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WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

Department of Art History and Archaeology

Adrift in Paris:

Marc Chagall and the Negotiation of Identity through Painting, 1911-1914

by

Aliya Ann Reich

A thesis presented to the
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
of Washington University in
partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the
degree of Master of Arts

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Aliya Ann Reich

2012

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INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of the Belle Époque in the final decades of the nineteenth century, Paris has been an artistic and cultural center from which many of the most important advancements in modern European art have emerged. With its reputation as the breeding ground for major avant-garde art movements such as Impressionism, Neo-Impressionism, and Fauvism, the city drew artists and writers from all over the world and became an increasingly diverse environment by the beginning of the twentieth century. In particular, a new wave of immigrant artists arrived in Paris from Central and Eastern European countries around the turn of the century, bringing with them a broad range of different languages, cultures, economic backgrounds, and religions. Through the social and artistic circles they constructed upon their arrival in Paris, these immigrants had a significant impact on artistic trends in the years leading up to the First World War.

Marc Chagall (1887-1985) arrived in Paris from Belarus in May of 1911, a key moment in the history of Parisian modern art.¹ This thesis will explore the cultural, social, and artistic environments Chagall found upon his arrival in Paris and the subsequent manner in which he engaged with varied styles of French modernism in his art from 1911 to 1914. I argue that the social and professional networks he cultivated during this time were crucial for the development of his art. My discussion will consider the

¹ There is a discrepancy in the scholarship on Chagall regarding the date of the artist's arrival in Paris. Many sources use August 1910 (see Baal-Teshuva 1998, 33; Harshav 2003, 10, and 2004, 198; and entries in Oxford Art Online and Grove Art Online). However, Jakov Bruk's chronology in the catalog for the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art exhibition "Marc Chagall" (2003) convincingly puts the date later, at early May 1911 (27). Bruk situates Chagall's departure with a letter the artist received from Léon Bakst in November 1910, and a manuscript in the State Tretyakov Gallery. Further, Jackie Wullschlager's biography of Chagall (2008) also places his arrival in 1911 with ample evidence (125 and 530), as does the catalog for the 2011 Chagall exhibition, *Chagall et l'Avant-Garde Russe* (2017). I have found their discussions and chronologies convincing.

relationships he had with other immigrant Russian Jews and those he maintained with friends and family who remained in Russia; those he shared with key figures within the Parisian artistic and literary avant-garde; and those he cultivated with gallery owners and collectors outside of France.

The content of Chagall's paintings from these years, generally marked by a combination of identifiably Jewish, Russian, and French motifs, represents a collapsing of place, time, and different cultures through a disjunctive handling of traditional color and pictorial space. Chagall's fantastic rendering of color and space evokes contemporary French and Russian avant-garde styles as well as the ecstatic practice of Hasidic Judaism and the traditions of folk art associated with peasant culture. That Chagall was able to develop an original, hybrid art is directly related to the benefits he reaped from the social and professional networks he maintained in Paris, which allowed both past experiences and present surroundings to remain at the forefront of his attention and artistic practice during this period.

Through a detailed formal analysis of some of these works, I will argue that Chagall's hybrid artistic output was his solution to the difficult negotiation of the liminal social and artistic position he occupied in pre-war Paris as an immigrant Jewish artist from a Russian market town. Chagall used his art to negotiate between alienation from and adaptation to a French, urban, largely Catholic society and its artistic tradition in the early twentieth century, soon after its ambivalent recovery from the divisive Dreyfus Affair of the 1890s. Each of his identities—foreigner, Jew, townsman, artist—figures importantly in the work Chagall created during this time. My discussion will analyze the motifs Chagall used to represent these identities in his paintings, consider the way in

which he figured them within a disjunctive pictorial space and by the use of unconventional color, and ultimately link his work to the social and professional networks that supported and sustained him.

In analyzing the different ways in which Chagall negotiated his identities in Paris from 1911 to 1914, it is important to disambiguate the term “assimilation” and other terms with which it is associated. Historian Michael Marrus defines assimilation as “the process by which individuals of Jewish background assumed an identity which is essentially French” through the practices of intermarrying with other Frenchmen, accepting civil allegiances demanded of French citizens, engaging in extensive social interaction with other Frenchmen, or otherwise moving “toward a situation in which...they were ‘Frenchmen like any other.’”² Yet, historian Paula Hyman argues that this kind of definition does not appropriately represent the complex process of transformation of Jewish identity in France during this period, and that the term “assimilation” itself is too blunt and simplifying.³ “Assimilation” as a term does not allow for the many factors that forge an individual’s identity, the different social contexts in which one or another identity is expressed, or the coexistence of the desire for full civic integration with the retention of cultural particularism.⁴

As a result, other terms are more appropriate for frequent use throughout this study. These include: acculturation, or the acquisition of the cultural and social habits of the dominant non-Jewish group; integration, or the entry of Jews into non-Jewish social

² Michael R. Marrus, *The Politics of Assimilation: A Study of the French Jewish Community at the Time of the Dreyfus Affair* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 2.

³ Paula Hyman, *The Jews of Modern France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 54.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 54.

circles and spheres of activity; emancipation, or the acquisition of rights and privileges enjoyed by non-Jewish citizens and subjects of similar socioeconomic rank; and secularization, or the rejection of religious beliefs and associated obligations and practices.⁵ Here these terms will be applied to identity both in a biographical sense (how an immigrant artist in France adapts to French culture and lifestyle) and in relation to artistic production (how an immigrant artist engages with French styles and pictorial strategies in his or her art). This study will strive to distinguish between these approaches and provide nuance to our understanding of the varying degrees to which Chagall and other artists in his circle adapted to French culture and styles in their lives and in their artwork.

Art historian Paul Tucker offers a useful model for considering the range of immigrant Jewish artists' approaches to French culture and art. Tucker suggests that immigrant Jews had three methods by which they could become professional visual artists in pre-war Paris: they could create works based exclusively on their own folklore or personal biography; they could blend their backgrounds with the visual language of French ideology; or they could leave their traditions and history behind and become as French as possible in their lives and artworks.⁶ Most artists opted for the third approach. In Tucker's application of artists to his model, the notion of acculturation as a range—especially as one of distinct choices made by the immigrant artist to adapt or resist French modernist styles, in addition to lifestyle choices—is itself useful as a model for

⁵ Definitions from Todd M. Endelman, "Assimilation," *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, 2010, <http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Assimilation> (accessed April 18, 2012).

⁶ Paul Hayes Tucker, "Montparnasse—A Promised Land?" *Art in America* 74 (May 1986): 143.

considering biography and artistic production.

For understanding Chagall's relationships beyond their biographical importance to the artist, it will also be illuminating to consider sociological networks, as examined by art critic Lawrence Alloway and as theorized by sociologist Bruno Latour. Alloway notes the importance of the first exhibition of a newly made work of art. This first exhibition takes place, he proposes, in the artist's studio, and its audience is the artist's friends and close acquaintances. This initial small, intimate audience views the work in the context of its creation, usually in the presence of the artist and associated with the rest of his life.⁷ From the studio, an artwork goes on to be exhibited in a public gallery, is bought by a collector or a museum, and then perhaps is reproduced in catalogs and magazines, functioning in the latter as a subject of information rather than as an object.⁸ This movement of art is thus directly related to the professional networks an artist cultivates throughout his career. Alloway states that his study strives to consider the art world as a system and what effects this has on the viewer's understanding of art.⁹ Bearing these ideas in mind, my own study will focus on the social and professional networks that drive such a system in relation to the development of Chagall's art from 1911 to 1914.

Alloway's consideration of the art world as a system is related to the construction of social groups that drive that system: an artist and his friends; art galleries with employees and curators that put on exhibitions to attract audiences; publications staff who put works of art in magazines or catalogs, and the readers who consume them. In

⁷ Lawrence Alloway, "Network: The Art World Described as a System," in *Network: Art and the Complex Present*, ed. Donald Kuspit (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1984), 3.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 5.

Chagall's experience in pre-war Paris, social and professional groups take different, more amorphous forms than those outlined by Alloway. However, as this thesis will demonstrate, group associations are a crucial part of the development of Chagall's social and professional networks that can be better understood with a consideration of Latour's actor-network theory. Part of this complex theory treats group formation, arguing that a particular "actor" can be a member of many, sometimes contradictory, group formations.¹⁰ As a result, in contrast to previous sociological practice of determining a static group as a subject of study from the outset, in Latour's mandate to "reassemble the social," sociologists and historians must follow a particular actor's own way "and begin our travels by the traces left behind by their activity of forming and dismantling groups."¹¹ This study takes Latour's concept as a model and begins its travels by studying the formation and dismantling of groups by the primary actor of its study, Marc Chagall.

To do this effectively, we must first begin with some basic biographical information about Chagall. He was born in 1887 to an observant Hasidic Jewish family in the moderately sized, conservative Belarusian community of Vitebsk, located near Russia's western border. This community's practices of traditional faith and prayer played a considerable role in his life and career which came at a particularly tumultuous moment in the history of being Jewish in Russia.¹² Ethnic Russians perceived Jews as generally alien as well as economically undesirable, religiously impious, and morally

¹⁰ Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 29.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Susan Tumarkin Goodman, "Chagall's Paradise Lost: The Russian Years," in *Marc Chagall: Early Works from Russian Collections*, ed. Susan Tumarkin Goodman, exh. cat., Jewish Museum New York (New York: Third Millennium Publishing, 2001), 14.

corrupt, yet many also maintained that in order to solve the “Jewish problem,” it was necessary to attempt to level the distinctions between Jews and Gentiles through assimilation.¹³ Unfortunately, the anti-Semitic Russian media blamed the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881 on the Jewish community; the resulting violent anti-Jewish riots, or pogroms, created a dangerous environment for any Jews living in the region.

Chagall was born into this environment only a few years after the most horrific of these pogroms. He began his studies as a young artist first with Yehuda Pen (1854-1937) in Vitebsk and subsequently in St. Petersburg with Léon Bakst (1866-1924) and others in early 1907. However, the alienation, severe poverty, and anti-Semitism in St. Petersburg led Chagall—who at the time was an artist proudly utilizing Jewish motifs and drawing upon Jewish artistic traditions, as with his inclusion of the fiddler in *The Dead Man* (fig. 1) and his treatment of a Jewish wedding in *Russian Wedding* (fig. 15)—to ultimately see relocating to Paris, the epicenter of the Western art world, as a necessity for becoming a successful artist. Four years after his arrival in St. Petersburg he left his family, his fiancée, and his home country and made the long, difficult journey by train to the French capital.

Chapter One will discuss the Parisian and larger French social and political environment in which Chagall arrived in the spring of 1911. This Parisian environment must be historicized with a consideration of the Jew in France and relationships of different groups of Jews and gentiles to one another; the implications of the nineteenth-century trend toward the official separation of Church and State for Jews and other religious groups in 1905; and the divisive Dreyfus Affair and its aftermath in mainstream

¹³ Michael Stanislawski, “The Jews and Russian Culture and Politics,” in *Russian Jewish Artists in a Century of Change, 1890-1990*, ed. Susan Tumarkin Goodman, exh. cat., Jewish Museum New York (New York: Prestel, 1995), 17.

French society after 1906. Though many scholars emphasize France as a comparatively liberal, accepting society for Jews and immigrants during this period, this study will argue that residual tensions from the divisive Affair and emerging anxieties in the pre-war years rendered this social environment as somewhat less accommodating for Jews than it is often characterized.¹⁴ Perhaps as a result, other immigrant Jewish artists working during this period often chose not to represent explicitly Jewish and foreign themes. A discussion of work by artists such as Sonia Delaunay and Amedeo Modigliani will demonstrate the patterns of artistic adoption of French styles and subjects that most foreign Jewish artists followed in their work during this period.

Chagall did not, however, adopt modern French styles in the same way as did many other artists around him. The second chapter will discuss the beginning of Chagall's engagement with French styles and the ways in which he began to register French influence in his earliest Parisian artwork, which in content often recalled his homeland and home culture. This was in part because he remained so connected both socially and emotionally to Russia. This connection is clear in many of his works from this period, including *To Russia, Asses and Others* (fig. 2) of 1911-12, begun soon after his arrival in Paris. In this work, Chagall has beheaded his largest figure; she hovers,

¹⁴ In his essay "From Eastern Europe to Paris and Beyond," from *The Circle of Montparnasse: Jewish Artists in Paris, 1905-1945* (1985), Arthur Cohen states that the debate about the Jewishness of Jewish art at the beginning of the twentieth century had effectively been nullified in Paris, "where the lack of any official anti-Semitism—and even, relatively speaking, the absence of any effectual social prejudice (until the late 1930s)—meant an exhilaratingly open field for Jewish artists and, indeed, for artists of whatever ethnic origins" (66). Here Cohen, like other scholars, downplays the occurrence of anti-Semitism because it was not officially sanctioned. Patricia Hyman, in *From Dreyfus to Vichy, the Remaking of the French Jewry, 1906-1939* (1979), also cites this period as a "golden age" for the French Jewry (34). Yet, I will suggest that the environment that immigrant Jewish artists experienced was more complicated than this.

anchorless, above a brightly-colored domed church, a motif Chagall often used in his work to recall the Vitebsk skyline.¹⁵ In the lower register of the picture, atop the roof of the building next to the church, a cow—a motif Chagall often used to symbolize his rural homeland¹⁶—drinks from a trough while she nurses an emerald green calf and a human child. All of this dreamlike activity is set against a night sky, rendered with a brushy application black paint punctuated with passages of bright color. As is evident in this work and others like it, Chagall has effectively disposed of illusionistic pictorial space, rendering his figures in disjunctive sizes that would have been a striking feature of his fantastic painting. He also disregarded the naturalistic modeling of these figures, opting instead to render them in bright colors drawn from Russian folk art and Fauvism and a style that evokes the spatial structures of Cubism. This discussion proposes that the very choice of these subjects and Chagall's use of fantastic pictorial space are linked to experimentation with French styles and art history, and also with his Hasidic background. Hasidism advocates song and dance as devotional Jewish expression, an almost mystical emphasis on unity in life, and the importance of love for people and animals as a way of intuitively communicating with God.¹⁷ Like many other artists during the period, Chagall was forced to negotiate the tenuous line between adapting to modern French society and continuing to embrace his native religious and traditional cultures, a tension evident in his work and often expressed through themes of dislocation in his painting.

¹⁵ Goodman, "Chagall's Paradise Lost," 31.

¹⁶ Mirjam Rajner, "Chagall: The Artist and The Poet," *Jewish Art* 21-22 (1995-1996): 54.

¹⁷ Jackie Wullschlager, *Chagall: A Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), 30.

Chagall spoke no French when he arrived in Paris in 1911, and in the years to follow he would depend heavily on other Russians in the city to help him navigate both socially and professionally.¹⁸ Primarily because of the language barrier and in part for comfort, he at first associated himself almost exclusively with Russians, many of whom were also Jews. Prior to Chagall's departure, Viktor Mekler and Alexander Romm were friends and supporters who encouraged him to go to Paris. Upon his arrival in Paris, Yakov Tugendhold and the Russian painter Ehrenberg helped to orient and secure housing for the young foreigner. Maxim Vinaver's financial support and his fiancée Bella's emotional support were crucial for his survival, though both were long-distance. Chagall visited galleries and exhibitions in the Paris art world, and he enrolled in courses at Paris art schools Académie La Palette and Académie de la Grande Chaumière, but even there he associated primarily with the other Russian students. Chagall's artistic activity during this period reflects these emotional and social connections to Russia. For his first year in Paris, he devoted himself to reworking themes he had initially painted in his homeland, including village birth and wedding scenes, as well to experimenting with such whimsical works as *To Russia, Asses and Others*, all while beginning to engage with French styles and pictorial strategies.

Chagall's Russian connections eventually allowed him to ease into the greater cosmopolitan social network of Montparnasse and the Parisian artistic and literary avant-

¹⁸ Much of the literature on Chagall's artwork stresses his emotional connection to Russia (Baal-Teshuva 1998, 32-73; Silver and Cohen in Silver et al. 1985, 27-30, 62, 65). However, much of this scholarship does not analyze the relationship between Chagall and his Russian and avant-garde networks, which I see as crucial elements to his livelihood and artistic production in Paris during this period. Jackie Wullschlager's biography (2008) and Benjamin Harshav's anthologies of primary documents (2003 and 2004), which include many letters, poems, and critical reviews, serve as important resources in my study.

garde. After a year living in relative isolation, Chagall moved to the “La Ruche” community in the spring of 1912. La Ruche, or “The Hive,” was home to dozens of impoverished immigrant artists and writers and was a microcosm of cosmopolitan, pre-war Paris just southwest of the heart of Montparnasse. Chapter Three will address the broadening of Chagall’s social and professional networks to include the larger Parisian avant-garde at La Ruche and how his work continued to represent numerous dialogues linked inextricably to his multiple identities. Among these dialogues evident in pictures he painted after moving to La Ruche are Chagall’s positions as a foreigner in Parisian society; as a Jew in an often anti-Semitic, predominantly Catholic society; as a struggling artist, living and working in an urban artist colony of Frenchmen and foreigners; and as a townsman adjusting to life in a bustling urban center. In these works, the viewer sees floating human and animal figures; skylines of Paris and Vitebsk; rural scenes of daily life; musicians playing; allusions to proverbs, poetry, and literature; portraits of poets at work; religious ceremonies and scenes; and representations of the life cycle. These subjects were central to Chagall’s artwork during this period.

Chagall’s competitive spirit made friendships with other visual artists difficult, but he began to befriend the Russian-speaking writers who lived in or frequented La Ruche.¹⁹ One, Guillaume Apollinaire (1880-1918), became an important member of Chagall’s network and wrote regularly about his work. The Swiss poet Blaise Cendrars (1887-1961) also quickly became one of Chagall’s closest friends and greatest supporters. Cendrars was a friend of other La Ruche artists and writers and was passionately loyal in

¹⁹ Wullschlager, 154.

including Chagall in this network.²⁰ Some of Chagall's paintings during this period, such as *Homage to Apollinaire* (fig. 3), clearly show the importance of the relationships Chagall had with Cendrars, Apollinaire, and others. In *Homage*, Chagall not only depicts an effigy of a cosmopolitan figure with whom he was in regular contact, but he also records the names of his other contacts around a heart-shaped motif in the lower left corner.

That he explicitly articulated the names of members of his Parisian networks in his paintings indicates Chagall's sense of the importance of these and other collegial relationships. In addition to Cendrars and Apollinaire, Chagall inscribed the names "Canudo" and "Walden." Ricciotto Canudo was an active writer and critic in Paris during this period who hosted a weekly Friday evening Salon that Chagall attended regularly. It was at this Salon in the spring of 1913 that Cendrars introduced Chagall to Herwarth Walden. Walden was the owner of the Berlin gallery Der Sturm, which exhibited German, French, and Italian avant-garde art. Through Walden and his increasingly international social network, Chagall sold his first major work outside of Russia²¹; in 1914, Walden held Chagall's first solo exhibition at Der Sturm, helping to launch the artist's career and set the foundation for his worldwide fame.²² The years of hard work leading up to this exhibition were of great importance in the development of the young artist's career and life, and a close examination of the art Chagall produced during this formative period is crucial for a larger understanding of his legacy and his significance in the context of the Parisian avant-garde in the pre-war years.

²⁰ Wullschlager, 159.

²¹ Ibid., 177.

²² Ibid., 179.

CHAPTER ONE THE PARISIAN ENVIRONMENT

*When, on Bakst's advice, I sent a few canvases to the "Mir Iskonstva" exhibition [in Russia], they were calmly left behind in the apartment of one of the members, while almost every Russian painter of any standing whatever was invited to become a member of the society. And I thought: it must be because I'm a Jew and have no country of my own. Paris! No word sounded sweeter to me!*¹

*There, [at the Paris Salon,] I was soon to see clearly what distinguished me from traditional French painting. ... When I complained of being persecuted, even in the Salon, the wife of a doctor whom I sometimes visited for company and consolation said to me: 'Really? Well, all the better, it's what you deserve; don't paint pictures like that, then!' I was only twenty, but I was already beginning to be afraid of people.*²

Chagall, *My Life*

The eight years situated between the end of the Dreyfus Affair in 1906 and the beginning of the First World War in 1914 represented a rich and important moment in French history for immigrants and for Jews, as well as a moment of reckoning for what it meant to be French. In this chapter, I will outline the social, political, and artistic environment Chagall entered in Paris in May of 1911 and indicate its importance for comprehending his artistic production from this point to the beginning of the war. In particular I will focus my discussion on three aspects of the history of Jews in France: a brief summary of the relationships of the different Jewish populations to one another and to non-Jewish Frenchmen after the French Revolution and the legacy of that history in the early twentieth century;³ the implications for Jews of the nineteenth-century European trend toward secularization, which began roughly when the Concordat of 1801 recognized Judaism as a state religion and culminated in the official Separation of Church

¹ Chagall, *My Life*, 4th ed., trans. Dorothy Williams (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 105.

² *Ibid.*, 108-9.

³ For this discussion of the relationship between French and immigrant Jewries, the work of Paula Hyman (1979) and Michael Marrus (1971) will be particularly helpful.

and State in France in 1905;⁴ and the Dreyfus Affair, which took place in the last decade of the nineteenth century, stretched into the twentieth, and resulted in deep cleavages in pre-war French society.⁵ Once these histories have been established as contributing factors to the Parisian environment in 1911, I will consider artistic responses to this environment by two of Chagall's contemporaries, Sonia Delaunay and Amedeo Modigliani. These two artists, both also Jewish immigrants, produced paintings that were more typical of the Jewish immigrant artist's response to the French avant-garde, which was generally one of absorption of French styles and pictorial strategies and disposal of national and religious identities as artistic subjects. Considered in the context of post-Dreyfus, pre-war Paris and in relation to the work of his immigrant artist contemporaries such as Delaunay and Modigliani, it will become clear that Chagall's art represents a unique contribution to the Parisian avant-garde during this period.

The relationships between the different groups of Jews and non-Jews in France have a complex history from the eighteenth century to the present. It is not simply a story of the interactions between two static groups of people who have either aligned with Judaism, or have not; rather, groups of Jews changed, evolved, and redefined themselves as they integrated into French ways of life or as they immigrated to France from other countries. To understand the environment for an immigrant Jew like Chagall in this time, it is first important to begin to comprehend the nuanced relationships

⁴ Nadia Malinovich's study (2008) will be useful in my discussion of the Separation of Church and State.

⁵ The scholarship of Christopher Forth (2004), Paula Hyman (1979 and 1998), Norman Kleeblatt et al (1987), Katherine Marie Kuenzli (2007), and Linda Nochlin (1987) will be most valuable in my discussion of the Dreyfus Affair.

between the different groups of Jews themselves, who had been living in and immigrating to France over the previous few centuries, and their relationships with the non-Jewish French population. Though they may have seemed similar to the Parisian population because of their associations with the same major religion and their emigration to the same Western European country, the cultural, economic, and political differences between these groups often made them much more disparate than alike.

The French Jewry at the beginning of the twentieth century was for the most part composed of the descendants of those emancipated in 1791 during the French Revolution, the first Jews in the West to achieve such freedoms.⁶ Their subsequent rapid acculturation allowed the post-Revolution French Jewry to accept the somewhat limited terms of their emancipation, which, through the establishment of a Jewish Consistory by Napoleon in 1808, defined the limits of Jewish identity, political activity, and institutional structure. The Consistory, or religious governing body, gave the Jewish religion a legal status parallel to that of Protestantism and Catholicism, the other two officially recognized religions of France.⁷ At the time, French Jews generally preferred to adapt to French life and patterns of behavior rather than to be negatively distinguished and marginalized from the rest of French society based on their Jewishness, though they sought neither the disappearance of their own institutions nor to merge biologically with the French population.⁸ They felt that acculturation did not demand the obliteration of Jewish identity but rather allowed for its transformation and privatization in accordance

⁶ Paula Hyman, *From Dreyfus to Vichy: The Remaking of French Jewry, 1906-1939* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), 3.

⁷ Nadia Malinovich, *French and Jewish: Culture and the Politics of Identity in Early Twentieth-Century France* (Portland, OR: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2008), 15.

⁸ Hyman, *The Jews of Modern France*, 57.

with standards of a larger community.⁹ These Jews became an integral part of French society by the middle of the nineteenth century, often members of the upper financial echelons and active participants in French intellectual and cultural life. Eventually many shared mainstream French society's ideas on race. So long as the idea of a Jewish race did not imply an attack upon them, their designation as an ethnic group was accepted and used freely in Jewish circles.¹⁰ Within two generations after the Revolution, the French Jewry attained behavioral assimilation, or acculturation, but not structural assimilation, or the obliteration of their distinctiveness as a group.¹¹ As a result, they maintained a peaceful balance between successfully defining themselves as French and continuing to function as a distinctive, though not completely foreign, group of Jews within French society.

By contrast, the immigrant Jewish community was primarily composed of new arrivals to France in the wake of the Eastern European pogroms of 1881, triggered by the assassination of Tsar Alexander II, and of 1905, following the failed Revolution. Because France had achieved emancipation significantly earlier than any other Western European country, it had the established reputation of being a particularly hospitable, open country for Jews fleeing oppressive countries. Between 1881 and 1914, 40,000 Eastern European Jewish immigrants settled in Paris.¹² These usually poor immigrants brought with them customs, ideologies, and a folk culture alien to the French Jewry, and they disrupted the illusion of cultural homogeneity toward which the French Jewry had

⁹ Hyman, *From Dreyfus to Vichy*, 6.

¹⁰ Marrus, 16.

¹¹ Hyman, *From Dreyfus to Vichy*, 7.

¹² Malinovich, 30-31.

been aspiring since the French Revolution. With their arrival, the almost completely middle-class Parisian Jewish community acquired a working-class component. The immigrants' foreign folk culture, customs, and ideologies, as well as their cultural and political interests, could not be accommodated within the defined community of the French Jewry at the beginning of the twentieth century.¹³ These differences produced fear across the French-Jewish community that the presence of these immigrants would encourage growing anti-Semitism. Other French Jews saw the influx of these immigrants in a more positive light, considering the newcomers' version of Judaism to be more authentic, in contrast to the established presence of more typically secular, assimilated Jewishness in Paris common during this period.¹⁴

Moreover, immigrant Jews established their own institutions in France, which included new congregations and sects of Judaism, possible and legal after the Separation of Church and State. The very existence of these new institutions challenged the long-standing claim of the Consistory to speak for the entire French Jewry. They also challenged greater Catholic control over the French-Jewish population, which was problematic for the bulk of non-Jewish French society. This moment of the Separation of Church and State marked a major turning point in the history of the Third Republic as well as in the relationship between religion and the French State.¹⁵

Napoleon's Concordat of 1801 and the establishment of the Consistory in 1808 meant that for the entirety of the nineteenth century the French state had recognized

¹³ Hyman, *From Dreyfus to Vichy*, 31.

¹⁴ Malinovich, 31.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 68.

Judaism and considered Jews to be legally equal citizens to their Catholic and Protestant counterparts. Each of these recognized religions had a central governing body that retained the right to approve or veto the creation of independent religious groups within them. This structure created an inherent connection between the religious organizations and the state. Objection to this power, and ultimately to the very link between church and state, became a central feature of Third Republic political life. This objection was manifested specifically in relation to the secularization of French schools during the first wave of anti-clericalism (1882) and the election of radical government figures such as Émile Combes (1902), who, viewing the Catholic Church as embodying anti-Dreyfusism, sought to remove all government funding of and control over French religious institutions. Such changes created significant tensions in the last decades of the nineteenth century.

When the Separation was passed in December of 1905, it was met with mixed reactions. Initially it caused widespread protest, and it deepened the divisions between secular and religious aspects of French society.¹⁶ Ultimately, however, the Separation served to reduce the stigma of religion in republican circles, because to separate church and state was also to separate religion and politics. Such a separation allowed for political activists to have greater freedom of religious expression without the concern that their chosen practice would interfere or contradict with their political persuasions.¹⁷ Religion had become a private matter, and affirming one's faith in any religion was no longer tied

¹⁶ Malinovich, 68.

¹⁷ Ibid., 69.

to a specific institution that was sanctioned and funded by the government, with its own political affiliations.

The effect on Judaism specifically is particularly important to this discussion. In the wake of the Separation of Church and State, Reform Judaism emerged for the first time on French soil with the establishment of the Union Libérale Israélite as an independent congregation in 1907. The first stirrings of the Reform movement in France can be traced back to the final years of the nineteenth century, much later than in other parts of Europe and in the United States. This delayed interest in the Reform movement occurred in part because French Jews enjoyed the status of being full-fledged citizens. Additionally, the practice of Judaism in France was modernized with the establishment of the Consistory in the early nineteenth century in a number of different ways, through the use of organs and choirs, the updating of rabbis' clothing, and the introduction of sermons in French.¹⁸ As a result, by 1900 the need to modernize the religion was not as great as in other countries. Yet, the time between the Separation of Church and State in 1905 and the beginning of the First World War in 1914 was a period of great religious revival and restructuring in France for all major religions.

During this period, founders of the Reform movement were responding to a spiritual crisis in the Jewish community. They sought to reconcile traditional Judaism with modernity and to bring spirituality back into contemporary life. Indeed, they also strove to demonstrate to their fellow Jews, particularly the young generation, that Judaism had a rich spiritual heritage that should not be abandoned. Leaders of the Reform movement were specifically working against the trends of secularization and

¹⁸ Malinovich, 70.

religious and social assimilation during these years. These were the same trends that affected artistic production by Jewish artists during the same period.

In addition to the complicated relationships between the different Jewish and non-Jewish populations in Paris, as well as the nuanced situation surrounding the Separation of Church and State and the development of the Reform movement, the Parisian environment in which Chagall arrived in 1911 was complicated in the years following the 1906 legal resolution of the Dreyfus Affair. The Affair began only two years after the Panama Canal Scandal of 1892, in which Édouard Drumont's anti-Semitic newspaper, *La Libre Parole*, cultivated anti-Semitism by linking bribery and government corruption to Jews. The subsequent Dreyfus Affair of 1894, which, according to historian Christopher Forth, represented "the first serious eruption of modern anti-Semitism" in Western Europe, thus began in an already tense environment.¹⁹ Alfred Dreyfus was a Jewish Alsatian general in the French military who chose to remain French upon Germany's annexation of the Alsace-Lorraine territory after France's defeat in the Franco-Prussian War in 1871. In spite of this clear expression of his allegiance to France, Dreyfus came under suspicion of treason in late 1894. By the end of that year he had been found guilty and was sentenced to deportation and military degradation, despite his innocence. After his deportation to solitary confinement on Devil's Island in French Guiana, little of the French media's attention was given to the Affair again until 1898. On January 13 of that year, Émile Zola's "J'Accuse," an open letter to French President

¹⁹ Christopher E. Forth, *The Dreyfus Affair and the Crisis of French Manhood* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 18.

Félix Faure, appeared in Georges Clemenceau's newspaper, *L'Aurore*.²⁰ Its appearance and the subsequent reactions to it brought the Dreyfus Affair back into the public eye and clearly divided much of the French public along pro-Dreyfusard and anti-Dreyfusard—and often Semitic and anti-Semitic—lines. While Zola's letter and the continuing case functioned to incite anti-Semitic riots across France and in French territories, public opinion slowly began to turn in favor of the innocent Dreyfus, for it was becoming increasingly obvious that the case against him was circumstantial. Still, as late as 1899 Dreyfus was reconvicted in a trial in Rennes; in spite of this guilty verdict, he was pardoned a few weeks later.²¹ Though General Gaston Marquis de Galliffet, the French Minister of War, declared the incident “over” on September 21 of that year, it was not until July of 1906 that the Rennes verdict was annulled and Dreyfus was reinstated as a captain.²²

The Dreyfus Affair split the French public into a number of different groups along sometimes surprising divisions in the years around the turn of the twentieth century, and this split impacted artistic circles as well. The Affair resulted in fundamental changes in the political landscape of modernist painting, and it polarized and politicized every aspect of French political, cultural, and intellectual life from 1898 to 1906.²³ For the purpose of this study, it is important to consider the responses to the Affair of three

²⁰ Anita Friedman, “Chronology of the Dreyfus Affair,” in *The Dreyfus Affair: Art, Truth, and Justice*, ed. Norman L. Kleeblatt, exh. cat., Jewish Museum New York (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), ix.

²¹ *Ibid.*, xi.

²² *Ibid.*, xi-xii.

²³ Katherine Marie Kuenzli, “Aesthetics and Cultural Politics in the Age of Dreyfus: Maurice Denis's *Homage to Cézanne*,” *Art History* 30, no. 5 (November 2007): 683.

groups in particular: that of the French Jewry; that of the immigrant Jewry in France during and after the *Affair*; and that of the Parisian art community.

The French and non-French Jewish populations' political differences were perhaps the point of greatest tension between them in relation to the Dreyfus *Affair*. Collectively, the French Jewry—who, again, identified culturally and socially as French rather than as Jews separate from the French—remained politically neutral on the issue.²⁴ Spokesmen for the French Jewry refrained from public activity on Dreyfus's behalf; they saw the *Affair* not as a matter for Jewish political action but as a clash between Republican and anti-Republican forces. Thus, the *Affair* appeared to the French Jewry, in Paula Hyman's words, as an “unfortunate aberration in the relatively untroubled experience of Jews in France.”²⁵ French Jews' anxiety around this “aberration” was greatly exacerbated by the large influx of immigrant Jews, who served as a reminder of Jewish difference and whose sometimes radical political leanings, derived from the revolutionary climate in Eastern Europe during the period, led them to express more extreme opinions about the *Affair*. The negative stereotypes of the Jew which the French Jewry had been strenuously resisting for generations—Jews as exploitative capitalists, vicious corrodors of French tradition, and uprooted, wandering aliens—were renewed with the arrival of Jews from Eastern Europe. These immigrant Jews thus cast into doubt the carefully cultivated respectability and patriotism of the organized French-Jewish

²⁴ Hyman, *From Dreyfus to Vichy*, 11.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

community and called unwanted attention to the uncomfortable difference between the Jewish and non-Jewish French publics.²⁶

Artists were also not immune to polarization on the issue of the Dreyfus Affair. Many of the most prominent names in art of the period took sides, impacting friendships and artistic networks and sometimes poisoning relationships.²⁷ Pro-Dreyfusard artists included Claude Monet, Camille Pissarro, Mary Cassatt, Paul Signac, Odilon Redon, and Pierre Bonnard.²⁸ Edgar Degas is perhaps the most famous example of a prominent artist who was strongly anti-Dreyfusard and also, according to Pissarro, “ferociously anti-Semitic.”²⁹ Other anti-Dreyfusard artists included Paul Cézanne, Auguste Rodin, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, and Maurice Denis.

The implications for Denis and the Nabis, still functioning as a group at the turn of the century, were evidently greater. For them, the Dreyfus Affair became not exclusively a question of Dreyfus’s innocence or guilt; rather, it transformed into an ideological and methodological debate within a group of artists. A right-wing nationalist, Denis sympathized most with the politics of right-wing political essayist Adrien Mithouard. Mithouard conceived of culture as a battleground between races, between classicism and romanticism, and between reason and emotion, among other conflicting

²⁶ Hyman, *From Dreyfus to Vichy*, 23.

²⁷ Philip Nord, *Impressionists and Politics: Art and Democracy in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 106.

²⁸ Linda Nochlin, “Degas and the Dreyfus Affair: A Portrait of the Artist as an Anti-Semite,” in *The Dreyfus Affair: Art, Truth, and Justice*, ed. Norman L. Kleeblatt, exh. cat., Jewish Museum New York (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 96.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

tendencies.³⁰ In 1901, Mithouard published the aesthetic treatise *Le Tourment de l'unité*, which informed Denis's conception of modern painting. In the treatise, Mithouard conceives of art largely as the product of a struggle between "expressive" and "harmonious" aesthetic sensibilities and tendencies. Whereas expressive sensibilities were associated with immediacy, emotions, instability, and color, harmonious sensibilities embraced the opposite: reflection, reason, balance, and the principles of hierarchy.³¹ These ideas carried strong political associations; both Mithouard and Denis connected expressive sensibilities with anarchism, individualism, and pro-Dreyfusism and harmonious sensibilities with principles of authority, artistic tradition, and anti-Dreyfusism.³² Where it concerned Jewish artists, such associations may have served to actively marginalize explicitly Jewish work. If colorful, individualistic art—perhaps much like Chagall's own aesthetic—was associated with anarchism and pro-Dreyfusism, then to be against this kind of art, as well as anti-Dreyfus and anti-Semitic, was by extension nationalistic and patriotic, and thus could be justifiable. Though ultimately Denis and Mithouard perceived these associations as two sides of an eternal aesthetic dialectic and strove to synthesize them,³³ these contorted, problematic associations between particular aesthetics and political views had a strong effect upon the artistic climate in France during and immediately following the Dreyfus Affair.

Ideas like those contained in Mithouard's *Le Tourment de l'unité* and its validation of aesthetic homogeneity and new classicism contributed to the artistic environment

³⁰ Kuenzli, 690.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., 692.

³³ Ibid., 690.

Jewish immigrant artists encountered upon their arrival in France in the first decade of the twentieth century. The majority of Jewish artists opted not for explicit recollections of the past, based on nostalgia for their own backgrounds, nor for a specifically Jewish art, as are evident in Chagall's work. Rather, they most often chose to directly address present styles of French modernism around them, adopting French artistic styles into their art.³⁴ They often did so through the abandonment of visual references to their own national and religious identities in order to adopt their own variety of French modernism, which Tucker deemed a middle-ground approach.³⁵

Sonia Terk Delaunay (1885-1979) was one such artist. Two years older than Chagall, Sonia was born in the Ukrainian village of Gradizhsk.³⁶ Her immediate family was poor, but in 1890 she was adopted by a wealthy uncle, Henri Terk, and enjoyed a comfortable upbringing in a large townhouse in St. Petersburg.³⁷ Her uncle's family was part of the well-assimilated Jewish elite who profited intellectually and financially from the liberalizing periods of the 1860s and 1870s and who weathered the Jewish repression of the 1880s and 1890s reasonably well. Henri Terk practiced law among an international crowd, and as a result Sonia was able to travel and gain exposure to Western European

³⁴ Tucker, 143.

³⁵ Ibid. In using the term "middle-ground," Tucker means that the variety of French modernism with which many of these immigrant artists experimented was not exceptionally radical; rather, it was a somewhat tempered approach in its appropriation of French styles and pictorial strategies—innovative and original, but not so alien as to cause great disturbances in the Parisian art world.

³⁶ I have drawn biographical information on Sonia Delaunay from Sherry A. Buckberrough, "A Biographical Sketch: Eighty Years of Creativity," in *Sonia Delaunay: A Retrospective*, 13-99, exh. cat. (Buffalo, NY: Albright-Knox Art Gallery, 1980) and Stanley Baron, *Sonia Delaunay: The Life of an Artist* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1995).

³⁷ Buckberrough, 13.

peoples and cultures. She began painting and drawing as a teenager, and arrived in Paris early in 1905, at the age of twenty, with the specific purpose of studying art. Soon after her arrival, she saw the Salon d'Automne that featured Fauvism and Henri Matisse's *Woman with a Hat*, followed by a retrospective of artwork by Paul Gauguin in 1906. In 1908 Sonia married the well-connected German art dealer, collector, and critic Wilhelm Uhde, through whom she came to know Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque, and André Derain.³⁸ After two years of what was apparently a marriage of convenience to mask Uhde's homosexuality, Sonia divorced him and married French painter Robert Delaunay, whom she also met through Uhde.³⁹ Robert was also well-connected; he knew many important avant-garde figures in the Western European art world, including Henri Rousseau and Apollinaire in Paris and Wassily Kandinsky and the Blue Rider group in Munich.

Through major exhibitions of avant-garde art and the networks she began to develop upon her arrival in Paris, Sonia Delaunay was interested in the use of pure color and spontaneous brushstrokes she saw in the artwork around her. She too sought a purity and directness of emotional expression in her own work, which was influenced by Vincent van Gogh, Gauguin, and Matisse.⁴⁰ Even in her earliest Parisian paintings, Delaunay seems to have readily adopted the popular French styles of the time. Her *Philomène* of 1907 (fig. 4) is a half-length portrait of a female figure rendered in a combination of French visual strategies. Though it may loosely relate to the Russian icon

³⁸ Kenneth E. Silver, "The Circle of Montparnasse: Jewish Artists in Paris 1905-1945," in *The Circle of Montparnasse: Jewish Artists in Paris 1905-1945*, exh. cat., Jewish Museum New York (New York: Universe Books, 1985), 15.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Buckberrough, 18.

tradition in its red and yellow palette and its static sitter, this link is subtle and overpowered by Delaunay's use of French visual language, established by artists like van Gogh and Gauguin. In this painting, Delaunay's sitter stares blankly into the distance; her large eyes and defiant eyebrows, along with her crossed-arm posture, refuse engagement with the viewer, and her dark hair is swept back severely. The artist has rendered her subject with a vibrantly thick application of bright, primary color—even Philomène's face is composed of a variety of chunky, non-naturalistic hues—which contrast dynamically with her vacant stare.

The disjunction between the vibrant color palette and the sitter's perceived lack of interest is also echoed in the composition of the picture, with a sharp contrast between large swaths of color in the foreground and the punctuating patterns in the background of the picture; the flat red field of the figure's body in the foreground is set apart from the actively patterned wallpaper behind her. Philomène's massive shoulders and chest dominate the picture plane. Hardly modeled, her bright red body is contained only by the thick black lines Delaunay has traced around the figure's contour. Flowers in the same colors as the figure's skin float around her body, creating a lively, decorative motif that directs the viewer's eye around the picture. The accentuated flower petals echo Philomène's stocky, round hands.

In *Philomène*, Delaunay has explicitly engaged with the popular styles and techniques of the French avant-garde. There are many elements of Delaunay's painting that directly recall portraits by influential French artists who were being exhibited in 1905 and 1906. *Philomène* clearly conjures Van Gogh's *La Berceuse (Woman Rocking a Cradle; Augustine-Alix Pellicot Roulin)* of 1889 (fig. 5) and a number of Gauguin's portraits from

the 1890s, including *Portrait of a Young Woman, Vaïte (Jeanne) Goupil* of 1896 (fig. 6). These two works, also half-length portraits, likely provided a model for Delaunay's later effort in their compositions and use of vibrant colors, thick impasto, and decorative backgrounds. In *La Berceuse*, van Gogh has rendered his portrait of Madame Roulin in a palette of bright colors; the vivid red of the floor vibrates against her green jacket and turquoise skirt. His use of large blocks of color, divided from one another by thick black lines, may inform Delaunay's use of color and contour. In *Philomène*, Delaunay handles the blocky torso of her figure in a strikingly similar fashion. Delaunay also treats her sitter's hairstyle and gesture in a similar way to van Gogh's figure; in both pictures, the figures sit with pulled-back hair and crossed arms. Additionally, the patterned floral wallpaper behind *Philomène* seems linked to that in *La Berceuse*, where van Gogh employs the use of the same visual strategy to break up his composition. It is likely that Delaunay would have seen one of the several versions of *La Berceuse* in Paris galleries; this version, now in the Metropolitan Museum's collection, was owned and probably exhibited both by the Vollard and Bernheim-Jeune galleries in Paris during the period in which *Philomène* was painted.⁴¹

The overall execution of *Philomène* is also closely tied to Gauguin's portraits. In *Portrait of a Young Woman, Vaïte (Jeanne) Goupil*, Gauguin utilizes thick contour lines to separate his figure's body from the background and to clearly demarcate the yellow of her robe from the bright pinks and blues that compose the flat background behind her. Delaunay also uses contour lines to achieve a similar result. Moreover, by its very nature

⁴¹ The Metropolitan Museum of Art, "La Berceuse (Woman Rocking a Cradle; Augustine-Alix Pellicot Roulin, 1851–1930)," <http://www.metmuseum.org/Collections/search-the-collections/110002439> (accessed March 28, 2012).

as a half-length portrait, the resulting composition is quite similar to *Philomène*. There is also a similar tension in both works between two- and three-dimensionality, particularly where each figure's modeled hands meet the rest of their flattened torsos. Such a tension is also strong between the foreground and the background; both artists place their modeled figures against flat, decorative wallpaper with no indication of three-dimensional space. The result of the tension between flatness and depth in Delaunay's painting, as in Gauguin's and van Gogh's, is a representation of a bold figure that stands out against a busy, flat background.

From this comparison, it should be clear that Sonia Delaunay quickly adopted French styles, subjects, and techniques into her painting soon after her arrival in Paris. Except for a possible link to the Russian icon tradition and a shared interest in bright colors, Delaunay retained little artistic influence from her homeland. More importantly for this discussion, there are no vestiges of Delaunay's Jewish identity present in this picture or others from the period. She generally did not use any explicitly Jewish iconography or make any clear connections to Judaism in her body of work, instead largely absorbing the artistic influences of Paris at the turn of the century. In this tendency, Delaunay exemplifies Tucker's middle-ground approach to French modernism. She does not express an explicit, nostalgic retention of her past, nor does she create controversial works that created disturbances in the Parisian avant-garde; instead, she makes use of available French styles with innovative, yet tolerable, results.

Sonia Delaunay was by no means unusual as a Jewish artist coming to Paris during the first decade of the century. Amedeo Modigliani (1884-1920) was also an

immigrant Jewish artist; he came to Paris from Italy in 1906.⁴² He first lived in Montmartre, where he met the Bateau-Lavoir group that surrounded Picasso,⁴³ and lived and worked in Montparnasse after 1909. He was born into a Sephardic Jewish family in Livorno, a small city in northern Italy that was particularly hospitable to Jews; at the turn of the century, it boasted the second largest Jewish population in the country and the second largest synagogue in Western Europe.⁴⁴ Though his parents had declared bankruptcy just prior to his birth, Modigliani grew up in a liberal, cultivated, and intellectual family with bourgeois sensibilities and an idealized cosmopolitan worldview. Upon his arrival in France, two of his greatest advantages were that he spoke French fluently and that he could depend on a regular income from home, even if it was minimal.⁴⁵ This was a significant advantage over most other Eastern European immigrant Jewish artists, who were ethnically and linguistically distinct from the greater French public. Because of this combination of identities as both a Jew and a European Westerner, he became an important role model for other immigrant Jewish artists in Montparnasse during this period.⁴⁶ He befriended and painted many of them, including Jules Pascin, Moïse Kisling, and André Salmon, demonstrating his active participation in the School of Paris socially, as well as artistically.⁴⁷

⁴² I have drawn biographical information on Modigliani from Kenneth Wayne, *Modigliani and the Artists of Montparnasse* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2002); Mason Klein, ed., *Modigliani: Beyond the Myth* (New York: The Jewish Museum in association with Yale University Press, 2004); and Meryle Secrest, *Modigliani: A Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011).

⁴³ Silver, "The Circle of Montparnasse," 18.

⁴⁴ Wayne, 18.

⁴⁵ Carol Mann, *Modigliani* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 31.

⁴⁶ Silver, "The Circle of Montparnasse," 20.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

Unlike Delaunay, for Modigliani, Jewishness was a key element in his sense of personal identity⁴⁸; yet, it was not ever consistently a primary subject in his work. His *The Jewess* of 1908 (fig. 7) was one of only a few images Modigliani created, along with later portraits of his Jewish friends Chaïm Soutine, Jacques Lipchitz, and Paul Alexandre, that showed a direct connection to any kind of Jewish subject. *The Jewess* was the first picture he exhibited in Paris, at the 1908 Salon des Indépendants.⁴⁹ This may indicate the importance of Modigliani's Jewish identity to him during his early years in Paris. Even so, the connection to Jewish content is in title only. In this painting, Modigliani has rendered a female figure emerging eerily from a dark background of blues and blacks; her white face, at the center of the canvas, floats statically. Her red lips and blue eyes punctuate an otherwise monochromatic and expressionless visage. The figure in Modigliani's picture possesses no clear Jewish characteristics—with the exception of what might be a hooked nose, since Modigliani was a painter of faces from diverse national, ethnic, religious, and class backgrounds⁵⁰—and is not depicted with any kind of legible, explicitly symbolic Jewish objects or accessories. Her interiority connects the portrait to a subdued form of Symbolism, a primary interest of Modigliani's at this time.⁵¹ Any possible connection to Jewish content is obscured in the dark muddiness of the artist's chosen color palette.

Though he created it during the same period as Delaunay's portrait discussed above, in *The Jewess*, Modigliani produces a quite different result. He was also strongly

⁴⁸ Silver, "The Circle of Montparnasse," 19.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Emily Braun, "The Faces of Modigliani: Identity Politics under Fascism," in *Modigliani: Beyond the Myth*, ed. Mason Klein, exh. cat., Jewish Museum New York (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 25.

⁵¹ Mann, 35.

influenced by van Gogh, Gauguin, and Matisse, but he distills remnants of his interest in these artists' work subtly in *The Jewess*. Though Modigliani dispenses with the bright coloring of this earlier work for an overall different effect, in execution and in composition *The Jewess* recalls van Gogh's *La Berceuse*. In *The Jewess*, Modigliani applies activating brushwork to the background of his painting and his figure's face that is similar to van Gogh's brushy application of paint in *La Berceuse*. Additionally, the portraits have similar compositions, showing the sitter in three-quarter view before a flat background, and the two figures appear to wear similar hairstyles. This subtle inclusion of elements popular in well-known French avant-garde paintings during this period perhaps serves to indicate the influence of such styles on Modigliani's oeuvre after his arrival in Paris.

Though this link with van Gogh is somewhat loose, Modigliani's interest in and adoption of the manner of French artists and trends is much clearer. In particular, he was interested in the work of Paul Cézanne—ironic, given Cézanne's active anti-Dreyfusard position in preceding years. This is manifested in Modigliani's oeuvre overall; in *The Jewess*, the powerful influence of Cézanne is felt in Modigliani's application of paint, the obvious hatching strokes, and the warm and cool palette.⁵² Also, in this painting Modigliani displays a serious interest in sculptural effects, which is also tied to his discovery of Cézanne.⁵³ He was even known to have carried a reproduction of Cézanne's *Boy in a Red Vest* in his pocket and was apparently able to reproduce it precisely from

⁵² Silver, "The Circle of Montparnasse," 20.

⁵³ Mann, 45.

memory.⁵⁴ Cézanne painted a number of portraits with similar titles over these years, but they all include the same type of brushwork and compositions that Modigliani would execute in works like *The Jewess* and the many more to follow.⁵⁵

Modigliani's subtle composition, informed by French masters like van Gogh and Cézanne, is typical of the work of Jewish artists in the School of Paris in the early twentieth century. His oeuvre occupies a somewhat ambiguous space among these categories; while he does not explicitly deny his Jewishness and clearly embrace all trends of French modernism in his paintings, he does not clearly embrace his ethnicity, or his home country's stylistic trends, either. In addition to Cézanne, other artists such as Giovanni Boldini and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec and the stylistic traits of African and Egyptian arts significantly influenced Modigliani.⁵⁶ However, he rarely manifested these influences explicitly in his work. Unlike Delaunay, whose artwork can be clearly and directly connected to the paintings of artists like van Gogh and Gauguin and has little or

⁵⁴ In her biography, Meryle Secrest notes Paul Alexandre's observation that he and Modigliani would go to the Cézanne show at Bernheim's gallery "day after day. Alexandre wrote, 'I remember an anecdote about [Modigliani's] visual memory, which was extraordinary: once, to my great astonishment, he drew from memory and at a single attempt Cézanne's *Boy with a Red Waistcoat*'" (115).

⁵⁵ Cézanne's *Boy in a Red Waistcoat*, in the collection of the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, was exhibited in the Exposition Cézanne at the Bernheim-Jeune Gallery in Paris in 1910 (See National Gallery of Art, "Boy in a Red Waistcoat," http://www.nga.gov/fcgi-bin/tinfo_f?object=93044&detail=exhibit [accessed March 28, 2012]). Thus, it is probably this version that Modigliani knew well and reproduced easily. Kenneth Wayne confirms this in "Modigliani and the Avant-Garde," in *Modigliani and the Artists of Montparnasse*, exh. cat., Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 2002), 31. Other examples include *Boy in a Red Vest*, 1888-90, The Barnes Foundation, Merion, PA; *Boy in a Red Vest*, 1888-90, Museum of Modern Art, New York; and *The Boy in the Red Vest*, 1894-95, stolen from the E. G. Bührle Collection, Zurich, among others.

⁵⁶ Jacques Lipchitz, *Amedeo Modigliani* (New York: Harry N. Abrams in association with Pocket Books, Inc., 1954), 13.

no Jewish content, Modigliani's effort is somewhat more enigmatic, distilling his influences and visual references to engage with French and School of Paris avant-garde trends in a more nuanced way in his brushwork and composition. With the exception of *The Jewess*, he, like Delaunay, incorporated no overt Jewish content into his oeuvre. As manifested in his body of work as a whole, Modigliani's Jewish identity plays a limited, often non-existent, role. Thus in the limited manifestation of his Jewishness in his art and his tempered approach to French modernism, Modigliani, too, exemplifies another version of the middle-ground approach to French modernism Tucker proposes.

Marc Chagall represents an exception to this tendency. Like Delaunay, Modigliani, and many other immigrant Jewish artists, he was also living in Paris during the pre-war period and was also impacted by the confluence of the historical and social contexts I have outlined throughout this chapter. Yet, his work differs significantly in content and style from that of his peers in terms of its Russian, Jewish, and rural content and the way he absorbed French avant-garde trends, in spite of some of the similarities he may have shared with immigrant Jewish artists around him.

Chagall and Sonia Delaunay had regional origins in common; both were born in Eastern European towns and lived in St. Petersburg as teenagers. However, Chagall came from a more modest background than that of Sonia Delaunay, who spent her childhood in her wealthy uncle's household. In spite of the fact that both artists were Russian by birth, this commonality appears to have not mattered significantly in terms of a common impact on their artwork's content and style. Whereas coming from an impoverished village family may have been significant for Chagall's worldview and possibly heightened the importance of his Hasidic Jewish upbringing to him, Delaunay's

more upper-class, cosmopolitan childhood may have allowed her easier adaptation upon arrival in Western Europe. This may explain why Chagall drew so heavily on Jewish, Russian, and rural content in his artwork, and Delaunay did not.

Though Modigliani was Italian, and thus Western European by birth, he and Chagall came from somewhat comparable economic backgrounds. Modigliani's family had at one point been a part of the Livorno bourgeoisie but declared bankruptcy just prior to his birth. As a result, the household in which he was raised was a modest one, perhaps not unlike Chagall's. Additionally, by the time they arrived in Paris, both artists could depend on modest incomes from people in their home countries. Despite these commonalities, Chagall's and Modigliani's artwork was also strikingly different. Modigliani did not explicitly incorporate his Jewish or Italian identities in his painting; instead, he created a body of work that only occasionally referenced his religious and national identities in subtle ways.

Another important difference between Chagall and Delaunay and Modigliani was a linguistic one. Both Delaunay and Modigliani spoke French fluently upon their arrival in Paris, whereas Chagall did not. This linguistic and cultural barrier slowed Chagall's process of acculturation and adaptation to life in France. This distance may have impacted his choices of artistic subject matter, as Chagall seemed to have felt closer to his Jewish and Russian backgrounds than did Delaunay and Modigliani.

Even when compared to numerous other examples among the dozens of Jewish immigrant artists working in Montparnasse,⁵⁷ it remains clear that Chagall's work is

⁵⁷ Among the artists for whom records exist today, most—including Moïse Kisling, Jacques Lipchitz, and Max Weber, among many others—did not incorporate Russian or Jewish content into their artwork from this period. Lipchitz addressed Old Testament themes in his

exceptional. Tucker, in establishing his discussion of their tendencies of acculturation, notes that “the vast majority of these Jewish artists of Montparnasse thus opted not for recollections of the past, nor for a specifically Jewish art, but for confronting the present, ...abandoning their ethnicity for French modernism.”⁵⁸ Yet, rather than abandon his past as other artists chose to do, Chagall made use of his background and his associated identities in his paintings. His artworks from the pre-war years in Paris represent a continued, more direct engagement with Russian and Jewish subjects, forms, and motifs than is found in the work of his colleagues. The next chapter will explore Chagall’s work and further analyze some reasons for these differences.

sculptures from the 1930s and 1940s, but during this period did not use such subjects, engaging instead with Cubism and content typical of French avant-garde art. Most others distilled the influence of prominent French figures such as Cézanne (in the case of Kisling) and Matisse (in the case of Weber) in their artwork. For more information on these artists, see *The Circle of Montparnasse: Jewish Artists in Paris, 1905-1945* (1985), especially 95-117.

⁵⁸ Tucker, 143.

CHAPTER TWO
TO RUSSIA, WITH LOVE: EARLY PARISIAN PAINTINGS

Here, in the Louvre, before the canvases of Manet, Millet, and others, I understood why my alliance with Russia and Russian art had not worked. Why my very language is foreign to them. Why no-one has faith in me. Why the artistic circles ignore me. Why, in Russia, I'm only the fifth wheel of the coach. And why everything I do seems outlandish to them, and everything they do seems futile to me. I can say no more. I love Russia.

Chagall, *My Life*¹

Upon arrival in Paris, Chagall found himself immersed in a foreign country with a complicated social, cultural, and political environment for impoverished immigrant Jewish artists. Previous scholarship on Chagall's early Parisian artwork tends to emphasize the unique, exceptional qualities of the paintings he made in response to that environment—especially the floating figures, non-naturalistic colors, and docile animals that populate and organize his compositions—and as a result, it regularly casts him as an anomaly within the School of Paris.² This is basically true, but Chagall's work is unlike the contributions of other artists not simply because of its inclusion of unusual symbols, but more significantly because of its distinctive hybridity and manifested combination of many different influences and identities, often driven by his relationships to members of his social and professional networks. The hybrid nature of Chagall's work is what makes it exceptional, and it is necessary to examine the reasons why Chagall, more than his immigrant Jewish counterparts, was so inclined to produce a series of paintings marked by fantastical hybridity during this period.

¹ Chagall, *My Life*, 101.

² See Silver et al. 1985, 28-29; Baal-Teshuva 1998, 32-73; Foray 2003, 14-15; Bougault 1997, 41-58; and Kamensky 1989, 9-14, 73-152.

This chapter will argue that Chagall was able to create a body of work that represents such a high level of artistic hybridity—in terms of artistic styles, subjects, and representations of form and space—because of the networks he maintained before and upon his arrival in Paris. In the first year of this early period abroad, Chagall’s networks consisted almost exclusively of Russian fellow expatriates, to whom he looked for social and professional contact and emotional support. The exception was Chagall’s experience at the Montparnasse art schools Académie La Palette and the Académie de la Grande Chaumière. However, even in those environments, he remained in close and regular contact with other Russians who were students there; unsurprisingly, he preferred to stay within his comfort zone as he slowly began to engage with his surroundings in the French art world.³ Considering Chagall’s networks in relation to Lawrence Alloway’s idea of the art world as a group-driven system,⁴ it becomes clear that Chagall’s relationships with other Russians initially helped the artist produce artwork during this period. The subsequent study here will focus on these relationships as starting points for Chagall’s artistic career, following Bruno Latour’s actor-network theory.⁵ Ultimately, the networks and relationships Chagall forged supported the young artist in a way that allowed him to make unusual work, and this artwork represents a negotiation of identities through a combination of Russian, Jewish, rural, and French motifs and artistic styles.

³ Wullschlager, 133.

⁴ Alloway, 3-5.

⁵ Latour, 29.

Painted during his first winter in Paris when living in a studio on the Impasse du Maine in Montparnasse, *To Russia, Asses and Others* (fig. 2) is an example of the hybridity with which Chagall was already beginning to imbue his work from an early date.⁶ Because it represents an amalgamation of French styles and Russian, Jewish, and rural motifs, it provides an effective entry point into a discussion of the hybrid nature of Chagall's artwork. This large, vertically-oriented canvas portrays a pastoral scene, but Chagall's composition is atypical and even bizarre. His imaginative rendering of form and pictorial space is initially difficult to comprehend; he renders a large cow, a calf, and a human child nursing together on the precariously sloping rooftops of a village, surrounded by a sky spotted with Stars of David, geometric shapes, and cosmic passages of sweeping bright color. The rosy cow's expression appears to be one of disinterest, distraction, or even ecstasy; as she drinks steadily from the sloping trench, her eyes nearly roll back inside her head. Yet, in contrast to her removed expression, her tail actively flicks across the center of the composition, perhaps registering the influence of the Futurists exhibiting in Paris during this period.⁷ It dissolves into the dark black night behind her.

⁶ There are some discrepancies in the dating of *To Russia, Asses and Others* and the location where he created it. Various sources date it 1911; others date it 1912. Jackie Wullschlager, Chagall's biographer, writes that he created this piece in the winter of 1911 in order to exhibit it in the spring Salon des Indépendants in March of 1912 (Wullschlager, 138). He moved to La Ruche in the spring of 1912, which means that he certainly began this work in his studio at 18, Impasse du Maine, and probably continued working on it into 1912. This is consistent with records from the object file on this work at the Centre Pompidou, Paris, as well as the catalog created for the exhibition of this work after its thorough scientific material study in 1997 (*À la Russie, aux ânes et aux autres*, Musée National Message Biblique Marc Chagall, Nice, 15).

⁷ Danièle Giraudy and Jean-Paul Rioux, "À la Russie, aux ânes et aux autres: Une histoire d'éclipse," in *À la Russie, aux ânes et aux autres: Un chef-d'œuvre de Marc Chagall*, exh. cat., Musée

A female figure, presumably the animals' caretaker, floats above them, her head separated from her body. She is cloaked in a colorful, patterned garment, which is broken down into non-naturalistic, angular planes. In what is a tempered appropriation of French Cubism, Chagall uses the fragments to transform the figure's body into a decorative geometric pattern. The caretaker hovers above the nursing cow and babies, gesturing toward them with a milking pail. Her solid, heavy clogs contradict the lightness with which she hangs in pieces in the sky, and as a result she appears to be descending toward the rooftop scene.

Like the animal group, this caretaker has also been affected by Chagall's whimsical tendencies. In an eerily calm way, the figure's head is detached from her body, and all parts are suspended timelessly like constellations in the sky. The bright arcs of color in the sky add movement to the piece; it almost seems as if the figure is flinging her own head off of her body so that it careens helplessly into a vibrant red passage of paint in the top right corner. One can read the bright colors and fracturing of this figure and sky as an example of Chagall's experimentation with Fauvist style and Cubist representations of space.

In addition to a conscious engagement and experimentation with French aesthetic trends, Chagall may also have been employing this strategy of disjunctive pictorial space and color to symbolize the dislocation one feels in a foreign country, far from home. Home is clearly at the forefront of Chagall's mind in this painting, as he specifically locates the scene in Russia through its title and through the motifs he has

National Message Biblique Marc Chagall, Nice (Paris: Éditions de la Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1997), 34.

chosen. Additionally, the cow was a motif Chagall often used in his paintings to represent his rural homeland.⁸ Further, the beheaded figure can possibly be read to operate simultaneously as a reference to Cubism and also to Chagall himself, who may have been feeling dislocated, uprooted, and out of place during his first few months in Paris, when he created this painting. One may read many of Chagall's paintings from this period with the idea of dislocation in mind, either as a theme he directly represented or as a subtext for the paintings he created that were steeped in symbols and memories of his homeland and home culture. In addition to the cow and the beheaded figure, the small church in the bottom corner of *To Russia, Asses and Others* is a motif that can be directly traced to Chagall's hometown of Vitebsk,⁹ a town of 70,000 in Belarus, near Russia's western border.¹⁰ Born into a deeply religious family in a conservative Jewish community, Chagall experienced the influence of Hasidic faith and prayer from an early age, which played an important role in his life and artwork.

Hasidism, which originated in Eastern Europe in the second third of the eighteenth century, is a branch of Orthodox Judaism.¹¹ Starting in small, spontaneously

⁸ Rajner, "Chagall: The Artist and The Poet," 54. See also *I and the Village*, 1911, Museum of Modern Art, New York for another example of the motif of the cow representing Chagall's homeland in his artwork.

⁹ A domed church is present in some of Chagall's earliest paintings, including *The Window*, 1908, private collection. Goodman, in "Chagall's Paradise Lost," notes that even "at this early stage, the artist is aware of the simple structures of his town, with its monastery, churches, and synagogues crowded together with the dome of a cathedral dominating the view" (31). Throughout his life, Chagall would continue to use this motif to represent his hometown.

¹⁰ Population in 1895. Arthur A. Cohen, "From Eastern Europe to Paris and Beyond, in *The Circle of Montparnasse: Jewish Artists in Paris 1905-1945*, exh. cat., Jewish Museum New York (New York: Universe Books, 1985), 65.

¹¹ Rachel Elior, *The Mystical Origins of Hasidism* (Portland, OR: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2006), 1.

formed groups of Torah scholars in Poland and Lithuania, it grew into a popular, widely accepted movement throughout Eastern Europe by the end of the eighteenth century, though it was threatened by pogroms and secularization at the end of the nineteenth century.¹² Among its many values, Hasidism emphasizes the ideal of *simhah*, or religious joy, and as a result Hasidim frequently engage in singing and dancing¹³ for the purification of the soul, the unification of the community, and the enhancement of social relationships.¹⁴ Because of this practice, notions of ecstasy, mysticism, and magic are often associated with the religion.¹⁵ Such ideas also helped members of impoverished Eastern European communities like Chagall's to maintain a broader worldview of vitality and celebration, beyond their own daily survival, transforming their often dismal present into a greater, more harmonious ideology.¹⁶

Many of these elements of Hasidism seem to be at play in *To Russia, Asses and Others*, especially when one considers historian Moshe Idel's definitions of ecstasy and magic. Idel defines ecstasy to mean "the temporary effacement of one's own personality, during which time one is possessed by the divine power or presence of the divine spirit," and magic to be "the exercise of a preternatural control over nature by human beings,

¹² David Assaf, "Hasidism: Historical Overview," *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, 2010, http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Hasidism/Historical_Overview (accessed March 22, 2012).

¹³ Louis Jacobs, "Hasidism: Everyday Life," *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, 2010, http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Hasidism/Everyday_Life (accessed March 22, 2012).

¹⁴ Yaakov Mazor, "Hasidism: Dance," *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, 2010, <http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Hasidism/Dance> (accessed March 22, 2012).

¹⁵ For a discussion of these terms, see Moshe Idel, *Hasidism: Between Ecstasy and Magic* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), esp. 1-30, 45-102, 149-188.

¹⁶ Wullschlager, 31.

with the assistance of forces more powerful than they.”¹⁷ These definitions provide a different context for considering Chagall’s composition. The floating, decapitated figure may be read to be so because she is possessed by a divine spirit; her orientation in the sky as a kind of celestial body is perhaps a reference to the Hasidic saying, “when one dances, at least one foot is above the earth.”¹⁸ Further, a human child nursing a cow might indicate this kind of “preternatural” relationship between humans and nature, aided and normalized in part by divine forces that are symbolized by the church to the right. While it may not be possible to prove whether Chagall’s compositional choices were so directly connected to his thinking about his Hasidic faith, I suggest such direct links to underscore the importance of keeping Chagall’s Hasidism as another framework through which to view his magical, ecstatic paintings.

It is clear through the example of *To Russia, Asses and Others* that Chagall’s national, cultural, and religious origins played an important role in the content and formation of his paintings from his first Parisian period. His artistic and social origins are similarly important to this artwork. As a teenager, Chagall developed an interest in art after seeing a classmate’s drawing. In his autobiography, he recounted a subsequent conversation with his mother about enrolling in an art school in Vitebsk. He said to her, “I wish to be a painter. Save me, Mamma. Come with me. Come on, come on! There’s a place in town; if I’m admitted, and if I finish the course, I’ll be a complete artist by the time I leave. I should be so happy!”¹⁹ Though her first reaction was not positive, they

¹⁷ Idel, 29.

¹⁸ Jacobs, n.p.

¹⁹ Marc Chagall, *My Life*, 58.

ultimately went to Yehuda Pen, the owner of the school, and enrolled the young Chagall in courses there. An artist himself, Pen's own practice was based in naturalism. His most common subjects included naturalistically rendered domestic views, genre paintings, and portraits of people—devout Jews, craftsmen, and town citizens—all drawn from his immediate Russian-Jewish world.²⁰ Chagall would have seen portraits like Pen's *Lady with Veil* of 1907 (fig. 9), which depicts one of his provincial types rendered with thickly applied paint in a realist style. Though Pen did not initially intend his school to focus exclusively on Jewish art, its emphasis was decidedly Jewish anyway; much of Vitebsk's population was Jewish and the majority of Pen's students spoke only Yiddish. Chagall studied in Pen's school only for a few months, but the older artist's emphasis on Jewish themes and types taught Chagall that these were legitimate artistic subjects.²¹

In the winter between 1906 and 1907, Chagall left Pen's school for St. Petersburg; as a large city within Russia proper, it offered Chagall more opportunities to develop his artistic skills and education. Though the city was dangerous—especially in the hostile environment in the wake of the violent pogroms and Revolution of 1905—it was known as a meeting place for young Russian artists connected to the artistic movements of the European avant-garde.²² It was in St. Petersburg that Chagall was for the first time directly exposed to French schools of Expressionism, Symbolism, Fauvism, and Cubism prior to his departure for Western Europe.²³ Chagall was also exposed to the difficulty of being Jewish in a city in which anti-Semitism was pervasive. He met individuals who

²⁰ Goodman, "Chagall's Paradise Lost," 19.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 25.

²² *Ibid.*, 28.

²³ *Ibid.*

remained connected to their Jewish roots as well as those more interested in assimilating into Russian Christian society, but he was not fully connected with either group.

Chagall's studies with Léon Bakst, from whom he took courses at the Zvantseva School in St. Petersburg until 1910, did not have an overwhelmingly strong effect on the young artist's style and technique.²⁴ Yet, it was during his studies under Bakst that Chagall seriously reflected on his artwork and his choice to become an artist.²⁵ Bakst was instrumental in exposing his students to contemporary European art and may be responsible for encouraging Chagall to look specifically toward Paris for artistic inspiration.²⁶ In 1910, Chagall entered his painting *The Dead Man* (fig. 1), a dark composition with an eerie yellow-green sky, into the Zvantseva School exhibition.

The Dead Man, completed in 1908 in St. Petersburg, portrays a funeral procession in the street of a residential area. It was apparently inspired by a traumatic experience Chagall had had as a child, when he saw a woman crying over her dead husband in the street, imploring anyone for help.²⁷ The sober, dark palette of this painting—unique to Chagall's early work—reflects his cramped, frustrated life in St. Petersburg²⁸ as well as the connection he continued to feel with Vitebsk. He has placed the viewer directly in the middle of the inky black street, which begins in the center of the composition and radiates down to the lower corners of the canvas, charging out of the picture. To the left, the dead man himself, shrouded in a deep maroon garment and surrounded by six

²⁴ Goodman, "Chagall's Paradise Lost," 28.

²⁵ Eléna Basner, "Marc Chagall: Les Collections Privées de Saint-Pétersbourg," in *Marc Chagall: Vitebsk, Saint-Pétersbourg, Paris*, exh. cat. (Paris: Galerie Gerald Piltzer, 1993), 21.

²⁶ Goodman, "Chagall's Paradise Lost," 28.

²⁷ Wullschlager, 72.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 82.

glowing candles, hovers above the street. The viewer has the impression this man is about to float down the road, off of the canvas, and into the viewer's own space; his bare feet extend uncomfortably close to the picture plane. The candles illuminate his body in the dark street, but in their yellow-green halos, they echo the bright yellow sky above and lend a balance to this macabre composition. The houses along this street are colorful but somewhat muddied, and Chagall has rendered them in distorted, stage-like perspective.

Above and to the left of this scene, which includes several other townspeople, a man with a fiddle sits on a roof. Relegated to the periphery, he oversees the action. He almost appears to be the scene's narrator, and perhaps can be seen as a symbol of the artist himself. This figure of the fiddler would come to function as a metaphor for Jewishness within Chagall's oeuvre in many later works and is likely functioning that way in this early painting.²⁹ Additionally, a link to music through the inclusion of this figure might intentionally represent Chagall's upbringing as a Hasidic Jew, and that religion's emphasis on the worship of the divine through music and dance. As a result, the link between this figure and the artist likely indicates the importance of Chagall's Jewish identity to him at this moment, as an affirmation in a turbulently anti-Semitic city. The fiddler motif is also connected to the artist's developing interest in Russian-Jewish folk music, cultivated through his interaction with Symbolist circles in St. Petersburg.³⁰

Many motifs and elements from the early St. Petersburg paintings reappear repeatedly in Chagall's later works. It is clear when examining some of his early Parisian paintings that the roots of his subjects, compositions, and motifs, as well as his

²⁹ Mirjam Rajner, "Chagall's Fiddler," *Ars Judaica* 1 (2005): 117.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 119.

formation of space in some works, lie in his training in Russia and his Jewish background. The influence of his homeland and home culture is ever-present. The continued presence of Russia and Judaism in his artwork through his specific, often imaginative choices of subject and motifs is directly related to Chagall's maintenance of Russian and Jewish contacts even after his arrival in Paris.

Upon his arrival there, his old friend from Yehuda Pen's studio, Viktor Mekler, was at the station to meet him. Mekler was the son of Vitebsk's richest paper manufacturer, and was among the elite Jews in the town's First Guild of Merchants.³¹ His privileged background thus differentiated him from Chagall, but made him a crucial friend and contact. Chagall was intimidated from a young age by the class difference between himself and Mekler, yet the two became close friends and often worked together as young men in Vitebsk.

Because of his higher social standing, Mekler was able to travel with his father to St. Petersburg, where he observed new artistic trends long before they reached Vitebsk. With certain exceptions, Jews needed special certificates to enter St. Petersburg and were barred from living there; however, Jewish merchants like Mekler's father were exempt from such restrictions and were able to travel there freely. As a result, Mekler opened the door to a cultural environment outside of Pen's narrowly-focused studio. Chagall became increasingly close with Mekler's family, who welcomed him into their circle of wealthy Russian-Jewish intellectuals; however, he continued to be plagued with a sense of social inferiority and insecurity because of his modest background. This sentiment strained the relationship between the two young men, though in 1906 the friendship was emotionally

³¹ Wullschlager, 36.

and practically essential to Chagall.³² It was Mekler who initially pushed him to venture to St. Petersburg, and Mekler's family who provided a merchant's certificate that allowed Chagall to enter the capital somewhat legally. Without this social connection, it is questionable whether Chagall would have ever had the courage or ability to leave Vitebsk, let alone Russia.

Mekler went to Paris in 1910, in advance of Chagall, and reported in letters that he was struggling in Paris and was desperate to reconnect with his friend. Chagall, for his part, had already moved on to develop other relationships with wealthy, well-connected Russian Jews in St. Petersburg, including Alexander Romm, another student at Bakst's Zvantseva School. After 1909, Romm was the sophisticated bourgeois friend to whom Chagall turned for emotional intimacy and support in unfamiliar surroundings.³³ According to his biographer Jackie Wullschlager, Chagall would depend on this type of relationship until his marriage to Bella several years later.³⁴ Romm spoke many European languages fluently and represented at the Zvantseva School what Mekler had been to Chagall in Vitebsk.

Chagall's relationships with such peers were necessary to his personal and professional livelihood from an early point. It is clear that he felt his social and artistic success depended on deep friendships with and support of like-minded individuals, and following Alloway's model of the art world as a group-driven system, perhaps it did.³⁵ These figures both resembled Chagall's cultural background in that they were also Jewish

³² Wullschlager, 49.

³³ *Ibid.*, 112.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Alloway, 3-5.

and Eastern European, yet they were more privileged financially and socially than Chagall's family. Growing up in an impoverished, remote shtetl meant that Chagall did not have his own family connections in the art world and thus had to work hard to develop and maintain social and professional networks himself. As a result Chagall valued the members of his networks highly. It was because of the fulfillment of his need for emotional sustenance and professional support and his opportunistic attitude toward friendships that Chagall continued to progress rapidly during the early part of his career, developing his skills as an artist and making artwork with Russian and Jewish content.

In spite of his waning dedication to his friendship with Mekler, Chagall was interested in getting to Paris in any way possible to continue to advance his career and artwork. The outlook seemed dim. Then Maxim Vinaver, a leader of a liberal political party and member of the Russian assembly, acquired Chagall's *Russian Wedding* (fig. 15) and *The Dead Man* (fig. 1). Vinaver had founded the St. Petersburg Jewish Historical and Ethnographic Society in 1908 with the wealthy banker and philanthropist Baron David Günzberg, one of the few Jews in the empire who had direct connections with the Tsar.³⁶ Chagall was loosely connected to Günzberg through Ilya Ginzberg, a sculptor who knew Yehuda Pen in Vitebsk. To Günzberg and Vinaver, Chagall, the gifted artist from a peripheral shtetl, embodied their hopes for the future of Jews within the Russian empire.³⁷ As such, Vinaver was supportive of Chagall and his artwork during his time in St. Petersburg. He ultimately offered to pay for Chagall's travel to Paris and a living stipend of 125 francs per month, which became his financial livelihood in Paris. Having

³⁶ Wullschlager, 67.

³⁷ Ibid.

Vinaver's support likely impacted the unusual hybrid art Chagall made during his time there, either by allowing him freedom from the pressure to make art that would sell in French markets, or by inspiring him to continue treating Russian and Jewish themes, infused them with French styles.

Though Chagall's friendship with Mekler broke down almost immediately after they were reunited on French soil, Chagall continued to depend almost entirely on Russian-Jewish contacts in Paris.³⁸ After Mekler, Chagall connected with Yakov Tugendhold, a Russian-Jewish cosmopolitan critic who was one of his earliest supporters. According to Chagall, the critic "took my canvases in his hands. What? What's the matter? Hurriedly, he began to call one person, another, to call me to go here, or there...Tugendhold became my friend. Many times I asked him how I should work, and often, I admit, I whimpered (my specialty) to him. He comforted me..."³⁹ Tugendhold was the Paris correspondent for the arts journal *Apollon* and covered the activity of Léon Bakst and the Ballets Russes, as well as other Russian artists in Paris, and was familiar with the work of Picasso and Matisse. Thus, he was particularly well-connected in the Parisian art world.

As a result of a connection with Tugendhold, the Russian painter Ehrenburg offered to rent his studio to Chagall.⁴⁰ This studio was located in a small, nearly-hidden house on the Impasse du Maine, a quiet cul-de-sac in the developing Montparnasse neighborhood. The popularity of Montparnasse among artists and writers was

³⁸ Wullschlager, 126.

³⁹ Marc Chagall, "In Memory of Ya. A. Tugendhold," in *Marc Chagall and His Times: A Documentary Narrative*, ed. Benjamin Harshav, trans. Benjamin and Barbara Harshav (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 200.

⁴⁰ Wullschlager, 126.

intensifying with the increasing gentrification of the Montmartre neighborhood on the north side of the city, and renting a studio in this area put Chagall in a key location to profit from the lively Parisian avant-garde in this period. However, with the exception of the art academies he was attended, Chagall initially chose to lead a frugal, mostly solitary life, usually electing instead to work alone in his studio.⁴¹

While he was working alone and cultivating and maintaining his Russian-Jewish contacts, he simultaneously began to engage his surroundings in the center of the Western art world. Immediately after his arrival, Chagall went to the Salon des Indépendants, an annual spring exhibition of avant-garde art. He told Pierre Schneider in 1967 that he “hurried at once to the Salon des Indépendants [and] went quickly to the moderns, at the far end. There were the Cubists: [Robert] Delaunay, [Albert] Gleizes, [Fernand] Léger...”⁴² Chagall was thus almost immediately exposed to the most current, cutting-edge French art in Paris.

The 1911 Salon was particularly significant because it was the moment when Cubism was presented for the first time as a coherent, radical movement.⁴³ Henri Le Fauconnier, Jean Metzinger, and Marie Laurencin were also included in this exhibition, and together these six artists exemplified Salon Cubism. Picasso, Braque, and Juan Gris did not exhibit in the Salon and were fiercely critical of it; they were spearheading the Cubist movement from a more isolated, esoteric position. According to many critics and dealers, including Apollinaire and Henry Kahnweiler, the somewhat commercialized

⁴¹ Wullschlager, 127.

⁴² Pierre Schneider, “Dialogue in the Louvre with Pierre Schneider, 1967,” in *Marc Chagall on Art and Culture*, ed. Benjamin Harshav (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 155.

⁴³ Wullschlager, 131.

work of the Salon Cubists represented a derivative, second-rate Cubism. However, it was their work that made the aesthetic of the Cubist movement available to a wider public.⁴⁴ Indeed, it was through the work of these artists at the Salon that Chagall was first exposed to Cubism in France.

A brief consideration of some of the works Chagall would have seen in the spring 1911 Salon des Indépendants will help to make clear exactly the nature of his initial exposure to Cubism. Among the works exhibited in “Salle 41,” the gallery at the Salon that held this new Cubist work, were Léger’s *Nudes in a Forest* of 1909-11 (fig. 10) and *Study for Three Portraits* of 1910-11 (fig. 11), which present human figures in multifaceted, volumetric forms. These two paintings show Léger’s considerable engagement with volumetric reductiveness and the breakdown of forms into harsh, geometric planes.⁴⁵ He considered *Nudes in a Forest* to be “battle of volumes,” and he was attempting to evoke the sheer physical presence of weighty, three-dimensional form in these works.⁴⁶ Le Fauconnier’s painting *Abundance* of 1910-11 (fig. 12), which addressed similar concerns about the representation of volume, was also hung in the Salon near Léger’s canvases. A larger-than-life-size portrait of the artist’s wife that similarly addresses weightiness in full, geometricized forms, the painting briefly became one of the most famous and celebrated Cubist paintings in the world.⁴⁷ *Abundance* portrays a nude female figure and child carrying the return from a plentiful fruit harvest in a bright palette of tans, reds, and

⁴⁴ Wullschlager, 132.

⁴⁵ Edward F. Fry, “Léger and the French Tradition,” in *Fernand Léger*, exh. cat., Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY (New York: Abbeville Press, 1982), 12.

⁴⁶ Christopher Green, *Léger and the Avant-Garde* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 7-10.

⁴⁷ Wullschlager, 132.

blues, an allegory of the life cycle.⁴⁸ As in Léger's paintings, in Le Fauconnier's, the conventional pictorial distinction between solid and space is fractured, and the artist geometricizes every elements of the picture. This dissection of form was also present, along with a bright palette, in Delaunay's paintings of the Eiffel Tower (fig. 23), on view in the same room.

Initially these paintings may seem unrelated to Chagall's artwork of 1911. The aesthetic concerns of the French painters in these works generally do take a different focus from those of Chagall, who began to address Cubism in a more gradual fashion than did the artists he saw in the Salon des Indépendants. Though his approach was moderate, one can detect resonances of Cubism in many of his canvases begun in 1911, including *To Russia, Asses and Others* (fig. 2). As previously discussed, *To Russia* displays a breakdown of three-dimensional forms and an interest in the representation of weight on canvas as in the Cubist works at the Salon. This is particularly evident in the female figure's garment, to which Chagall introduces geometric angles and shapes in a non-naturalistic fashion, as well as in the literal fracturing of the floating, weightless figure. Chagall also represents a cityscape and utilizes a bright palette, which may indicate the influence of Delaunay's paintings.

After the Salon and Alexander Romm's arrival in Paris in June, the two young artists enrolled at the Académie La Palette art school in Montparnasse and took classes

⁴⁸ Oxford University Press, "Cubism," The Museum of Modern Art, http://www.moma.org/collection/details.php?theme_id=10068§ion_id=T020544 (accessed March 28, 2012).

from Le Fauconnier and Metzinger.⁴⁹ Though his studies there were sporadic and brief,⁵⁰ it was at La Palette that Chagall came into contact with artists working at the forefront of the Parisian avant-garde. There, he profited from experimenting with Fauvism and Cubism.⁵¹ Yet, the environment did not force him too far out of his comfort zone; Le Fauconnier's Russian wife, Maroussia, attracted many Russians like Chagall and Romm to the school. Chagall was thus able to continue working in a Russian-friendly context even thousands of miles from his hometown. Chagall combined lessons at La Palette with classes at Académie de la Grande Chaumière, also in Montparnasse, where he was able to draw from nude models.⁵² He worked alongside Léger at La Grande Chaumière, who also made studies there.⁵³

Though Chagall was coming into initial contact with many of the most important French figures of the Parisian artistic avant-garde, he continued to feel isolated and alienated in the foreign city. He felt this way in his classes and in his exploration of the avant-garde galleries in Paris.⁵⁴ In his autobiography, Chagall described the experience of gazing into the galleries owned by Paul Durand-Ruel, Ambroise Vollard, and Alexander Bernheim. He felt comfortable at Bernheim's gallery—in part because the dealer was

⁴⁹ I have derived much of my information on Chagall's enrollment in art schools in Paris from Wullschlager, 133-35.

⁵⁰ Michael R. Taylor, *Paris Through the Window: Marc Chagall and his Circle*, exh. cat. (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2011), 8.

⁵¹ Hélène Vincent, "Chagall à Paris," in *Chagall et l'Avant-Garde Russe*, exh. cat., Musée de Grenoble and the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto (Paris: Éditions du Centre Pompidou, 2011), 60.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Wullschlager, 133.

⁵⁴ Chagall once reportedly said "academies are not places of feeling. I got cold-shouldered too at La Grande Chaumière not only as a *métèque* [foreigner] but as a Jew" (Wullschlager, 134).

Jewish—but much less so when taking in the work in other galleries. In most cases, especially with Vollard, he chose to merely gaze in through the windows; he wrote that he “didn’t dare go in” because he was too afraid to enter.⁵⁵

The paintings Chagall produced between his arrival in May 1911 and the spring of 1912 represent his absorption of influence from the Parisian avant-garde. In addition to works like *To Russia, Asses and Others*, many of these initial works from his earliest months and first domicile in Paris are generally characterized by a reworking of the Russian and Jewish themes that Chagall first attempted in Russia under the influence of his teachers in Vitebsk and St. Petersburg. In his reconsideration of these themes upon his arrival in Paris, Chagall manifests his initial engagement with French styles in a number of ways; he does so primarily by using vivid, Fauvist color and experimenting with a Cubist-informed style and representations of space. In his choice to remain tied to his previous subject matter, but to consider it through the lens of French-informed styles and techniques, Chagall begins to create a body of work in 1911 that is a hybrid of these multiple influences as well as his multiple identities.

Chagall created at least two major paintings upon his arrival in Paris that mirror works he created in Russia, but with a new French flavor. They address major themes and important moments in the life cycle, perhaps indicating that Chagall was in the process of determining his position in his own life cycle. The Parisian versions of these paintings are amazingly different from the earlier canvases of the same subjects; they show an interest in Fauvism and Cubism that results in a strikingly bright color palette

⁵⁵ Chagall, *My Life*, 106-7.

and a major change in the artist's handling of pictorial space. These paintings also show an effort not only to merge his Russian subjects with French avant-garde styles, but also to merge avant-garde styles with one another.

One pair of these pictures represents two starkly different birth scenes. *Birth of 1910* (fig. 13), is marked by muddy, deep colors, dim lighting, and an almost eerie quality. In its palette and composition, it recalls Chagall's earlier canvas, *The Dead Man*, and it seems much closer to that than to a French aesthetic. Under the canopy of a four-post bed, an exhausted, bloody mother reclines as a village midwife holds the screaming infant above her head. A dark male figure lurks at the end of the bed. Chagall has chosen to represent the moment immediately following what appears to have been a dramatic, even violent, birth, but he represents it in a subtle, muted way that implies such an event would not have been an unusual occurrence. A number of male figures congregate on the other side of the room while they speak to another figure through a dark window, but they do not react to the mother or the newborn child.

The later version of the same scene, *Birth of 1911* (fig. 14), is a much larger, celebratory picture with a complex composition. In contrast to the earlier painting's muddy colors and dull lighting, Chagall has rendered the later work in pure Fauvist jewel tones that glow transparently, recalling stained glass;⁵⁶ the bold hues color the ceiling a watery turquoise, the walls a bright forest green, and the wood floor an active, orangey-brown. Delightfully, there are also large swaths of iridescent pink, red, orange, and blue that color the figures and furniture. In the lower left corner, a bright pink mother glows as her baby is raised up on a plate. She is also bloody, as in the earlier composition, but

⁵⁶ Christopher Green, *Art in France, 1900-1940* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 15.

less obviously so, as Chagall has transformed her flesh into a soft, warm pink hue. These two birth scenes are significantly different from one another in technique and rendering; the former is vague, naturalistic, and subdued, while the later work shows the influence of Cubism in its dissolution of solid forms and a geometricization of the scene, as well as the incorporation of a bright, Fauve-influenced palette. The space is fractured and less coherent, which allows the picture to seem more whimsical and magical. In addition to his use of bright colors and disjunctive pictorial space, Chagall's application of strong contour lines to most elements in the later composition recalls stained glass and the cloisonnist aesthetic, popular in avant-garde art of the late nineteenth century.

The second pair is marked by the same kinds of differences in style, color, and space. These two pictures each portray a wedding procession; the painting *Russian Wedding* of 1909 (fig. 15) depicts such a procession as Chagall conceived it while living in St. Petersburg, whereas the Pompidou's *The Wedding* of 1911 (fig. 16) is a reconsideration of this theme after his arrival in Paris.⁵⁷ The earlier of the two pictures, *Russian Wedding*, was one of the two paintings Chagall sold to Vinaver, which allowed him to go to Paris.⁵⁸ In somewhat muted colors and a stage-like composition, as in the *Russian Birth* and the earlier *The Dead Man*, *Russian Wedding* portrays a Jewish marriage procession led by a village violinist, a typical participant in Jewish weddings. Thus this important figure

⁵⁷ The dating of Chagall's work is somewhat complicated during this period. According to Wullschlager, Chagall somewhat regularly and intentionally misdated details of his early life to make himself appear more precocious (Wullschlager, 530). As a result, he dated the French version of *The Wedding* to the year 1910—clearly visible in the painting's lower left corner—to make it appear as though he arrived in Paris a year earlier than he actually did. But, Wullschlager notes from her archival research that it is clear from Chagall's letters to Alexander Romm he arrived in Paris in May of 1911. His French version of *The Wedding* may still be considered one of his earliest works in Paris.

⁵⁸ Kamensky, 57.

makes another appearance in Chagall's paintings. Dressed as a soldier, the fiddler walks next to a Jewish clown in checkered trousers and a skullcap.⁵⁹ Following behind them are a dozen figures of varying ages, genders, and religious persuasions; among these Jewish and Gentile figures, the bride and groom figure prominently near the center of the composition. The bride's brilliant white dress is the brightest point in the picture, and as a result the viewer's eye begins directly with her. On the upper right side of the canvas Chagall has rendered a number of small buildings to indicate a town. Townspeople and a water carrier pause during their work and, with young children, look on to watch the procession make its way down a hill and into an open plaza.

Chagall's composition and palette in this earlier canvas relate closely to *The Dead Man* from the previous year. As in that picture, Chagall has composed his work to read like a stage set, with the town buildings arranged at the back along a high horizon line. In both paintings, the figures in the procession make their way down and towards the lower center of the canvas, threatening to invade the viewer's space. Chagall's diagonal strokes render a village street marked by sloping hills; this further contributes to the sensation that these figures might exit the picture and continue on beyond the borders of the canvas. Additionally, while there are moments of bright color—the bride is dressed in striking white, and spots of red are present momentarily in small patches across the canvas—as in *The Dead Man*, *Russian Wedding* is more generally marked by a muddy ochre palette. It is the composition and the muted color of the earlier picture that offer the greatest point of contrast with the radically different 1911 *Wedding*, in which Chagall's palette has suddenly become bolder and his engagement with the forms and space in his

⁵⁹ Kamensky, 57.

compositions has become significantly more geometricized under the influence of French avant-garde styles. On the right side of the picture, luminous rectangles read as roofs capping bright buildings, but as the viewer's eye moves to the left, these rectangles also form the patchy sky. The rest of the buildings, the figures' garments, and even the street have also breathed in a cacophonous rainbow of rich hues that are marked by the bright palettes of French paintings from the first decade of the twentieth century.

Another important link between Chagall's earlier canvases and the later wedding picture is the figure of the fiddler, whose role through these compositions Chagall continually transforms and who he ultimately bathes in saturated color in later work. Pulled down from the rooftop to participate in the picture's main action, the fiddler not only leads the procession in *Russian Wedding*, but also seems to be set apart from it. The coloring of his military garments allows him to blend seamlessly into the composition, but the bright bands of red on his hat and shoulder create a popping visual interest that draws the viewer's eye to him. The later fiddler by contrast is one of the darkest figures in the composition with his black and grey garments and his deep blue skin; he forms a striking silhouette against the yellow-brown building behind him. Though this later fiddler remains near the beginning of the procession, he is no longer the first figure to lead it; a translation of the clown figure, two boys, and a woman stand between him and what appears to be the procession's destination, a shop with a sign in Russian characters.

As discussed in relation to the *Dead Man*, the figure of the fiddler in Chagall's art was a metaphor for Jewishness from an early time,⁶⁰ and as a result it resonates with this meaning whenever it appears in Chagall's paintings. This association between the fiddler

⁶⁰ Rajner, "Chagall's Fiddler," 117.

and Jewishness continues to be relevant in Chagall's later works that include fiddler figures. Chagall first began exploring this motif while he was in school in St. Petersburg; the origins of the fiddler in his work trace to his *Seated Violinist* of 1908 (fig. 17) and *The Dead Man*.⁶¹ As a student in St. Petersburg, Chagall learned about the place of music among the arts, which he added to his knowledge of the role of music in Hasidic Judaism.⁶² In Hasidism there was an important connection between melody and deep religious experience; by incorporating a musical figure into his paintings, Chagall may have been attempting to extend that relationship to include a link between ecstasy and the visual arts as well. Beyond its religious role, Chagall would have also seen the use of the violin in Jewish folk art and visual culture. Often the fiddler and musical motifs in the visual arts functioned to introduce a lighter, happier, yet still specifically Jewish theme to an artwork, without making an explicit reference to Jewish suffering.⁶³

Music in general, and the violinist in particular, represented motifs specifically associated with Judaism that were positive, even in a negative context.⁶⁴ This may begin to explain why the fiddler was such an important and continually examined motif in Chagall's art throughout his life, and one with which the artist may have consciously associated himself. Perhaps functioning as a metaphor for a painter creating an artwork, the fiddler in *The Dead Man* is set apart from the action while simultaneously seeming to narrate it. Similarly, in both wedding processions, Chagall clearly articulates the fiddler

⁶¹ Rajner, "Chagall's Fiddler," 117.

⁶² For more about music in Hasidism, see Yaakov Mazor, "Hasidism: Music," *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, 2010, <http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Hasidism/Music> (accessed March 22, 2012).

⁶³ Rajner, "Chagall's Fiddler," 119.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

and, though he accords him a different significance in each of the two compositions, he continues to play an important role in both.

Thus it is clear, through close analysis of Chagall's earliest artistic production in Paris, that these works are marked by a distinctive combination of many cultures and influences. As he experimented with and incorporated French avant-garde styles in his Parisian paintings, Chagall did not make a significant break from his Russian and Jewish past in his art as did his peers in their own art in terms of his chosen content and motifs. There are a number of plausible reasons for this. First, he clung closely to his past in his personal life during this period by maintaining Russian connections with his fellow expatriates in Paris. Additionally, he continued to maintain contact with his patron and his fiancée back in Russia through letters. Chagall was perhaps choosing to represent in his art the close connection he felt with his homeland and home culture in his personal life because of these close connections. By contrast, fellow immigrant Jewish artists Sonia Delaunay and Amedeo Modigliani did not maintain the same kinds of foreign Jewish networks as Chagall; they both elected to engage more fully with the Parisian avant-garde and were able to do so in part because of their linguistic and cultural fluency in France. Such fluency afforded them different networks and, perhaps as a result, they decided to dispense with their foreign and Jewish identities in their paintings.

In addition to the close ties he maintained to them through his networks, Chagall may have also had more strategic reasons for continuing to represent his homeland and his home culture in such an explicit, nostalgic way. At some point during his first few months in Paris, Chagall was reunited with Léon Bakst, his teacher from the Zvantseva

School in St. Petersburg.⁶⁵ Bakst was in Paris at the time and was involved in Sergei Diaghilev's Ballets Russes productions; the two were reunited when Chagall attended the Ballet. Based on his account of it, Chagall's experience at the theater seems to have been less than pleasant:

For me, the ballets had the same source as the "Mir Iskoustwa," which, in any case, was also founded by Diaghilev.⁶⁶ All the discoveries, the finds, the "novelties" were refined there, and polished, to reach society in a slick, sophisticated style. As for me, I'm a son of workers, and in a drawing room, for want of something to do, I often feel like dirtying the shining floors.⁶⁷

In describing the Ballets as "polished" and "slick," Chagall indicates his disapproval of the way in which Diaghilev and Bakst were representing Russian culture. Perhaps in his own artwork, Chagall was strategically attempting to produce a more authentic representation of his home culture that was distinctively different from the slick commodification of Russia so popular in mainstream Parisian high culture during this period.⁶⁸

This desire for authenticity may have registered in Chagall's paintings as a representation of rural themes and motifs. From portrayals of his homeland in his earliest work, Chagall tended to identify it with the rural through images of the countryside or small town. This tendency is evident in his inclusion of the cow and maid in *To Russia*; in his ascribing of an unexceptional, everyday quality to his birth scenes; and

⁶⁵ Wullschlager, 134-35.

⁶⁶ When Chagall was still in Russia, he was excluded from the "Mir Iskoustwa" exhibition, which he believed was because he was Jewish. His mention of the group in relation to the Ballets Russes makes his comment particularly charged and indicates his negative feelings about the Ballets. See Chagall, *My Life*, 105, or the first epigraph for Chapter One of this thesis for the artist's account of having been left out of the exhibition.

⁶⁷ Chagall, *My Life*, 104.

⁶⁸ For more on the Ballets Russes, see Jane Pritchard, ed., *Diaghilev and the Golden Age of the Ballets Russes, 1909-1929* (London: V&A Publishers, 2010).

in the folk figure types he included in *The Dead Man* and the wedding processions, such as the water carrier and the fiddler. To incorporate such elements into his paintings may have meant that he was associating his work with the city-country dialogue popular in French avant-garde art in the nineteenth century that Chagall would have seen in the Louvre and in Paris art exhibitions. In doing so, he may have been tactically carving out his own niche in the Parisian avant-garde: choosing what he wanted from French, Russian, and Jewish styles and motifs, rebelling against a mainstream image of Russian culture and profiting from an earlier French avant-garde trend in the process, and producing a body of work that was distinct from that of other Eastern European Jewish artists in Paris.

It is clear that in using French art to transfigure his previous compositions, Chagall continued to think of Russia and Judaism and to use motifs that referenced his homeland and home culture once in Paris. This was because Chagall remained personally, professionally, and emotionally connected to Russia through the maintenance of his Russian relationships, and perhaps also through strategic artistic decisions to cast his work as strikingly different from the mainstream image of Russia produced by the Ballets Russes, and to reference themes of rural primitivism in French avant-garde modernism.⁶⁹ Through his navigation of these influences in his art, Chagall was determining the nature of his identity as a Russian-Jewish immigrant after the first few months of his Parisian period had passed. The next chapter will consider the ways in which Chagall allows the French influence to grow and change in his work after he relocated in the spring of 1912 to the bustling Montparnasse artist's colony, La Ruche.

⁶⁹ See the work of van Gogh in Arles and Gauguin in Brittany for examples of rural primitivism in French avant-garde painting in the nineteenth century.

CHAPTER THREE
PARIS THROUGH THE WINDOW: THE LA RUCHE PAINTINGS

In my imagination, Russia took the form of a paper balloon hanging from a parachute. The deflated bulb of the balloon sagged, cooled off, and collapsed slowly as the years went by.

Chagall, *My Life*¹

In the spring of 1912, Chagall moved out of his solitary apartment on the tucked-away Parisian cul-de-sac, the Impasse du Maine. He did not move far; he remained in Montparnasse, near his former residence. Yet, his living situation and subsequent experience in Paris was radically altered with this slight change in location. After a year of living alone and confining himself almost exclusively to his Russian-Jewish contacts in Paris, Chagall moved to the increasingly famous and well-populated artists' colony called La Ruche, or "The Hive."² Located in close proximity to the slaughterhouse district in a building from the Universal Exhibition of 1900, La Ruche provided studio and living space for many immigrant artists, mostly from Poland and Russia.³ With this move, Chagall was suddenly in close quarters with some of the most important avant-garde experimentation and figures of the pre-war moment; as a result, his social and professional networks broadened to allow him to ease into the cosmopolitan Parisian artistic and literary avant-garde active in Montparnasse.

In this chapter, I will argue for the importance of Chagall's move to La Ruche in the continuation and development of his social and professional networks in Paris, and ultimately in a number of important shifts in his art. As his level of comfort increased in

¹ Chagall, *My Life*, 100.

² Wullschlager, 149.

³ Silver, "The Circle of Montparnasse," 25.

Paris, Chagall's most important relationships came to be those with prominent Francophone members of the Parisian avant-garde such as Guillaume Apollinaire (1880-1918) and Blaise Cendrars (1887-1961)—notably, creative figures who were not themselves visual artists. Yet, his relationships with writers proved to be important for the development of Chagall's visual symbolism. At La Ruche, his work became increasingly marked by a continued, more intense use of bright, Fauve colors, a greater and more explicit experimentation with a Cubist aesthetic and representation of space, and an incorporation of specifically French subjects and motifs. These include café scenes, portraits of prominent members of the Parisian avant-garde, and the inclusion of the Eiffel Tower in a number of his paintings. This shift sometimes meant he chose not to reference his Russian and Jewish identities, creating works marked more by a middle-ground, adaptive approach to French styles. Ultimately, Chagall's incorporation of a new, more explicit engagement with French art into his previous aesthetic of Russian and Jewish themes and motifs—which was facilitated by the development of his relationships with important Francophone avant-garde figures—represented his navigation of many identities, yielding an unusual contribution to the Parisian avant-garde.

Before one can fully comprehend the importance of Chagall's relationships with Apollinaire and Cendrars and the effect these connections had on his art, it is crucial to understand the environment of Montparnasse, a developing neighborhood and artistic center within Paris, where they all lived or frequented. In the first chapter of this thesis, I explored the general social, historical, and political contexts of the Parisian environment for immigrant Jews in 1911. A more specific discussion of the nature of the

neighborhood in which Chagall and members of his network lived is now necessary for comprehending the young artist's increased engagement with it upon his move to La Ruche in early 1912.

Montparnasse was the locus of much of the avant-garde artistic and cultural activity in Paris during this period. The Boulevard du Montparnasse, in the heart of the district, contained bustling cafés, cabarets, noisy restaurants, dance halls, and nightclubs.⁴ The intersection of the Boulevard Raspail, the Boulevard du Montparnasse, and the Rue Vavin formed the center of this area. To the north of this center were the Luxembourg Gardens lined by tidy bourgeois apartments, and to the south remained small pockets of natural open space, gardens, and parks. The large area the district covered, which overlapped the sixth and the fourteenth arrondissements, was thus marked by spaciousness, spruce apartment blocks, grassy courtyards, and new construction. It was also a particularly diverse part of Paris, where one could find members of the bourgeoisie, as well as “bohemians, priests, students, mystics, and ladies of easy virtue.”⁵ At the turn of the century, many artists began to leave Montmartre, the reigning artistic center in the northern part of the city, because of rising prices and tourism, in favor of the less expensive Montparnasse community. Because of this gentrification, Montmartre had become somewhat passé and undesirable. Montparnasse, on the other hand, was a truly modern place, where parts of boulevards were still being constructed in 1902.⁶

Additionally, a link on the Paris Métro on the Number 12 Nord-Sud line had just been

⁴ Valérie Bougault, *Paris Montparnasse: The Heyday of Modern Art, 1910-1940*, trans. Murray Wylie (Paris: Éditions Pierre Terrail, 1997), 19.

⁵ Jean-Marie Drot, *Les Heures Chaudes de Montparnasse* (Paris: Éditions Hazan, 1995), 12.

⁶ Romy Golan, “The Last Seduction,” in *Paris in New York: French Jewish Artists in Private Collections*, ed. Susan Chevlowe, exh. cat. (New York: The Jewish Museum, 2000), 12.

built to connect the southern part of the city in which Montparnasse was located to Montmartre to the north.⁷ This new construction, coupled with easier mobility throughout the city and low rent costs, increased the incentive for many artists to relocate to and settle in the southern part of Paris.

The Montparnasse neighborhood was also home to a large immigrant community with émigrés from all over the world. Many of the artists working alongside Chagall in La Ruche and in Montparnasse in general—including Léopold Gottlieb, Jacques Lipchitz, and Moïse Kisling, among many others—were also immigrant Jews from Eastern Europe, for whom Paris signified both liberation from oppression and the opportunity to receive an artistic education. In fact, for many people, rightly or wrongly, Montparnasse and Jews were synonymous.⁸ In actuality it was a more diverse environment that included immigrants from other parts of Europe, Jewish and non-Jewish, as well as people from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds, and of course native-born Frenchmen and Frenchwomen. While the Jewish immigrants who settled in Montparnasse generally experienced a more welcoming environment there than in their places of origin, they still remained outsiders, curious about French customs and lifestyles.⁹ As a result, the vast majority of Jewish artists living and working in Montparnasse during this period opted to confront the urban present in their artwork,

⁷ Wullschlager, 126.

⁸ Kenneth E. Silver, Introduction to *The Circle of Montparnasse: Jewish Artists in Paris 1905-1945*, exh. cat., Jewish Museum New York (New York: Universe Books, 1985), 11.

⁹ Golan, “The Last Seduction,” 12.

abandoning representations of their Jewish roots in favor of French modern subjects and styles in an acceptable middle-ground approach.¹⁰

Even so, Montparnasse was an environment that was global in nature and was generally accepting of the Jewish artists who lived there. The internationally-focused School of Paris was active in Montparnasse during this time, with Picasso, Sonia Delaunay, Piet Mondrian, Modigliani, Chagall, and many others having arrived before the First World War. Additionally, Jews both of French and foreign origins were active in the larger context of the Parisian art world; many of the Right Bank dealers were Jewish, including the Bernheims and the Wildensteins, as were many of the great collectors, with whom Chagall would have been familiar.¹¹ The Left Bank dealers, who tended to specialize in new, avant-garde art, were likely to be Jewish as well; among them were Berthe Weill, Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, Adolphe Basler, and Léonce and Paul Rosenberg. Several of the important critics were Jewish as well, including Louis Vauxcelles, Florent Fels, and Waldemar George.¹²

Thus, the Montparnasse neighborhood was a thriving, diverse area for the production of avant-garde art in Paris in the pre-war years. Even more than a particular Parisian *quartier*, however, the artist community located specifically within the La Ruche building, just southwest of the heart of Montparnasse, was a crucial location for much development of the Parisian avant-garde. La Ruche, or “The Hive,” was the name given to the building based on its circular, beehive-like design. Within it, there were between

¹⁰ Tucker, 143.

¹¹ Silver, “The Circle of Montparnasse,” 17.

¹² Ibid.

eighty and one hundred narrow, triangular studios on two floors that formed a cell-like, honeycombed design, topped by a glass skylight and cupola.¹³ The name also implied a constant hum of activity. La Ruche was a remnant of the 1900 Universal Exhibition and was acquired by the sculptor-philanthropist Alfred Boucher in 1902.¹⁴ Boucher purchased vacant, cheap property in the Vaugirard district, an undesirable area because of its close proximity to the slaughterhouses, and acquired structures from the Exhibition, reassembling them at La Ruche. Thus, in its construction, La Ruche was not unlike its inhabitants: a mixture of different entities representing the far reaches of the globe, all with varying backgrounds and histories. The main edifice was from the Médoc wine pavilion designed by Gustave Eiffel; the forged iron gate at the main entrance was salvaged from the Pavilion des Femmes; and two caryatids at the entrance originated at the British East Indies pavilion (fig. 18).¹⁵

Between 1902 and the 1920s, La Ruche became a haven for artists from all over the world. This establishment was home to many painters and sculptors as well as to writers, critics, and anarchists, most of whom were impoverished Eastern European Jews attracted by the reasonable rent and familial atmosphere.¹⁶ Boucher was the landlord for this building, and he rarely collected rent, though what he charged was minimal. This is likely because Boucher imagined La Ruche as a kind of ideal community, free of external regulation and based on the ideas of Charles Fourier, a nineteenth-century French social

¹³ Bougault, 41.

¹⁴ Wullschlager, 149.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

reformer who called such communities *phalanstères*.¹⁷ Writers and revolutionaries resided in apartments dispersed throughout La Ruche, while sculptors generally lived on the first floor, and painters on the second. Though studios were narrow, they had a great amount of light and airiness, and their high ceilings allowed for lofted sleeping spaces above workspaces and kitchens. Chagall's studio was on the second floor of the building along with the other painters and faced out toward the main entrance (fig. 19). Its slanted ceilings, airy skylight, and large windows would have provided him with plenty of space to produce the many canvases for which he is best known during this period.

In spite of Chagall's relocation to an intentional community of artists and creative types, he still was reluctant to actively participate in social life in Montparnasse and at La Ruche. This was largely how he handled his living situation on the Impasse du Maine; he would attend classes, but return home alone to his studio to create his works in isolation. Even after his relocation, Chagall was rarely seen out at cafés; rather, he felt more at home in his studio.¹⁸ And even at La Ruche, he kept to himself. Léon Indenbaum, who was from Vitebsk and who had come to Paris with Viktor Mekler in 1910, remembered Chagall to be “très méfiant. Il fermait sa porte avec une ficelle et l'ouvrait rarement... on n'osait pas le déranger, il vivait renfermé, en marge de la communauté.”¹⁹ He intentionally distanced himself from other painters, perhaps fearing the expression of his many identities to people he did not know well or trust. Chagall is often characterized as a talented but arrogant, jealous, overly competitive, and self-conscious painter, and he

¹⁷ Silver, “The Circle of Montparnasse,” 25.

¹⁸ Bougault, 48.

¹⁹ “very distrustful. He closed his door with a rope and opened it rarely.. one didn't dare disturb him, he lived withdrawn, on the margins of the community” (from Jeanine Warnod, *La Ruche et Montparnasse* [Paris: Weber, 1978], 41).

was afraid other artists would reject him or, worse, steal his ideas.²⁰ As a result, he stayed away from visual artists, Jewish and otherwise, and associated more freely with writers.²¹ He exposed himself to French artistic trends by observing his peers from a distance in classes and at La Ruche and by attending the major exhibitions of modern art in Paris.

As in his previous residence, Chagall's relationships with others continued to be important to him and influential upon his work. Chagall regularly represented the relationships he had with writers in his paintings after moving to La Ruche. His two paintings *The Poet Mazin* (fig. 20) and *The Poet (Half Past Three)* (fig. 21), both of around 1912,²² demonstrate in their subject matter, motifs, and style that Chagall was increasingly influenced by his surroundings at La Ruche, whether he chose to actively participate or not. They also show that he was increasingly absorbing the influence of French avant-garde styles after his relocation to the urban artist's colony southwest of Montparnasse. Finally, these two paintings also do not contain any explicitly Russian or Jewish content; this was unusual for Chagall and did not signal a permanent trend, but it is symptomatic of the extent to which the painter was absorbing his surroundings at La Ruche and weighing the importance of his many different identities, both in his personal life and in his artwork.

The Poet Mazin is a half-length portrait of a man, evidently the poet and La Ruche resident Mazin, whose first name has been lost to posterity. Mazin sits in a chair at a

²⁰ "Il avait peur des 'tapeurs'"; Chagall was afraid of thieves (from Warnod, 41).

²¹ Silver, "The Circle of Montparnasse," 27.

²² There is some discrepancy in the dating of *The Poet (Half Past Three)*. The Philadelphia Museum, which owns the work, dates it to 1911; however, they also date his arrival in Paris to 1910, which Jackie Wullschlager has shown to be incorrect. Wullschlager dates this work to 1912; based on the work's content and my own research on the topic, I believe this to be correct.

table, squarely facing the viewer and sipping casually from a cup. To the mug-like cup Chagall has added inky black swirls, perhaps to indicate heat radiating from it; though a vessel the shape of a bottle of wine sits to the side, perhaps the poet is also consuming hot coffee. A balance of the two would have been necessary for writing late at night. The swirls also may serve to imply a multisensory engagement, where Mazin tastes, feels, and smells the liquid he is consuming. Chagall works in a generally primary color palette, though his hues are darker in this composition, probably indicating the poet's late working hours. Still, Mazin's forehead is a bright white with thick impasto, while the rest of his face is a deep, rosy red, and his eerie eyes stare blankly out. To his proper left, the wine bottle sits precariously on the corner of an angular table—originally yellow, then layered with white—that juts in from the right side of the canvas. Above this meeting point hangs the lower left corner of a picture or window frame, a crucial compositional element. The frame's rectangular shape fills empty space on the wall, and its corner points in toward the center of the composition, highlighting the angularity in the picture.

A colorful book sits in the poet's lap, which he holds with a stubby, ruddy hand. The words are obscured by overpainting in white and red, and are thus illegible. This is also how Chagall handles his signature, which appears sideways on the yellow of the jutting table. Only the "Cha" is visible; he has obscured the second syllable of his name, also with white, thick impasto. Perhaps his choice to obscure his name and his figure's poetry is a reference to Cubism, which he seems to be tentatively engaging throughout this composition. The flat plane of the tabletop meets Mazin's three-dimensional elbow at a point, which demonstrates how Chagall is using Cubist, "passage"-style illusionism to fuse three-dimensional and two-dimensional forms. The artist's experimentation with

Cubism is also evident in his use of partial and obscured words, perhaps as signs for longer words, his stylized rendering of Mazin's garments, and the simplified geometric shapes that pervade the composition. Additionally, the painting's subject of a portrait in a café setting was a favorite of many prominent Cubist painters.

The Cubist paintings Chagall would have seen at the 1911 Salon des Indépendants may have informed his handling of *The Poet Mazin*. Le Fauconnier's *Abundance* (fig. 12) and Léger's *Study for Three Portraits* (fig. 11) are much more radical in their geometricizing aesthetic and attention to the volume of forms than Chagall's painting is. However, they are related in their vertical formats, the angularity they ascribe to their figures, and in their color palettes of warm reds and vibrant greens. As in Le Fauconnier's handling of the figures in *Abundance*, Chagall reduces Mazin to simplified geometric forms in his cylindrical arms and legs and his pointed face. In both pictures, deliberately-placed swaths of non-naturalistic color highlight the geometricized forms. In Léger's *Study for Three Portraits*, these geometricized body parts take on bulbous volume through sharp highlighting and deep shadows, present also in Chagall's picture. Though *Study for Three Portraits* is a much more complicated composition than *The Poet Mazin*, with a multitude of forms undulating across the picture plane, Chagall's picture can be read simultaneously as a continued engagement with and a simplification of the Cubist approach to representing three-dimensional form and space.

Another work linking *The Poet Mazin* with Cubism is not through paintings Chagall would have seen at the Salon des Indépendants, but rather through artwork he may have seen elsewhere. Picasso's *Ma Jolie* of winter 1911-12 (fig. 22) was owned by Parisian gallery owner Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler from its creation until his collection was

seized by the French government at the beginning of the First World War.²³ Shows at galleries like Kahnweiler's did not attract the same wide audience as the Salon des Indépendants, but artists watched them intently and visited them regularly.²⁴ Thus, Chagall may have seen *Ma Jolie* there, or at least been aware of its existence, during his exploration of avant-garde galleries soon after his arrival in Paris, and ultimately may have used it loosely as a model for his café portrait. Though the visual language of *Ma Jolie* and *The Poet Mazin* is quite different, the two works do share certain significant aspects; specifically, they are both vertically-oriented portraits set in cafés. Café culture was particularly important as a subject in Cubist paintings, and though Chagall did not actively participate in these kinds of social activities, he may have been adopting that visual subject in *The Poet Mazin*. Ultimately, when considered in conjunction with the multitude of sources Chagall would have seen in Paris at the Salon des Indépendants and in galleries across the city, *The Poet Mazin* becomes comprehensible as Chagall's synthesis of a Cubist style, a figurative portrait of a French friend, and an artwork set in a café, a scene which would have been particularly common in French art during this period.

It is clear that Chagall continued to manifest in his paintings the importance of his relationships to him and to his work during this period, though the way in which he does so changes after his move to La Ruche.²⁵ Previously, in his former residence on the

²³ The Museum of Modern Art, "Provenance Research Project: Picasso, 'Ma Jolie,' Paris, winter 1911-12," http://www.moma.org/collection/provenance/provenance_object.php?object_id=79051 (accessed March 28, 2012).

²⁴ Wullschlager, 131.

²⁵ The Centre Pompidou dates *The Poet Mazin* at 1911-1912, and in their catalog of the collection, they situate this work within Chagall's oeuvre after his move to La Ruche. See

Impasse du Maine, Chagall manifested the importance of his social and professional connections in an indirect way, through his choice of subject matter that related directly to his and their Russian and Jewish backgrounds. In *The Poet Mazin*, Chagall portrays one of his new French friends in a style directly related to French trends with no clear link to the artist's own Russian-Jewish identity. This perhaps represents a moment in which Chagall is questioning the power of his former identities as artistic subjects. Regardless, this explicit engagement with French subjects and styles represents an important step forward in engaging with his surroundings in Paris after his move to La Roche.

Such an engagement continues in *The Poet (Half Past Three)* (fig. 21). This painting is a nearly full-length portrait of a man in a blue suit, seated next to a bright red table that angles in violently from the right. The compositions of the two paintings are strikingly similar; in fact, this picture might also be a portrait of the poet Mazin.²⁶ Chagall has rendered this painting in a much more Cubist style than his previous canvases demonstrated; except for the bright palette which Chagall may be drawing from Fauvism, one can see resonances between this painting and those by Le Fauconnier, Léger, and Picasso in its splintering and geometricizing of forms, chaotic composition, and café setting. While it is still a generally comprehensible subject, in this work Chagall's style has changed distinctively. He splinters nearly everything he incorporates into the painting, from the man's suit, to the disjunctive still life on the table, to the decorative wallpaper behind it, down to the green and red cat licking the figure's right elbow. Such fragmentation of forms and spatial ambiguities indicate the influence of the Salon

Agnès Angliviel de La Beaumelle, "Le Poète Mazin," in *La Collection du Musée National d'Art Moderne* (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1987), 121.

²⁶ Kamensky, 128.

Cubists and his peers and teachers in his classes.²⁷ Chagall's poet writes a love poem²⁸ in a little, colorful book while lifting a cup to his face, where his mouth should be; however, his one-eyed green head is turned upside-down and sideways, twisted impossibly. A bottle tips dangerously on the same angle as the jutting table, and a barely perceptible wine glass sits off to the side. These elements all contribute to the notion that imagination is preeminent over reality, perhaps an inheritance from the Symbolist era, and also a departure from the careful intellection of Picasso; this picture seems to be a visual analogy of the poet's emotional state, and each object within it is represented with its fundamental, spiritual essence in mind.²⁹ Portraying his subjects in this way—simultaneously rendering their physical presence and their emotional states—is an approach Chagall would continue to make in many other canvases from this period.

Chagall has geometricized his forms in a radically new way in *The Poet*. Figure and ground are fully integrated through overlapping, interpenetrating planes on a flattened, yet tilted, surface, complicating pictorial space. This approach may demonstrate the artist's experimentation with Cubist "passage," which involves the breaking of contours so that surfaces flow together and blur the distinction between space and solid form, foreground and background.³⁰ While the strong diagonal lines throughout the composition imply great depth, that depth is undermined by the moments of overlap, the flattened background, and the general lack of illusionistic modeling throughout the

²⁷ Taylor, 8.

²⁸ Rajner, "Chagall: The Artist and The Poet," 43.

²⁹ Kamensky, 131.

³⁰ Christopher Green and John Musgrove, "Cubism," Grove Art Online and Oxford Art Online, <http://www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T020539> (accessed March 23, 2012).

canvas. Chagall's palette remains bright, though slightly more limited than in his previous works. In addition to the visual links between *The Poet (Half Past Three)* and the work of Le Fauconnier, Léger, and Picasso, it is also likely that Robert Delaunay, another exhibitor in the "Salle 41" at the Salon des Indépendants, played an influential role in the development of paintings like this one.

Chagall's friendship with Robert Delaunay was the only friendship he was ever able to sustain with another painter.³¹ After Chagall was exposed to his work at the Salon des Indépendants, the two became close in 1912. Sonia Delaunay, Robert's Russian-Jewish wife and a fellow student of Chagall's at Académie La Palette, introduced the two painters.³² *The Poet*, created around the time when Chagall and Robert became friends, manifest the French painter's influence in its use of transparent color and prismatic effects. In these traits it reveals a close affinity with Delaunay's variation on mainstream Cubism, "Orphism."³³

Coined by Apollinaire, Orphism describes an artistic movement that is related to Cubism in its fragmentation of forms, but that strives for the rehabilitation and reintegration of color.³⁴ Artists interested in Orphism, also known as "pure painting," included the Delaunays and Léger as well; these artists sought to liberate color, affirming its validity in its own right and not exclusively as a tool for naturalistic representation of form. This is evident in Delaunay's series of paintings of the Eiffel Tower (fig. 23) of 1910 and 1911, which show a palette of "pure," generally primary color and strategic

³¹ Wullschlager, 161.

³² Taylor, 8.

³³ Bougault, 52.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 50.

fragmentation that is related to Cubist style, but not exclusively governed by it. This work or one like it was shown at the Salon des Indépendants, so Chagall would initially have seen it immediately after his arrival in May 1911. Chagall's tempered engagement with Cubism meant he internalized and experimented with Delaunay's approach over a long period of time, and he manifested this influence more directly later, as he entered into Delaunay's circle. Often related to this fragmentation was a great sensation of movement in his paintings; the notion of simultaneity, or the representation of successive phases of movement in a picture, was also an element of Orphism with which the Delaunays and Léger experimented, and which influenced Chagall in a number of his canvases.

These ideas coalesce in *The Poet*, which utilizes many of the same visual strategies. Chagall's fragmentation of the poet and the space he occupies has the effect of activating the canvas, giving it a frenetic, chaotic feeling. The viewer derives similar sentiments from Delaunay's *Eiffel Tower*. In its angular representation of the iconic French structure and buildings surrounding it, Delaunay depicts a turbulent, frenzied city scene. This simultaneity contributes to the overall feeling of a quickly moving, essentially modern picture. Additionally, the artists' use of colors is similar. Delaunay's painting depicts the Tower and the buildings surrounding it in bright reds and oranges and thus liberates these hues by using them emotively, rather than naturalistically. This use of paint and color implies an important relationship with quick-paced modernity. In a similar vein, Chagall presents his viewer with a strangely-colored scene that includes a green-faced poet and a green-furred cat. However, Chagall's emphasis is not as much on modernity

as it is on imaginatively representing the fantastical, dreamlike situation of a poet working into the late night hours.³⁵

Ultimately, what is as important as Chagall's experimentation with French modern styles in these two portraits is the fact that in them, Chagall has chosen to explicitly represent members of his developing La Ruche community. This is a significant change from the way in which he was manifesting the influence of his relationships with his Russian networks during his time on the Impasse du Maine. By the time he has relocated to La Ruche, Chagall has begun to more fully engage in his French surroundings and chooses to less explicitly reference his Russian-Jewish background. Gone are the bucolic images of Russian farm animals and church domes, as are the representations of Jewish traditions and Stars of David. Instead, at La Ruche, Chagall's networks and the resulting paintings he produced are much more thoroughly steeped in French subjects, styles, and approaches to visual culture and production, perhaps indicating Chagall's greater identification with France and signifying the beginning of a new French identity. This possibility is suggested in *The Poet Mazin* and *The Poet (Half Past Three)* by his choice to produce portraits of his French colleague and café scenes; his decision to engage with Cubism and Orphism, distinctively French movements; and his disjunctive approach to fracturing and layering within his works.

These trends are also evident in one of Chagall's best-known paintings from this period, *Homage to Apollinaire* of 1912 (fig. 3). While evidently an homage, this painting also seems to be a kind of portrait, though its composition is radically different from

³⁵ For an extended discussion of the influence of French Symbolist poetry and the myth of Orpheus on the development of this painting, see Rajner, "Chagall: The Artist and The Poet," *Jewish Art* 21-22 (1995-1996): 40-67.

those of the two poet paintings and it does not actually depict Apollinaire himself. In the previous paintings, Chagall placed his figure in a reasonably comprehensible though increasingly turbulent space: a café interior with furniture and wall hangings. In *Homage*, there are a number of oddities. First, Chagall represents two figures in gold that meld into one at the waist; at their torsos, above their shared legs, one half is male and one is female. They stand in an ambiguous place, non-naturalistic space; there is no clear ground or attempt at a third dimension, so the figures seem to float. Behind them, a series of colorful, flat, concentric circle-spirals spread like wallpaper. The only sense of depth Chagall gives to this painting is in the lower right corner, where he has represented a small skyscape of colorful clouds and two tiny white birds.³⁶ This dark sky adds to the painting's dreamlike quality and invokes a sense of the infinite.

In contrast to this dark corner, the circle that provides the backdrop for Chagall's two figures is split into slivers of silver, gold, and other bright colors. The slivers, which seem to be slowly spinning, contain non-naturalistic angularities and geometric shapes. Within these slivers, Chagall has inscribed numbers. A large nine, a zero, and a one are visible on the left side of the painting. These numbers serve as signs for the numbers on a clock.³⁷ The nine stands for itself, whereas the zero is a sign for the ten o'clock hour, and the one for eleven o'clock. This play with the use of numbers as signifiers is another indication of Chagall's heightened engagement with Cubism and semiotics during this period, as Picasso and others often included such signs in a general exploration of how painted marks signify.

³⁶ Werner Haftman, "Hommage à Apollinaire," in *Marc Chagall* (Cologne: Verlag M. DuMont Schauberg, 1972), 78.

³⁷ Kamensky, 128.

Despite the significance of the background, perhaps the most interesting aspect of the painting is the enigmatic, hybrid human form, presumably intended to be a mysterious, symbolic representation of Apollinaire. This figure may be read as Adam and Eve, combined into one body; yet, in his sketches and in the final painting dedicated to Apollinaire, Chagall departs from the text of the Old Testament story about Adam and Eve. That passage in Genesis states that God made man along with the world, and then formed woman from one of the man's ribs.³⁸ Chagall sketched the figure in this composition a number of times (fig. 24)³⁹, and in each Adam and Eve share a torso and pair of legs, but are differentiated into two sets of shoulders, four arms, and two heads.

In another sketch of this time called simply *For Apollinaire* (fig. 25), Chagall portrays his friend in a much more naturalistic way, in a half-length portrait in which Apollinaire stands and faces the viewer. In his right hand, his crooked, angular fingers hold a writing instrument; his expression is one of confidence and relaxation. Behind him Chagall has sketched assorted structures; one, above Apollinaire's right shoulder, is an edifice that could be a leg of the latticed, iron Eiffel Tower, while in the opposite corner one may read the angular geometric shapes as buildings in the La Ruche complex

³⁸ Kamensky, 128.

³⁹ As is the case in many of Chagall's artworks, dating is a complicated issue because the artist often deliberately misdated his works. In my appendix, I am using the dates that the collections that hold these sketches attribute to them because I have not been able to find more accurate dates, as I was able to with more major works. However, based on the dates of *Homage to Apollinaire* (1912) and the Saint Louis Art Museum's *Temptation* (1912), which also treats an Adam and Eve theme, I believe these sketches are more accurately dated 1912 or later.

or as other nearby structures on the Passage de Dantzig. Hot air balloons float in the sky in the upper left corner.⁴⁰

Chagall renders his figures quite differently in the sketch *For Apollinaire* and in the finished painting, *Homage to Apollinaire*. In the sketch, the artist represents his writer friend in an essentially naturalistic way as a cosmopolitan figure, versatile and fluid within the urban Parisian world. He stands comfortably and confidently in the midst of a chaotic, modern city. He is dapper, contentedly wearing a neat, close-fitting coat, collared shirt, and hat. However, while he is intrinsically connected to the realm of reality, he is also linked to the celestial realm by the floating balloons. This connection to the otherworldly is also present in the finished painting, which relates Apollinaire to the Old Testament figures, Adam and Eve. Perhaps Chagall links his friend to the Creation story because he views Apollinaire respectfully, as an inspiring creative force. In *Ma Vie*, Chagall calls Apollinaire “ce doux Zeus,” or “that gentle Zeus.”⁴¹ Clearly he associated Apollinaire with greatness, and perhaps he intended to display this idea in his *Homage*.

Chagall met Apollinaire through the Delaunays, when the writer their houseguest.⁴² Apollinaire at the time was one of Paris’s most influential art critics, and as a result his reviews and opinions were powerful in the art world. He took an interest in

⁴⁰ There is a possible connection here to the work of Henri Rousseau in Chagall’s inclusion of the hot air balloon and similar floating-figure motifs (in this sketch and in later paintings *Self-Portrait with Seven Fingers* (fig. 28) and *Paris Through the Window* (fig. 29). Rousseau also includes hot air balloons in his painting *Myself, Portrait and Landscape* (National Gallery, Prague, 1890). Though there is no direct link between Chagall and Rousseau’s work, Rousseau significantly influenced Robert Delaunay. Delaunay was inspired to reproduce part of Rousseau’s painting in his 1912 canvas *City of Paris* at the Musée National d’Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris (Bougault, 22), which Chagall may have seen.

⁴¹ Marc Chagall, *Ma Vie*, 2nd ed., trans. Bella Chagall (Dijon, France: Imprimerie Darantière, 1957), 158.

⁴² Wullschlager, 163.

Chagall's work when he saw three paintings—*Dedicated to My Fiancée* (fig. 26), *To Russia, Asses and Others* (fig. 2), and *The Drunkard* (fig. 27)—in the spring Salon des Indépendants in 1912. These paintings provoked an intense reaction from the public and critics, who even called *Dedicated to my Fiancée* pornographic. In *Ma Vie*, Chagall acknowledges how controversial and different his work was:

...I was eagerly preparing for the Salons. But how could I get such conspicuous canvases carried through "La Ruche" and right across Paris? A good-hearted refugee took charge of everything, as much for the laughs as anything else. ...I was soon to see what distinguished me from traditional French painting. At last, the pictures are hung. In an hour, the varnishing. But the censor walks up to my pictures and orders one of them to be removed: "The Ass and the Woman" [*Dedicated to my Fiancée*]. My friend and I try to persuade him: 'But sir, it's not what you think, there's no pornography.' It's settled, the picture is hung again. When I complained of being persecuted, even in the Salon, the wife of a doctor whom I sometimes visited for company and consolation said to me: 'Really? Well, all the better, it's what you deserve; don't paint pictures like that, then!' ...No doubt my early tendencies were a little strange to the French.⁴³

Yet Apollinaire was wholly supportive, and his opinion carried more weight than most. He wrote in a review of the exhibition that the gallery containing Chagall's paintings was the one "which contains the first really significant works" in the Salon.⁴⁴ Such a comment was a serious honor to Chagall, who highly valued Apollinaire's friendship and opinion. Apollinaire, né Wilhelm Kostrowitzky, was the illegitimate son of an aristocratic Belarusian mother and an unknown father. Though he was raised speaking French, had been brought up in Monaco, and was educated on the French Riviera, he did share Russian roots with Chagall and spoke a little of the language. The fact that Apollinaire so fluidly crossed these two boundaries and was so successful in the European art world

⁴³ Chagall, *My Life*, 108-9.

⁴⁴ Wullschlager, 138.

that the young artist was trying to enter made him an even more important contact for Chagall professionally.

Another significant relationship Chagall maintained at the same time was that with Blaise Cendrars, whose name the artist inscribed in the lower left corner of *Homage to Apollinaire*. Cendrars was a Swiss poet, né Frédéric Sausser, who was the same age as Chagall and who was living in Paris at the same time. Quickly he and Chagall became close friends; ultimately the poet became one of Chagall's greatest supporters. Cendrars traveled extensively during his childhood and lived in Russia as a teenager, witnessing the 1905 revolution in St. Petersburg. After three years there he was fluent in Russian, which is one reason why he and Chagall became so close. Even by the time Chagall moved to La Ruche, the artist had acquired very little French and spoke almost exclusively Russian. Language thus proved to play a significant role in the contacts Chagall made during this period.

Chagall's and Cendrars's personalities complemented one another, as did their artistic productions.⁴⁵ The artist's quiet, distrustful nature balanced Cendrars's outgoing personality, but they had age, foreignness, and their enthusiasm about their creative potential in common.⁴⁶ Their work, though in different media and addressing different subjects, had much in common as well; the whimsical imagery in Cendrars's poetry mirrored the dreamlike quality of Chagall's paintings. Cendrars was responsible for a number of the titles of Chagall's canvases, including *Dedicated to my Fiancée*, *To Russia*,

⁴⁵ Wullschlager, 159.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 156.

Asses and Others, and *I and the Village*.⁴⁷ He also wrote poetry about his artist friend; of his “Nineteen Elastic Poems,” two—“Portrait” and “Studio”—are about Chagall. In

“Portrait,” he writes of Chagall:

He’s asleep
He wakes up
Suddenly, he paints
He takes a church and paints with a church
He takes a cow and paints with a cow...
He paints with all the dirty passions of a little Jewish town
With all the exacerbated sexuality of the Russian provinces
For France
Without sensuality...⁴⁸

Cendrars characterizes Chagall as a frenetic creator; one imagines him sitting straight up in bed, rushing to his canvas, and beginning to work immediately, no matter the time of day or night. Additionally, the poet associates Chagall strongly with his Russian, Jewish, and village identities, indicating that he “paints with” his Jewish hometown, his Russian provinces. Chagall manifests these associations in his work, but it is clear from Cendrars’s poem that Chagall’s contemporaries perceived him to be intrinsically wrapped up in these identities as well.

As the poem continues, Cendrars draws directly upon imagery from many of Chagall’s paintings, including *To Russia*, *Asses and Others*, *Birth*, and *Paris through the Window*, among others:

It’s the corner grocer
The milkmaid
The midwife

⁴⁷ Élisabeth Pacoud-Rème, “États d’âme: Chagall et Cendrars, de l’amitié au doute,” in *Dis-Moi, Blaise: Léger, Chagall, Picasso et Blaise Cendrars*, exh. cat., Musées Nationaux Fernand Léger (Biot), Marc Chagall (Nice) and Pablo Picasso (La Guerre et La Paix, Vallauris) (Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 2009), 71.

⁴⁸ Blaise Cendrars, “Portrait,” in *Blaise Cendrars: Complete Poems*, trans. Ron Padgett (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 60.

There are tubs of blood
They wash the newborn in
Skies of madness
Mouths of modernity
The Tower as corkscrew...⁴⁹

These poems and Chagall's paintings are intrinsically linked. This is also the case with Cendrars's poem about Chagall's studio, which in its rhythm and imagery make the reader feel present with the two creators in the cluttered, triangular studio, intoxicated, late in the evening.

The collaboration and mutual creativity that marked this friendship made it one of the most important in Chagall's life. The fact that this intense collaboration existed, and that the two formed such a deep friendship from it, played a crucial role in the development of Chagall's work during this period. He drew titles from Cendrars; perhaps he even conceived of compositions in relation to Cendrars's whimsical poems and dreamlike imagery.⁵⁰ Cendrars's deep importance to the artist is underscored by Chagall's inclusion of his name, along with that of Apollinaire and two others, in his painted *Homage*. Though its title indicates Chagall's reverence for Apollinaire specifically, the painting may also be seen as an homage to the other members of his La Ruche network.

Cendrars was well-situated to help the immigrant painter discover Paris and to connect him to people who could further his discovery and artistic development. Cendrars's own network included Robert Delaunay, Apollinaire, Modigliani, Léger, and Picasso, among others.⁵¹ Thus, in addition to being a close friend and emotional

⁴⁹ Cendrars, 60.

⁵⁰ Kamensky, 100.

⁵¹ Wullschlager, 159.

supporter, Cendrars was also a pivotal figure for the professional development of Chagall's career in France.

In addition to two of his most important supporters, Chagall inscribed the names of two other figures in the corner of *Homage to Apollinaire* who were in the greater network of Cendrars and Apollinaire and who would play important roles in the expansion Chagall's network. Ricciotto Canudo (1879-1923) was an active writer and critic in Paris and was the editor of a liberal periodical called *Montjoie*. More important for Chagall than Canudo's writing was the weekly Salon he held in his Paris apartment. There, in 1913, Cendrars introduced Chagall to Herwarth Walden (1879-1941), a German gallery owner and organizer of the Der Sturm gallery in Berlin.⁵² Walden was particularly interested in the German Expressionists and found many of the same qualities he enjoyed in that aesthetic in Chagall's work as well. Through Canudo and Walden, Chagall eventually increased his social network to an international level in Europe. In 1914, Chagall had his first solo exhibition and sold his first painting outside of Russia at Walden's gallery, launching his career worldwide and setting the foundation for international fame. Of that show, Apollinaire wrote that Chagall was a colorist full of imagination; the writer described him as an extremely varied artist, capable of monumental paintings and embarrassed by no system.⁵³

These paintings in some ways represent Chagall's disengagement with his Russian-Jewish roots. In *The Poet Mazin*, *The Poet (Half Past Three)*, and *Homage to Apollinaire*, there are no vestiges of bucolic life in the Russian countryside, no tiny Stars

⁵² Pacoud-Rème, 72.

⁵³ Guillaume Apollinaire, "Les Arts: Marc Chagall (1914)," in *Oeuvres en prose complètes*, vol. 2 (Tours: Gallimard, 1991), 745.

of David, no skylines of Vitebsk. Instead, Chagall drew and painted portraits of and homages to his friends and observations from life in La Ruche that are characteristically French in their subjects and in the style he utilized. Chagall retained an interest in representing the whimsical, the imagined, and the dreamlike; this tendency may be linked to his Hasidic upbringing, but it is not a direct connection as the motifs he has chosen to represent in his Impasse du Maine paintings. This represents one part of the process in which Chagall negotiates his identity, moving closer to the middle-ground approach of Sonia Delaunay and Modigliani. In other compositions—perhaps ones Chagall was working on concurrently with the portraits, or perhaps after—Chagall reintegrates Russian and Jewish motifs into a number of his compositions while maintaining the French influence he has absorbed. These paintings represent the ultimate realization, and the ultimate hybridization, of his unusual style and disparate identities.

Self-Portrait with Seven Fingers (fig. 28), of 1912, represents a continued engagement with the portrait as a subject but is distinctively different from his portraits of poets. While he still situates his figure in a comprehensible, naturalistic space, Chagall has infused his self-portrait with a number of dreamlike qualities and motifs. Imagination is crucial to the formation of this scene. His studio is brilliantly colored; its sharply receding lemon-yellow floor and the deep, blood-red walls activate the composition, making the painting vibrate. The Fauvist palette is made almost exclusively of pure, primary colors, which explode against the black shadows. This use of color is important for visual movement of the eye; it is a visual strategy to destabilize the composition and emphasize the dreamlike quality of the composition.

Rendered up-close and pushed to the front of the picture plane, Chagall's self-portrait depicts him as comparably multicolored and thus perfectly integrated into his surroundings. The coils of his curly hair complement the rest of his multicolored outfit, which both serve to seamlessly locate Chagall in this studio, identifying the figure exclusively with the space and the space with its inhabitant. In terms of technique, Chagall has used Cubist idioms in his self-portrait; his appendages in particular are either overly round or too narrow, and they are clearly exaggerated in their geometricized forms. His brightly splotched palette in the lower left corner also integrates him successfully into this rainbow space as he looks intensely at his painting. Chagall gestures toward it with a seven-fingered hand, which references a Yiddish saying that to do something with seven fingers is to do it as well as one possibly could.⁵⁴ This painting can be read of a confident expression of Chagall's artistic ability and creative prowess and the linking of that ability to his own cultural position.

The canvas Chagall is contemplating in *Seven Fingers is To Russia, Asses and Others*. The inclusion of this painting-within-a-painting indicates both the importance of this particular work to Chagall and the pride with which he still identified himself as a Russian Jew, albeit now much more cosmopolitan in his Parisian studio. Additionally, both compositions have resonances with the number seven: *Seven Fingers* quite explicitly, but *To Russia* also, in its composition formed of seven elements (trough, calf, child, cow, bucket, woman's body, woman's head) and its inclusion of fourteen stars in the sky and fourteen circles on the woman's garment.⁵⁵ Chagall, who claimed to have been born on

⁵⁴ Wullschlager, 165.

⁵⁵ Giraudy and Rioux, 33.

July 7, 1887, was personally marked by this number, which thus explains his repeated emphasis on it in his self-portrait.⁵⁶ In this work Chagall is a Cubist, both figuratively and literally, with his angular nose, geometricized face, and oval eyes, reminiscent of Le Fauconnier's and Léger's figurative paintings. Nevertheless, he continues to dream of his homeland and his Hasidic roots. A vignette of a small cityscape appears in the upper right corner atop a puffy, white cloud. This is a literal rendering of imagination, again a crucial concept in the formation of this painting. On the wall above his head, Chagall has inscribed the words "Paris" and "Russia" in Hebrew, a nod both to his adopted homes and to his Jewish identity. Though Parisian viewers of this work would not necessarily have been able to read the Hebrew, on a visual level the letters function to associate Chagall with Judaism. These letters are a visual link between the Russian vignette and the window on the other side of the canvas. A view of Paris through this window over Chagall's right shoulder balances the scene. The Eiffel Tower stands clearly in white, prominent against a black night sky.

This painting is no longer a mediated reflection of Chagall's observations of his surroundings; rather, this is an almost completely imagined scene.⁵⁷ From his studio in La Ruche, Chagall would not have been able to see the Eiffel Tower, and certainly not the parachuting figure he has represented next to it; however, his inclusion of these elements, particularly the Eiffel Tower, is emblematic. While his thoughts may have been back in Russia, his manifestation of them so directly—as directly as his Parisian scene outside—is an important element of this painting. Chagall thus is intentionally blurring

⁵⁶ Giraudy and Rioux, 33.

⁵⁷ Kamensky, 135.

the boundaries between reality and surreality and collapsing a reality-based understanding of time and space. This composition is not only a product of the painter's imagination, but also portrays its contents. This dual representation is perhaps related to notions of simultaneity where one may experience concurrently the conscious and the subconscious, the real and the surreal, the actual and the imagined, and the present and the past.

Chagall takes this approach in other compositions from this period as well.

Painted two years after his arrival in France, *Paris Through the Window* (fig. 29) of 1912-13 represents an important moment in the artist's career, looking both backward to his life and artistic training in Russia and forward to the relationship with France he would build and continue to deepen throughout his life. As in *Self-Portrait with Seven Fingers*, *Paris Through the Window* also represents an important achievement in Chagall's unique, patchwork style, which he was able to reach by way of his diverse networks and cosmopolitan contacts. These paintings are often discussed analogously, and in addition to their hybrid quality, they also share commonalities in color palette and in their whimsical natures, in addition to a number of specific motifs.

Paris Through the Window is composed of complex visual structures and many somewhat ambiguous, multivalent signs. The blocky Paris skyline, punctuated by a flattened Eiffel Tower, meanders across the center, the multicolored structures rendered in simple geometric, prism-like forms. An inverted train passes by in front of them, suspended in midair. Contributing to this three-dimensionality is the modeled, double-faced figure in the lower right corner. Chagall has pushed the figure's blue and yellow faces to the front; accompanied by a human-faced cat, he oversees the scene. These buildings and this figure provide a level of depth in the painting that is contrasted by the

flattened forms of the rainbow-colored window architecture pressed forward and the looming white Eiffel Tower at the back. Somewhat alarmingly, three human figures float near the Tower. One seems to descend by way of a triangular parachute that echoes the structure of the Tower itself; this figure is also represented in *Seven Fingers*, though relegated to the very edge of the upper register of the composition. Two figures in black hover sideways in the ambiguously cloudy space near the Tower's base; perhaps they reference the floating figure in the earlier painting, *The Dead Man*.

In both compositions, Chagall renders the Eiffel Tower in white against a sharply contrasting colored or black sky. His inclusion of this most explicit symbol of Paris places Chagall a long way from his earliest Parisian canvases in which he only subtly referenced the French influence upon his work. By including a motif so obviously connected to France in his self-portraits, Chagall openly embraces his adopted land. In these paintings that seamlessly mix his Russian and Jewish identities with the influence of French stylistic tendencies, Chagall's addition of the motif of the Eiffel Tower is one way he is able to tangibly declare his level of comfort and identification with a city and country in which he painted many hybrid works and developed deep friendships. Ultimately, Chagall's smooth incorporation of a strikingly new engagement with French styles into his previous aesthetic of Russian and Jewish themes and motifs in these pictures—facilitated by the development of his relationships with important Francophone avant-garde figures—represented an amalgamation of his many identities to produce a unique and unusual contribution to the Parisian avant-garde.

CONCLUSION

Marc Chagall's four-year sojourn in Paris took place at a key moment in the artist's life and career, as well as in the history of modern European art. He arrived there at an early stage in his professional life as an artist to find a city teeming with artistic activity. Though he had received his first education as a painter in Vitebsk and St. Petersburg, he made the pilgrimage to Paris to experience first-hand the revolutionary transformations occurring there in modern art in 1911. Twenty-three years old upon arrival, he was also at crucial point in the development of his adulthood and personal identity. Chagall explored his coming of age through the themes he addressed in his artwork, often dealing with the life cycle, his national and cultural origins, and his present surroundings in a foreign country.

Many foreign Jewish artists like Chagall relocated to Paris at around the same age, most in their early twenties and at a similarly transitional moment in their lives. These other young artists also surely experienced similar challenges in negotiating their identities as foreigners and as Jews adjusting to life in France. However, though many of them lived in close quarters with one another in communities like La Ruche and greater Montparnasse, each artist handled this negotiation of identity differently in his or her artistic production. Sonia Delaunay effectively dispensed with her Jewish identity in her artwork and focused primarily on adopting the French artistic trends she saw in the work around her. Amedeo Modigliani, who felt deeply connected to his Jewish identity in his personal life, nevertheless generally chose to leave it out of his art as well. In addition, both artists chose not to explicitly reference their national or local origins in their artwork. Because of these tendencies, Delaunay's and Modigliani's artwork represented

middle-ground engagements with French art as outlined by Paul Tucker, embracing French trends over the influence of their home countries and cultures.¹ Chagall, however, used his artwork throughout this early period as an imaginative forum for the negotiation of his multiple, sometimes conflicting, identities. He took a number of different approaches in doing so, often producing artworks that would fall in different places on Tucker's spectrum of nostalgic representations of the homeland on one end and a complete embrace of French avant-garde styles on the other. The resulting body of work Chagall created was unusual and often represents a combination of these many identities.

Chagall's identities as a foreigner, a Hasidic Jew, a townsman, and an artist sometimes smoothly wove in and out of one another. At other moments, however, these identities were in direct conflict with each other and with Chagall's surroundings.² The resulting tension is evident in Chagall's paintings. The Parisian environment likely contributed to the tensions Chagall was experiencing during this period and manifesting in his art. However welcoming France was understood to be toward Jews during this period, the social and political environment in pre-war Paris was complicated with undercurrents of anti-Semitism and ambivalence toward Jews in the aftermath of the Separation of Church and State and the divisive Dreyfus Affair, which affected both the immigrant and French Jewries significantly.

Chagall mediated this complicated environment by making social contacts that were crucial to his survival and professional development. Through the security of these networks and his friendships with Russian Jews like Viktor Mekler, Alexander Romm,

¹ Tucker, 143.

² This idea of identities in conflict follows Latour's social network theory, wherein an individual "actor" may carry group identifications that conflict with one another (Latour, 29).

Yakov Tugendhold, the Russian painter Ehrenburg, and Maxim Vinaver, Chagall maintained a deep connection to his Russian and Jewish backgrounds while working through what those identities meant and adapting to life and local avant-garde artistic styles in Paris. He was observant of current events in the French art world, attending the Salons and various classes at art schools in his neighborhood. As his exposure to and understanding of French art developed, Chagall incorporated it into his art in clear ways, transforming his forms, colors, and representations of pictorial space into a distinctive, hybrid style. This style represented the combination of many of Chagall's artistic influences and identities into his paintings, though it was not always the case that Chagall manifested every identity in every canvas. That there is a change in the relative importance Chagall accords to his different identities from work to work is an indication that the artist was navigating the meaning and value of these different identities to him, and their effectiveness as visual subjects, in the artwork he created during this period.

In addition to helping Chagall come to a greater self-awareness and understanding of his relationship to his surroundings, he may have also been choosing to explicitly portray his Russian and Jewish identities for strategic reasons. Though having Maxim Vinaver as a patron may have allowed Chagall the freedom to explore unconventional subjects without the pressure of needing to sell his art to survive, he also may have chosen his content based on a desire to please his patron, who seemed to favor Russian-Jewish content in his work.³ It is also possible that, in embracing the theme of

³ Vinaver purchased *Russian Wedding* (fig. 15) and *The Dead Man* (fig. 1) in 1910 and chose to support him as a result of that purchase (Wullschlager 123). He believed Chagall, who he saw as a gifted unknown from the shtetl, embodied his hopes for the future of Jews within the Russian empire (Wullschlager 67).

the rural village in many of his paintings from this period and in associating himself with the village, he was intentionally entering into the city-country dialogue that dominated much of French art in the nineteenth century.⁴ Chagall may have done so to cast himself in contrast to the mainstream image of Russia in French society that was Diaghilev's highly Orientalizing and manicured Ballets Russes. With these strategic decisions, he may have been seeking to create his own version of an avant-garde aesthetic, using the canvas as a medium through which he could determine the relative importance and utility of his identities and relate his work specifically to European avant-garde art history and contemporary Parisian artistic trends.

Chagall's relationships with other Russian Jews, and subsequently with supportive writers, critics, and gallery owners such as Guillaume Apollinaire, Blaise Cendrars, Ricciotto Canudo, and Herwarth Walden, allowed Chagall the intellectual stimulation and support to explore his numerous identities in his artwork. Though such artwork was not initially successful in professional terms—he sold his first work outside of Russia at his first solo show in Berlin in 1914, after leaving Paris⁵—because of his patronage, it did not need to be successful in the market for his survival. Instead, the work played a crucial role in Chagall's personal and artistic coming of age, allowing him to determine the

⁴ See *To Russia, Asses and Others* (fig. 2); *I and the Village* (1911, Museum of Modern Art, New York); and *The Cattle Dealer* (1912, Öffentliche Kunstsammlung Basel, Kunstmuseum, Basle), among others. See also folk scenes of births (figs. 13-14), weddings (figs. 15-16), and mothers (*Maternity*, 1912-13, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam), which Chagall locates within village settings. For more information on the city-country dialogue in nineteenth-century French avant-garde art, see Robert Herbert, *Peasants and "Primitivism": French Prints from Millet to Gauguin*, exh. cat. (South Hadley, MA: Mount Holyoke College Art Museum, 1995).

⁵ Wullschlager, 177.

relative importance of his multiple identities that would affect his artwork for the rest of his life.

Ultimately, Chagall's social networks and personal relationships played a crucial role in the challenging process of determining his place in the Parisian art world, and allowed him to become a successful professional artist in Western Europe. The logistical and professional benefits of these networks helped him negotiate the varying positions he maintained as an immigrant Russian-Jewish artist working in Paris in the first fifteen years of the twentieth century. Often these identities were distinctly different from societal norms in the Parisian environment of the period. He was a foreigner in a largely French society; he was a Jew in an often anti-Semitic, predominantly Catholic society; he was a struggling artist in an expensive European city; and he was a townsman adjusting to life in a bustling urban center. Supported by the development of his social and professional relationships, Chagall was able to use specific content, motifs, and varied aesthetic styles in his paintings to sharpen his interest in and successfully navigate his cultural, artistic, and personal relationships to his homeland and to his new life in France.

ILLUSTRATIONS



Figure 1. Marc Chagall, *The Dead Man*, 1908. Oil on canvas. Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.

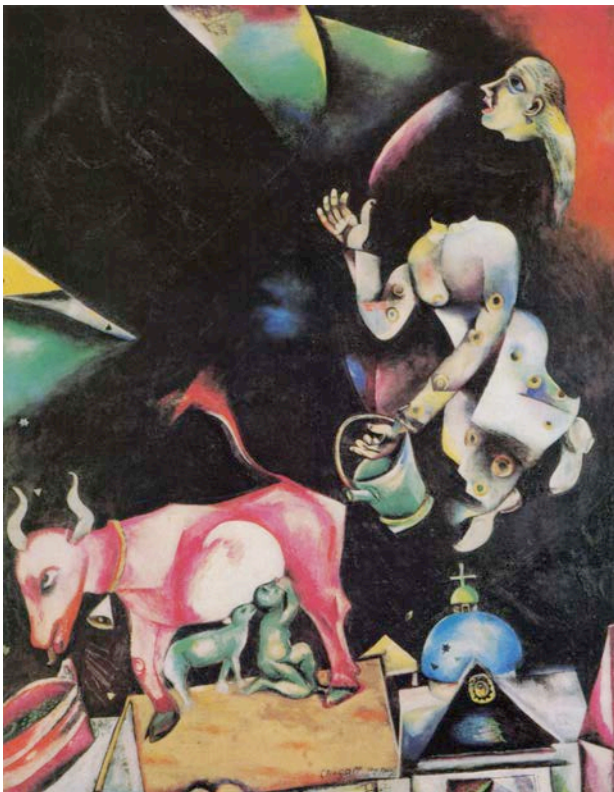


Figure 2. Marc Chagall, *To Russia, Asses and Others*, 1911-12. Oil on canvas. Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.



Figure 3. Marc Chagall, *Homage to Apollinaire*, 1912. Oil, gold and silver powder on canvas. Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven.

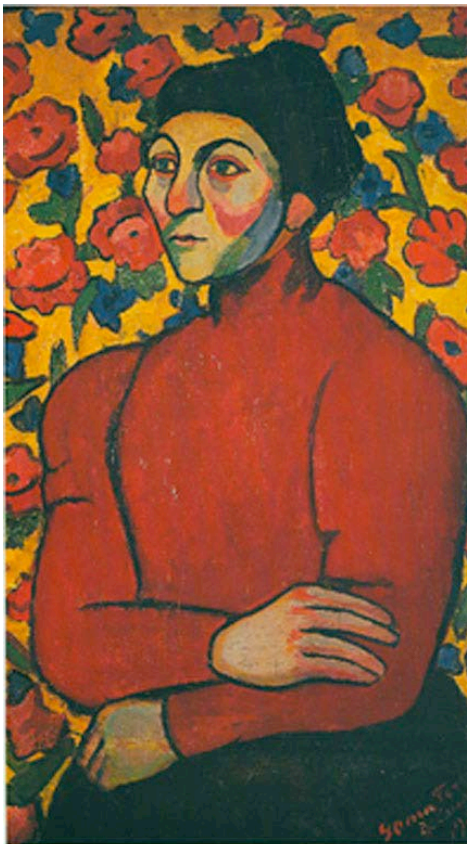


Figure 4. Sonia Delaunay, *Philomène*, 1907. Oil on canvas. Whereabouts unknown.



Figure 5. Vincent van Gogh, *La Berceuse (Woman Rocking a Cradle; Augustine-Alix Pellicot Roulin)*, 1889. Oil on canvas. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



Figure 6. Paul Gauguin, *Portrait of a Young Woman, Vaite (Jeanne) Goupil*, 1896. Oil on canvas. Ordrupgaard, Charlottenlund, Denmark.



Figure 7. Amedeo Modigliani, *The Jewess*, 1908. Oil on canvas. Private collection.

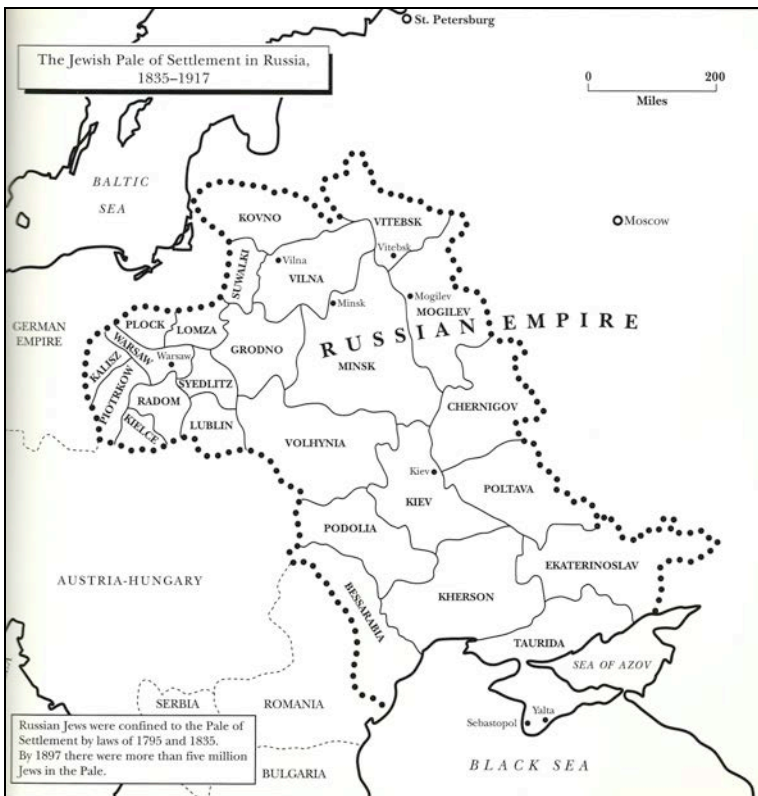


Figure 8. Map of The Jewish Pale of Settlement in Russia, 1835-1917. From *Marc Chagall: Early Works from Russian Collections*, edited by Susan Tumarkin Goodman. Exh. cat., Jewish Museum New York. New York: Third Millennium Publishing, 2001, 11.



Figure 9. Yehuda Pen, *Lady with Veil*, 1907. Oil on canvas. Collection Vitebsk Regional Museum, Vitebsk.



Figure 10. Fernand Léger, *Nudes in a Forest*, 1909-11. Oil on canvas. Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo, The Netherlands.



Figure 11. Fernand Léger, *Study for Three Portraits*, 1910-11. Oil on canvas. Milwaukee Art Museum.



Figure 12. Henri Le Fauconnier, *Abundance*, 1910-11. Oil on canvas. Gemeentemuseum den Haag, The Hague, Netherlands.



Figure 13. Marc Chagall, *Birth*, 1910. Oil on canvas. Kunsthaus, Zurich.



Figure 14. Marc Chagall, *Birth*, 1911-12. Oil on canvas. Art Institute of Chicago.



Figure 15. Marc Chagall, *Russian Wedding*, 1909. Oil on canvas. Collection of the E.G. Bührle Foundation, Zurich.

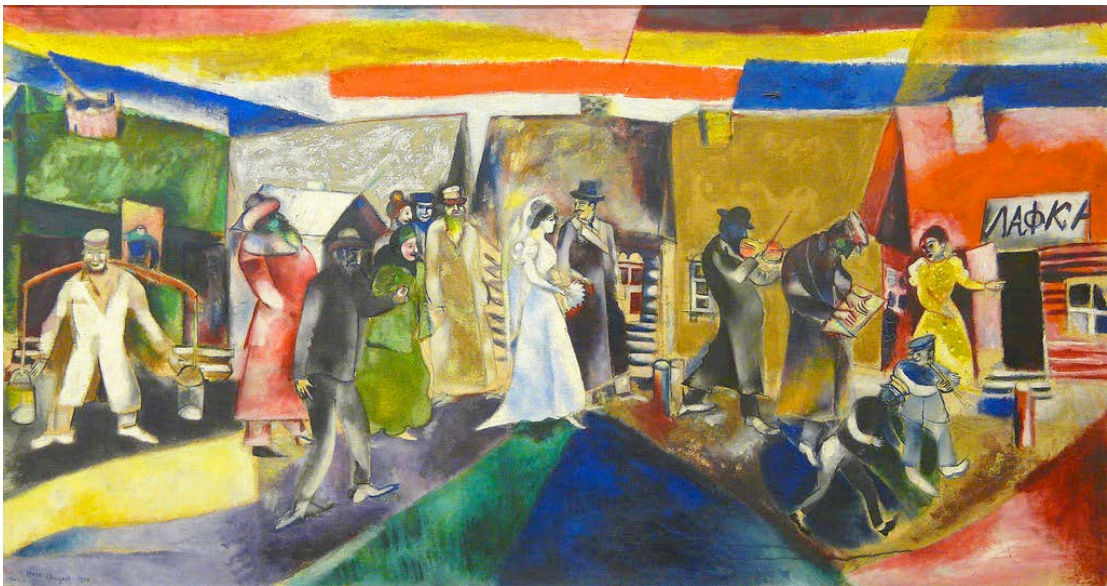


Figure 16. Marc Chagall, *The Wedding*, 1911. Oil on canvas. Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.



Figure 17. Marc Chagall, *The Seated Violinist*, 1908. Watercolor, black ink, and pencil on paper. Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.



Figure 18. Historical photograph of the entrance to La Ruche, c. 1906. From *À la Russie, aux ânes et aux autres: Un chef-d'oeuvre de Marc Chagall*. Exh. cat. (Paris: Éditions de la Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1997), 40.



Figure 19. View from Chagall's studio. Photograph taken by Aliya Reich, January 2012.

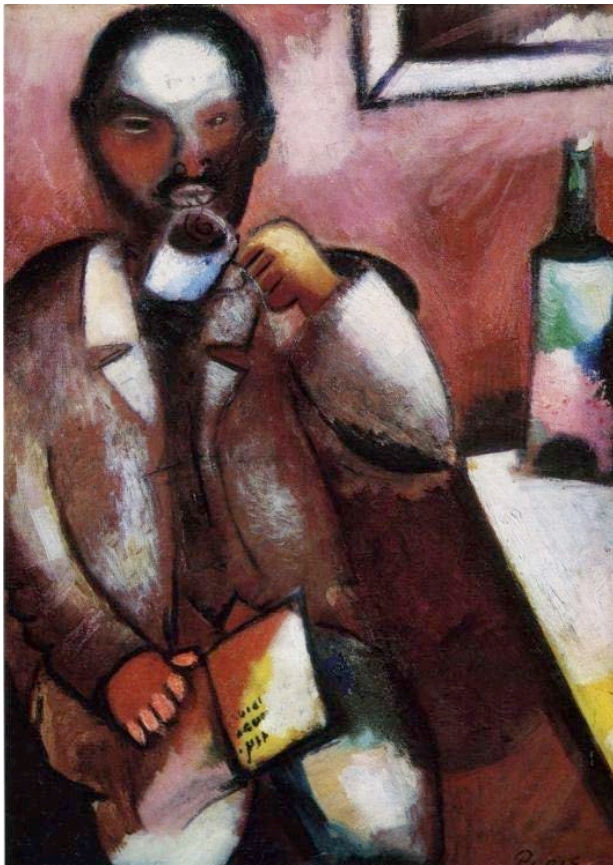


Figure 20. Marc Chagall, *The Poet Mazin*, 1912. Oil on canvas. Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris.



Figure 21. Marc Chagall, *The Poet (Half Past Three)*, 1912. Oil on canvas. Philadelphia Museum of Art.



Figure 22. Picasso, *Ma Jolie*, winter 1911-12. Oil on canvas. Museum of Modern Art, New York.



Figure 23. Robert Delaunay, *Eiffel Tower*, 1910-11. Oil on canvas. Kunstmuseum, Basel.

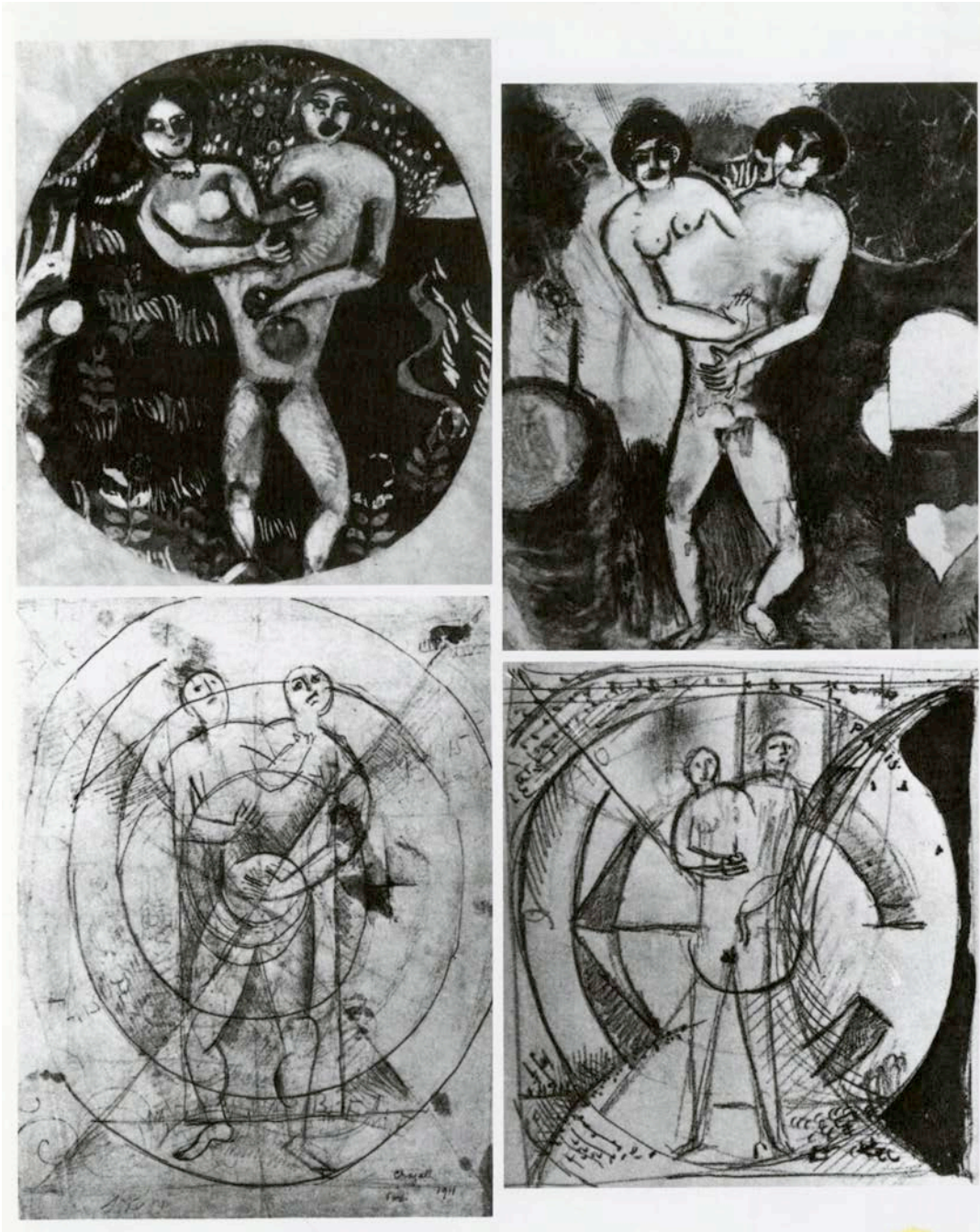


Figure 24. Marc Chagall, clockwise from top left: *Adam and Eve*, study for *Hommage à Apollinaire*, 1910-11, gouache on paper, private collection, Basel; *Adam and Eve*, study for *Hommage à Apollinaire*, 1910-11, gouache on paper, Mrs. Donald Ogden Steward Collection, London; *Sketch II* for *Hommage à Apollinaire*, 1910-11, pencil on paper, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris; *Sketch I* for *Hommage à Apollinaire*, 1910-11, pencil on paper, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris.



Figure 25. Marc Chagall, *For Apollinaire*, 1912. Pencil on paper. Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris.



Figure 26. Marc Chagall, *Dedicated to my Fiancée*, 1911. Oil on canvas. Kunstmuseum, Bern.



Figure 27. Marc Chagall, *The Drunkard*, 1911-12. Oil on canvas. Private collection.



Figure 28. Marc Chagall, *Self-Portrait with Seven Fingers*, 1912. Oil on canvas. Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.



Figure 29. Marc Chagall, *Paris Through the Window*, 1912-13. Oil on canvas. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.

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