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microcosms" of the United States, Levine says. The gentry occupied the boxes, in the "pit" were middle-class patrons, and the gallery was the preserve of the common people. Shakespeare's plays served as the centerpiece of programs that included minstrel shows, acrobats, and other entertainments; and the shows traveled far and wide. Makeshift stages in Western outposts such as Red Dog, Rattlesnake, and Hangtown drew some of the best Shakespearean actors that the East, and even Europe, had to offer. Just about everyone was familiar with Shakespeare, Levine notes. Countless intentional parodies, such as *Julius Sneezer*, attest to that.

Shakespeare was popular for a number of reasons. His plays wore well in a society that valued oratory, and they lent themselves to melodrama. Shakespeare also seemed to be in tune with American moral sensibilities. The words, "The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, / But in ourselves," could just as well be those of Thomas Jefferson as of Cassius in *Julius Caesar*.

Yet, after the mid-19th century, "polite" culture gradually claimed Shakespeare for its own. Among the reasons: The masses of newly arriving immigrants demanded more entertainment that did not have to be heard to be enjoyed—boxing, burlesque, baseball. But Levine sees growing class divisions as the chief cause. Middle-class theatergoers lost their enthusiasm for popular showplaces, such as one in Philadelphia where the clientele was given to pelting the performers with rotten fruit and the management felt obliged to warn that "officers are appointed who will rigidly enforce decorum." So the well-to-do segregated themselves from their uncouth countrymen. And separate audiences, Levine notes, gave rise to separate cultures.

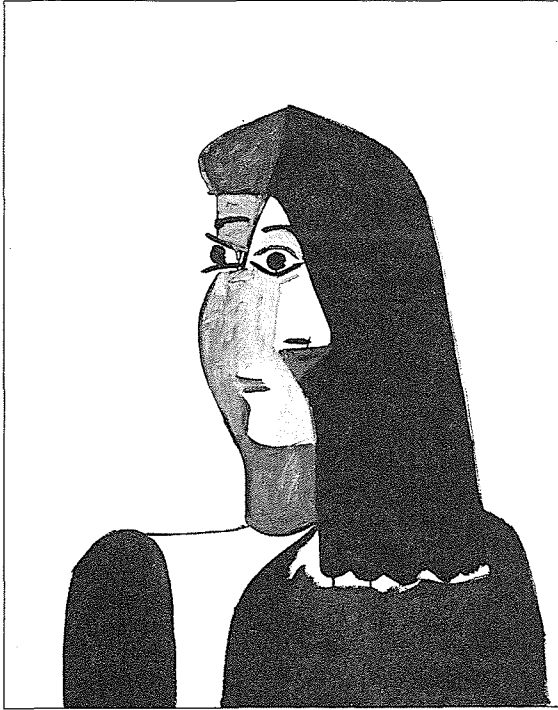
Picasso's Last Paintings

"The Catch in the Late Picasso" by John Richardson, in *The New York Review of Books* (July 19, 1984), P.O. Box 940, Farmingdale, N.Y. 11737.

During the last decade of his life, Pablo Picasso (1881–1973) fell from favor among art critics, and his works from that period are still not well regarded. But Picasso's friend and biographer, John Richardson, contends that they represent "a phenomenal finale to a phenomenal career."

In 1961, Picasso moved to a villa in southern France shortly after his marriage to Jacqueline Roque, the patient, protective (and much younger) woman whose presence henceforth dominated his life and work. After the move, the artist rarely left his immediate neighborhood, but he continued working vigorously until his death, guarded all the while by his wife. As in the past, the transformation in Picasso's life was mirrored in his work. Many of the paintings and prints of this period depict "baleful nudes flaunting their sexual parts." If some of these nudes and lovers often look like wrestlers, it is because Picasso "got hooked on *Catch*," the French version of staged television wrestling. *Catch* also contributed to "the general air of burlesque violence" in the late works.

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Picasso's wife, Jacqueline Roque, was the model for his 1963 painting, Head of a Woman.

The “not very sexy” sexuality of these works is seen by many critics as a pathetic reflection of the artist’s own waning sexual powers, but Richardson argues that Picasso used sex as a metaphor for the struggle, self-expression, and occasional comedy involved in the making of art. The vulgarity of what Picasso referred to as his “surreal” women—“hefty, smelly creatures” Richardson calls them—“threatened a generation nurtured on [abstract] art that had been deodorized and sanitized.” In his eighties, Picasso could still shock even the avant-garde.

To charges that Picasso during these years borrowed from his artistic predecessors and executed his paintings clumsily, Richardson concedes nothing. Picasso, sure of his place in the history of art, felt no compunction about “cannibalizing” past masters, commenting on their work, and, as in the case of Edgar Degas, even inserting their likenesses into his own paintings. The seeming clumsiness of the style in these late works, Richardson insists, is nothing but an attempt to ensure that technique would not stand in the way of subject.

Often that subject was art. More often it was Jacqueline Roque. Her presence in Picasso’s work during these years is rivaled only by her influence on his life. For that reason, Richardson says, this last of Picasso’s great periods should be called *l’époque Jacqueline*.