SURREALISM’S PRAYING MANTIS AND CASTRATING WOMAN

By Ruth Markus

Mantis, or mandit, is the general term for many kinds of praying insects (Orthoptera), relatives of the grasshopper, cricket, and locust. The word “mantis” is derived from Greek and means soothsayer, diviner, or magician ordained with spiritual qualities. The scientific term Mantis religiosa is La Mante religieuse or Prie Dieux in French, Gottesanbeterin in German, and Praying Mantis in English. These terms indicate a trans-linguistic connection between the mantis and prophecy, sanctity, and prayer. The term “praying” was apparently given to the mantis because of the insect’s distinctive posture while awaiting its prey: holding its front legs together before its chest. The visual association with praying is enhanced by its habit of swaying back and forth, like a leaf in the wind, in order to mislead its victim.

The mythologies that have evolved around the mantis in various cultures all feature a distinct ambivalence. It is simultaneously magical and holy as well as demonic and destructive. Since the mystical powers of the mantis (positive and negative) are always associated with the female, the insect will be referred to henceforth as “she.”

The most characteristic idiosyncrasy of the female mantis is her devouring of the male during or directly after the sexual act. Sometimes she decapitates the male at its start, his body performing his duty automatically, like a sex-machine. Because of this brutal custom, it has been argued that the mantis should be called “preying” rather than “praying.”

Some scientists claim that the beheading of the male results in reflexive and convulsive spasms that ensure successful fertilization, while others maintain that the female eats the male because copulation demands extra nourishment. In fact, this phenomenon is not as common as might be thought. Under natural conditions, many males escape, as cannibalism of the male is more frequent in the close confines of a small cage. Indeed, some scientists claim that the decapitation of the male is not a natural phenomenon at all and takes place only in captivity.

Thus, while the mantis’s bad reputation may be undeserved, the Surrealists, unaware of the scientific evidence, reinforced the myth to such an extent that the Praying Mantis is universally associated with the praying female. The French sociologist and avant-garde writer, Roger Caillois, contributed greatly to the mantis myth in his two essays published in the Surrealist journal Minotaure, “La Mante religieuse” (1934) and “Mimétisme et psychasténie légendaire” (1935). Both impressed the Surrealists.

Because of her posture, Salvador Dalí identified the praying woman in Jean-François Millet’s L’Angelet (1857-59; The Louvre) with the mantis. Since Dali considered this to be the same posture the mantis assumes in coitus before devouring the male, he thus saw this position as expressing the woman’s sexual frustration. L’Angelet apparently inspired a number of Dalí’s paintings, among them Atavism of Twilight (1933-34; Kunstmuseum, Berne), in which Dalí’s couple reflects the pose of Millet’s, but the man has a skull for a head and a gaping hole in his chest above his heart, as though the female has already bitten him.

The mantis is not the only female that kills the male. A similar phenomenon is common among certain kinds of spiders, scorpions, and beetles. Indeed, some of these, such as the Black Widow, have become symbols of the femme fatale who precipitates physical and/or emotional castration, even death. However, the Surrealists were captivated almost exclusively by the mantis because of her many ambivalent attributes. To them she embodied the most negative female archetype, the “castrating woman,” who represents cannibalism and death.

The moment of death commingling with the creation of new life has led many cultures to associate the mantis with fertility and renewal. Because of this dual connection, the mantis evokes primordial fears or desires in our collective unconsciousness while representing the female archetype, in the Jungian meaning of the term. At the same time she represents the two primordial Freudian instincts: Eros (or libido), the sexual motivating force of creation, and the “death instinct,” the desire for self-destruction.

Caillois argues that there are some creatures whose forms and behaviors invite poetic metaphors, that ambivalent or antibehavioural meanings are especially powerful, and that since the mantis provides such imagery, she offers a useful means of “lyrical communication.” Her anthropomorphized appearance contributes further to her symbolic image, and her activities are often interpreted in accordance with human behavioral patterns.

Her powerful poetic image is probably one reason the mantis fascinated the Surrealists. The mantis as female archetype and the mythology surrounding her habits featured in their works. André Breton and Paul Eluard cultivated mantises in their homes, studied them closely, and invited others to observe the spectacle of their macabre sexual rites. Eluard even told Caillois that their sexual act reflected the ideal sexual relationship—diminishing the male and magnifying the female—making it completely natural, he argued, for the female to take advantage of her momentary superiority and kill the male.

The connection between erotism and death was common in Surrealist thought and was developed especially in the ideas of George Bataille, who believed sex and death to be inextricably linked. André Masson, influenced by Bataille, depicted the mantis many times, particularly after 1934, when he moved to Spain and acquired some of his own. In one of his mantis paintings, Summer Divertissement (1934; Private Collection), humanized mantis revel in a carnivalesque and bestial orgy. The Surrealists’ attraction to the mantis is underscored by the two most prominent motifs in their art, metamorphosis and vagina dentata. Both are represented frequently through the image of the mantis.

Metamorphosis—the transformation of an inanimate object from one form into another, or the transfiguration of living forms into inanimate objects (and vice versa)—was used as an artistic means of challenging reality, that which is perceived by the senses, in order to reach another, parallel world, one resembling the world.
of dreams or of the unconscious. Breton argued that the fusion of these two worlds is needed to create a superior world: "I believe in the future transmutation of those two seemingly contradictory states, dream and reality, into a sort of absolute reality, of surreality, so to speak." Metamorphosis embodies the vision of Breton, and the mantis is a metamorphic image. Its capacity to change and transform derived primarily from camouflage techniques, which Caillios calls "mimétisme." The mantis can disguise itself as a leaf, either alive and green or withering and brown; it can lie in wait motionlessly for its prey and then pounce swiftly. Examples of mimétisme can be seen in a number of paintings by Max Ernst, in which metamorphosing fauna and flora merge into one another. Sometimes they are camouflaged in such a way that they become almost indistinguishable. In Joy of Life (1936, Fig. 1), only on close inspection (and partly by guessing) can the two mantis be detected at the bottom of the painting. Probably a male and a female, they are depicted in the process of an ambiguous activity, part copulation, part battle, and, indeed, probably both. The female appears to be winning, as the male (so it seems) is lying on his back with no head.

The Surrealists also admired the mimétisme of the mantis because it represents a need to become one with nature. This pantheistic desire—to destroy the boundaries between humanity and nature, to break down the walls of one's self, to become nothing and thus unite with nature—was described by Caillios as a yearning for the primordial, for a return to prebirth unconsciousness, to the state of existence that precedes awareness. But, as Caillios observed, in order to be swallowed up in this way we must first lose our individuality; he therefore refers to it as a desire to eradicate individuality—‘désindividuation.’ Caillios sees this phenomenon as weakening, as a loss of ego substance, and he calls the space in which the individual wishes to be lost the "devouring force." Erich Neumann uses similar terms when discussing the image of the negative female archetype, the Terrible Devouring Mother. The weaker the ego, he writes, the stronger the gravitation of the unconscious, in which the ego wishes to "sink" and be "swallowed up." Neumann, who portrays the Terrible Devouring Mother with a mouthful of teeth—the vagina dentata image—sees a correlation between the fear of being swallowed up by her and the fear of castration: both represent a state of immaturity and are symbolized by teeth.

The desire to be swallowed up is dangerous; the need to lose one's self and to return to the primordial state of unconsciousness is in fact a suicide, a "death-drive." According to Neumann, we can confound this instinct through awareness. Confronting this danger, and elevating it from the unconscious to the conscious, is the first step toward overcoming it. Because symbols and metaphors operate on both the conscious and the unconscious levels, they enable us to express our primordial desires and experience danger without really being in danger. The mantis is such a symbol: through her image we represent our desire to be swallowed up, at the same time neutralizing the threat of death (which is inherent in such a desire), for the mantis is merely a metaphor.

The mantis's importance as metaphor is enhanced by her ambiguity, representing simultaneously death and resurrection. The Hottentots and the Bushmen, for instance, worship the mantis as a celestial divinity that was swallowed by a Devouring God but then vomited out alive, thereby connected to rebirth and nourishment. In some Bushmen myths the mantis is killed, disintegrates, but comes back to life, similar to the vision of the Dry Bones or the myths of Osiris and Dionysos. The myth of the disintegrated mantis correlates to another motif in Surrealist art—the disintegrating woman, an image that recurs in many of Dalí's paintings.

In, for example, The Scream of Sex Appeal (1934: Dalí Foundation), Dalí finds a new sexual attraction in what he calls "the spectral capacity of women"—"their possible dissociation, their luminous charnel decomposition."
In many cultures the mantis is associated with teeth, both as a cure for toothache and as a symbol of nutrition and digestion. Because the mantis eats her sex-partner, the teeth have come to symbolize both cannibalism and castration. Represented by a mouth filled with threatening fangs or with a toothed vagina designed to castrate any penetrator, she becomes Surrealism’s other main trope, the vagina dentata.

Ties between maturity and teeth are evident in many cultures and often find expression in initiation ceremonies. Caliloi claims that in primitive cultures that do not practice circumcision as a rite of passage, maturity is celebrated by the removal of a tooth. If the tooth represents a state of immaturity, in which one fears being swallowed up and drawn back into the unconscious, the removal of the tooth represents a confrontation with this fear and the acquisition of awareness. Some North American Indian tribes believe that a sharp-toothed, meat-eating fish resides in the vagina of the Terrible Mother. He who breaks and removes the teeth from the vagina (thereby turning the “terrible woman” into a “real woman”) is a hero. In other tribal myths, the breaking of the vaginal teeth is an expression of manhood.

In Ernst’s Joy of Life, near the mantis couple is the head of a snake (or a lizard) with a mouthful of teeth that clearly represents the vagina dentata. Its closeness to the couple creates a connection between their coitus and the castration complex, a cynical and macabre reminder of the link between eroticism and death also suggested in the title. Ernst’s Berenice (1935; Piero Chiatellessa, Turin), based on a tale by Edgar Allen Poe, reveal an even clearer link to the vagina dentata. Egeus’s Berenice’s suitor, became haunted by the image of her teeth. When she was reported dead he went to her tomb, and in a trancelike state he extracted her teeth. Only after he awoke did he realize that she was not dead but in a deep trance.

Vagina dentata images also appear in many works by Picasso, mostly from the twenties, when he was in close contact with the Surrealists and somewhat influenced by them. He used the mouth full of teeth and the vagina dentata as ambivalent images as early as 1927. Bust of a Woman with Self-Portrait (1929; Fig. 2) expresses his attitude toward women through her teeth. Paintings such as Nude on a White Background (1927) and Large Nude in a Red Armchair (1928), both at the Musée Picasso, Paris, depict an oval, tooth-filled mouth in an abstract woman’s face. The vertical oval more closely resembles the aperture of a vagina than a mouth. This shape recurs in his 1928-29 series of paintings showing the artist and his model in the studio.

Fierre Daix claims that the paintings of this period reflect the violence of Picasso’s domestic situation, and that Picasso had created an ideogram of the face of his wife Olga, which was “undoubtedly drawn from the image she presented as she screamed incoherently at her husband.” This ideogram was composed of angular shapes, stiff locks of hair like the teeth of a comb, and a mouth filled with threatening teeth.

Between 1928 and 1931 Picasso (with the help of González) created a series of iron sculptures as models for a monument to Apollinaire. The sharp, angular shapes of “Olga’s ideogram” fit the jagged and aggressive character of this material, as can be seen in Women in Garden (1929; 30; Musée Picasso, Paris). A more direct connection between teeth and the mantis can be detected in Picasso’s Seated bathing (1930; MOMA, New York), in which the figure appears as an anthropomorphized combination of insect and crab, possessing a bony jaw with pincer-claws, and filled, once again, with threatening teeth.

In some of Picasso’s paintings, for example, The Kiss (1931; Fig. 3), the sharp-toothed osculators (male and female) seem to devour each other. This cannibalistic love relation, in which each swallows the other, is perhaps the ultimate unification, similar to the absolute unity between man and nature. The Kiss also redefines the sex roles. As the male and the female devour each other, they are equally in danger of being swallowed up (or castrated). This interpretation contradicts those classical psychoanalysts who claim that fear of castration is a formative part of the male definition of gender, with the female as the castrator. Barbara Walker claims that the vagina dentata is not derived from the fear of castration, attacking this attitude as a patriarchal corruption of earlier myths. Walker argues that the mouth of the vagina represents both male and female fears: the fear of being swallowed up by the mouth of the earth, an unwillingness to cede one’s individuality to death. Thus, Picasso, in The Kiss, liberates the woman from her role as the sole aggressor.

Although the works of many Surrealist artists are informed by the multiple images of the mantis in relation to mimétisme and vagina dentata, works by Dalí and Giacometti are used here as examples of two different approaches to the ambivalent female archetypal that the mantis represents.

Neumann argues that a man who fears woman (seen as the vagina dentata) has not yet reached maturity, still seeing himself as a vulnerable phallus rather than an independent entity. For such a man, masturbation provides an escape from sexual intercourse and protects him from possible castration. This idea is evident in some of Dalí’s paintings, especially The Great Masturbator (1929; Fig. 4), in which the amorphous shape that fills the canvas is actually the artist’s self-portrait face down, with a grasshopper for a mouth. The head of Gala Eluard, Dalí’s lover and later his wife, grows out of the nape of his neck; her mouth is positioned at the crotch of a standing man, who is seen only up to his loins. The male phallic is neither exposed nor erect, and Gala’s mouth is shut and therefore (temporarily) not threatening.

The Great Masturbator was created just before the marriage of Gala and Dalí and may represent Dalí’s anxieties about his future with her. Whitney Chadwick, although explaining the ambivalence of Dalí’s attitude toward Gala, describes her in this painting as heroine-savior. And indeed, Gala saved Dalí from the attacks of paralyzing laughter that prevented him from working and gave him a sense of reality and equilibrium. But their relationship was complicated and problematic, as Gala was married to Eluard when
so hint at Dalí's id—the immature Dalí as a phallus that desires Gala but feels threatened by the vagina dentata. 

The placement of the grasshopper near what would be Dalí's mouth suggests its connection to eating, which, in the context of this painting, also is associated with sex and love. Calbois points out that Dalí, in his comments on Millet's L'Angelus, intuitively understood the connection between sexuality and eating and between love and the desire to consume the beloved. And indeed, just as he feared being swallowed, he also feared his cannibalistic impulse—the desire to swallow up others. Dalí discussed this in an article on the modern style in architecture, in which he claimed that Art Nouveau had aroused people's imagination to the extent that they wanted to devour the object of their fantasies and love. 

This lust acquires greater significance in Dalí's essay on the Surrealist object, where he concludes that our relationship with the object is divided into four stages. In the fourth stage, he writes, "the object tends to bring about our fusion with it and makes us pursue the formation of a unity with it (hunger for an article and edible articles)." Cannibalism, as a wish to unify with the object of our love, could also explain Dalí's idea about the sexual appeal of the edible woman.

For Giacometti, a confrontation with the negative female archetype, rooted in his complex relationship with his mother, led him to create an absolute division between the "saint" and the "whores." He admitted that he suffered from impotence and could reach satisfaction only with prostitutes. The Surrealists introduced Giacometti to Freud's writings even before he became a member of the group, and by the late 1920s he set out on a quest of self-discovery, a sort of self-psychoanalysis, externalizing his innate violence toward women.

Rather than escaping direct contact with women via masturbation, as did Dalí, Giacometti attacked. Like the mythical hero or the mature man who had experienced ceremonial initiation, he turned upon the dreaded vagina dentata, breaking its teeth with his toothed phallus. Disagreeable Object (1931; Fig. 5) is such a phallus, an antithesis to the vagina dentata. Here it is the male organ that threatens to mutilate the female. This disagreeable object marked a necessary stage in his path to maturity: he replaced escapism and impotence with angry assault.

In Woman with Her Throat Cut (1932, Fig. 6), Giacometti uses the mantis image in a particularly violent way. The woman, with many mantislike features, lies outstretched upon the floor. At the end of her particularly long throat, slit in the middle, is a tiny head with an open mouth, as though gasping for one last breath. The body of the woman-mantis is split into two jagged, toothlike parts,
which lie on either side of a spinal column. The installation of the sculpture makes the sense of violence more striking. Seen from above, it is more repulsive, as not only is her throat slit and her body lacerated, she appears also to have been trodden upon, like a cockroach. Brutally vanquished and mutilated by male violence, the mantis is disempowered, a disintegrating woman, and no longer dangerous.

However, the threat is still present in the open legs. An ambiguous symbol, it can emphasize the fragility of the woman-mantis as well as her readiness to have sexual intercourse. Above all, the open legs symbolize the Freudian view of the male fear of the vagina dentata: “Probably no male human being is spared the terrifying shock of threatened castration at the sight of the female genitals.” Therefore, although the mutilated mantis symbolizes the ostensibly primitive male aggression that resides in the male collective unconscious, this violence is not aimed at an innocent victim. The immature Giacometti sees woman as a threat and, therefore, a legitimate target for his sexual aggression.

Woman with Her Throat Cut also contains smooth, rounded, circular, pearlike shapes resembling breasts, ovaries, and the womb, all symbols of fertility since ancient times. Giacometti also used female archetypal forms of concave containers like vessels, which are, according to Freud and Jung, an attribute and symbol of the feminine nature.

But is it possible that these signs of female fertility represent simply another threat of impotence? To understand their meaning, one must know that Giacometti contracted mumps when he was about 16, and was left sterile.

The concept of female fertility could have reminded him of his sterility, perhaps symbolizing impotence.

By his thirties, a more mature Giacometti was able to present a more positive aspect of fertility. In 1+1=3 (1935; Fig. 7) male and female sexual organs unite as one integral form, containing their creation, the embryo (thus one plus one amounts to three).

No longer associated with the Surrealists, Giacometti was free of their gender wars.

The representation of woman as a fertility symbol has a problematic history. Should women be judged by their ability to reproduce? Robert Belton argues that after World War I the need to repopulate France led to a pronatalist campaign, culminating in July 1939 in laws that offered financial inducements to women who fulfilled their maternal role.

In such a society, a reaction against fertility could be viewed as a rebellion against bourgeois standards; however, the Surrealists continued to depict woman as either the Great Mother or the femme fatale, always a prisoner of her gender, and often symbolized by the Praying Mantis.

The ambivalent characteristics attributed to the mantis led it to become a powerful image in many cultures and, as such, an ambiguous symbol of Woman in art. As a symbol of male pirmordial fears and needs, the mantis image in Surrealist art is mostly negative: the castrating woman, the disintegrating and mutilated woman, and the edible woman. The Surrealists’ fascination with the mantis is an indication of their attitude toward woman, which was ambivalent, if not misogynistic.

Belton claims that Surrealism’s problematic sexual lexicon, although recently reevaluated, is reinforced by the tenacity with which they held onto the mantis theme.

For Donald Kuspit, on the other hand, the Surrealists’ patriarchal sexual attitudes represented a transitional phase from authoritarianism to anti-authoritarianism. The Surrealists’ belief that uninhibited sex would bring about a free society made them, he argues, the great emancipators of modern times. Another reading is suggested by Susan Gabar, who looks at the misogynistic signs of woman’s representation as an absurdity that functions as provocation against conventional bourgeois morality.

As far as can be ascertained, no female Surrealist portrayed the female as a mantis, although many used the same vocabulary as the males (but in different discourse), representing the women as disintegrated, mutilated, and even edible, sometimes even exploiting the male castration anxiety.

Chadwick argues that by representing herself in the male vocabulary, the woman Surrealist recreates her womanhood through her own eyes and produces a new narrative of the self. She adds that the body has become a site of cultural mediations and is used—decomposed, mutated, dissolved, or reconstructed—as an expression of cultural and personal fears.

Chadwick also argues that many women prefer to look for the source of femininity in epochs and places where women were believed to have spiritual and psychic power and therefore represent the female as a mythic image, sometimes as a mythic beast, denoting the masculine and feminine soul. Since the mantis is such a mythic image, we could expect the women artists to use it, as they have used other insects. However, they do not—perhaps because the mantis image is a male appropriation, filled with too many negative female attributes.

NOTES
1. Orthopteran is the common name for members of four related insect orders. The mantis belong to the Dictyoptera, and the cricket, locust, and grasshopper to the Orthoptera. The Surrealists used images of several Orthoptera, which they endowed with connotations associated only with the mantis.


4. Roger Caillios, “La Mante religieuse,” Minotaure (Décembre 1934), 25. The idea that the male must die to ensure the fertility of the female does not have only a biological origin but exists in many ancient mythologies. See Robert Belton, “André Masson’s Earth-Mothers in their Cultural Context,” RACAR, 15.1 (1988), 53-55.

5. Eckehard Liske of the Max Planck Institute and W. Jackson Davis of the University of California watched the mating of 30 pairs of Chinese mantises: No male was decapitat-

![Fig. 7. Alberto Giacometti, 1+1=3 (1935), plaster. Private Collection. ©ADAGP, Paris.](image)
ed, and the only female that attacked a male had been starved for several days. They concluded that praying mantis cannibalism results from stressful conditions and lack of food in captivity; see “Sex Among Mantises,” Discover (January 1985), 9.


7. William Pressly, “The Praying Mantis in Surrealism Art,” Art Bulletin (December 1973), 600. See also William Rubin, Dada and Surrealism (London: Thames and Hudson, 1969), 227-28. It should be noted that the mantis assumes the “praying” posture while waiting for it prey, and not, as Dalí said, before the female devours the male.


9. Robert Belton mentions two books that contributed to the fashionable analogies between human and insect behavior: Xémy de Gourmont’s Physique de l’Amour: Essai sur l’Instinct Sexual (Paris: Mercure de France, 1903; reprint 1920), in which he compared human sexual practice to that of animals; and the 10-volume half-scientific, half-poetic Souvenirs entomologiques by J. H. Fabre, published in Paris in 1924-25, in which Fabre claimed that sexual instinct is the most primitive and therefore the most natural. See Robert Belton, “Edgar Allan Poe and the Surrealists’ Image of Woman,” WJQ (S/S 87), 8, 12, n. 1.


12. Ibid., 25. Belton suggests that Eluard and Breton kept the mantis “to remind themselves of an ever-present danger in their own relationships with women;” see his “Edgar Allan Poe,” 8.


15. André Breton, “What is Surrealism?” in Herschel B. Chipp, ed., Theories of Modern Art (Berkeley: University of California, 1975), 414. This was said in a lecture given in Brussels on June 1, 1936, and issued as a pamphlet immediately afterward. An excerpt, translated into English by David Gascoigne, appears in André Breton, What is Surrealism? (London: Faber & Faber, 1936), 9-24.


17. Belton noted that Ernst revealed the image of the mantis even in paintings that were produced “automatically,” like Hunger Feast (1935); see his “Edgar Allan Poe,” 8.


19. Caillois, “La Mante religieuse,” 26, and Krauss, “Corpus Delicti,” 74. Bataille also argues that we seek infinity by eradicating the trappings of individuality; see Pressly, “Praying Mantis in Surrealist Art,” 608. Bataille, drawing comparisons between death and eroticism, claims that the sensation of eradicating individuality can be reached via extreme sexual ecstasy or violence; see his L’Érotisme, 19.


21. Ibid., 168.

22. Ibid., 26-27.

23. Caillois, “La Mante religieuse,” 24. In the prophet Ezekiel’s vision, God transformed the Dry Bones into living beings to symbolize the revival of the people of Israel and their return to their land. The Egyptian god Osiris was murdered by his brother Set. His body was cut to pieces and spread across the entire country, but his wife, the goddess Isis, collected the pieces and reassembled the body and was able to conceive with him their child Horus. The newborn Greek god Dionysos, child of Zeus and Semele, was torn to shreds by order of Hera, Zeus’s legitimate wife, but was rescued and reconstituted by his grandmother, Rhea. Bataille was the first to notice that mutilation and destruction are characteristics of primitive art as well; see his Oeuvres Completes, I (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), 247-54.


28. On the relationship between Breton and Picasso and on Breton’s campaign to appropriate Picasso’s works as Surrealist, see Elizabeth Cowling, “‘Proudly We Claim Him as One of Us’: Breton, Picasso, and the Surrealist Movement,” Art History (March 1983), 82-104.

29. A female head with a mouthful of nail-like teeth was reproduced in La Revolución Surrealista (October 1927), 20; see Cowling, “Proudly We Claim Him,” 98.


31. Such shapes were also common at that time in the sculpture of González and Giacometti. On Picasso and Apollinaire and on Picasso’s work on the models for the monument, see Peter Read, Picasso et Apollinaire, Les Métamorphoses de la Mémoire 1905/1973 (Paris: Édition Jean Michel Place, 1995).


33. Walker, “vagina dentata,” in Woman’s Encyclopedia, 1034-37; see also her entry on “castration,” 142-47.


35. Belton explains that sexual reproduction necessarily involves male loss of erection, and the male, who sees himself chiefly as an embodiment of his phallus, accepts it as a loss (as a “little death,” as Bataille would put it); see in his “André Masson = Earth-Mothers,” 54. We may assume that the masturbator believes that he controls the act, and at the same time he avoids the shame of being defeated by the female.

36. A similar, and more accurate profile, also with a grasshopper for a mouth, is depicted in Dalí’s The Lugubrious Game (1929).

37. Pressly refers to Gala in this painting as “his wife to be;” see his “The Praying Mantis,” 605.


40. Rubin, Dada and Surrealism, 220. Also see, for example, Dalí’s use of a lobster in the role of mantis clinging to a woman’s pubis, in his costume design for The Dream of Venus; see Robert Belton, The Beriboned
Bomb: The Image of Woman in Male Surrealist Art (Calgary, Can.: University of Calgary, 1995), 99. 
42. Ibid. 
44. Rubin, Dada and Surrealism, 220. 
45. The 37-year-old Dali admitted that the fright that the grasshopper caused him had not yet diminished; see his The Secret Life of Salvador Dali, 128. 
47. Since it symbolizes the same fear—that of being swallowed—the grasshopper-mantis, for Dali, represented both his father and Gaia. 
49. Since the grasshopper is the image of Dali’s father, it could equally suggest a fight between Dali’s id and his super-ego, chastising him for immorality. 
51. Salvador Dali, “De La beaute terrifiante et comestible,” 69-76; Pressly, “The Praying Mantis,” 602. The details from Guilmard’s photographs of Métro entrances create an association between decorative floral shapes and human sexual organs and, at the same time, resemble the mantis; see Ades, “Photography and the Surrealist Text,” 179. 
52. Salvador Dali, “The object as revealed in Surrealist experiment,” in Chipp, ed., Theories of Modern Art, 417-27. Dali was probably influenced by Freud, who claimed that “the act of eating is a destruction of the object with the final aim of incorporating it”; see Freud’s “The Theory of the Instincts,” 149. Rubin argues that the roots of Dali’s cannibalism can be found in his childhood, in the sacrament of the Eucharist. The Catholic believer, who eats the Host and drinks the wine, unites momentarily with the body of Christ and becomes one with the Deity; see Dada and Surrealism, 230. 
53. For more details on Giacometti and women, see James Lord, Giacometti (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1986), 15, 19, 77, 78. See also my forthcoming “Sex and Gender in Giacometti’s Couples,” Assaph: Studies in Art History (Tel Aviv University, 2001). 
54. Walker, “vagina dentata,” 1034. See also Susan Gubar, “Representing Pornography: Feminism, Criticism, and Depictions of Female Violation,” Critical Inquiry (Summer 1987), 732. Neumann states that the spreading of the legs to exhibit the genital region represents a ritual act, most often symbolizing fertility; see his The Great Mother, 120. 
56. Lord, Giacometti, 29. 
57. Reinhold Hohl, “Form and Vision,” in Alberto Giacometti (New York: Guggenheim Foundation, 1974), 27. Hohl refers to this work as “pregnant woman,” but I believe that this is an oversimplification; the embryo symbolizes creation in general and Giacometti’s artistic creation in particular. 
60. Belton, The Beribboned Bomb, 53. 
62. Gubar, “Representing Pornography,” 723. This does not mean that Gubar herself is satisfied with this reading. 
64. Chadwick, “Empty Mirrors,” 11, 14. 
65. Ibid., 14. 
66. Ibid., 13. 

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