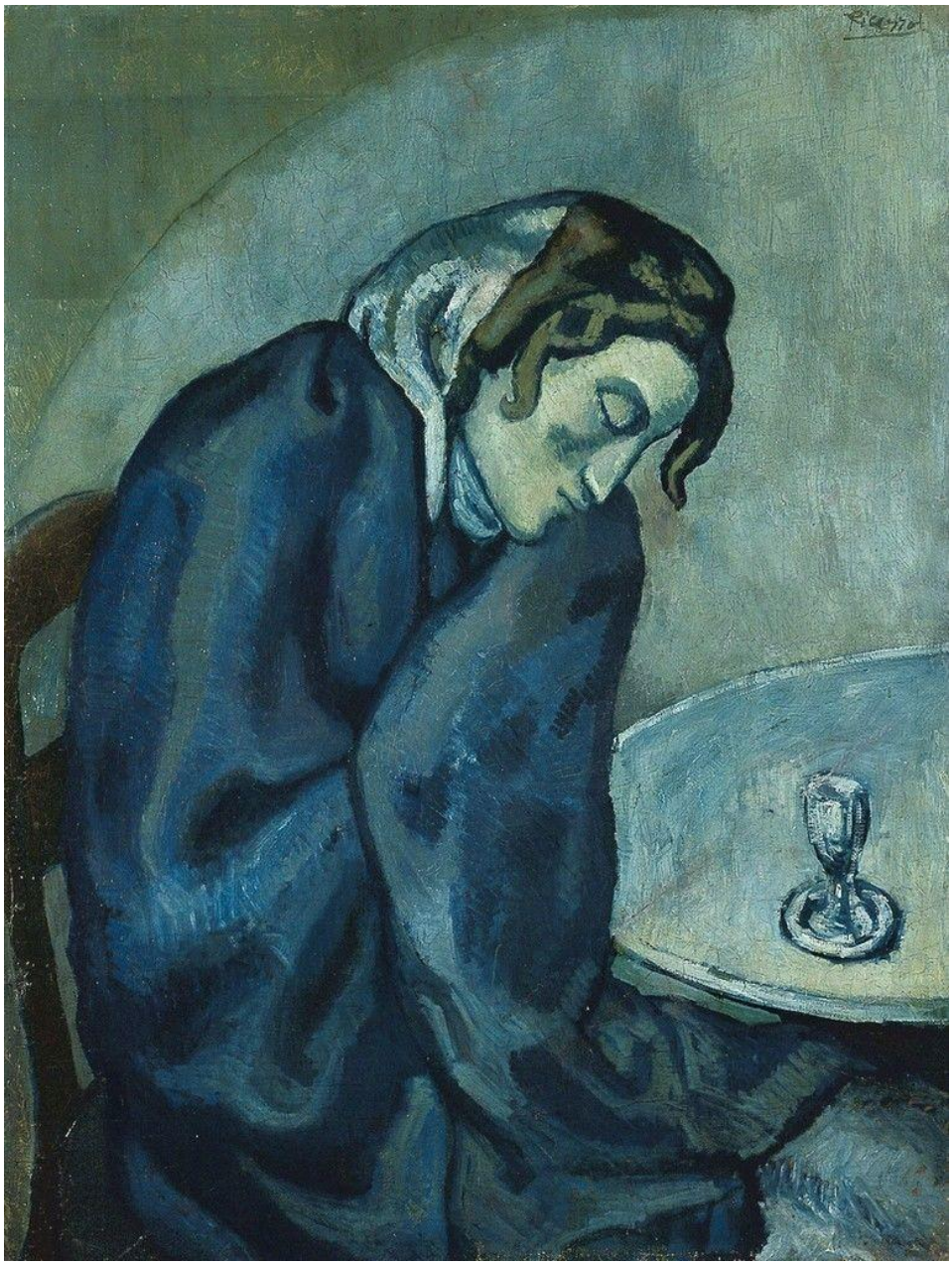

Fig. 1. Pablo Picasso, *The Absinthe Drinker (La Buveuse Assoupie)*. 1902, oil on panel, 80 x 62 cm. Kunstmuseum, Bern.

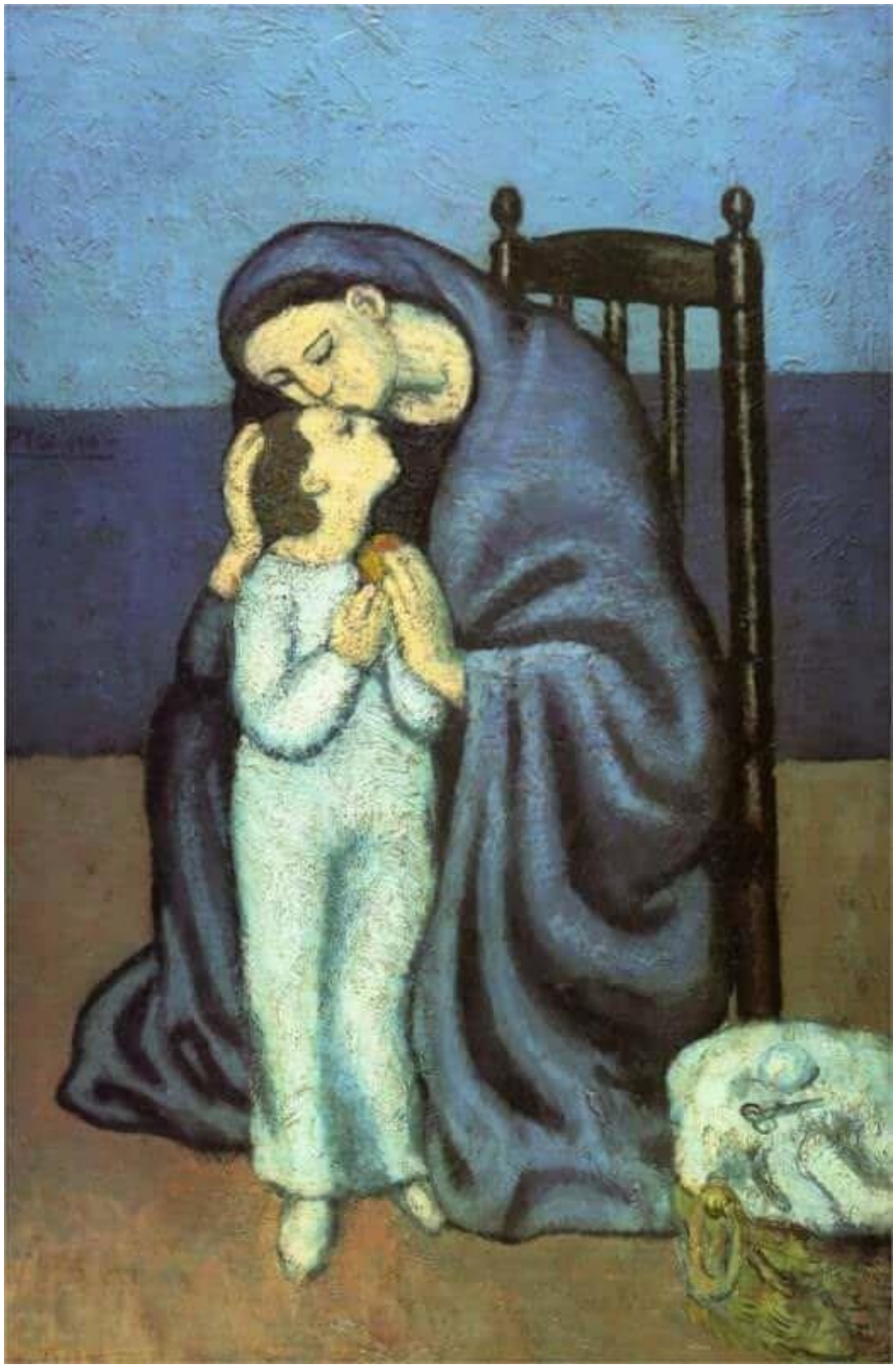

Fig. 2. Pablo Picasso, *Motherhood*. 1901, colour lithograph, 64 x 42 cm. Private collection.

Fig. 3. Edvard Munch, *Inheritance*. 1897-1899, oil on canvas, 141 x 120 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City.

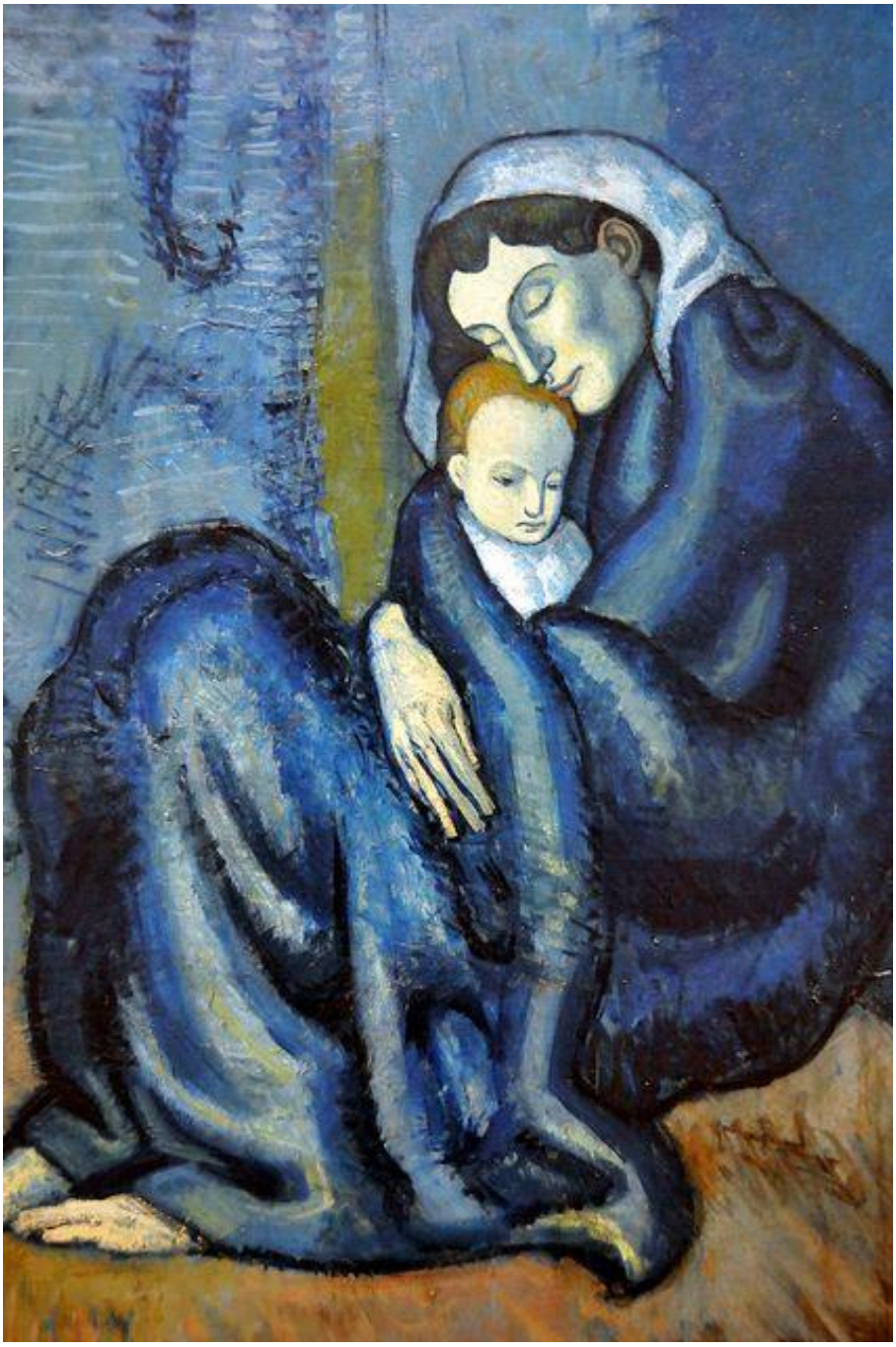

Fig. 4. Pablo Picasso, *Mother and Child*. ca. 1901, oil on canvas, 112 x 97.5 cm. Harvard Art Museum, Cambridge.

Fig. 5. Pablo Picasso, *Desemparats (Mère et enfant au fichu)*. 1903, pastel on paper, 47.5 x 41 cm. Museu Picasso, Barcelona.

Fig. 6. Alonso Cano, *Virgin of Bethlehem*. 1635-1637, oil on canvas, 91 x 71 cm. Capilla de Nuestra Señora de Belén, Catedral de Sevilla.

Fig. 7. Bartolomé Esteban Murillo, *Madonna with a Napkin*. ca. 1665-1666, oil on canvas. Museum of Fine Arts of Seville, Seville.

Fig. 8. Raphael, *Tempi Madonna*. 1508, oil on wood, 75 x 51 cm.
Alte Pinakothek, Munich.

Fig. 9. Giovanni Battista Salvi Sassoferrato, *Madonna with Child*. Mid-17th century, oil on canvas, 80 x 61 cm. Palazzo del Capitano del Popolo, Arezzo.

Fig. 10. Berthe Morisot, *The Cradle*. 1872, oil on canvas, 56 x 46 cm. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

Fig. 11. Mary Cassatt, *Mother and Child (The Oval Mirror)*. ca. 1899, oil on canvas, 81.6 x 65.7 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City.

Fig. 12. Elizabeth Nourse, *À l'abri (mère et bébé)*. ca. 1897, oil on canvas. Unlocated.

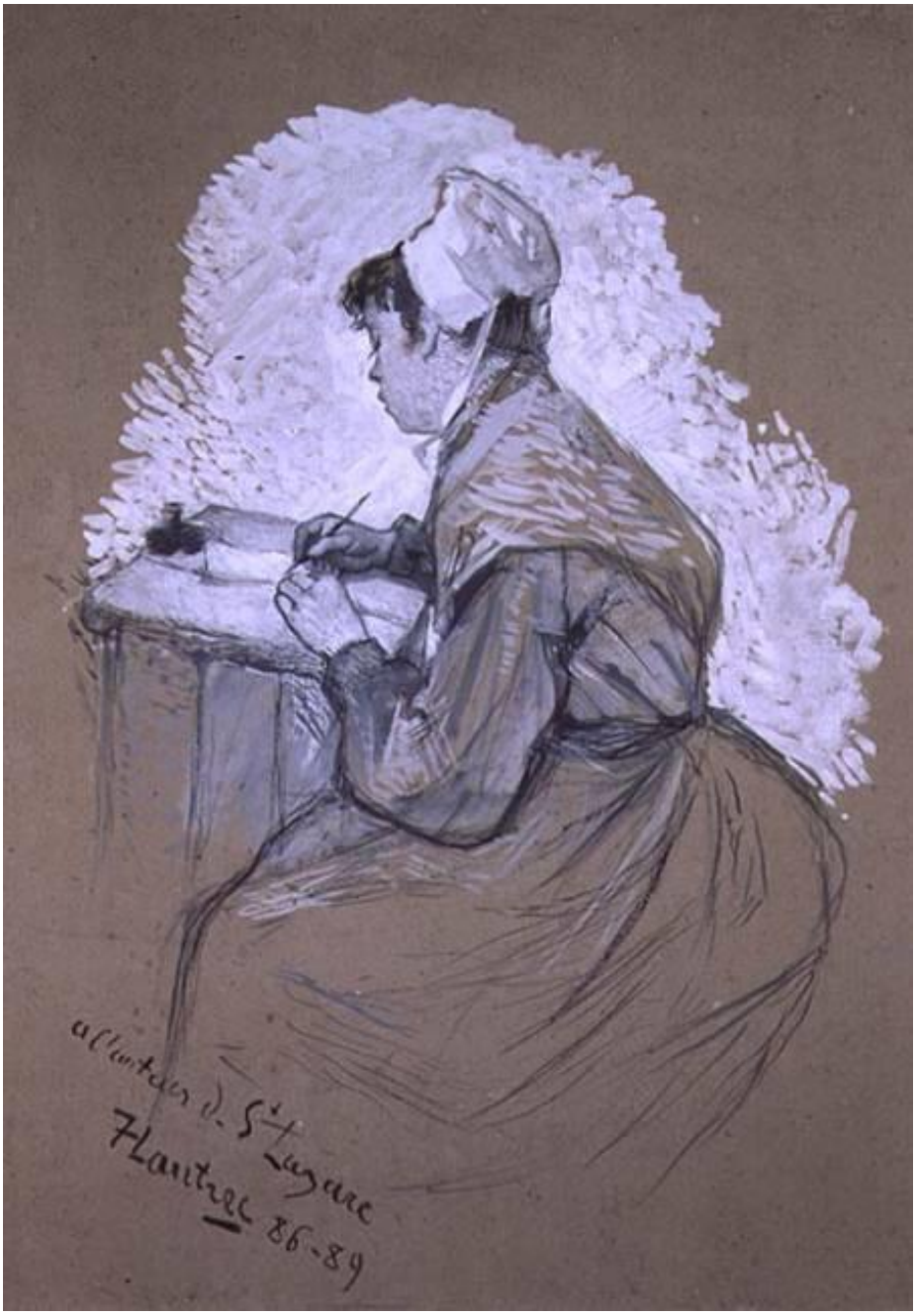

Fig. 13. Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, *To the Author of St. Lazare,* possible study for a drawing published in *Le Mirliton*. 1886-89, pencil and gouache on paper. Peter Willi, Private Collection.

Fig. 14. Pablo Picasso, *Women at the Prison Fountain*. 1901, oil on canvas, 92.7 x 74 cm. Private collection, USA.

Fig. 15. Pablo Picasso, *Two Women Sitting at a Bar*. 1902, oil on canvas, 80 x 91.5 cm. Royal Academy of Arts, London.

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