

FREUD, DALÍ

& THE METAMORPHOSIS OF NARCISSUS



FREUD MUSEUM
LONDON

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Professor Dawn Ades

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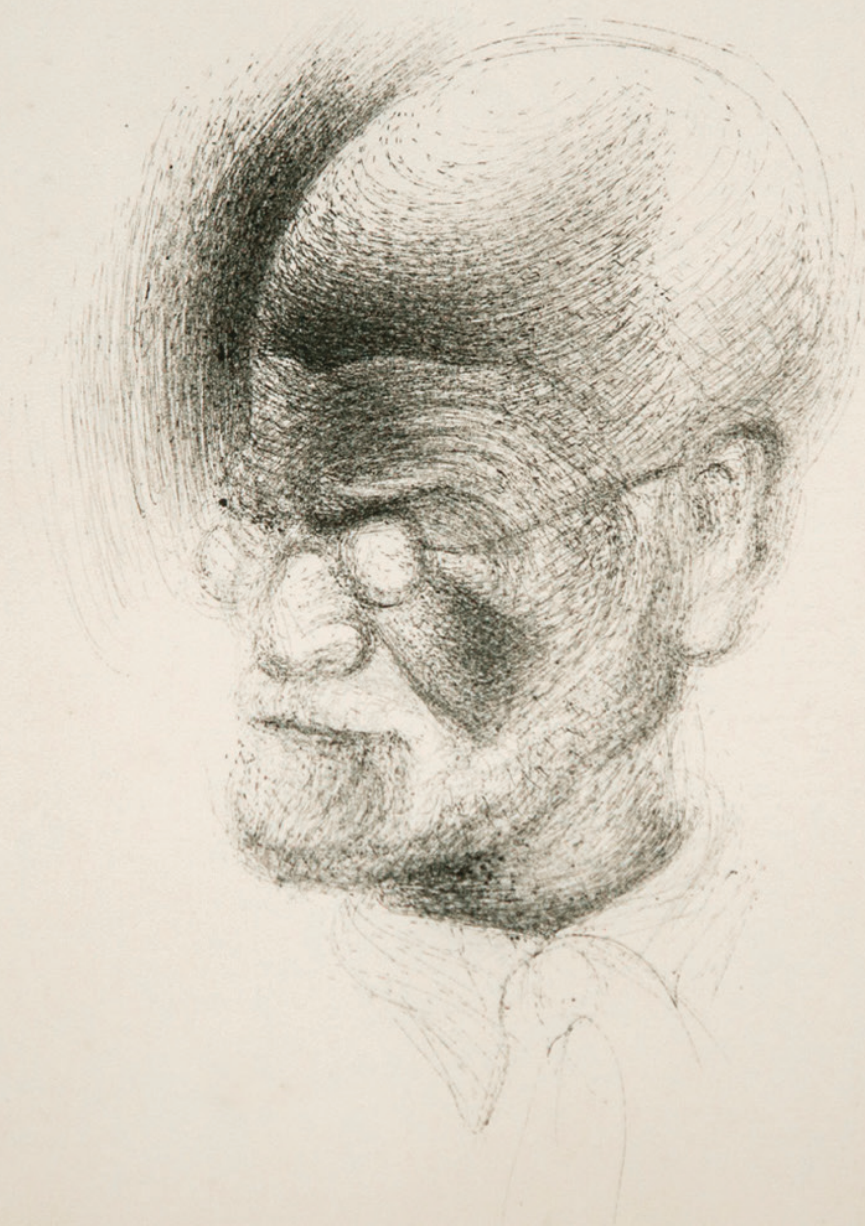
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Foreword

Carol Seigel

A portrait by Salvador Dalí of Sigmund Freud hangs on the first floor landing at 20 Maresfield Gardens, now the Freud Museum London. This portrait of the elderly Freud was the outcome of the only meeting between the famous psychoanalyst and his fervent admirer, the young surrealist painter Salvador Dalí.

It was in London that the Freud family settled in 1938 after fleeing Nazi persecution in Austria. Here is the final home of Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis, and his daughter Anna, pioneer of child analysis. Their legacy is preserved at the Freud Museum London, where the work and influence of Sigmund and Anna Freud is continually examined and explored.

Unusually for a refugee, Sigmund Freud was able to bring his possessions out of Vienna where he had lived and worked nearly all his life. These were reassembled in Freud's new home, a substantial house in leafy North London. Here the elderly Freud was again, until his death in 1939, working in a unique environment of his own making, surrounded by his books, his antiques, and the original psychoanalytic couch.

20 Maresfield Gardens opened as a museum in 1986 and has become a popular London historic house museum and a renowned international centre for research, education and innovative public programmes.

The Freud Museum has also developed an impressive reputation for its imaginative, wide-ranging exhibitions both about psychoanalysis and its history and by contemporary artists engaging with psychoanalytic themes.

Sketch of Sigmund Freud by Salvador Dalí, 1938
© Freud Museum London



Dalí, Freud and the Metamorphosis of Narcissus

Dawn Ades

When Salvador Dalí finally met Freud in London, it was the realisation of a long-held ambition. The visit took place on 19 July 1938¹, only a few weeks after Freud arrived in London with his family as a refugee from Nazi-occupied Vienna. He was 82, but, although frail and in ill health, still alert, writing, and curious about new visitors, if selective about those he received. The meeting was arranged by his friend the writer Stefan Zweig, who explained in preparatory letters to Freud why it was so important: Dalí was, in his opinion, the only genius among contemporary painters, “the only one who will last, fanatical defender of his own opinions, and the most faithful, the most grateful of the disciples you have among the artists. This true genius has longed to meet you for many years (he claims that there is no-one to whom he owes so much...)”². They will be accompanied, Zweig continues, by Dalí’s wife³ and Edward James, the owner of the painting they are bringing to show him, Dalí’s latest and best, “whose title is *Narcissus* and has perhaps also been created under your influence.” Zweig also warns Freud that Dalí would like to make a sketch during the conversation – though “he always makes the veritable portraits from memory.”

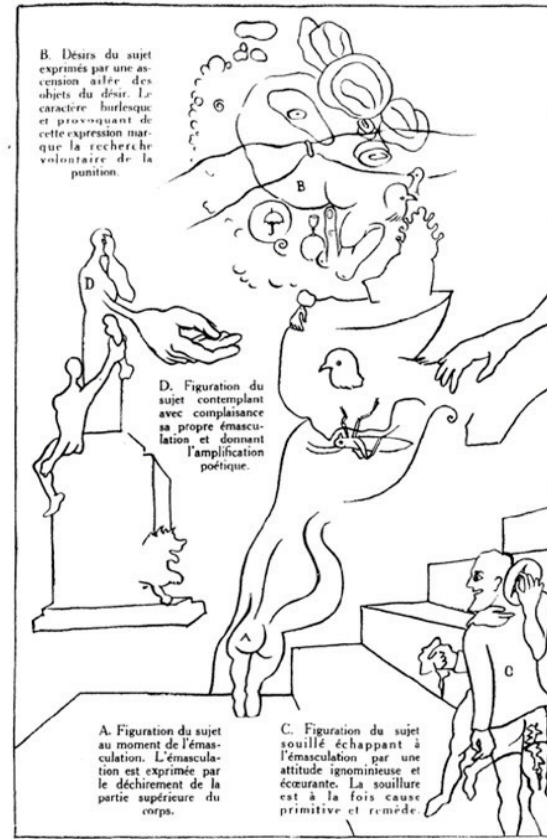
Dalí had previously tried to see Freud in Vienna – three times, he claimed in his autobiography *The Secret Life of Salvador Dalí*. In 1937, shortly after finishing *Metamorphosis of Narcissus*, which he had painted at Zürs in Austria, he wrote to Stefan Zweig asking for an introduction. Zweig sent him a note to present to Freud, but warned Dalí that Freud was in bad health. According to Dalí his attempts to see Freud in Vienna followed the same pattern: in the morning he went to look at Vermeer’s *The Art of Painting*, in the afternoon failed to meet Freud, and in the evening held “long and exhaustive imaginary conversations” with him. So the build-up to the London meeting was considerable.

Freud in summer 1938 in his study at Elsworthy Road, Primrose Hill, where the Freuds stayed until the house in Maresfield Gardens was ready. This is where the meeting between Freud and Salvador Dalí took place.
© Freud Museum London

A change in Dalí's paintings in 1927 can plausibly be ascribed in part to his fascination with psychoanalysis. Meticulous illusionism and purist abstraction exist side by side, motifs such as a rotting donkey and strange constructions jostle with scattered fragments – heads, hands, breasts, fingers, heralding the “images of concrete irrationality”, the “hand painted dream pictures” of his surrealist period. Dalí joined the surrealist movement in 1929 and produced that year a succession of brilliant, memorable images such as *The Great Masturbator* and *Lugubrious Game*, in which sexual references are both explicit and coded.

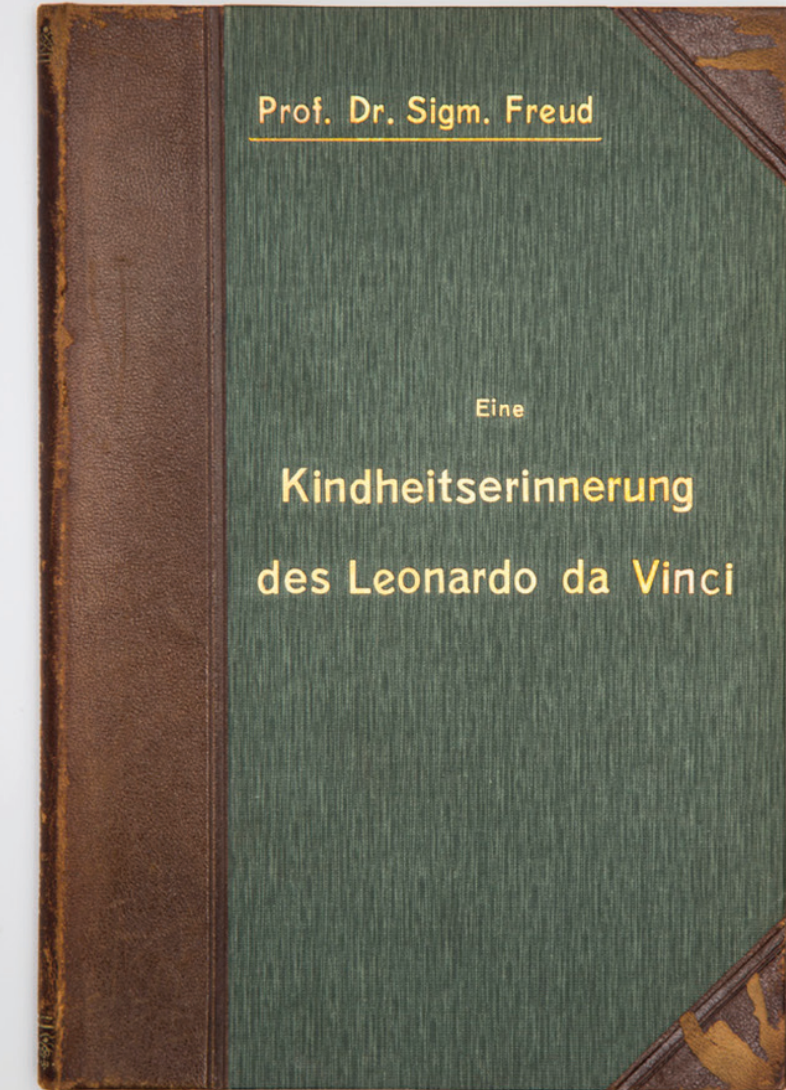
Dalí's uninhibited representations of sexual inhibitions and perversions, his glee in the deployment of symbols of desires and anxieties drawing strongly on Freud quickly made him notorious, though interpretations of their significance varied (then as now). Georges Bataille, when denied permission to reproduce *Lugubrious Game* in his magazine *Documents*, owing to a temporary feud with the surrealists, reproduced instead a “Psycholoanalytical diagram of the contradictory representations of the subject in Salvador Dalí's ‘Jeu lugubre.’”¹⁰ Bataille interprets the imagery as witness to a castration complex, commenting on the gender-ambiguous statue on the left, with its hugely enlarged hand and a fossilised phallus gripped by a smaller, seated figure as the “representation of the subject complaisantly contemplating its own emasculation and amplifying it poetically”. It is interesting that while Georges Bataille emphasises violence and horror in *Le jeu lugubre*, for Breton the painting announced liberation from repression and constraint.

The text Dalí took to show Freud, “Interprétation Paranoïaque-critique de l'Image obsédante ‘L'Angélus’ de Millet”, had been published next to Jacques Lacan's “Le Problème du style et les formes paranoïaques de l'expérience” in the first issue of *Minotaure* (1933).¹¹



SCHEMA PSYCHANALYTIQUE DES FIGURATIONS CONTRADICTOIRES DU SUJET DANS "LE JEU LUGUBRE" DE SALVADOR DALI.

Schematic drawing by Georges Bataille of Dalí's painting *Le Jeu Lugubre*, *Documents* no 7 Paris 1929



Eine Kindheitserinnerung des Leonardo da Vinci by Sigmund Freud, 1910. © Freud Museum London

The Narcissus Myth¹⁴

Unlike the other myths Dalí invented or adapted as bearers of his passions and obsessions, such as St Sebastian and William Tell, he only treated Narcissus once. However, the theme of love and death permeates his work – a notable instance is the film *Un Chien andalou* he made with Luis Buñuel, which had Wagner's *Liebsteod* as soundtrack; as Marcuse said, the image of Narcissus reconciles Eros and Thanatos.¹⁵

The ancient legend of the beautiful youth Narcissus, who fell in love with his own reflection in a pool, was most famously told by the Roman poet Ovid in Book 111 of his *Metamorphoses*, "the story of Echo and Narcissus".

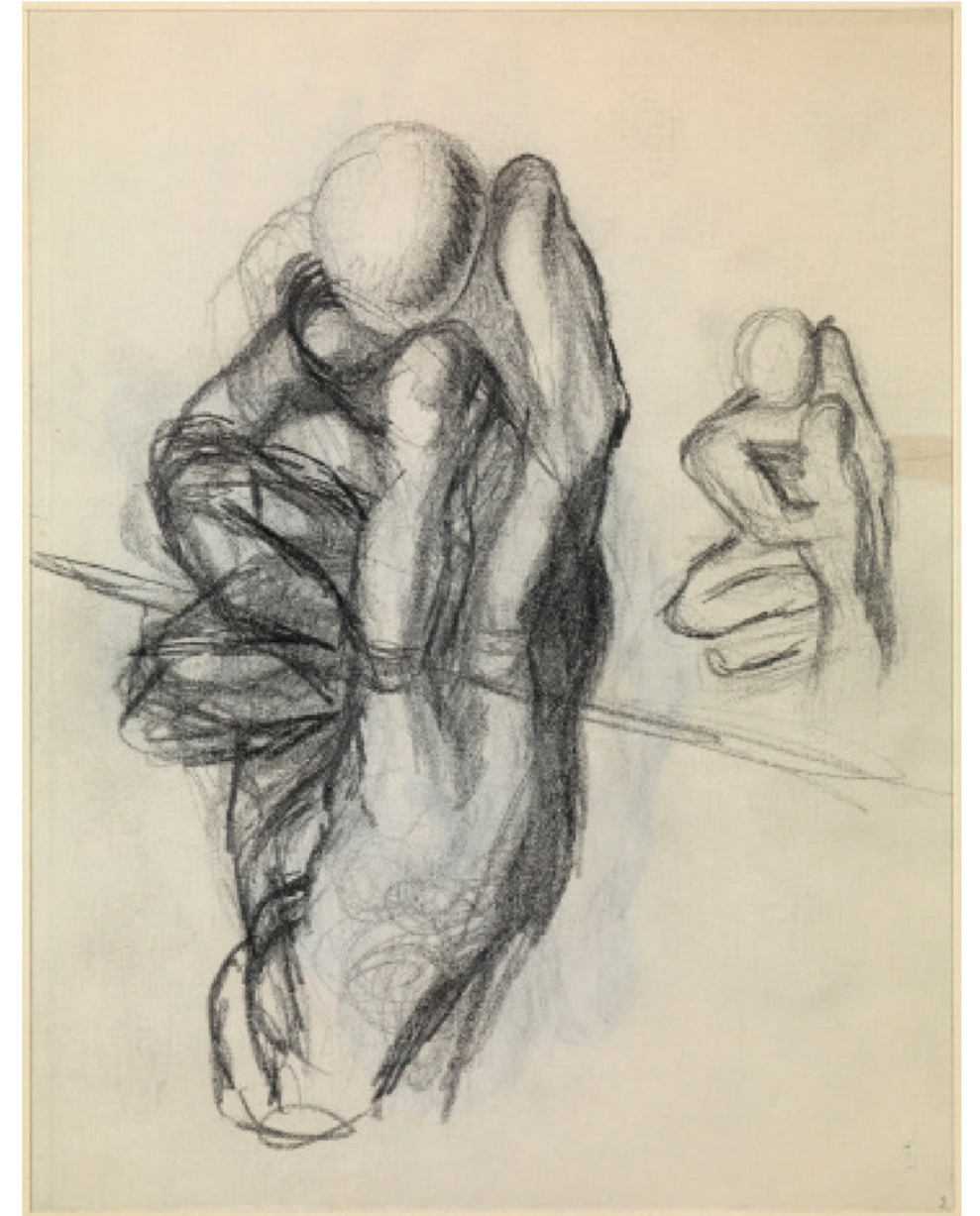


Narcissus was so lovely that many boys and girls fell in love with him but he rejected all their advances. Especially persistent was the nymph Echo, whose embraces Narcissus spurned. Shamed, she hid in the woods and shrivelled away. Even her bones turned to stone and only her voice remained.

One day, resting from hunting in a cool glade with a clear pool, Narcissus lent down to drink and was transfixed by the image he saw in the water: "the twin stars that were his eyes, his flowing locks, worthy of Bacchus or Apollo, his smooth cheeks, his ivory neck, his lovely face..." Reaching down he tried to embrace the vision not yet realising it was himself. Slowly consumed by the fire of his desire, Narcissus wasted away. When the mourners came for his body, all they found was a flower.

The myth has long been mined by artists and writers, not least as in relation to homosexual

Bronze figure of hand holding an egg, Roman, 1st/2nd century AD
© Freud Museum London



Study for "Metamorphosis of Narcissus" by Salvador Dalí
© Salvador Dalí, Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí, DACS 2018



The Double Image

David Lomas

The image of a Narcissus-hand is one of the most visually arresting of the many ambiguous or reversing images to be found in Dalí's oeuvre. It is a testament to his exceptional inventiveness as an artist and to his abiding concern with optical illusions.¹ Breton dismissed Dalí's works of this kind as mere 'picture puzzles', but it is worth recalling that as well as being a source of popular amusement optical illusions (many of which were discovered in the late 19th and early 20th century) engaged the interest of scientists for what they can reveal about the nature of vision.² *Metamorphosis of Narcissus* (1937) is able to astonish and entertain while at the same time raising questions about our relation to images - to truth and error - from philosophical and psychoanalytic standpoints.

The double image of the Narcissus-hand can be seen as an ingenious attempt to resolve the challenge that all visual artists depicting the myth of Narcissus have faced of how to represent a metamorphosis that unfolds in time. Ovid's account in the *Metamorphoses* describes Narcissus lying beside a stream unable to drag himself away from the lure of his own reflection. He gradually pines away until his body becomes invisible only to be replaced by a flower.³ Traditionally, artists have got round the difficulty of representing two consecutive but distinct narrative moments by combining them, using a literary device of prolepsis to show Narcissus gazing at his reflection together with the flower that he would only later become. It is this disappearance and transformation that the switch of configurations in the Narcissus-hand seeks to represent more dynamically. Dalí says of the double image on the left of Narcissus at the edge of a lake hunched over his reflection that if viewed with a "distracted fixity" Narcissus will become invisible and a hand that emerges from the water appears holding a bulb that is about to split open and geminate. It is notable that in preceding drawings there is just a single Narcissus-hand but in the painting he chose to replicate the double image on the right showing a later moment still after the flower has bloomed. There is even a third iteration of the crouching figure in the background that an accompanying poem describes as a God of snow.

Opposite page: © Salvador Dalí, Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí, DACS 2018

Types of love

'We say that a human being has originally two sexual objects - himself and the woman who nurses him - and in doing so we are postulating a primary narcissism in everyone, which may in some cases manifest itself in a dominating fashion in his object choice..'

'What I have so far said by way of indication may be concluded by a short summary of the paths leading to the choice of an object.

A person may love:—

(1) According to the narcissistic type:

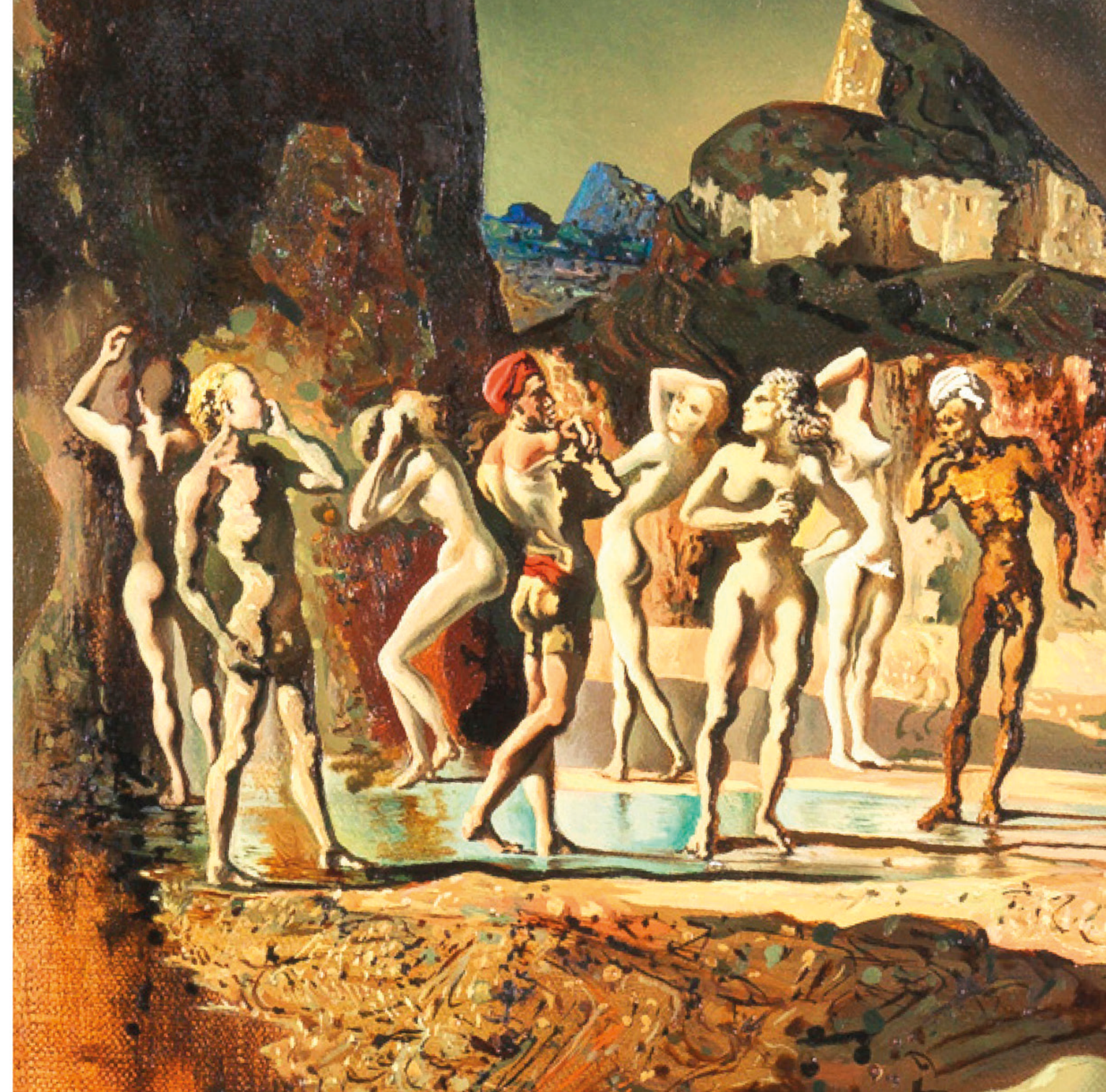
- (a) what he himself is (i.e. himself),
- (b) what he himself was,
- (c) what he himself would like to be,
- (d) someone who was once part of himself.

(2) According to the anaclitic (attachment) type:

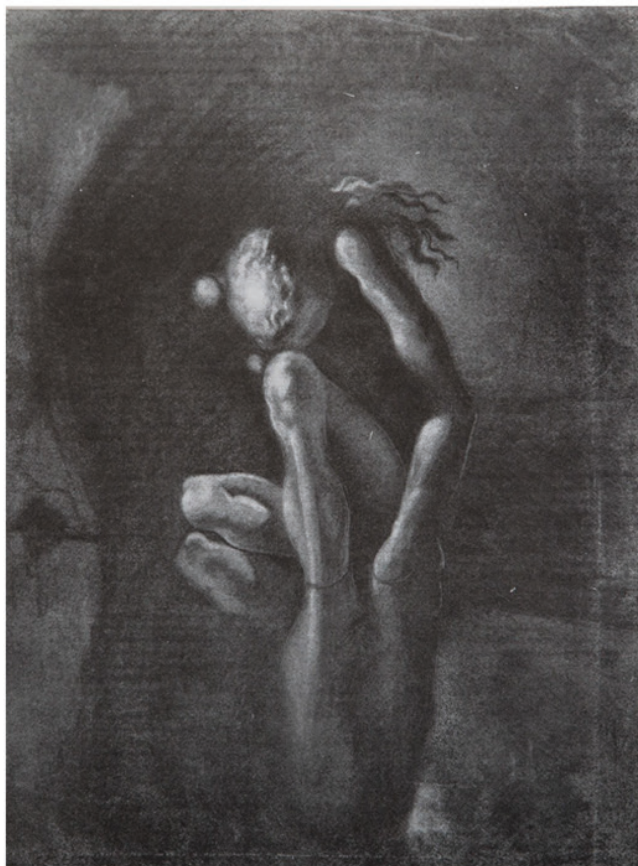
- (a) the woman who feeds him,
- (b) the man who protects him,
- and the succession of substitutes who take their place.'

'We have, however, not concluded that human beings are divided into two sharply differentiated groups, according as their object-choice conforms to the anaclitic or to the narcissistic type; we assume rather that both kinds of object-choice are open to each individual, though he may show a preference for one or the other.'

(1914)



Opposite page: Metamorphosis of Narcissus [detail]
© Salvador Dalí, Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí, DACS 2018



Salvador Dalí, Study for *Narcissus* reproduced in *Vrille*, Paris 1945

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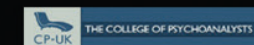
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