Picasso's Poems: Cubist Word Experiments

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**Abstract**

While Picasso wrote more than 350 poems and three plays in his lifetime, there is still relatively little academic research on his literary work. In 1935, Picasso stopped producing artworks and chose to focus on writing, which he did daily between 1935 and 1936. He kept producing texts until 1959. Picasso wrote mostly in French and in Spanish --- sometimes mixing both languages in the same poem. Picasso's French poems are particularly interesting as he was freer to experiment in this language than in his mother tongue.

While these texts have sometimes been dismissed as the hobby of a middle-aged man, I will argue that they constitute a true extension of Picasso's work. For Picasso, the border between word and image was fluid, as his own practice of integrating words in his paintings shows. I will demonstrate that in his poems Picasso was applying identical techniques to those used in his visual arts in the pre-1935 period. I will use intersemiotic translation theories to explore different equivalent techniques in his literary and visual production and their impact on the viewer/reader. I will argue that his literary works were not a break from his artistic creation but an expansion of his artistic methods to the written word. Therefore, this literary period should not be seen as "non-productive," but rather as a generative experimental time in the artist's career.

**Keywords**: Picasso, poetry, intersemiotic translation, cubism

**Résumé**

Alors que Picasso a écrit plus de 350 poèmes et trois pièces de théâtre au cours de sa vie, il existe encore relativement peu de recherches universitaires sur son œuvre littéraire. En 1935, Picasso a cessé de produire des œuvres d'art et a choisi de se concentrer sur l'écriture, ce qu'il a fait quotidiennement entre 1935 et 1936. Il a continué à produire des textes jusqu'en 1959. Picasso a écrit principalement en français et en espagnol, parfois en mélangeant les deux langues dans un même poème. Les poèmes français de Picasso sont particulièrement intéressants car il paraît plus libre d'expérimenter dans cette langue que dans sa langue maternelle.

Si ces textes ont parfois été considérés comme le passe-temps d'un homme d'âge mûr, je défends ici l'idée qu'ils constituent une véritable extension de l'œuvre de Picasso. Pour Picasso, la frontière entre mot et image était fluide, comme le montre sa propre pratique d'intégration des mots dans sa peinture. Je démontre dans cet article que dans ses poèmes, Picasso appliquait des techniques identiques à celles utilisées dans ses arts visuels avant 1935. J'utilise les théories de la traduction intersémiotique pour explorer différentes techniques équivalentes dans sa production littéraire et visuelle et leur impact sur le spectateur/lecteur. Je soutiens que ses œuvres littéraires n'étaient pas une rupture de sa création artistique mais une extension de ses méthodes artistiques à l'écrit. Par conséquent, cette période littéraire ne doit pas être considérée comme "non productive", mais plutôt comme une période générative expérimentale dans sa carrière d'artiste.

**Mots clés**: Picasso, poésie, traduction intersémiotique, cubisme

*Picasso, Pablo Ruiz—Spanish poet who dabbled in painting, drawing and sculpture.*
Pablo Picasso

For Picasso, the border between word and image was fluid—as is shown by his own practice of integrating words in his paintings and by the practice of visual poetry by the authors in his circle. Yet, Picasso's poems have sometimes been dismissed as the hobby of a middle-aged man, despite the fact that according to Miguel Acoca, Picasso himself told a friend that "long after his death" encyclopedias would describe him according to the quote above (Rothenberg 2004, xiii). Maybe, as this article argues, we should see Picasso's poetic practice as an extension of his visual practice. Rather than a mere diversion, then, Picasso was applying to literary media identical techniques to those he used in his visual arts in the pre-1935 period.

Along with Androula Michael, I too believe that for Picasso, "writing was not a circumstantial activity provoked by events in his private life, nor a game that he would occasionally borrow from the Surrealists. Writing gave him new 'answers' to older concerns" (2008, 8).[1] This is not surprising, as Picasso was, of course, an integral part of the Parisian cultural intelligentsia. French poems inspired by Picasso's work and life are numerous, while many writers transposed and commented on Picasso's visual production (Breunig 1958, 3). More directly, Picasso himself cultivated friendships with writers such as Max Jacob, Jean Cocteau, Guillaume Apollinaire, Paul Éluard, André Breton, Robert Desnos, and many others. The importance of these friendships is evidenced by the fact that on the door of Picasso's studio in the Bateau-Lavoir the formula "au rendez-vous des poètes" was inscribed. These poets are already well known for their exploration of the visual quality of poetry, and Apollinaire's calligrammes and Cocteau's works, for example, have been extensively studied.

In contrast, while Picasso wrote more than 350 poems and three plays, there is still relatively little academic research on his literary work. One had to wait until 1989 for most of his works to be published (Picasso, Bernadac, and Piot; see also Bernadac 2014), and even then, many texts were not translated into English until 2004. The colloquium "Par le mot, par l'image, l'œuvre littéraire de Picasso," held in Zurich in 2011, and the subsequent publication of the *Cahier de l'Herne* no. 106, edited by Wolf in 2014, marked a significant step in the study of Picasso's literary production. Pioneers in this research area, such as Christine Piot (2014), Marie-Laure Bernadac (1991, 1992, 2014), and Androula Michael (2008, 2014a, 2014b), still lament the limited interest literary scholars have taken in this topic. I optimistically note, however, an increase in interest (especially from the general public) since the much-needed English translation, *The Burial of the Count of Orgaz and Other Poems*, was published in 2004 and the exhibition at the Musée Picasso (21 July 2020- 03 January 2021). In light of this recent interest, this article aims to focus on the relationship between the well-known Picasso-painter and the not-so-well-known Picasso-writer.

Despite this discrepancy in scholarly knowledge, writing undoubtedly occupied a large part of Picasso's life. In 1935, he stopped painting and chose to focus on writing.[2] Picasso wrote daily between 1935

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[1] My translation from "Son écriture n'est pas une activité de circonstance provoquée par les épisodes de sa vie privée, ni un jeu qu'il aurait emprunté occasionellement aux surréalistes.Elle vient donner des 'réponses' nouvelles à des préoccupations plus anciennes."

[2] It is possible that there are even earlier texts or versions of texts still to be discovered. See Claude Picasso (2014) and Michael's (2014a, 165–66) argument related to Stein's text of 1933. In light of this, 1935 could instead be considered as the intensification of a process.

and 1936 and he kept producing texts until 1959. He wrote mostly in French and in Spanish and sometimes mixed both languages in the same poem.

Picasso's French poems are particularly interesting as, like many artists and writers of the time, such as Alberto Giacometti or Samuel Beckett, Picasso found that writing in a foreign language allowed him to experiment more freely with words that were detached from habits of language and traditional syntactical structures. He could also expand the usual limits of vocabulary, which Jerome Rothenberg (2004, xvii) called his "writing not at home". This rhizomatic and nomadic writing thus freed Picasso from conventional linguistic rules (Joris 2004, 167; Michael 2014a, 167).

To explore different equivalent techniques in Picasso's literary and visual production and their impact on the viewer/reader, this article will use intersemiotic translation theories. In his text "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation," Roman Jakobson (1963, 79) presented three types of translation: intralingual (or reformulation), interlingual (or translation in its usual meaning), and intersemiotic (or transmutation from one sign system to another). This last category can be used to study most word/image relationships from art criticism to illustration, or, as in this article, equivalence between visual and writing processes. If one considers Picasso's poems within the framework of "intersemiotic translation," the key issue is then one of finding equivalents between the two linguistic production processes. As such, the comparison between Picasso's Cubist poems and his images offer the same level of discrepancy and adaptation as interlingual translation.

All translations must adapt the material translated to the social, cultural, and in our case material context. Therefore, there cannot be any completely faithful translation. By looking at the equivalent techniques he employed in text and image, I will argue that Picasso's literary works were not a break from his artistic creation but an expansion of his artistic methods to the written word. Thus, this period shouldn't be seen as non-productive, but as a generative experimental time in the artist's career.

Picasso's writing, however, should not be taken as a homogenous whole. There are variations in his production and stylistic evolution—if one compares the texts produced in the 1930s and in the 1950s, for example. In any case, it is beyond the scope of this paper to trace his literary evolution. Rather, I will focus on his early poetic production and on what I see as his Cubist word experiments, with the texts studied in detail here having been chosen as particularly representative. I will also not discuss here the diversity of materials on which and with which Picasso writes. Michael (2008, 38–58) has already offered a first study of these materials: from envelopes to letterhead paper, from precious rare paper to toilet tissue, or recycled paper written on with lead or colored pencils, Chinese ink or red and blue ink pens. While the materials certainly influence the character of the production, I have chosen to focus on the works as literary texts rather than visual objects.

This paper will first set the scene and contextualize Picasso's shift to the verbal medium. I will then explore the equivalence between his Cubist visual techniques and his literary writing process, looking at his poems' themes, relationship to space, time, and narrative, and his layering of colors/words. Finally, I will focus on three poems, showing how they can be considered Cubist word experiments and showing how Picasso's analytical Cubism, synthetic Cubism, and collage are translated into words.

**Setting the Scene: Picasso the Writer**

*Paris as Ferment for Interdisciplinary Exploration*

Paris in the period from 1918 to 1935 was, once again, coming to life artistically. After the trauma of the First World War, the art world reignited. Artists were gradually abandoning Montmartre, which had become too expensive, and were settling in the Montparnasse area. In the early 1920s, Montparnasse was the new cultural heart of Paris: artists, writers, models, and bohemians from all over the world settled there. Apollinaire had called Paris "a haven of freedom and beautiful simplicity" (quoted in Wilson 2002, 110), and it was a place where tolerance, freedom, and cheap rent meant that artist colonies thrived. In particular, "La Ruche" (the beehive) was known for its extreme living conditions —the rooms were notoriously cold, dirty, and small—but the intellectual and artistic life made it all worthwhile.

Furthermore, Montparnasse was, at the time, beyond the tax collecting walls, so many cafés, dance halls, and famous brasseries opened there, including the legendary Le Dôme, La Rotonde, and La Coupole, among many others. These became the meeting points of the art world. In 1934 Marcel Duchamp stated that:

> Montparnasse was the first really international colony of artists we ever had. Because of its internationalism it was superior to Montmartre, Greenwich Village or Chelsea [and] the colourful but non-productive characters of Montparnasse often contributed greatly to the success of the creative group. Liquor is an important factor in the exchange of ideas between artists. (quoted in Wilson 2002, 111)

Many significant artists of the period thrived in this environment—Giacometti, Constantin Brancusi, Duchamp, Diego Rivera, Joan Miró, Amedeo Modigliani, Piet Mondrian, and Picasso, to name but a few— side by side with the most significant literary figures of the period, including Breton, Cocteau, Éluard, Blaise Cendrars, James Joyce, and Beckett.

At this period and in this place, the exploration of the relationship between word and image was thriving both within artistic and literary circles. As early as the 1910s, words had been included in paintings through the use of stencils, collage, or simply by painting words on the surface (Levaillant 1973). Similarly, Apollinaire, following in the footsteps of Stéphane Mallarmé, worked on visual forms of poetry. In a letter to Picasso, Apollinaire described his calligrammes as poems "that borrow their form not from common prose but to their subject matter itself. So, it is no longer free verse and at the same time the poetic form is always renewed" (quoted in Michael 2008, 14).[3] As Rothenberg (2004, xiii) has stated, when Picasso took up poetry, he must not be considered "an isolated or naïve voice but as a participant in what was then a verbal art in transformation."

*Picasso's Visual Art before His Turn to Writing*

Between 1908 and 1935 Picasso had gone through several periods of experimentation with visual media.[4] From 1909, Picasso and Braque investigated Cubist modes of representation, about which Braque famously

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[3] My translation from "qui empruntent leur forme, non à une prosodie quelconque mais à leur sujet même. Ainsi ce n'est plus le vers libre et en même temps la forme poétique est toujours renouvelée."

[4] Traditionally art historians separate his production into the Blue period (1901–4), the Rose period (1904–6), the African period (1907–9), the Cubist period (1909–18), the Neo-classicism/return to order period (1918–25), and a Surrealist period (1925–36).

said that "it was a little like being roped together on a mountain. … We worked very hard, the two of us" (quoted in Gedo 1980, 85). Two clear strains of Cubism were developed between 1908 and 1917: analytical Cubism and synthetic Cubism.

In analytical Cubism the subject is deconstructed into small geometric parts that are distinctly detached from one another. The subject's form is shattered with a clear center of composition on the canvas. Such paintings rejected single-point perspective and offered simultaneity of viewpoints while maintaining a strong overall geometric structure. Picasso's famous portrait of Ambroise Vollard of 1910 is a good example of such a technique. The figure appears as seen through a broken mirror, with the shape fragmented and systematically analyzed through this deconstruction. The image has tonal unity and regular geometric rhythm; there seems to be a quasi-mathematical logic to the deconstruction.

From 1912, there was a shift in Picasso's Cubist production. He used brighter colors, a more contrasting palette, and simpler lines and shapes to look for the geometric essence of the object. Synthetic Cubism deconstructs the object and recomposes an image focusing on the decorative ambiguities created. The aim of such an image is no longer the systematic exploration of the shape, but the explosion of the shape to liberate its aesthetic potential. *Violin and Guitar* of 1913 is a good example: the instruments are decomposed but their re-composition is more of a linear suggestion than a geometrical reconstruction. There is no systematic geometric rhythm here and the objects become a pretext for the painting. Collages (and *papiers collés*) are a significant part of this type of exploration.[5]

Words were used in Cubist visual works mostly in the form of collage or the inclusion of words painted onto the surface. Words were a constant feature in both Braque's and Picasso's works between 1911 and 1914 and in their collages from 1912 (Levaillant 1973, 45). As Françoise Levaillant (1973, 47) noted, these plays with words were exposing "the problem of painting's means of description."[6] These word experiments mix the readable and the visible, the intentional and the accidental, creating a dynamic relationship between the language of words and that of images on a single surface. There was therefore a fluid relationship between word and image for Picasso, even before he had started writing. Jaime Sabartès (1996, 128) has argued that "for Picasso, words directly precede the ideas; he draws on an impulse, then his drawing suggests more to him: words then come as a complement to finish the sketched image or other modes of expression."[7]

*Turning Points*

The 1930s were a turning point in Picasso's personal, political, and artistic life. Surrealism had, till then, a significant influence on his practice and on the way he perceived the word-image relationship. In his 1928 text "Le Surréalisme et la peinture," Breton branded Picasso "one of ours". Although Picasso exhibited works at the first Surrealist group show (1925), he never adopted the automatism concept at the core of Surrealism, as some other artists did—Giacometti, for example, produced texts written using Surrealist automatic techniques. In contrast, Picasso didn't believe automatic writing could be summoned at will (Michael 2008, 300).

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[5] Traditionally art historians distinguish between collage (which can be any material glued together) and *papiers collés* (which is only glued paper). For ease of use, we will employ the term collage for both practices throughout the chapter.
[6] My translation from "le problème des moyens de la description en peinture."
[7] My translation from "chez Picasso, les mots précèdent directement les idées; il dessine par impulsion, puis son dessin lui suggère d'avantage: les mots viennent alors en complément pour achever l'image esquissée par des lignes ou tout autre mode d'expression."

In 1935, Picasso also was in the process of separating from Olga Khokhlova. That same year, Marie-Thérèse Walter gave birth to Picasso's daughter, Maïa. In the summer of 1935, Picasso, instead of his usual traveling, stayed home in Paris. In the autumn he went to Boisgeloup to work in relative peace on his sculpture and writing (Penrose 1966, 249–50). The events that followed the start of the Civil War in Spain on July 18, 1936, affected Picasso greatly. For him, it was a time of political engagement unlike anything he had undertaken before.

In 1935, Picasso was fifty-four years old and in transition. As Sabartès (1996, 136) reported, Picasso "is writing. He has a notebook in one of his pockets. … To write, any place is good for him: the corner of a table, the edge of furniture, the arm of an armchair, his knee … as long as no one moves."[8] Furthermore, Michael has argued that it was not by chance that Picasso took up writing at the same time a major retrospective of his collage was held at the Galerie Pierre, reminding Picasso of his previous foray into using words as material (2008, 14; see also Baldassari 2003, 142). She also argued that it is very likely that this date marks an intensification of his writing activities (2014a, 166).[9] Picasso focused at that time on what Bernadac calls his "verbal clay" (quoted in Rothenberg 2004, xvii).

Picasso's incursion into literature was taken seriously at the time, especially in Surrealist circles. In 1935, Breton even wrote about Picasso's poems for the journal *Cahier d'Art*. Furthermore, in a 1935 letter to her son, Picasso's mother said, "they tell me that you write. I can believe anything of you. If one day they tell me that you say mass, I shall believe it just the same" (quoted in Sabartés 1996, 20).[10] Writing was, then, a serious endeavor for Picasso and should be studied as such. His early poems are particularly interesting when it comes to his writing technique. Indeed, Picasso translated his pictorial techniques to writing and experimented with his verbal material.


**Reading Picasso's Poems: Intersemiotic Translation of Picasso's Technique**

If we look at equivalents between Picasso's Cubist visual techniques and his literary writing process for his early poems, there are several levels of correspondence. The first level is the poems' themes, the fabric of his visual and literary world. The second level is Picasso's textual and visual relationship to space, time, and narrative. The final level is that of layering colors and words, which is the way in which he applies his materials.

*The Fabric of his Literary World: Picasso's Poetic Themes*

The first layer, the thematic layer, is quite problematic in Picasso's poems. Many poems are not "about" something, but rather flow from one image to the next, overlapping, jumping, and changing direction. The "bric-à-brac" of words (Michael 2014b, 212), topics, and images calls to mind Picasso the collector, who gathered all sorts of materials, such as rocks, postcards, toys, African art, papers, artworks, and so on.

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[8] My translation from "il écrit. Il a dans une de ses poches un carnet.… Pour écrire tous les endroits lui sont bons: un coin de table, le bord d'un meuble, un bras de fauteuil, son genou.… Pourvu qu'on ne bouge pas."
[9] In Michael's words: "au fond je suis un poète qui a mal tourné".
[10] My translation from "On me dit que tu écris. De toi je crois tout possible. Si un jour on me dit que tu as dit la messe, je le croirai aussi bien."

The vocabulary of painting is also present in his poems: frames, brushes, palettes, shadows, geometrical shapes, and many colors populate his text. Painterly activity is sometimes alluded to, as in the poems dated January 4, 1936 and October 13, 1936. Although these painterly references were by no means dominating his writing, some themes related to the content of his paintings can also be found in the poems. While there is a certain visual dimension to his poems, as there is a literary dimension to his visual production, as Michael (2008, 128–29) has argued, colors are not used as colors in his text, but only as signposts or as a structural device.

Michael (2008, 8) has also noted that recurring images related to "corrida, food, still lives, death, fold and fan, body, [and the] mixture of genres" were present in his writing. Unsurprisingly, in the fabric of his visual and textual production we find some of the same patterns and some of the same themes: *toro*, carrots, sardines, bottles, mirrors, instruments, cheese, and women are all there. Bernadac has studied the presence of the corrida (1991) and food (1992) in his writing; to her, Picasso's poems are about food, bodies, and paint (1992, 22–29). The words are related to such themes, creating fluid images, dynamic still lives, portraits, and landscapes, one image merging into the other in the manner of a Surrealist film, taking us into what seems like oneiric travel into Picasso's usual painted imagery.

In contrast, Javier Gutierrez-Rexach (2014, 292–97) has argued that the subject matter of the poems forms an autonomous reality where the associations are free and where artistic reality is detached from the everyday. This consideration is problematic, because as T. J. Clark (1999, 220–21) has shown, Picasso never detached himself completely from the representation of reality and of specific referents. Even in his most abstract works, one finds what Yve-Alain Bois (1992) calls "hieroglyphic" reference to the real world. Furthermore, Rosalind Krauss has argued that Picasso's collages, for example, involved a transformation of the everyday into high art (1992, 281), similar to the way in which Mallarmé worked. Indeed, a close look at the poems reveals that the themes go beyond Picasso's usual painted imagery and are closely related to his everyday life: his family life (children, songs), daily tasks and relationships (lists, prices, letters, presents), and his life events and pleasures (swimming in the sea, smoking, parties, meetings) all enter the poems. Thus, the themes are more varied than is usually claimed and are not separable from Picasso's everyday reality. Tension between his daily life and his writing process is also visible, for example in the poem dated November 12, 1935, he wrote "from that moment without the inevitable stop at the table at lunch time to be able to write while sitting in the middle of so many hyperboles mixed with the cheese and the tomato" (Picasso 2004, 46).[11] In a very Mallarméan approach, Picasso crystallizes from his daily life.

Some argue, including Michael (in Picasso 2014, 15), that the subject matter is at the poems' core and that it is the contemporaneity of the writing that matters. It is the simultaneous layers of time that are represented, encompassing direct sensations and memories recalled in the moment of writing (Michael 2014b, 213). The topic, the theme of the poem, can then be considered writing itself (Michael 2014b, 214). In his poem dated November 3, 1935, Picasso described himself writing

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[11] My translation from "qu'à partir de ce moment sans l'inévitable arrêt à table à l'heure du déjeuner pour pouvoir écrire assis au milieu de tant d'hyperboles mêlées avec le fromage et la tomate." For the original poem see Picasso (2013, 272).

while seated—writing in his small notebook—elbows sticking out one more than the other over the table's edge—the left hand holding the already written page the other on the paper—the point of the pencil here—where I press it. (Picasso 2004, 39)[12]

Around this passage, Picasso gathered and wove sensations, objects, and memories. Just as in his Cubist years, the objects were only an excuse to explore the frontiers of representation. Just as he played in his visual arts with recurring motifs (violins, faces, bottles, and so forth) he copied and re-copied his own texts (Michael 2008, 100), creating endless variations around specific motifs.

When analyzing the equivalence between the Cubist visual and verbal themes of Picasso, we see that while he used some of his usual visual vocabulary and translated it into words, he also expanded his thematic fields to encompass more of his daily life than he did in painting. However, the ways in which he uses such motifs are very similar in painting and in poetry.

*Fragmentation of Space, Time, and Narrative*

A feature of Cubist visual exploration is the fragmentation of space and time in the picture plane. In the same way that Picasso did not obey the rules of perspective, he ignored grammatical rules. As he famously stated, "I prefer to create [rules] myself as I see fit rather than to bend my words to rules that do not belong to me" (quoted in Sabartés 1996, 154).[13] Fragmentation and non-linearity find their intersemiotic equivalent in Picasso's poems.

Just as Picasso's painting deconstructs the image to achieve evocation through fragmentation, Picasso deconstructs the syntax of his text. This is partly what creates a loss of narrative and the disappearance of clear subject matter in his poems. His writing, focusing on rhythm, evokes Picasso's visual work on non-linear compositions that shatter the image, offering no single-point perspective. One image/word attracts the next, the interaction breaking and shifting the form. As Picasso explained about his painting, "there is an interaction, an effect of a painting's line on one another: one line attracts the other and at the point of maximum attraction the line curves and the form is changed" (quoted in Michael 2008, 169).[14] Just as Picasso eliminated delineated and finished forms in his visual works to create complicated images, he eliminated the syntactic and grammatical borders between words in his poetry, thereby creating labyrinthine texts. These changing shapes and moving focus points in the poems, as in the images, create in the reader the perception of a text in perpetual flux.

This impression of flux is reinforced by what Pierre Joris called an "endless chain of derivation" for Picasso's unusual use of "of /de," which Joris connects with "what the Situationists called a dérive"(2004, xxviii).

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[12] Originally, "toutefois qu'assis – écrivant sur son petit carnet – les coudes débordant un peu plus l'un que l'autre la ligne de la table – la main gauche tenant la feuille déjà écrite et l'autre sur le papier – la pointe du crayon ici – où j'appuie." For the full poem, see Picasso (2013, 187).

[13] My translation from "plutôt en faire moi-même à ma fantaisie, que plier mes mots a des règles qui ne m'appartiennent pas."

[14] My translation from "il y a une interaction, un effet des lignes d'un tableau l'une sur l'autre: une ligne attire l'autre, et au point d'attraction maximale la ligne s'incurve vers le point d'attraction et la forme est modifiée."

The elimination of punctuation also contributes to this effect of a shifting multiplicity of viewpoints. Picasso asserted that "punctuation is a cache-sexe that hides the private parts of literature" (quoted in Sabarté 1996, 152),[15] and he even toyed with the idea of writing without separating the words at all. Michael notes that the lack of punctuation creates a "river-poem" without beginning or end (Michael 2014a, 169). Generally, the lack of punctuation has the following effects:

1. it creates an ensemble or a unit of meaning, a tableau;
2. it triggers multiple meanings of words (I will return to this later);
3. it reinforces the non-linearity of the narrative.

The only continuity perceptible by the reader is not that of a usual narrative (with a clear beginning, middle, and end), but the continuity of thought, of an inner monologue or a dream (Michael 2008, 289). This fluidity is contained within a block of text. The block of text, as with the limited borders of a canvas, gives a structured space for the interaction of word and image to take place. The rhythm created within that space offers a geometrical framework for that interaction. In the image, the small geometrical planes are placed side by side in an organized non-mimetic way; similarly, the rhythm of the poem is inherent to the words and is not imposed by the traditional use of punctuation (Michael 2008, 276).[16] This "constructed deconstruction" within a limited space is a clear intersemiotic translation of Cubist methods into the realm of words.

Furthermore, Picasso's use of the eternal present creates fixity in the poem. Through this use of tense, Picasso attempts to remove the diachronic dimension of the text to recreate, to some measure, the synchronicity of painting in word form. Michael notes that this is a way of using the page as a visual unit (2008, 157), which in turn reinforces this painterly effect. When reading Picasso's poems, the viewer/reader's eyes drift away from line to line, resulting in a more global apprehension of the text. Just as Picasso refused finished works in the visual realm, he refused endings in his poems and used no full stops. He also could not help but make additions to his poems even on already typed or published text (Michael 2008, 128).

At the level of the construction of the text/image, we then find strong intersemiotic equivalence between Picasso's Cubist techniques and his writing process. He deconstructs syntax just as he does picture space, he fragments his narrative as he does his composition, and reconstructs images/narratives creating word/image interactions.

*Layering Colors/Words*

"Poems?" he said to me, "…when I began to write them I wanted to prepare myself a palette of words, as if I were dealing with colours. All these words were weighted, filtered and appraised. I don't put much stock in spontaneous expressions of the unconscious and it would be stupid to think that one can provoke them at will." (Picasso quoted in Rothenberg 2004, xvi)

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[15] My translation from "La ponctuation est un cache-sexe qui dissimule les 'parties honteuses' de la littérature."

[16] In some of his poems, Picasso experimented with various line lengths in the text to reinforce the rhythm (Sabartés 1996, 147).

Like his colors, Picasso's words were carefully weighed. It is important to understand—and is obvious when one looks at his manuscripts with their over-working, re-writing, strikeouts, circles, and arrows—that despite the impression of spontaneity created by his writing style, Picasso wrote laboriously and carefully chose each word and word association. Just as Picasso worked on combinations of forms and colors, using similar motifs in different combinations, in his poems he worked on combinations of words. The same words reappear in different combinations in the same poem but also across different poems. This creates what Levaillant (1973, 49) describes as a "juxtaposition of partial significations."[17] The Cubist visual process by which the image, through deconstruction and overlap, is detached and shifted from its referents in the real world finds its equivalent in poetry.

This process opens up the polysemy of the word, just as it does the ambiguity of the visual form. Picasso uses the word's multiple meanings to create plays on words (especially puns) and layered meanings. As Katherine Shingler (2013, 351) emphasizes, "what we find in Picasso's Cubism is an analogous tendency to produce visual overlaps: points at which different shapes coincide, or where a line or simple shape gives rise to two or more alternative readings." Just as images with multiple meanings change the way we see and understand the image, this use of words opens their meanings to multiple interpretations. Unsurprisingly then, in his Cubist works Picasso often used puns, that is "two or more meanings converg[ing] onto a single signifier, visual or verbal" (Shingler 2013, 350), and he transfers this use onto his poems.[18] This exploration of language, playing with multiple meanings and sounds, is remembered by Claude Picasso as one of his favorite childhood games with his father (2014, 13). In Picasso's poems, words are used as material—aural and visual—relatively independently from their customary use.

This materiality of the word is used to create rhythms through repetition, accumulation, and juxtaposition. Picasso proceeded, as with painting, adding layers and layers of words. As Joris notes:

> The conjunction "and," maybe the most basic ligature in our languages, is in Picasso—just as it is in children's telling and, at times, in epic narrative—a pure accelerator of action, a way of getting from one thing to the next; its multiplicity immediately overcomes the (mis)use … and [is] made to function as a divider, separator, creator of dialectical or ontological differentiations between two terms and thus as the originator of all dualisms. (Joris 2004, xxvii)

More than simple "gestures" (Joris 2004, xxvii), each of Picasso's additions are brushstrokes, the slow layering of the painter. Repetition is a key element of Picasso's writing; this is Michael's "mathematic time" (2014b, 216), the geometric framework within which he creates.

Once again, just as Cubist painting is about showing the act of painting, Picasso's poems are about making visible the act of writing. Just as Cubist works show all the layers of painting, all the layers of writing are laid out in the poems.

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[17] My translation from "une juxtaposition de significations partielles".
[18] See for example the poem of March 24, 1936, quoted in Picasso (2013, 403):
    24 Mars 1936
    pot
    scie
    ma     lady
    gai
    rit     sable.
This could also be read as "possi(bl)e maladie guérissable".

**Picasso's Cubist Poems: Analytical Cubism, Synthetic Cubism, and Cubist Collage**

The use of various Cubist techniques in his poems means that in general terms one can talk about intersemiotic translation of techniques and Cubist experimentation in words. I will now undertake a close analysis of three poems to see how specific techniques, such as analytical Cubism, synthetic Cubism, and collage, are translated into words by Picasso.

*Analytical Cubism*

Analytical Cubism is concerned with the systematic deconstruction of an object and its re-composition showing the simultaneous angles and existence of the object. In text form it means that, as Michael (2008, 272) points out, "perspective always shifts in the space of the text, its focus point [is] always moving. Picasso gives multiple viewpoints, cancels the unique perspective, as at the time of Cubism."[19] There are a few examples of such poem constructions, such as the poems from 1936 dated February 29 and April 9, 28, and 29. I will now closely analyze the poem dated February 29, 1936 (based on its 2004 translation).

> FEBRUARY 29 XXXVI
>
> the raft of the medusa unties itself from the sea to take the wash of the bird's pocket mirror in its arms
>
> if the raft of the medusa finally unties its chains flies through the dark its forehead hooks into the pocket mirror's wash
>
> if the raft of the medusa divests its body of its chains and lets the rags of waves float hanging on by the fingertips its forehead grinds its caress on the stone of the wash cut by the detached wing of pocket mirror
>
> if my raft of the medusa divests its body of its chains and only lets the rags of waves float hanging on by the fingertips its forehead grinds its caress on the stone of the wash cut by the detached wing of the tender wounded bird singing sitting on the tip of the great amorous buffalo's horn (Picasso 2004, 95)[20]

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[19] My translation from "la perspective se dérobe sans cesse dans l'espace du texte, son point de fuite est toujours déplacé. Picasso donne de multiple points de vue, annule la perspective unique, comme à l'époque du cubisme."

[20] For the original, see Wolf (2014, 189–90):

> 29 Février 1936
> le radeau de la méduse se détache de la mer pour prendre dans ses bras le sillage de la glace de poche de l'oiseau
> si le radeau de la méduse enfin détaché de ses chaînes vole dans le noir son front accroche le sillage de la glace de poche
> si le radeau de la méduse déshabille son corps de ses chaînes et laisse flotter accroché par les bouts des doigts des lambeaux de vagues son front moud sa caresse sur la pierre du sillage de l'aile détachée de la glace de poche
> si mon radeau de la méduse déshabille son corps de ses chaînes et ne laisse flotter accroché par les bouts des doigts que des lambeaux de vagues son front moud sa caresse sur la pierre du sillage creusé par l'aile détachée du tendre oiseau blessé qui chante posé sur la pointe de la corne du grand buffle amoureux.

The image of the raft of the Medusa is broken into recognizable elements derived from Théodore Géricault's famous 1818–19 painting: sea, wash, arms, rags, waves, the wounded, body, forehead, and so on. These pieces, which are the result of a systematic fragmentation of the original image, are then spread and sometimes repeated over the four paragraphs. Each paragraph works as a different variation on the motif, each time offering a different, re-composed arrangement. They each add extra perspectives/images, such as the bird, the mirror, the chains, the stone, hanging on by the fingertips, the buffalo's horn, and so on. Each re-composition creates a slightly different image. Overall a strong geometric structure is maintained by paragraph-building units, but the perspective and focus point shifts and moves in rhythmical waves through the poem, offering a simultaneous multiple view of Picasso's very own version of *The Raft of the Medusa*.

Looking at this writing process as an intersemiotic translation of the Cubist painting process, one finds a strong equivalence. As Levaillant (1973, 55) highlights, Picasso's Cubism is:

1- questioning the limits of the object (it is never closed on itself);
2- eliminating symmetry (the left and right side are never identical in form [1910–12] or color [1913–14]);
3- maintaining a logical deconstruction framework (for example, in most images vertical orientation is maintained).

Similarly, in his poem the limits of the object are broken by multiple associations and the symmetry is not maintained, as he looks for variations in the re-composition. Meanwhile, a logic/systemic framework of deconstruction is maintained. The poem-rhizome or the "ivy poem," an expression of Rafael Alberti (quoted in Michael 2014a, 173), is created through gradual increases and a consistent re-exploration of the word by additions, shifts of focus, and collisions with other words. The repetition, the creation of a geometric rhythm, and exploring the different viewpoints and potential of the objects make a poem such as the one dated February 29, 1936 an experiment in analytical Cubism.

*Synthetic Cubism*

The aim of synthetic Cubism is different. The objects are deconstructed and the re-composition aims at aesthetic ambiguity. The shape is shattered in order to explore the aesthetic potential of the object. With synthetic Cubism, by deconstructing and reconstructing the shape, the artist seeks to arrive at the essence of the object, a memory of the original shape, a reduction. We find such a process applied in the poems dated June 15, 1936 and April 8, 1936, for example.

June 15 XXXVI
garlic laughs at its color of star dead leaf
laughs mocking at the rose the dagger that thrusts its color into the garlic of star dead leaf
laughs maliciously at the dagger of roses the smell of a falling star dead leaf
garlic on the wing (Picasso 2004, 119)[21]

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[21] For the original see Picasso (2013, 673):
15 Juin 1936
rit l'ail de sa couleur d'étoile feuille morte
rit de sont air moqueur à la rose le poignard que sa couleur enfonce
l'ail de l'étoile en feuille morte
rit de son air malin au poignard des roses l'odeur de l'étoile tombante
en feuille morte
l'ail de l'aile.

Garlic here is explored aesthetically; its whiteness, "color of star," its texture, "dead leaf," and its smell, "of a falling star dead leaf," are all put under investigation through association, recombination, and gradual reduction. In parallel, the pleasure engendered by the garlic (by cooking) is evoked through the repetition of the word "laughs" three times, each with a different connotation —"mocking" and "maliciously." The poem closes with an essential, reduced image, "garlic on the wing." The original "L'ail de l'aile" in French plays on the resemblance between the two words (garlic and wing) and acts as a memory of the overall poem. Michael (2008, 233) has explained that in this manner Picasso "attains a purified unit that functions as a memento of the primary unit."[22] Unlike the analytical Cubist type of writing, the process here is not one of organic growth, but rather of gradual refinement of the image. There is also no systematic geometric rhythm in the poem and only the repetition of "laughs" gives it pace. Restoring ambiguity, breaking the object into distinct units, and looking for the essence of the object, this poem offers a good example of a textual translation of synthetic Cubism techniques.

*Collage*

Collage as a writing technique is generally rare and is only found once in Picasso's poetry (Michael 2008, 214). However, the process of fragmentation and re-composition is often found both in analytical and synthetic Cubist experiments. The poem using collage is dated December 14, 1935 and is conceptually very interesting.

14 December XXXV [I]

[I] Paris 14 – 12 – 35 ("Le Journal" 8 – 12 – 35 page 2)
Maxima : on the ground ---- under shelter ---- minima ---- under shelter ---- maxima under shelter 755 millimeters
(1.007) maximum +5

Abbeville ---- Ajaccio ---- Algiers ---- Angers ---- Antibes ---- Belfort ----Besançon ---- Biarritz ---- Bordeaux ---- Bréhat ---- Brest ---- Calais ---- Chartres ---- Châteauroux ---- Cherbourg ---- Dijon ---- Le Havre ---- Le Puy ---- Lyon ---- Marseille ---- Montélimar ---- Nancy ---- Orléans ---- Perpignan ---- Salon d'Automne, Grand Palais ---- French Association for the Defense of Animals ---- Pasteur's precursors ---- martyrized or kidnapped children … and the Christmas message ---- A.C. of 35 and 285 R.A.L. artistic matinée at 2 p.m. ---- after the call of the war dead and the minute of silence ---- it is often indispensable to insure their health and sometime their life the delicate features, the seductive force and the sex-appeal of the charming little household ---- the flame of remembrance ---- migratory birds piping and hopping about before taking off, the left, leaving behind them figures yet again ravaged, hearts suddenly closed up again, an ennui kin to pain

What S.V.P. is went about it like a child. She found expiring the head the chest caught under an armoire a pater familias shoots at the door nearly wounding the boss the mysterious death of a nurse and that's not all! He wanted to drink they didn't let him in he had drunk too much and couldn't pay a pater familias wanted to play at KIDNAPPERS it's the newspaper talking and answering for he alone destroys without pain ooh Fernand ---- ooh my colleague a woman I reclothed sap liqueur à la fine champagne Demars St-Amand (Cher)
"Le Journal" 8.12.35 page 3

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[22] My translation from "Il aboutit ainsi à une unité épurée qui fonctionne comme la mémoire de l'unité première."

milk givers the opening session of the conference on internship chatter society pages a world premiere fish journeys for the little Italians' Christmas tree the jubilee of the French squadron weather report what an annoyance! the lovers from below will leave us! engagement marriage necrology marvellous and muscadine what-a-shame!... (Picasso 2004, 59–60).

In this translated extract of a longer poem—part II is a more regular Picasso composition—Picasso investigates the potential of collage as a writing process. Generally, the collage technique interrupts the usual reading process to allow the viewer to see the readable as an aesthetic object. It forces the viewer to look at the text in a different manner, to look rather than hear/read. As Levaillant (1973, 48) puts it, "it is about systematically introducing in a field of representation dedicated to figure and space—the iconic field—something that the eye has un-learned to see in its figural aspect: the letter, or the number." Collage also makes the newspaper lose its reference to its use in reality and shifts our focus onto the concrete materiality of the newspaper.

How does this work in poetry? The de-contextualization makes the text mysterious. It takes time for the reader to realize what they are reading. On first reading this text, one is looking for poetic sounds and word evocations. Words are assembled, units of meaning are decomposed, and sentences are cut and re-assembled. The poem-collage increases the ambiguity of the text, mixing partial weather reports, lists of French cities, event announcements, and bits and pieces of *faits divers* and advertisements. As one reads, lost in a familiar format and tone, a poetic object and experience is created. Picasso explores the border of the word as a visual entity: the word as sound and word as meaning. Interestingly, Picasso uses only complete words here, while in his paintings, words are often incomplete. Writing about *Bouteille, Verre, Violon* (1913), Levaillant (1973, 51) had the impression that the object—the newspaper as a container of information —is here: it has a material presence, but its meaning is absent. The effect is very similar in the poem. The material words are there, but there is a semantic contradiction between the form of the poem (and the process whereby the artist cut, pasted, and selected) and the object (the newspaper giving information and closed narratives). The object—that is, the newspaper—simultaneously exists and disappears as it loses its primary function to take on a poetic function.

**Conclusion**

As we have seen, specific poems can fruitfully be analyzed by looking at Picasso's writing process as an extension of his visual art technique. This paper has argued Picasso's literary period isn't a pause in his artistic creation but is an expansion of his artistic methods to the written word. We have seen that there are general aspects of his writing process that are intersemiotic translations of his visual creative process in general (such as themes, structure, and layering). We have also seen that specific poems can be matched to specific Cubist artistic experiments. Therefore, this period of literary production can justifiably be seen as a generative experimental time in Picasso's life. As Louis Marin and Greg Sims (1993, 99) remark, "the studio of Picasso-poet thus becomes a laboratory, experimenting with the linking together of heterogeneous elements and with the production of their effects."

Picasso's literary production has been compared to that of the Surrealists, Joyce, or Arthur Rimbaud and indeed "between the pages of the acrobat book" (Picasso 2013, 621)[23] poetic treasures can be found. An artist such as Picasso did not turn to a new medium lightly and his constant moves between media should be a

clear indication that he was indeed looking for something new in the literary realm. Something that offered him means other than and complementary to painting, that allowed him to use what he described as "color deleted from the rolls of the living" (Picasso 2004, 120).[24]

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