



American Journal of Psychiatric Research and Reviews (ISSN:2637-479X)



Salvador Dali Meets Sigmund Freud: Paranoia, Narcissism, Snails

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the meeting between the artist Salvador Dalí and Sigmund Freud that took place in London in July of 1938. Freud had just escaped from the Nazi regime in Austria and was about a year away from death. Dalí had been influenced by Freud's work for many years and had sought to meet his idol on several previous occasions. The meeting, arranged by Freud's friend, Stefan Zweig, and attended by the poet, Edward James, is noteworthy in that Dalí brought his painting, "Metamorphosis of Narcissus," a treatise on the subject of paranoia, and sketched Freud's head conceived as a snail. The paper offers perspectives on each of these events. The meeting is seen in the context of Freud's artistic sensibility and his relationship to Surrealism. For Dalí the meeting served as a way to break with Surrealism and led to a revised philosophy of art. The paper concludes with the speculation that the meeting was experienced by the artist as an idealizing/envious narcissistic transference with Freud, thus replicating the theme of the painting that the artist had brought with him.

Keywords: Breton; Dali; Death instinct; Envy; Sigmund Freud; Lacan; Mirror phase; Mirror transference; Narcissism; Paranoia; Surrealism

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How to cite this article:

John J. Hartman. Salvador Dali Meets Sigmund Freud: Paranoia, Narcissism, Snails. American Journal of Psychiatric Research and Reviews, 2020; 3:25



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Website: <https://escipub.com/>

Salvador Dali Meets Sigmund Freud: Paranoia, Narcissism, Snails¹

On July 19, 1938, the artist Salvador Dali met with Sigmund Freud at the latter's temporary home at 39 Elsworthy Road in Primrose Hill in London. Freud had been suffering with intra-oral cancer for 16 years and had escaped the Nazi regime's house arrest with his family in Vienna only the month before. The meeting caused Freud to favorably alter his opinion of Surrealism and revealed an important aspect of his artistic sensibility. Dali was becoming well known and successful. The meeting with Freud provided him with an opportunity to assert his independence from the Surrealist movement and to chart an independent philosophical and artistic course. Dali brought his painting *Metamorphosis of Narcissus* (1937) and an accompanying poem by the same title. He also brought a copy of his 1933 treatise on paranoia published in the Surrealist magazine, *Minotaure*, to discuss. The artist spent most of the meeting sketching Freud and later turned the sketches into a lithograph, *Portrait of Sigmund Freud* (1938). The purpose of this paper is to describe the meeting from the accounts of the participants and to assess the significance of the meeting for Dali and for Freud in terms of their respective aesthetic philosophies. Therefore, the meeting will be discussed in detail to analyze how the different elements of it reveal the enormity of Freud's influence on Dali's life and art. The article proposes a speculative analysis of the meeting as a complex personal emotional experience for the artist. Before moving to an analysis of the meeting, I will first briefly discuss Freud's influence on the Surrealism movement.

Freud and Surrealism

Freud was a major influence on the Surrealist Movement that flourished between the world wars (Ades, 1974; Davis, 1973; Esman, 2011; Kaplan, 1989; Rose, 1983). Its founder, André Breton, had worked as a psychiatric aid in a military hospital during World War I and had

become familiar with Freud's work, particularly *The Interpretation of Dreams* (Freud, 1900; Davis, 1973). Originally an adherent to Dadaism, Breton based Surrealism on the Freudian unconscious in a radical critique of a society that suppresses and represses mankind's irrational nature. Two principles of Surrealism, symbolism and automatism, owe a good deal to Freud's understanding of dreams and to their interpretation (Ades, 1974). Automatic writing as employed by Surrealists was thought to be analogous to the free association method of understanding dreams. As Freud's work was translated into French, Surrealism grew as an artistic and political movement in the 1920's (Jeffett, 2010; Lomas, 2000).

Although Surrealism and psychoanalysis can be seen to have commonalities (Esman, 2011), Freud did not have much interest in nor respect for the Surrealists. Though he likely did not understand it very well, it is also known that he did not have much tolerance for modern art (Rose, 1983). In a letter he wrote to Breton on December 26, 1932, he expressed the following:

And now a confession which you must accept with tolerance! Although I receive so much evidence of the interest which you and your friends show toward my research, for myself I am not in the position to explain what Surrealism is and what it is after. It could be that I am not in any way made to understand it, I am at such a distant position from art (quoted in Davis, 1973, p.131). Breton was hurt and disappointed by Freud's responses to him, including a visit to Vienna that did not go well. Their correspondence reveals some of their conversations about Breton's criticisms of Freud in his 1932 *Les vases communicants* [*Communicating Vessels*] (Davis, 1973). Freud's communications with Breton are relevant to the context for his later meeting with Salvador Dali. By 1938, Dali had become a leading Surrealist but was having his own misgivings about the Surrealist movement and André Breton. Dali and Breton were difficult personalities

¹ I would like to thank the staff of the Salvador Dali Museum in St. Petersburg, Florida for Assistance in the

preparation of this manuscript, especially Shaina Buckles.

and often rubbed each other the wrong way. Moreover, Dali did not share many of Breton's political opinions, particularly his support for the French Communist Party. Dali also was looking for his own artistic philosophy and was beginning to find Surrealism confining (Finkelstein, 1996; Gibson, 1997). This is the larger setting within which Dali set out to meet Freud.

Freud and Dali: The meeting in detail **Arranging the meeting**

The meeting between Dali and Freud only occurred after three previous failed attempts by the artist. He expressed his frustration with travelling three times to Vienna for the same purpose, doing the same things:

My three voyages to Vienna were exactly like three drops of water which lacked the reflections to make them glitter... In the morning I went to see the Vermeer in the Czernin Collection, and in the afternoon, I did *not* go to visit Freud because I invariably learned he was out of town for reasons of health. I remember with a gentle melancholy spending those afternoons walking haphazardly along the streets of Austria's ancient capital. The chocolate tart, which I would hurriedly eat between short intervals of going from one antiquary to another, had a slightly bitter taste resulting from the antiquities I saw and accentuated by the mockery of the meeting which never took place. In the evening I held long and exhaustive imaginary conversations with Freud; he even came home with me once and stayed all night clinging to the curtains of my room in the Hotel Sacher (Dali, 1942, p. 23).

Not meeting with Freud seems to have left Dali feeling not just disappointed but bitter and mocked. After learning of Freud's escape from

the Nazis, he contacted a mutual acquaintance, Stefan Zweig, to try to arrange a meeting in London.² At the time, Freud was settling into his temporary quarters in London, ill and adjusting to his exile from Vienna. He was not at all inclined to receive visitors under these circumstances (Edmundson, 2007). Zweig wrote him three impassioned notes to try to convince him to meet with Dali. He reminds Freud that his enthusiasm for introducing him to Dali is an exception because of his belief in the artist's genius. He forewarns Freud that his works may seem strange, and also points out how they were influenced by Freud's thought. He says, "For years it has been the desire of this real genius to meet you. He says that he owes to you more in his art than to anybody else" (E. Freud, 1961, pp. 233). He added that the artist would like to make a portrait sketch of Freud at the meeting. The plan was to bring a gramophone to play a recording of a "paranoid-critical" poem by Dali that was meant to accompany the viewing of the painting, but this did not seem to have happened. At the last minute, Dali's wife of four years, Gala, did not attend the meeting and Edward James came in her place.³ Zweig told Freud that James was interested in an analysis with him as well as in writing his biography. Freud finally relented, and the meeting was set.

The Meeting

There have been several accounts of the Dali-Freud meeting in the psychoanalytic and psychiatric literatures (Brok, 2006; Harris, 2005; Romm and Slap, 1983; Rose, 1983). This section explores some of the details and the implications of the meeting in depth, emphasizing its impact on Dali's artistic philosophy and the direction of

² Born in Vienna, Stefan Zweig was a Jewish novelist, playwright, journalist, and biographer who anticipated the consequences of Nazism and settled in London in 1934. He became a popular writer between the world wars and credited Freud and psychoanalysis with a positive influence on his life and his writing. His correspondence with Freud offers the most reliable account of the meeting with Dali.

³ British poet, sculptor and passionate patron of the arts, Edward James was only 30 at the time of the meeting. Promoter of the Surrealist movement, he sponsored Dali and the Surrealist magazine *Minotaure*. James was the first owner of *Metamorphosis of Narcissus*. Married and divorced, James was thought to be bi-sexual and possibly in love with Dali (Gibson, 1997).

his artistic career. The meeting also provides a glimpse into Freud's aesthetics as well as the basis for his psychoanalytic approach to art.

At the time of the meeting, Freud had only recently come to London, having been rescued from house arrest by the Nazis through the efforts of Marie Bonaparte, Ernest Jones, William Bullitt, and others including several governments (Edmundson, 2007; Schur, 1972). He was finishing *An Outline of Psycho-Analysis* (1940[1938]) and his controversial *Moses and Monotheism* (1939 [1934-1938]). He was also feeling the effects of his 16-year battle with carcinoma of the palate that necessitated dozens of surgeries. The cancer was undoubtedly caused by his twenty-cigars-a-day habit that hardly abated during his illness. He was often in a good deal of pain and had trouble speaking because of difficulties with a prosthesis he wore to replace surgically-removed sections of his palate and jaw. He also suffered from a degree of hearing loss in his right ear due to the procedures (Romm, 1983).

The meeting with Dali was a diversion for Freud, welcome or not. He spoke mainly with James with occasional asides to Zweig. He did not speak directly with Dali although he could have done so in French. Dali sketched him for most of the meeting. Toward the end of the meeting Dali became more insistent that Freud take and read his article on paranoia that appeared in the first issue in *Minotaure*. As Dali became more and more animated, Freud declared to James: "That boy looks like a fanatic. Small wonder they have civil war in Spain if they look like that" (quoted in Gibson, 1997, p, 24). Dali took this remark as a supreme compliment.

The meeting is also noteworthy for Freud's commentary on the painting *Metamorphosis of Narcissus* (1937). The following day Freud wrote a letter to Zweig in which he expresses admiration for the artist and allowed that he had changed his mind about his previous negative opinion of the Surrealists. Acknowledging that they see him as a sort of "patron saint," he recants his earlier opinion that they were "cranks" and says of Dali, "The young Spaniard, however with his candid,

fanatical eyes and his undeniable technical mastery, has made me reconsider my opinion. It would in fact be very interesting to investigate analytically how a picture like this came to be painted. From the critical point of view it could still be maintained that the notion of art defies expansion as long as the quantitative portion of unconscious material and pre-conscious treatment does not remain within definite limits" (E. Freud, 1961, pp. 448-449).

Freud saw in Dali's work confirmation of some of his own ideas; he had always looked to artists and writers for independent corroboration for his discoveries gathered from clinical work with patients. As for Dali, the aim was rather different. His effort was to portray his unconscious deliberately in his art with the added aims of celebrating psychosexual regression and perversion and privileging the pleasure principle over the reality principle (Finkelstein, 1996). Freud had always privileged the voice of reason over the pleasure principle.

Implications for Freud

Because Freud saw poets, fiction writers, and artists as having a special insight into the unconscious and looked to their work for confirmation of his own "scientific" findings from his work with patients in psychoanalysis, the meeting with Dali might have provided this opportunity. However, in this case it provided an opportunity to clarify his own view of aesthetics even if they represent one of his only positive opinions about modern art (Gombrich, 1966; Spector, 1974). In his paper, "Creative Writers and Day-dreaming" (1908), for example, Freud expressed his view of aesthetics in this way:

The writer softens the character of his egoistic day-dreams by altering it and disguising it, and he bribes us by the purely formal – that is, aesthetic – yield of pleasure which he offers us in the presentation of his phantasies. We give the name of an *incentive bonus*, or a *fore-pleasure*, to a yield of pleasure, such as this, which is offered to us as to make possible the release of still greater pleasure arising from deeper psychical sources. In my opinion, all the aesthetic pleasure which a creative writer affords us has

the character of a fore-pleasure of this kind, and our actual enjoyment of an imaginative work proceeds from a liberation of tension in our minds (p.153).

This model would fit the artist as well as the creative writer and is consistent with Freud's more succinct statement to Zweig about Dali's work. Freud reiterated his view of creative art in his "An Autobiographical Study" (1925) where he emphasized that the technical methods that the artist employed were like the dream-work and reiterated the role of fore-pleasure in the emotional appeal of art.

Art historian Ernst Gombrich (1966) asserts that Freud's few words on Dali represent his "most revealing utterance" on his attitude toward art. Here he is referring both to Freud's appraisal of Dali's "technical mastery" as well as to the idea of a proper proportion between unconscious material and preconscious elaboration being kept within certain limits. Before seeing Dali's work, Freud had asserted that both Expressionism and Surrealism violated these proportions and should be considered "non-art." Gombrich goes on to argue that Freud's theory of successful art was based on the model he set forth in his book on jokes and that he used the same model to evaluate art (Freud, 1905).⁴ Gombrich concludes that Freud saw no artistic value in the primary process as such. The value of art, to him, lay in the mastery of the medium as well as its eventual adjustment to reality. The code generates the message of art and allows for the release of pleasure in the form of "fore-pleasure." Art succeeds to the extent that the artist can control the primary process through "regression in the service of the ego" (Kris, 1952) as well as sublimation. Freud was uncertain whether Dali's painting fulfilled the criteria of his aesthetic and came to no final conclusion.

⁴ In this work Freud asserted that the pleasure derived from a successful joke was based on its form and less so on its unconscious primary process content. As in puns, the pleasure derived from a joke comes from the fact that an unconscious impulse is allowed into consciousness

In his monograph on Freud's aesthetic philosophy, art historian Jack J. Spector (1974) also took up Freud's letter to Zweig arguing that Freud's formula regarding the balance of unconscious, preconscious and conscious elaboration was akin to Gustave Fechner's "scientific" aesthetics. Fechner (1801-1887) was one of the founders of experimental psychology and psychophysics in particular. However, his interest in aesthetics seems to have influenced Freud's views on art. Freud in fact quotes Fechner's "principle of aesthetic assistance" (p. 135) as the basis of his own speculations about the pleasure derived from jokes. Freud's idea of balance of conscious and unconscious forces, Spector sees as a blend of Freud's neoclassic tastes with its emphasis on order and 'beauty' and romanticism's emphasis on originality and free expression. Spector goes on to argue that Freud's aesthetic was like his view of the psychic apparatus with the ego in charge, regulating compromise and moderation. Unlike Gombrich, Spector doubted whether Freud's psychological formula made much of a contribution to a general theory of aesthetics beyond his own personal tastes and biases (pp. 143-145).

Implications for Dali

Meeting Freud was one of the highlights of Salvador Dali's life. The artist used Freud's positive reaction to his painting and his impression of him as a fanatic to further his artistic agenda as well as his personal mythology. Dali had won a kind of competition with Breton whose own meeting with Freud had not gone so well. Further Dali used Freud's remarks about his painting to indicate that Surrealism's agenda had hit a dead end. In his 1942 autobiography Dali described his visit to Freud as having shown him how the latter's death would signal the end of an old Europe. He repeats the words Freud said to him,

by virtue of a creative form that allows the usually unacceptable thought to become temporarily acceptable. A new structure is created that leads to pleasure and laughter.

declaring: "He said to me, 'In classic paintings I look for the sub-conscious – in a surrealist painting, for the conscious.' This was the pronouncement of a death sentence on surrealism as a doctrine, as a sect, as an 'ism'" (Dali, 1942, p. 397). The artist therefore used Freud's considerable authority to help complete his break with the Surrealist agenda, philosophy, and movement (Finkelstein, 1996). Dali was determined to become "classical" emulating his artist heroes from the past like Raphael, Velasquez, and Da Vinci (Finkelstein, 1996; Lomas, 2006).

He also seemed to take quite seriously some casual remarks about sublimation that Freud made to James during the meeting. Apparently, Freud referred to this concept several times in the context of discussing Moses. Whether Freud was talking about Moses the man or whether he was referring to Michelangelo's sculpture of Moses (Freud, 1914a) is not clear. In any case Dali came away from the meeting determined to give up his quest for the pleasures of psychosexual regression in his future aesthetic. At the conclusion of his autobiography he writes:

At the moment [the meeting] Freud was occupying himself mainly with "religious phenomenon and Moses." And I remember with what fervor he uttered the word "sublimation" on several occasions. "Moses is flesh of sublimation." The individual sciences of our epoch have become specialized in these three eternal vital constants – the sexual instinct, the sense of death, and the space-time anguish. After their analysis, after the experimental speculation, it becomes necessary to sublimate them. The sexual instinct must be sublimated in esthetics; the sense of death in love; and the space-time anguish in metaphysics and religion (Dali, 1942, p. 398).

As Finkelstein (1996) documents in great detail, the *Metamorphosis of Narcissus* (1937) and the meeting with Freud marked a turning point in Dali's work and aesthetic philosophy. Dali's artistic work during World War II and after did reflect this turn away from Freudian-inspired Surrealism and resulted in what the artist eventually called Nuclear Mysticism (Ades and Taylor, 2005).

The irony in this turnabout is that while Dali seems to have taken quite seriously Freud's words about sublimation and the proper balance between conscious and unconscious in art, the artist turned away from Freud and psychoanalysis to Einstein, Heisenberg, and nuclear physics for the inspiration for his new aesthetic (Ades and Taylor, 2005). For both Dali and Freud the meeting seems to have had a significant effect on their views of art but in vastly different ways and for very different reasons. Within the larger context of the meeting, three important elements emerge, to which I turn now: the paranoia article, the Narcissus painting, and the sketches of Freud's head as a snail.

Paranoia

Dali came to this long-anticipated meeting with Freud a copy of the first issue of the Surrealist journal *Minotaure* in which his article on paranoia appeared (Dali, 1933) back-to-back with another by the young psychiatrist, Jacques Lacan (Lacan, 1933). He wished to discuss paranoia with Freud much as he had with Lacan several years before (Constantinidou, 2005; Dali, 1942; Gibson, 1997).

Dali's article, "Paranoiac-Critical Interpretation of the Obsessive Image of 'Millet's *Angelus*,'" (Dali, 1933) was intended as an introduction to a monograph on Dali's interpretation of the famous *Angelus* painting and a full demonstration of his paranoid-critical method of arriving at such interpretations. He wrote this book in the 1930's but lost it during World War II. It was found after the war and published in 1963 (Dali, 1963). The monograph sought to explain the popularity of Millet's painting throughout Europe. Using the paranoid-critical method, Dali sought to provide evidence that the underlying meaning of the depiction of pious peasants at prayer at dusk involved latent predatory sexual themes as well as the mourning of the couple's child. Dali modeled his book after Freud's paper on Leonardo da Vinci (Finkelstein, 1996; Freud, 1910) and his methodology was meant to be an analogy to Freud's free association method, but was very different from it at the same time (Finkelstein, 1996; Lomas, 2006).

In this article, Dali asserts that the purpose of the paranoid-critical method is no less than the “total discrediting of the world of reality.” The work itself states that it was written from the point of view of Surrealism, but it also subtly undermines of the concept of automatism that was the mainstay of Surrealist methodology as promoted by Breton (Finkelstein, 1996). It is also important to note that Dali and Lacan (1933) apparently were in agreement that the psychiatric view of paranoia was in need of revision. The artist cited Lacan’s medical dissertation, “On Paranoiac Psychosis and its Relations with the Personality” (Lacan, 1932) as a “perfect account” of the paranoid phenomenon. French psychiatry at that time regarded paranoia as due to a paranoid constitution. Lacan’s dissertation disputed that claim and offered several case studies as evidence.

Dali promised to demonstrate in his monograph that the paranoid individual --or anyone who could induce a paranoid delirious state--was in possession of a potentially revealing view of the world. This “paranoia” could be applied to various aspects of life, including art, to great advantage. All that was needed was “a systemization in the delirious content.” He also knew well Freud’s work on paranoia and its link to repressed unconscious homosexuality (Freud, 1911), including his paper on Leonardo da Vinci that speculated about how repressed homosexuality played a crucial role in the Renaissance artist’s life (Freud, 1910). Freud’s repressed homosexual theory of paranoia is not mentioned, however, in any of Dali’s writings about paranoia. Gibson (1997) attributes this to Dali’s disavowal of his own homosexual conflicts.

Dali used his own life to develop his work on paranoia; he was no stranger to paranoia, and was fearful that he was afflicted with it. His grandfather, Gal Josep Salvador Dali, was thought to have suffered from paranoia and killed himself by jumping off the roof of a building at age 36. Dali attributed his own psychological symptoms as a young man to paranoia (Gibson, 1997). In addition, Dali used his observations of a woman he’d known since childhood, Lidia Sabá, to

further his views on paranoia (Ades and Taylor, 2005). He argued that her idea that the writer Eugenio d’Ors was communicating his love for her through newspaper articles that she saw as secret communications, gathering coincidences, plays on words, and other messages to create an elaborate system of belief that to Dali constituted a “systematic interpretive structure” (Dali, 1942; Finkelstein, 1996; Gibson, 1997).

Had Freud and Dali discussed the artist’s paper on paranoia they would have found many disagreements. Dali’s agenda was to completely discredit the world of reality and to privilege the pleasure principle over the reality principle. While Dali was visiting Freud as a ‘faithful’ and ‘grateful’ disciple, his artistic and philosophical agenda radically undermined some of the basic foundations of Freud’s work. The Surrealists, and Dali in particular, had little use for psychoanalysis as a treatment. Their goal was to harness the unconscious for art and to promote the pleasure principle to undermine a corrupt and repressive society that was depriving mankind of its true nature (Finkelstein, 1996). Dali’s ostensible reason for not entering psychoanalytic treatment was that it might harm his art (Gibson, 1997). Had Dali explained the methodology of his paranoid-criticism with its emphasis on coincidence, chance, arbitrary symbolism, and the like, Freud would certainly have been confirmed in his negative opinion of the Surrealists.

Dali’s insistence that Freud read his paranoia treatise may have been based on the artist’s feeling that he had made a significant contribution to the understanding of paranoia building on Freud’s conceptualization in the Schreber paper (Freud, 1911). Lacan and Dali found that they shared many of the same views on paranoia, and Dali may have been hoping for a similar welcome from Freud. Freud had written about the role of the unconscious in perception and its representation in paranoia. Dali had a similar interest in perception and representation in his art. This might have been a fertile common area of interest outside of Dali’s more radical critique of social “reality.”

Another area of common interest that they might

have discussed was interpretation and paranoid thought. Dali had asserted in his 1933 paper that paranoid ideation did not need to be interpreted as it was already an interpretation of reality. Freud had alluded to such an idea in the Schreber paper and Lacan had argued this point in his dissertation (1932). Constantinidou (2005) has argued that Lacan and Dali picked up where Freud had left off and that the subject of a paranoid interpretation of reality presaged issues relevant to structural linguistics. Dali, however, had to be content with the fact that Freud considered him to be a fanatic and not necessarily a contributor to his psychoanalytic science.

Metamorphosis of Narcissus (1937)

While Freud wrote to Zweig that it would be useful to explore psychoanalytically how Dali's painting came to be created, no psychoanalyst has yet attempted to do so. However, there have been several excellent analyses of this painting by art historians who have informed themselves deeply about Freudian psychoanalysis and its effect on Dali's art (Ades, and Taylor, 2005; Finkelstein, 1996; Gibson, 1997; Jeffett, 2010; Lomas, 1999, 2000). Dali has written that the discovery of Freud's work, especially *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) while he was in art school was one of the most important influences on his art and his personal life (Dali, 1942).

Dali intended the poem and the painting to be presented together. The painting was produced to illustrate the poem. The theme may have been suggested by the 1931 publication of Ovid's *Des Métamorphoses* edited by Albert Skira, the editor of the *Minotaure* (Gibson, 1997). Dali began the painting after a trip to the Austrian Alps with James and Gala at a time when snow was melting in the valleys and the narcissi were beginning to bloom. The art historians agree that the poem offers the painting greater meaning (see especially Finkelstein, 1996 and Lomas, 2010). The prologue, for example, reads:

First Port-Lligat Fisherman -- What's wrong with that chap,

Glaring at himself all day in his looking glass?

Second Fisherman – If you really want to know (lowering his voice) he has a bulb in his head.

'A bulb in the head', in Catalan, corresponds exactly with the

psycho-analytic notion of a 'complex'.

If a man has a bulb in his head, it might break into flower at

any moment, Narcissus! (Dali, 1937).

These lines plausibly suggest that the painting is autobiographical-- that the figure of Narcissus represents the artist and his narcissism (Ades and Taylor, 2005; Finkelstein, 1996; Gibson, 1997; and Lomas, 1999, 2000). Lomas (1999, 2000) has gone so far as to conclude that the poem and painting represent an account of Dali's self-analysis and self-cure.

The painting is thought to be constructed, as many of Dali's works, in the manner of a film (Jeffett, 2010). The painting depicts movement from the top to the bottom like the melting snow to the pool at the bottom of the painting. The theme of transformation is illustrated as snow is transformed into water, winter is transformed into spring, and Narcissus is transformed into a flower. Following the poem, the narrative of the painting begins in the upper left working downward to the Narcissus figure in the left foreground. Then attention shifts from the Narcissus figure to the double image of the hand holding an egg out of which springs a narcissus flower. When the painting and poem were first displayed in a gallery, Dali

provided a set of instructions about how the painting was to be viewed. The artist recommended that the viewer gaze at the painting with "distracted fixity" (quoted in Lomas, 2000, p. 174) at which point the image of Narcissus merges with surrounding rocks and disappears. The viewer's attention is then drawn to the doubled image of the hand holding the narcissus egg. Lomas believes that Dali's intent was to induce in the viewer a replica of the experience of Narcissus in both believing in an illusion and losing his sense of self. In this way, the viewer is meant to have a "narcissistic experience" (Lomas, 2000, p. 174).

The painting “begins” with the “god of the snow” “melting with desire,” “annihilating himself loudly among the excremental cries of minerals.” The mountainous background may have been inspired by the trip to the Austrian Alps, but the landscape is reminiscent of Cape Creus near Dali’s home and the spot where he first wooed his wife. Below the snow god is a statue of a youth on a red pedestal. In the center background is “the heterosexual group” comprised of men and women of various ethnicities. The poem makes it clear that Narcissus is isolated from this group. It may be that the youth on the pedestal was meant to represent Narcissus’ youthful homosexuality, and that the mature Narcissus distances himself from both the youth and the heterosexual group. The art historians have speculated that the heterosexual group was meant to portray the many suitors of Narcissus in the myth who were spurned by the solitary youth in love with his own image (Finkelstein, 1996; Lomas, 1999, 2000).

The figure of Narcissus in the painting is naked with his head on his knee gazing into the reflective water of a still pond. Gibson (1997) characterizes the youth as portraying shame with his head bowed and partially hidden. This is consistent with Gibson’s view of Dali as full of shame. In the original myth Narcissus was contemplating suicide. As mentioned the image of Narcissus can be viewed as merging into the surrounding rocks and disappearing. In the poem Dali writes:

Narcissus annihilates himself in the cosmic vertigo

In the deepest depths of which
Sings

The cold and dionysiac siren of his own image.

The body of Narcissus flows out and is lost
In the abyss of his reflection (Dali, 1937).

The image’s double is the hand which appears to be fossilized, crawling with ants, and holding an egg out which emerges a narcissus flower. Dali writes of the hand that it is “insensate,” “terrible,” “excrement-eating,” and “mortal.” The poem concludes:

When the head slits
When that head splits
When that head bursts
It will be the flower,
The new narcissus,
Gala – my narcissus. (Dali, 1937).

These lines make it clear once again that the painting and poem are an autobiographical account of the artist’s own metamorphoses in both his artistic and personal life.

One element that appears in the painting and not the poem is the greyhound eating a piece of raw meat that appears in the lower right foreground. This element was added to the painting later and its meaning is not clear. Dali wrote to James about the addition of the dog but did not explain its significance.

Art historians agree that the painting and poem represent a wishful personal mythological narrative of Dali’s life before and after he met his wife, Gala. Dali’s analysis of his life can be summarized as a young man beset by conflicts around sexuality, which led him to avoid the intimacy of both men and women to the point of being depressed and symptomatic. Masturbation was an outlet but it made him ashamed and hopeless. After meeting Gala he was transformed from narcissism and homosexuality to object love. The painting depicts a personal transformation that changed the course of the artist’s life.

Finkelstein (1996) argues that in addition to the personal transformation that Dali’s painting alludes to, there is also a transformation in his aesthetic philosophy. Dali sought to become “classical.” He argues that this painting allows Dali to signal a move away from valorizing regression in the form of polymorphous perverse sexuality to a new aesthetic that might ensure his immortality in art. In this endeavor, Gala was to continue to play a crucial role. In Finkelstein’s view “Gala constantly guards Dali from excessively giving in to these regressive tendencies or helps him to harness them. It might, however, also imply his perception of an overall change of direction [in] his theoretical stance vis-à-vis Surrealism, as well as one affecting his whole creative activity, which ... will lead to a new aesthetic

stance” (p. 234). Indeed, after the meeting with Freud Dali broke with Surrealism and eventually began to paint under his new “classic” Nuclear Mysticism philosophy (Ades and Taylor, 2005). It is also agreed upon by art historians that the painting and poem were produced with Freud’s work on narcissism very much in mind. Dali was familiar with the psychoanalyst’s papers on Leonardo (1910) and on narcissism (1914b). Lomas (2000), for example, points out that Dali learned that regression to primary narcissism, symbolized by Narcissus asleep in a fetal position, can lead to the loss of self. The painting is believed to portray Freud’s libidinal theory of developmental progression from primary narcissism, to autoerotism and secondary narcissism, to object love. Furthermore, Gibson (1996) points out that Dali was well aware of Freud’s connection between narcissism and homosexuality in the psychoanalyst’s study of Leonardo. While the painting suggests that Narcissus-Dali was isolated from both male and female suitors and preferring the company of his own reflection, the real-life Dali struggled with his homosexual impulses particularly when it came to his friendship with the poet Federico García Lorca (Gibson, 1997). In the poem Dali quotes lines from a Lorca poem involving the “wharves of blood.” James believed that Dali was more homosexual than heterosexual and that Gala had not really “cured” the artist of his homosexuality (Gibson, 1997). Further, both Lomas and Finkelstein assert that the painting portrays Freud’s controversial death instinct. Lomas (1999, 2000), for example, asserts that the emotion of disgust is a “presentation” of the death drive. The arousal of disgust was certainly an important part of Dali’s art. Freud is reported to have asked about the ants crawling on the hand in the painting. This image was prominent in Dali’s 1929 film *Un Chien andalou* in which a hand crawling with ants was to evoke disgust in the viewer. The death drive can also be construed in the hand being fossilized or transformed into rock. The image of Narcissus fading into the surrounding rocks can be construed in the same way – the return of something living to an inorganic state. There is no doubt

that the painting is about death and rebirth and the argument that the ideas behind it were influenced by Freud’s death instinct concept seem plausible.

Death was on his mind when Dali painted his Narcissus painting. His close friend, René Crevel, had committed suicide in 1935. A communist, Crevel had joined the Surrealist movement only to be expelled from it for his homosexuality. He was subsequently re-admitted but eventually despaired of being able to reconcile the Surrealists with communism. Federico García Lorca was assassinated in 1936 by Fascist forces during the Spanish Civil War. His homosexuality and Republican views were cited at the time as reasons for his murder. Ovid’s myth served Dali’s purposes very well as the themes of suicide, loss of self, death and rebirth resonated in the artist’s own life experience.

There are some elements in Dali’s painting that conformed to Freud’s formula for successful art and may suggest that Dali came closer to Freud’s artistic sensibility than the psychoanalyst may have thought possible for a modern artist. For example, Dali’s doubling of the image of Narcissus can be thought of as a visual equivalent of a pun, a representation with a double meaning. In this case the form or the code dominates the primary process content. The portrayal of narcissism is set in the cultural context of an ancient myth as well as in the context of an artistic tradition. Dali’s Narcissus pays homage to Caravaggio’s *Narcissus* (c1600) and thus inscribes the painting within a known art historical context. (Ades and Taylor, 2005; Lomas, 1999, 2000). This fulfills one of the art historian Gombrich’s criteria for the artist’s control of unconscious material – the conscious control of historical and cultural context. One can look at the painting as a series of visual puns intended to reveal as well as master a number of different issues having to do with narcissism in general as well as likely having relevance to the artist’s own personal history.

Further, the painting adds to a psychoanalytic understanding of narcissism. Freud had suggested a linkage between narcissism and

paranoia in the Schreber case (1911) but never fully spelled out this linkage. Meissner (1978) has detailed this relationship more explicitly in his monograph on paranoia. In *Metamorphosis of Narcissus*, Dali was attempting to represent this linkage pictorially. Freud also never spelled out the relationship between his death instinct concept and narcissism. It was not until Rosenfeld's (1971) paper on the aggressive component in narcissism that this connection was suggested in the psychoanalytic literature. Art historians, particularly Lomas (1999, 2000), have argued that Dali's painting suggested that aggression has a strong role in narcissism and that this aggression is connected to the death instinct. It may be that the addition of the dog eating raw meat is meant to convey the role of oral aggression in Narcissus' predicament.

While Dali seems to be following Freud in depicting the transformation from primary narcissism to autoerotism to object love, the painting seems also to presage a view of narcissism in terms of what can be called self and object representational terms. The poem, the painting, and the instructions involving the "narcissistic experience" all emphasize the loss and re-gaining of the sense of self. Recall the line of poetry: "Narcissus annihilates himself in the cosmic vertigo" (Dali 1937). While this viewpoint was alluded to by Freud in his narcissism paper (1914b), it was left for psychoanalysts like Winnicott, Mahler, Kernberg, and Kohut to fully explicate this aspect of narcissism.⁵ Dali seems to have anticipated this shift in psychoanalytic emphasis in his painting and poem.

Art historians are in disagreement about the influence of Lacan's concept of the mirror phase (Lacan, 1949) on Dali's painting of Narcissus. Finkelstein (1996) has argued that because of their shared views of paranoia in the 1930's Dali "may have" been exposed to Lacan's concept of the mirror stage before he painted Narcissus. Lacan presented his mirror stage work at the congress in Marienbad in 1936, in an encyclopedia article in 1938, and in revised form in a

published article in 1949 (Lacan, 1949). Finkelstein also cites Dali's painting *The Angelus of Gala* (1935) that depicts Gala and her mirror image, as evidence of Lacan's influence. In contrast, Lomas (2000) cautions that it is unlikely that Dali knew about Lacan's mirror phase concept in any detail when he painted Narcissus because it was not published in full form until 1949. Jeffett (2010) reviewed the publication history of Lacan's mirror stage concept but does not take a firm stand on this issue. In any case, the convergence of their views on mirroring is intriguing. Another psychoanalytic influence on Dali's rendering of Narcissus in addition to Freud and Lacan is surely Otto Rank's *The Double* (1914) [1925]. Rank reviewed literary and anthropological references to reflections, shadows, souls, and doubles. In many of these instances the double was associated with the power to steal life away. Rank's theoretical contribution centered on narcissism and the representation of the self or aspects of the self. Written in 1914, *The Double* did not use the language of self and self-representation but was surely a precursor of the self and object concepts that were alluded to in Freud's 1914 paper. Finkelstein (1983) discusses Dali's use of the double image in sets of paintings in the 1930's including *Metamorphosis of Narcissus* (1937). He makes the point that the double images make the most artistic impact when they are painted in the context of a philosophical position. The Narcissus was painted under the influence of the paranoid-critical methodology and the double images meant to illustrate the subjectivity of reality. His reading of Rank was plausibly an important influence.

Dali's interest in doubles and double images had a personal dimension as well. The artist was born nine months after his brother died of "gastro-enteritic cold" at twenty-one months. Dali claims to have been named after this brother, Salvador, although their full names were different (----, 2008). Dali

described himself in terms that has come to be known as the replacement child syndrome

⁵ Tutter (2014) makes a very similar point in her paper

on the painter Poussin renderings of the Narcissus theme.

(Sabbadini, 1988). In his autobiography, for example, he wrote, "[My brother's] death plunged my father and mother into the depths of despair; they found consolation only upon my arrival into the world. My brother and I resembled each other like two drops of water but we had different reflections" (Dali, 1942, p. 2). As with the metaphor he used in describing the unsuccessful Freud visits, Dali's description of his likeness to his brother places the relationship in the context of reflection, the double, and narcissism.

The poem makes clear that the transformation of Narcissus/Dali involves the artist's wife: "Gala - my Narcissus!" (Dali, 1937). While this transformation is meant to represent the finding of mature object love, the triumph of Eros over Thanatos, it seems more likely that Gala serves as an externalization of his own grandiose self (Lomas, 2000). In this way she serves as a narcissistic object, a double or a reflection of the artist. There was a point in Dali's career when he began signing his paintings Dali-Gala, a representation of this narcissistic love (Gibson, 1997).

This painting was perhaps created under the influence of Freud's theory of narcissism. It moreover extended Freud's work into more specific representations of the death instinct, self-representation, doubles, and aggression in narcissism. It may have been influenced by Rank and possibly Lacan, and it may have anticipated the later psychoanalytic work.

Freud's head as a snail

The third aspect of the meeting discussed here is the outcome of the sketches of Freud that Dali spent most of the meeting making. These served as the basis for a portrait that he completed later that year, *Portrait of Freud* (1938), now hanging in the Freud Museum in London. Bearing a great likeness to sketches that Leonardo da Vinci did in preparation for his paintings, Dali may well have been identified with Leonardo in making them. His emulation of Leonardo was perhaps part of Dali's admission that he wanted to impress Freud as a "dandy of 'universal intellectualism'" (Dali, 1942, p. 24).

Dali recalled in his autobiography the origins of how his portrait of Freud as a snail came about.

He mentions how he had been eating snails in the south of France when he saw a photograph of Freud in the newspaper, reporting on his exile. He claims that, "I had just that instant discovered the morphological secret of Freud! Freud's cranium is a snail! His brain is in the form of a spiral – to be extracted with a needle! This discovery strongly influenced the portrait drawing which I later made from life, a year before his death" (Dali, 1942, p. 23).

Two psychoanalytic papers discuss Dali's 1938 Freud portrait. Romm and Slap (1983) commented on it along with three other portraits of the psychoanalyst that Dali completed later. They interpret these works as depicting Freud as angry and distant: "[T]he portrait can be seen as a hostile gesture. Dali is angry at Freud for his previous rejections and projects that anger onto the face of Freud in the picture. Furthermore, the snail, an inconsiderable creature tucked into its protective shell, is perceived as insignificant for not having emerged from his shell to pay homage to Dali" (Romm and Slap, 1983, pp. 343-344). They place Dali's hostility to Freud in the context of the artist's relationship with his father and argue that because of similarities between Freud and the elder Dali, that the young artist displaced his hostilities toward his father onto Freud.

Brok's (2006) somewhat different interpretation proposed that Freud was an unwitting twin to Dali's love/hate wish for a double. He bases this on the notion of Dali as a replacement child for his dead brother. Brok concludes: "I am proposing that the sketch is a condensed version of Dali's deceased brother, Dali's deep sense of being alive and dead, Dali's unwanted experience of his own eventual deceased self, and the soon-to-be-deceased Freud" (Brok, 2006, p. 21). To these accounts I would add that the construction of the Freud sketch is an example of Dali's paranoid-critical methodology and the ambivalence noted in the portraits can also be understood in a framework of narcissism.

Dali's account of how he came to conceive of Freud's skull as a snail is not only a good example of his paranoid critical methodology; it also

provides evidence that he was still heavily influenced by this methodology in 1938. The coincidence that the artist was eating snails when he spotted a picture of Freud escaping the Nazis in Paris brings the two experiences together in a new and significant discovery-- Freud's cranium is a snail. This is the essence of Dali's paranoid-critical methodology—a chance event takes on a significance not understood by others. This special significance can be utilized as a source of artistic inspiration as well as to view so-called reality in a new and valid manner.

When Dali was approaching Freud's apartment for the meeting, he noticed a snail had perched itself on a bicycle seat in the courtyard. This second chance occurrence reinforced the original conclusion that snails and Freud went together. This in turn led to Dali's conclusion that he had "unconsciously" sensed Freud's impending death, another insight provided by the paranoid-critical method. Dali, the creative artist and the paranoid individual can thus see truths that others cannot.

Zweig feared that if he showed Freud Dali's sketch, the old man would see its deathly implications, even lying to Dali and telling him that he had showed the sketch to Freud and that he liked it (Dali, 1964). When the artist learned that Freud had not been shown the portrait, he merely took this as further evidence that he had indeed predicted Freud's death.

There seems to be some agreement that there was cruelty involved in the sketch that Dali made of Freud. There are many ways in which he could have portrayed the aging Freud. The fact that Dali explicitly declared that Freud's brain could be extracted with a needle and eaten like a snail can plausibly be viewed as an indication of Dali's animosity toward Freud. Dali had a tendency to appear to be in a relationship while undermining it at the same time. Aggression toward idealized male authority figures

characterized Dali's relationships with other important men, including Breton and Picasso, as well as the Surrealist movement and psychoanalysis in general. While this pattern can be seen in the artist's relationship with his father and has ostensibly competitive elements, I suggest that the pattern can also be conceptualized in terms of envy rather than exclusively in competitive terms. Dali envied Leonardo and sought to emulate him, including in his way of sketching Freud (Lomas, 2006). He also envied Freud and sought to replace psychoanalysis first with the paranoid-critical method and soon after with his philosophical shift to Nuclear Mysticism.

Despite these various interpretations, the symbolism of the snail remains unclear. Finkelstein (1996, p. 390) quotes Freud saying that the snail is a "perfect" female symbol. This would be consistent with the view that Dali's snail image represents a derogation of Freud's masculinity. But there are also other possible determinants of Dali's conception of Freud's head as a snail. For example, Dali was interested in natural morphology, and developed a special interest in the kind of spirals found in snail shells, nautilus shells, pinecones, and hurricanes. In his paintings after the meeting with Freud, he became obsessed with the "golden section", the "golden rectangle", and the "golden spiral." These are aesthetically pleasing forms based on numerical and geometric representations of form. The golden spiral form, for example, is a visual representation of the Fibonacci number sequence where each number after the first two is the sum of the two previous numbers. In his shift to "classical" painting, these mathematical and geometric considerations played a greater role in his aesthetic philosophy and artistic style (Lomas, 2000). Dali's characterization of Freud's skull as a snail shell therefore may represent admiration as well as derogation.⁶

Conclusion: Transference enactment

⁶ It is perhaps also relevant that Dali was also obsessed with the idea of hard and soft forms (Ades and Taylor, 2005; Finkelstein, 1996). The snail represents the

combination of the hard exterior form and the soft inner form. The explanation of this preoccupation is beyond the scope of this paper except to point out that a specific

This article details specific elements of the meeting between Salvador Dali and Sigmund Freud about a year before the latter's death to trace its significance in relation to their own aesthetic theories. Building on this discussion, I would like to offer some speculations about some unconscious implications of Dali's longstanding relationship with Freud. Specifically, I offer the speculation that the meeting involved a complex enactment of narcissistic fantasies involving Dali's conflicts with male authority figures. I propose here that aspects of the meeting recapitulated some of the themes of the painting that Dali brought to show Freud.

Dali likened his previous attempts to meet with Freud to "three drops of water which lacked the reflection to make them glitter" (Dali, 1942, p. 23). The implication of this metaphor is that Dali was looking forward to an experience in which his self-esteem could be enhanced--the glitter--by Freud's reflective presence. This implies a narcissistic experience of mutual grandiosity. Dali's wish to bask in Freud's reflection had been frustrated, leaving the artist with feelings of bitterness. The artist also knew of the meeting that took place between Freud and Breton that had left Breton embittered as well.

Above, I noted that Dali claimed that his initial intention was to impress Freud with his expansive intellectual prowess as both artist and serious scientist of paranoia. Lomas (2006) has demonstrated that Dali consciously emulated and was in competition with Leonardo da Vinci in a number of ways, including in his manner of sketching Freud, who made Leonardo the subject of an extensive biographic analysis (Freud 1910). He characterizes Dali as having a "Leonardo complex" and determined to become "classical" by combining modern science with art as Leonardo had done in his time. Lomas demonstrates in some detail how the sketches of Freud bear an uncanny resemblance to da Vinci's own sketches (pp. 5-6). Lomas concludes that in the meeting with Freud Dali was

demonstrating "a complex set of psychic investments" in Leonardo that included a deliberate and conscious identification with him (p. 6). After the Freud meeting Dali set about to stage his new artistic turn to classicism in a series of paintings that began with *Leda Atomica* (1949), a painting likely inspired by Leonardo's *Leda and the Swan* (1508).

I believe that Dali wished to have his grandiosity as a renaissance artist-scientist reflected back to him in Freud's appreciation of him, just as the psychoanalyst clearly appreciated the genius of Leonardo. Things did not work out quite that way, however. Dali was well aware that Freud's analysis of Leonardo focused on both his homosexuality and his repressed love for his mother—two subjects about which Dali was most conflicted. (Gibson, 1997). As was discussed both the painting and the paranoia article alluded to the theme of homosexuality, following Freud's thinking about the role of homosexual libido in both narcissism and paranoia. In the painting as well as in the meeting, Dali seems to be both unconsciously affirming and disavowing his homosexuality in his behavior with Freud.

Dali had had a long, passionate, but perhaps not physical, relationship with Lorca after his mother died. He also describes a highly sexual attraction to a boy when he was eight years old that is described in graphic detail in *The Secret Life of Salvador Dali* (1942). The disavowal is seen in the narrative of the painting he brought to Freud and in the accompanying poem to the effect that Gala was the cure for his narcissism, his paranoia, and his homosexuality owing to the fact that her love had transformed him from narcissism to object love.

For his part, Freud was not interested in discussing the paper on paranoia. He did, however, affirm that Dali was a fanatic, a technical artistic master, and the reason he had adopted a more favorable impression of surrealism. This was music to Dali's ears, and he treasured these characterizations to the end of his life (Gibson,

sexual symbol does not entirely explain the complexity of the snail image for Dali.

1997). We can understand these interactions as a gratification in which Freud reflects back to Dali what in the artist's mind represents a grandiose conception of himself. The meeting in these respects has the hallmarks of an enactment of a narcissistic mirroring experience described by Lacan (1949) and later by other psychoanalysts. It also parallels the same kind of imagery as the mirroring waters of Narcissus' reflection in the pool depicted in the painting Dali brought to show Freud.

The problem for Dali was that his relationships with men in authority were often fraught with conflict. Dali developed the paranoid-critical method under the banner of Surrealism but was at the same time challenging and subverting Breton's methodology of automatism (Finkelstein, 1996). In like fashion, *Metamorphosis of Narcissus* was painted under the banner of psychoanalysis, but it, too, can be seen as challenging and subverting important aims of psychoanalysis. Dali felt he had no use for psychoanalysis as a treatment for mental ills—Gala was the answer to all of his troubles. No doubt in part inspired by the idea of free association, the paranoid-critical method also involved citing random events as evidence of underlying truth. Dali's goal was the destruction of the sense of reality, and the social structure that purported to support that reality. In addition, Dali at this time privileged regression and the indulgence of (often perverse) pleasure over reason and understanding (Finkelstein, 1996).

As the meeting went on and Dali finished sketching, the artist became increasingly insistent that Freud look at his paranoia paper. He writes in his autobiography that "contrary to my hopes we spoke little but devoured each other with our eyes" (Dali, 1942, p. 75). I suggest that the destructive sadism in this remark is significant. Psychoanalytic conceptualization of narcissism subsequent to Freud's initial major work on the subject (Freud, 1914b) has emphasized the role of primitive aggression and envy in a fuller understanding of narcissism (Kernberg, 1976; Rosenfeld, 1971). Rosenfeld (1971) attempted to relate fusion and defusion of the death instinct

to narcissism. This a strand of theory that Freud never pursued in his later writings on the death instinct. As mentioned above, several art historians feel that Dali's *Narcissus* painting was done with the Freud's concept of the life and death instincts in mind (Finkelstein, 1996; Lomas, 1999, 2000). In this sense Rosenfeld's understanding of narcissism in the context of the death instinct may be consonant with what Dali's painting was attempting to represent pictorially. Rosenfeld asserted that some narcissistic states involve a "violent destructive process" such that the "libidinal self is almost completely absent or lost" (p. 177). He writes that omnipotent narcissism defends against primitive envious destructive wishes. The narcissist believes that everything valuable in external objects is part of him or controlled by him. This I believe accounts for Dali's remark about Freud and himself "devouring each other with their eyes" as well as the characterization of Freud's head as a snail, one of the artist's favorite foods. In the painting, the image of the dog eating raw meat may refer to the destructive aspects of narcissism as well. In Dali's case, identification with and envy of his brother and father, replicated in his ambivalent relationships with Breton, Freud, and others can be distinguished from oedipal conflict although it may be confused with it.

In conclusion, I would like to propose that for Dali the meeting with Freud involved a wish to establish a mutually gratifying mirroring experience that defended against envious and destructive feelings to acquire and control all of Freud's most admirable qualities and achievements. This is similar to Romm and Slap's (1983) observations on the Freud-Dali meeting in which they place the artist's hostility in an Oedipal, father-transference model. I have supplemented this analysis by suggesting that we should add a narcissistic dimension to our understanding of Dali's ambivalent relationship with Freud. Just as Dali wished the viewer of his painting to have a narcissistic experience, I believe the artist experienced this himself with Freud.

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