

Dalí, Picasso, Velázquez: Measuring Up

By ELLIOTT H. KING

“I’ve always said I’m a very bad painter because I’m too intelligent to be a good painter. To be a good painter, you’ve got to be a bit stupid, with the exception of Velázquez, who is a genius and whose talent surpasses the art of painting.”

– Salvador Dalí[1]

The year 1960 marked the 300th anniversary of the death of Spanish artist Diego Velázquez, inciting a flurry of commemorative exhibitions, books, and other popular and scholarly studies around the globe.[2] The occasion could not have been overlooked by Spain’s two most prominent artists, Pablo Picasso and Salvador Dalí, each of whom executed his own reinterpretations of Velázquez’s paintings in the years directly preceding and following the tri-centennial. This essay considers these bodies of work, albeit in a somewhat round-about fashion. For Picasso, I will look, as a group, to the fifty-eight paintings he executed on the theme of Velázquez’s painting *Las Meninas* (1656) in 1957, and for Dalí, to his handful of paintings and statements extolling Velázquez as a precursor to atomic physics and contemporary action painting, spearheaded by his 1958 canvas, *Velázquez Painting the Infanta Margarita with the Lights and Shadows of His Own Glory*. While I intend to compare and contrast the two artists’ approaches to Velázquez in the late-1950s and early-1960s, I have chosen a somewhat unorthodox framework to facilitate the question.

Dalí welcomed comparisons between his work and that of Picasso, whom he called the other great “genius” of Spain (in addition to himself).[3] Having reinvented himself as a “classic” painter in 1941, Dalí launched a barrage of defamatory statements and back-handed compliments against Picasso that pitted his own Renaissance-revival style against what he described in 1956 as Picasso’s “pure bestiality.”[4] From amongst Dalí’s myriad proclamations, I have located a rather fleeting one that strikes me as ranking amongst his most memorable and opaque. It comes from one of many conversations in the early 1970s between Dalí and the young artist Louis Markoya, when the two were attempting to paranoiacally combine Albrecht Dürer’s drawing of a sea crab (c.1495) with Raphael’s *Saint Catherine of Alexandria* (1507). According to Markoya, the discussion turned to Raphael’s angels, with Dalí declaring triumphantly that Raphael was a genius *specifically because he had a small penis*. A large organ would have kept Raphael earth-bound, Dalí continued; it would have sapped his strength and distracted him from loftier goals. A small sex, by contrast, allowed an artist to “approach the angels.” Picasso, however, “broke all the rules,” and this one was no exception. Markoya recalls Dalí’s words: “Picasso is a genius, even though he had a large penis.”[5]

The statement is lewd, of course, though discussions of “limousines” and “sewing machines,” Dalí’s euphemisms for the male sex and intercourse, respectively, were commonplace amongst his so-called “Court of Miracles.”[6] Where Dalí repeated other comparisons to the point of empty sound bites – e.g., “Picasso is a genius; so am I. Picasso is a Communist; me neither”[7] – I am drawn to this seemingly insignificant morsel, first for its absence in the historical record but also because it is so fecund to unpack. Not simply a self-deprecating comparison of manhood, Dalí presents a memorable, albeit peculiar metaphor for Picasso’s and his own artistic styles, enlightening both artists’ respective approaches to Velázquez’s Baroque painting.

The humor of Dalí's joke is in both his shocking candor and his non sequitur, equating "genius" – an admittedly problematic term, though I am relying on Dalí's verbiage here – with the size of one's (exclusively male) genitalia.^[8] Of course part of Dalí's humor must be rooted in insinuating Picasso's large size in light of his famous sexual appetite.^[9] Yet there is the other implication of Dalí's remark as well: The Old Masters, he explains, uniformly possessed small genitalia, thus accounting for their ability to "reach the angels." Since Dalí made no secret of his own self-proclaimed "genius," even entitling his 1964 memoir *Journal d'un génie* ("Diary of a Genius"), should this not imply that his own sex was probably small as well?

The question would be wholly vulgar and inappropriate had Dalí had not openly disclosed such intimate details himself and proudly so. Dalí's size is potentially significant, then – or, better said, his *descriptions* are significant as they underlie certain recurring images in his work. Although Dalí was coyly adroit at being photographed and painting himself nude without any explicit views,^[10] his writings consistently portray him small. In *Comment on devient Dalí* he recounts comparing his own adolescent body to his school friends' only to find his sex "small, pitiful and soft":

I can recall a pornographic novel whose Don Juan machine-gunned female genitals with ferocious glee, saying that he enjoyed hearing women creak like watermelons. I convinced myself that I would never be able to make a woman creak like a watermelon.^[11]

Of course, none of this may have any historical truth, and in fact his actual physical anatomy is irrelevant here. I raise the issue simply because Dalí explicitly identified his early concerns over his own size and consequent fear of impotence as joining other feelings of shame, inadequacy, anxiety, and oedipal angst as informing his Surrealist imagery of the late-1920s and 1930s. Later, according to his 1970s Picasso quotation, size seems to connote a very different meaning for him.

During Dalí's direct association with the Surrealists between 1929 and 1939, his depictions of male genitals – of which there are many – range from the diminutive and flaccid to the gargantuan and monstrous. The flaccid member – like the soft watch or the elongated buttock – generally connoted weakness, castration, and impotency; one might think to the father figure in his 1930 painting *William Tell*, for example, whose penis hangs limply despite his threat to castrate his son with shearers. The oversized sex meanwhile invoked other psychoanalytic narratives – the shame of masturbation in *The Lugubrious Game* (1929), for instance, or erotic fantasy in *William Tell and Gradiva* (1931).

The Surrealists would formally expel Dalí from their group in 1939,^[12] and beginning in 1940 he claimed to turn away from Surrealism towards what he called "classicism" – effectively a "return to order" that embraced the values and conventions of Old Master painting. "My Surrealist glory was worthless," he wrote in *The Secret Life*. "I must incorporate surrealism in tradition."^[13]

[...] All those who continue to imitate me by redoing 'primary Surrealism' are doomed to the limbo of lack of style, for to arrive at the creation of a style, instead of continuing to disintegrate, it is necessary to integrate, and instead of stubbornly attempting to use Surrealism for purposes

of subversion, it is necessary to make of Surrealism something as solid, complete and classic as the works of museums [...] The sexual instinct must be sublimated in aesthetics; the sense of death in love; and the space-time anguish in metaphysics and religion. Enough of denying; one must affirm. Enough of trying to cure; one must sublimate! Enough of disintegration; one must integrate, integrate, integrate. Instead of automatism, style; instead of nihilism, technique; instead of skepticism, faith; instead of promiscuity, rigor; instead of collectivism and uniformization – individualism, differentiation, and hierarchization; instead of experimentation, tradition. Instead of Reaction or Revolution, RENAISSANCE! [14]

I have sought elsewhere to elucidate the artist's convoluted use of the word "classic," introduced in the catalogue for his 1941 exhibition at New York's Julien Levy Gallery. [15] While his writings from the period underscore the separation between his latest paintings and earlier Surrealist works, I maintain that the artist's "classicism" was not an utter rejection of earlier ideas but may be understood instead as an alternative investigation into the subconscious. Indeed, it was allegedly Sigmund Freud himself who had recommended in 1938 that Dalí turn away from his Surrealist imagery to more reserved subject matter in which subconscious content was more latent and therefore authentic; as Freud told him (by Dalí's account), "In classic paintings I look for the subconscious – in a Surrealist painting, for the conscious." [16]

While Dalí's motivations for becoming "classic" may have been a continuation of his earlier Surrealism – he later harangued Breton for not recognizing that "through convention, the subversive language of the subconscious expressed itself in a much more intense and authentic way than in the belabored anarchy of a surrealist picture" [17] – it is nonetheless apparent that his subject matter did undergo certain key changes in the years following his "classic" premiere. Many of these are well documented: Perhaps as a credit to Freud, he largely shied away from the sexual imagery of his earlier "hand-painted dream photographs," finding inspiration instead in religious subjects, at least after 1943; after 1946, he became enthusiastic for the Golden Section, a mathematical device he had explicitly rejected in 1933 as "dreary" but that became prevalent in his work later for its connection to Italian Renaissance artists; [18] and around the same time, he began exploding his figures in homage to the atomic bomb. These acknowledged, a less pronounced but certainly observable change may be seen, too, in his depiction of male genitalia. During Dalí's so-called "classic" phase – effectively the 1940s – there are relatively few examples of paintings that depict the male sex; given its previous ubiquity in his oeuvre, this alone suggests its significantly lesser role in his work following his break from the Surrealists. A useful example for my purpose here is the painting *The God of the Bay of Roses*, now in the collection of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. Though painted in 1944, *God of the Bay of Roses* did not debut until Dalí's 1947 exhibition at the Bignou Gallery, where it was the only nude male in the exhibit. [19] In lieu of explicit sexuality, one is faced instead with Dalí's archetype of beauty; at precisely the point of a logarithmic spiral – the common denominator of the 1947 exhibition – a young, nude male hovers above a pedestal surrounded by admirers. Dalí possibly based his figure on one of the nude women in Albrecht Dürer's drawing *Women's Bath* from 1496, in which case Dalí has changed both the gender and the fundamental narrative. *God of the Bay of Roses* may be reasonably read as possessing a certain eroticism, but it is far less carnal than *William Tell and Grädiva* or even Dürer's original drawing. Dalí emphasizes instead figurative and mathematical harmony; he even used one of the drawings of the central figure



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to illustrate the “Harmonious placement of the male model” in his treatise, *50 Secrets of Magic Craftsmanship*, published in 1947. The figure’s limbs are long and elegant, his body appears strong but not especially muscular, and his penis – hardly the most prominent point of the composition – is uncircumcised and small. This last detail may seem an esoteric observation, but it was important in the context of the 1947 exhibition. Titled simply “New Paintings by Salvador Dalí,” the Bignou Gallery presented seventeen works, all of which ultimately served to advance Dalí’s self-defined position as a contemporary painter in the legacy of the Old Masters. This was reinforced by Dalí’s catalogue essay, titled “History of Art, Short but Clear;” he wrote:

Contemporary art, with the disintegration of the abstractionist “isms,” threatens to submerge the history of art once more in a totally anonymous pseudo-decorativism. But, at this moment, a new name emerges: Dalí, who, exactly like all the other great names, longs to follow the ancient tradition. Whether people like it or not, whether for good or for ill, the history of art finds in Dalí a new starting point.[\[20\]](#)

This brings me back to his deity’s sex in *God of the Bay of Roses*. Clearly Dalí has departed here from his earlier Surrealist work, in which the penis, large or small, was of central importance to the composition. Instead, he models *God of the Bay of Roses* on a Renaissance attitude: that a small, uncircumcised penis was regarded, at least in art, as the most aesthetically pleasing option. “History of Art, Short but Clear” elsewhere describes Raphael, Leonardo and Giorgione as seeking “again the beauty of Antiquity.” Indeed, like many stylistic conventions of the period, the Renaissance tendency to depict average or smaller-than-average-sized genitalia was derived from the ancient Greeks. For the Greeks, the ideal image of manhood – not only in art but life as well – was a small, thin organ covered with a long tapered foreskin, like that of a young boy.[\[21\]](#) Aristophanes summarized the perfect physical characteristics of a young Greek man in his comedic play, *The Clouds* (c.423 BCE): “a stalwart chest [...] Complexion bright, shoulders high, a tiny tongue, a stout behind, and a diminutive masculine member.”[\[22\]](#) Particularly taking into account Dalí’s earlier Surrealist imagery, it seems clear that, after 1940, he was deliberately following the classical model of representing small genitals specifically because it supported the air of beauty and association with the Old Masters that he now sought in his paintings. Already in 1947, Dalí’s foil for this “classic” campaign was Picasso. The Bignou Gallery exhibition was accompanied by the second (and final) issue of his faux-newspaper, *Dalí News*, which trumpeted Picasso’s and his own respective roles in the “Artistic Crisis and Rebellion”: [Picasso] has the glory of having destroyed the painting of the salons and of the pseudo “official beauty,” of having assassinated Bouguereau and even the abstract art which had grown out of his own cubism through the frenetic biology of his instinct. But destruction cannot go on indefinite-

ly, always, always, always; the general clean-up which Picasso affected in the history of art should enable young people to see Raphael again in his original and eternal splendor, free of the academic dust which had made it invisible.[\[23\]](#)

Dalí's portrayal of Picasso as "one of the greatest anarchists and destroyers known to history," as he wrote in *Dalí News*, emerges in his painting *Portrait of Pablo Picasso in the Twenty-First Century*, which debuted in the Bignou Gallery exhibit along with *God of the Bay of Roses*. The painting depicts a soft, gargoyle-like bust resting on a traditional classic pedestal. The skin hangs loosely, forming what may be read most readily as saggy breasts or, more ambitiously, legs with a patch of white chest/pubic hair. The figure's white curly hair, partially smothered by a heavy rock, wraps behind the head and into the neck, from which it emerges through the open mouth as an elongated spoon brandishing a small lute. Unlike *God of the Bay of Roses*, *Portrait of Picasso* does not contain explicit genitalia, large or small, though the spoon is not an unfamiliar phallic object and is, of course, especially long.[\[24\]](#) Picasso's extended spoon in contrast to the more demure sex of *God of the Bay of Roses*, coupled with Picasso's ram-like horns, to which I shall return, brings me to compare the significance of large and small genitalia in classical art. Just as Dalí's paintings of small penises were intended to invoke the classical ideal of beauty, it is worth remembering that images of large penises had their place in Greek art, too. Where the small, uncircumcised penis signified intellect, harmony, and athletic effort, the classical Greeks widely associated a large organ with barbarian culture, slaves, and stupidity.[\[25\]](#) They linked the large sex with humankind's more animalistic tendencies, and fittingly figures with large penises tended to be animal-figures themselves: the goat-footed Pan, or the *Satyrs who accompanied Dionysus in ritual celebrations*. With this in mind, Dalí's description of Picasso from *The Cuckolds of Antiquated Modern Art* bears repeating: "Grave in the extreme, cannot possibly get worse, *pure bestiality*."[\[26\]](#) Picasso's art was wild, chaotic, destructive, and *animalistic* – all attributes that come across even in the 1947 *Portrait of Picasso in the Twenty-First Century*. Dalí even goes so far as to depict the older painter brandishing spiral-shaped ram's horns, quoted from the illustrations for *50 Secrets of Magic Craftsmanship*, which effectively transform Picasso into an aged Satyr, more beast than man.

I do not mean to suggest that Picasso regarded any of his own work in any of Dalí's phallogocentric terms, of course, nor did Dalí stay consistent to his reserved ideal;[\[27\]](#) one need only look to his 1954 painting *Young Virgin Auto-Sodomized by Her Own Chastity* as one of many examples in his later work of an oversized penis distinct from a classical model (though paradoxically he described this painting as his "most chaste of all").[\[28\]](#) Still, antiquity's connotations for large and small genitalia, I contend, were at the root of his statement that Picasso was a "genius" despite being "well endowed," as well as his insinuation that he was, by contrast, small. With the smaller sex signifying classical restraint, Picasso's penis, in Dalí's estimation, was that of a barbarian – the very word he used in 1973 to describe Picasso to André Parinaud.[\[29\]](#) As a "barbarian" (keeping in mind the word's etymology, signifying one who is not Greek), Picasso had ended the modernist imperative towards abstraction by taking it to its hyperbolic end, and now Dalí would respond by bringing back the Old Masters: "Picasso is the greatest genius of modern art," Dalí said in a 1960 interview. "But he has destroyed modern art with his ugliness. By destroying beauty, he has created a new desire for the beautiful."[\[30\]](#) It was an art historical story of rivalry and conquest that Picasso could never have believed but that Dalí, as preposterous as it may sound, ostensibly took in earnest.

All this dovetails with Dalí's description of the Old Masters as "approaching the angels," a conclusion he most likely extrapolated this conclusion from the writings of his friend and spiritual mentor, the Catalan philosopher Francesc Pujols. Pujols' early twentieth-century philosophical system, called *hiparxiologi*,^[31] described a five-step "ontobiological ladder," the *Escala de la Vida* (staircase of life), that connected the vegetable, protozoan, animal, human, and angelic domains. All beings are positioned along the *Escala de la Vida* according to their percentage of "materiality" versus "spirituality": A vegetable is almost completely material with very little spirituality and is therefore low on the ladder, while at the other end an angel is nearly wholly spiritual with only a small percentage of materiality. The end goal of all things was to reach the angelic level. Dalí was decidedly aware of Pujols' philosophy, describing it to Louis Pauwels as "the most learned description of Heaven",^[32] and he told André Parinaud in 1973 that he was in "the angelic phase of [his] existence."^[33] If angels were more spiritual and less material than humans, and humans were, in turn, less material than animals, then a "bestial" human – as Dalí described Picasso – was closer to the animals and therefore farther from the angelic "rung." A more "spiritual" being, by contrast, was *literally* closer to the angels on the *Escala de la Vida*. "Pujols believed in an irreversible evolution of the universe," Dalí said in 1968. "There was a kingdom of minerals, vegetables, animals, in which there were man, in which some were privileged to be close to perfection (like Raphael)."^[34] When Dalí lauds Raphael (and himself) for approaching the angels by virtue of a small penis, it follows that a larger member makes a man closer to the animals and therefore lower on Pujols' *Escala de la Vida*.

As Dalí's depictions of the male sex became smaller and less compositionally significant through the 1940s as he shifted "from revolution to Renaissance," it is amusing to observe that Picasso generally followed the inverse path. For most of his career, Picasso's nudes had possessed relatively average-sized sexes – from his *Self-Portrait with Nude* of 1902 through his neoclassic works of the 1920s; even his depictions of Centaurs and Minotaurs, a ripe opportunity for presenting an engorged phallus, are surprisingly modest given his proximity to Surrealism. Picasso would abandon this restraint gradually through the 1930s and especially later in life, when, quoting John Richardson, a loss of libido left him "sexually deprived, but, to judge by his work, more sex obsessed than ever."^[35] The graphic content of Picasso's later works – I think especially to his 1968 etching, *The Artist and Model*, part of the famous 347 series – was not lost on his critics: Robert Hughes wrote of the *Late Picasso* exhibition at the Palais des Papes in Avignon in 1973, "Picasso appeared to have spent his dotage at a costume party in a whorehouse [...] No exhibition in memory has been so full of eyes (or of anuses and genitals, his other fetish objects)."

Contrasting his own 1930s Surrealist work with his later "classicism" and subsequent "Nuclear Mysticism," Dalí employed the familiar dichotomy of Dionysian and Apollonian, extrapolated from Nietzsche's 1872 *Birth of Tragedy*. The Dionysian, named for Dionysus, connotes feeling, chaos, and irrationality; the Apollonian, after Apollo, rationality and order. The "1930s Dalí," he wrote in 1966, was "possessed of wildly Dionysian madness," while his later incarnation was "calm, Apollonian, Apostolic and Roman Catholic."^[36] I have taken a rather back-road way of getting to this point, but in considering the way in which Dalí framed his post-War relationship with Picasso – not from Picasso's perspective, as he seems to have given Dalí little notice after about 1935 – the Apollonian and Dionysian duality is a useful construction. While others have

identified an Apollonian and Dionysian character in Picasso's relationship with Matisse.^[37] Dalí has been omitted from the equation, and yet surely Picasso was, for the later Dalí, a Dionysian counterpart – not a nemesis, necessarily, but one whose activities were fundamentally linked to his own.

With the Apollonian Dalí on one hand and the Dionysian Picasso on the other, one may turn at last to each artist's respective responses to Diego Velázquez. Both artists had a long history with the Baroque painter: Picasso had been infatuated by Velázquez's paintings since his first visit to the Prado in the summer of 1895, and as student at the Royal Academy of San Fernando he had executed copies of Velázquez's *Philip IV, Las Meninas*, and other works.^[38] After the Second World War, having explored analytic cubism, synthetic cubism, neoclassicism, and formal abstraction, Picasso turned his attention to transforming paintings by esteemed masters from the past – El Greco, Poussin, Manet, Rembrandt, Delacroix, and eventually, Velázquez. That Picasso did not begin the *Las Meninas* series until he was in his seventies should not suggest that the subject was only of belated interest: As he approached his seventy-sixth birthday, he was acutely aware that he was entering a "late phase" in his career. For most artists this connoted a waning of creativity and skill, though for Titian, Rembrandt, Monet, and Picasso's beloved Cézanne, it offered the promise of further glory.

Picasso executed his series over the course of a feverish five months, from August 17 to December 30, 1957, at his villa, La Californie, on the outskirts of Cannes. All Picasso's *Las Meninas* paintings testify to his fundamental interest in form, color, and expression; in what Michel Leiris described as "an unforeseen succession of formal adventures," Picasso analyzed, reinterpreted, and ultimately recreated *Las Meninas* by altering its color, dimensions, composition, and subject matter.^[39] He was especially drawn to the central portrait of the five year-old Infanta Margarita Teresa, who features in fourteen of the fifty-eight paintings – more than any other subject save his beloved Dachshund, Lump, which replaces the Spanish mastiff in fifteen of the works. While Picasso breaks down *Las Meninas* into abstracted forms reminiscent of his earlier analytic cubism, Dalí takes a different approach, though both approached Velázquez with fundamentally similar personal aims. As William Jeffett observes:

Picasso and Dalí both gravitated towards Velázquez for similar reasons: to affirm themselves as the greatest living painter, to affirm their identity as Spaniards, and to affirm their artistic independence of sovereignty. They both were occupied with establishing their legacy, and in so doing looked backward rather than forward, positioning themselves in relation to the past within a chain of masters and masterpieces.^[40]

Like Picasso, Dalí, too, had long admired Velázquez, having heralded the painter in 1919, when he was only fifteen years-old, as "one of the greatest, perhaps the greatest, of all Spanish artists and one of the best in the world."^[41] Dalí would reference Velázquez in a number of his post-War paintings: One of the fishermen in *The Christ of Saint John of the Cross* (1951) is taken from one of Velázquez's studies for *The Surrender of Breda* (1634), which is also the source for the creased paper with a folded corner that appears over Christ's head in *The Christ of Saint John of the Cross* and in the upper-left of *The Sistine Madonna* (1958). Even Dalí's iconic moustache was inspired by Velázquez, a connection suggested through Philippe Halsman's mid-1960s photographs of Dalí posing as a psychedelic Velázquez surrounded by a court of dwarves.

By the late 1950s, Dalí, too, was well into what might be considered today his “late phase,” though unlike Picasso, who was twenty-three years his senior, Dalí was only about fifty-four when he painted *Velázquez Painting the Infanta Margarita with the Lights and Shadows of His Own Glory*, and he considered himself to be at the height of his artistic prowess. In *Velázquez Painting the Infanta Margarita with the Lights and Shadows of His Own Glory*, Dalí depicts Velázquez’s tiny silhouette in the process of painting *Portrait of Infanta Margarita Teresa in a Pink Dress* of 1660 – a painting now attributed to Velázquez’s student, Juan Bautista del Mazo, though when Dalí executed his painting the Prado still attributed the work to Velázquez. The spasmodic flashes of paint coalesce to form a gestalt portrait of the nine year-old daughter of King Philip IV and his second wife, Mariana of Austria. If Picasso was, for Dalí, taking a Dionysian attitude towards his subject – wild and animalistic, with the whole exceeding its individual parts – Dalí’s fine detailing exhibits “Apollonian” restraint: Again, the overlay of a Golden Rectangle reveals his carefully constructed composition, with the vertical columns – the edges of Velázquez’s canvas from *Las Meninas* – corresponding to the measurements of the Golden Section. As Reynolds Morse first noted, the diagonal lights and shadows are taken from Jan Breughel’s *Allegory of Sight and Smell* (1618); these flatten the canvas but also lead the eye to the background’s salon of paintings, objects, and characters, including an angel and mirror – an element from Breughel’s foreground that also recalls Velázquez’s *Rockeby Venus* of 1647.

Given the copious detail and overall smooth finish, Dalí’s technique is actually a far cry from Velázquez’s. Where Velázquez’s brushwork is loose, almost feathery, Dalí’s is extremely tight and meticulously controlled, even when he is attempting to convey movement – a style he was developing in other “explosive” works such as *Pi-Mesonic Angel* (1958).



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Indeed, in *Velázquez Painting the Infanta Margarita with the Lights and Shadows of His Own Glory*, Dalí is arguably farther from Velázquez than he is to another of his favorite painters, Ernest Meissonier. I invoke this comparison deliberately since Dalí widely cited Meissonier’s academicism as the antithesis of modernism and Picasso as modernism’s emblematic proponent. As early as a 1933 letter to André Breton, Dalí credited Meissonier’s “photographic” skill as “the most complicated, intelligent and extrapictorial means” towards depicting his “irrational” phantasms, and in the same letter acknowledged Picasso as the inverse of Meissonier since Picasso, he wrote, revolutionizes not subject matter but “the ‘means of expression’ in an amazing and sensational manner.”^[42] In *Velázquez Painting the Infanta Margarita with the Lights and Shadows of His Own Glory*, Dalí similarly delves deeply into an exploration of subject while keeping

his “means of expression” firmly traditionalist: The painting’s explosions, we are told in his 1958 “Anti-matter Manifesto” and elsewhere, signify atomic reintegration and are analogous to Velázquez’s own swift brushstrokes – what Dalí would describe in 1961 as the Baroque painter’s “ecumenical ‘chafarrinadas’”^[43] – but Dalí’s own brushstrokes are not wild; some of his “shrapnel” even adopts the semblance of tiny rhinoceros horns, his heavily laden 1950s symbol for logarithmic form, chastity, and the Virgin Mary. His writing on Velázquez in *ArtNews* enlightens this reserve: “Velasquez [sic] started with figurative representation, to end up with ‘taches.’ And today, with *taches* as a starting point, one should aim at sublime figures.”^[44] Velázquez’s brushstrokes had been a precursor to action painting, he argued, but now in the midst of gestural abstraction – he calls out specifically Franz Klein and Georges Mathieu – painters should return to traditional figuration. This would presumably motivate his more experimental renderings of Velázquez, such as *The Infanta (Standing Woman)* from 1961, which despite its gestural quality and closer proximity to Picasso’s paintings must be understood chiefly as a demonstration of Velázquez’s relevancy to contemporary art. Picasso breaks down his subject, and Dalí counters that from stains and spots, one can build up figures.

With all this in mind, it is unsurprising that Dalí expressed so little admiration for Picasso’s *Las Meninas* paintings. His explication as to why Picasso painted so many versions was cutting: He had to do the same subject a hundred times, for he never knew which was the right one [...] The only thing he never pulled off was a real painting. Not one masterpiece! But a prodigious quantity of satires.^[45]

Without wholly discounting the element of satire in Picasso’s series, it would be a mistake to read Picasso’s *Las Meninas* as desperate repetition in search of an ever-elusive “masterpiece.”^[46] Indeed, Picasso suggested that he reworked *Las Meninas* so many times because he wanted it to become his own; as he told Jaime Sabartés in 1950:

I’ll try to do it my way, forgetting about Velázquez. The test would surely bring me to modify or change the light because of having changed the position of a character. So, little by little, that would be a detestable *Meninas* for a traditional painter, but would be my *Meninas*.^[47]

Anne Baldassari described Picasso as a “cannibal,” saying that “[h]e ate up works and let them digest. Then he would produce something entirely his own.”^[48] Both these quotations enlighten the liberties Picasso took with Velázquez’s painting: Velázquez’s studio becomes Picasso’s, complete with the large windows open to the pigeons that lived just outside on his balcony; he includes nine paintings of the pigeons, in fact, as well as three landscapes from La Californie and a portrait of his wife, Jacqueline Roque. The resulting paintings testify to Picasso’s aptitude: His *Las Meninas* series is clearly recognizable for its source, but Picasso’s recrafting allows the works to stand also independently. Nothing about them betrays that their inspiration had been painted 301 years earlier, in 1656.

Dalí’s painting appears contemporary as well – assuredly more so today than it did in the 1950s, when mid-century modernists largely rejected his traditional figuration and slick, academic surfaces.^[49] But where Picasso exerts an independence from its source, Dalí relies on Velázquez. Picasso needed to take Velázquez out of the equation to make his work his own; Sabartés described Picasso’s method as “destroying the better to build.”^[50] Dalí, by contrast, could not

forget Velázquez, nor could he permit him to be forgotten by his contemporaries; he was, in Dalí's words, "the most alive and most modern of painters."^[51] In its "Apollonian" appeal to the intellect, Dalí's painting is rife with esoteric symbols and self-referencing narratives, but from a formalist standpoint it is firmly traditionalist; Clement Greenberg's 1939 critique Dalí's Surrealist canvases continues to resonate in *Velázquez Painting the Infanta Margarita with the Lights and Shadows of His Own Glory*: "The chief concern of a painter like Dalí is to represent the processes and concepts of his consciousness, not the processes of his medium."^[52] What Greenberg intended as a criticism of Dalí's artistic values the artist reframed as a virtue: his primary focus was the ideas – in Apollonian terms, the intellect; Picasso, by contrast, concentrated on manipulating formal qualities in an effort to make *Las Meninas* his own. It is not necessarily a question of one attitude being better than the other but of two artists taking drastically different approaches to art and art history, each with an eye towards securing and elevating his respective legacy.

According to Dalí, Picasso was a "genius" for all he had done to move modern art towards the "classic" aesthetic Dalí claimed to espouse, but he was by this virtue also a barbarian who sought to "detonate everything," "pulverize tradition," and "wipe out perspective."^[53] This fundamentally destructive process reflects what Dalí intuited as Picasso's Dionysian attitude – taking apart Velázquez where Dalí sought to build him up – which Dalí represented through the colorful metaphor of a large, animalistic penis, cognoscente of all its historical connotations. To this Dalí claimed to adopt instead an "Apollonian" approach to his own work – that of reason and intellect, signified by a diminutive member that he argued would bring him closer to the angels. Dalí did not seek to "revolutionize the means of expression," as he had credited Picasso early on, but instead to situate himself in the legacy of Phidias, Raphael, Leonardo, and indeed, Velázquez. It was an ambitious lineage, but Dalí did not lack for confidence; as the adage goes, good things come in small packages.

^[1] *Arena: Salvador Dalí*, Television program, Produced by Adam Low (1986; BBC in cooperation with Demarte Pro Arte B.V.).

^[2] Chief amongst these was *Velázquez y lo velazqueño. Catálogo de la exposición homenaje a Diego de Silva Velázquez en el III centenario de su muerte, 1660—1960* (Madrid: Ministerio de Educación Nacional, Dirección General de Bellas Artes, 1960).

^[3] Salvador Dalí, "Picasso y Yo," lecture given in the María Guerrero Theatre, Madrid, 11 November 1951. Translated and published in A. Reynolds Morse, *Salvador Dalí/Pablo Picasso. Pablo Picasso/Salvador Dalí. A Preliminary Study in their Similarities and Contrasts* (Cleveland: Salvador Dalí Museum, 1973), 51.

^[4] Salvador Dalí, *Dalí on modern art: the Cuckolds of antiquated modern art* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 1996), 17. Originally published in French as *Les Cocus du vieil art moderne* (Paris: Fasquelle, 1956).

^[5] Email from Louis Markoya to the Yahoo Group collectdali@yahoo.com, 13 November 2007. Markoya subsequently confirmed and elaborated upon the story in an email to Elliott King, 25 January 2015.

^[6] See, for example, Amanda Lear's memoir, *Le Dalí d'Amanda* (Paris: Favre, 1984), as well as Carlos Lozano's *Sex, Surrealism, Dalí and Me* (Cornwall: Razor Books, 2000).

^[7] Dalí, "Picasso y Yo," 51.

[8] It is beyond my scope here to address Dalí's chauvinism in linking "genius" with penis-size, thus denying women the possibility of attaining an equal level of greatness. Towards further consideration, both Amanda Lear and Carlos Lozano recount a lively argument between Dalí and the painter Leonor Fini: It seems Dalí provoked Fini by announcing that while she was a "talented" painter, she could never be a "genius" because "genius is in the balls." Fini retorted that "[g]enius is in the slit" (Lozano, 109).

[9] When I have shared Dalí's quotation with friends and colleagues, the first question tends to be, "So how big *was* Picasso?" This voyeuristic curiosity strikes me as utterly tangential, but as it is the question that arises most immediately, suffice to say that according to Picasso biographer John Richardson, the artist was "well-endowed" (Jerry Saltz, "3-sentence reviews: Picasso, Clemente, and Murakami," 19 November 2014. Accessed online at: <http://www.vulture.com/2014/11/3-sentence-reviews-picasso-and-more.html> [accessed 1 March 2015]).

[10] To quote Frédérique Joseph-Lowery on the c.1954 painting, *Dalí, Nude, Entranced in the Contemplation of Five Regular Bodies Metamorphosed in Corpuscles, in which Suddenly Appears Leonardo's "Leda", Chromosomatized by the Face of Gala*, "What is big about this canvas is not the penis but the title" (Frédérique Joseph-Lowery, "Salvador Dalí," *Art Press*, no. 24, 2012).

[11] Salvador Dalí with André Parinaud, *Comment on devient Dalí* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1973), 89.

[12] André Breton announced Dalí's dismissal from surrealism in his article, "Des Tenances les plus récentes de la peinture surréaliste" (*Minotaure* 12-13 [Paris] May 1939, p. 17).

[13] Salvador Dalí, *The Secret Life of Salvador Dalí* (Haakon M. Chevalier, trans.) (New York: Dial Press, 1942), 350.

[14] *Ibid.*, 397-398.

[15] See Elliott H. King (ed.), *Dalí: The Late Work* (New Haven: Yale University Press with High Museum of Art, 2010), 10—53.

[16] Dalí, *The Secret Life of Salvador Dalí*, 397. One cannot know whether Dalí's account of his conversation with Freud is verbatim, though in the hand-written manuscript for *The Secret Life*, conserved in the *Centre d'Estudis Dalinians of the Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí*, the artist does specifically employ the word 'clásiques' in his report of the meeting: 'Le jour que ge fus render visite Sigmund Froid,/dans son exil a Londres/, vers les proximites de la veille de sa mort, ge conprit par la-tradition/lecon/de tradition clasique de sa viellesse : combien de chosses etai / en-train / finir en Erope / avec la perte proche de sa vie/ - Il me dit : dans les tableaux clasiques gi cherche le subconcient Dans un tableau Surrealiste "le conscient"' (Salvador Dalí, manuscript [in phonetic French], *Centre d'Estudis Dalinians, Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí, Figueres, Spain*. Published in Frédérique Joseph-Lowery, *La Vie secrète de Salvador Dalí: Suis-je un génie?* [Paris: L'Age d'Homme, 2006], 721).

[17] Salvador Dalí with Louis Pauwels, *The Passions According to Dalí* (Eleanor R. Morse, trans.) (St. Petersburg, FL: The Salvador Dalí Museum, 1985), pp. 77-78. Originally published in French as *Les Passions selon Dalí* (Paris: Éditions DeNoël, 1968). Note that Pauwels takes certain unspecified liberties with Dalí's verbiage, suggesting quotations may not be verbatim.

[18] Salvador Dalí, "De la beauté terrifiante det comestible de l'architecture modern style," *Minotaure* (Paris) no. 3-4, December 1933: 69-76.

[19] The paintings included in the exhibition according to the catalogue were 1. *Leda Atomica*; 2. *One second before the awakening from a dream provoked by the flight of a bee around a pome-*

granate; 3. Mythological study; 4. Portrait of Pablo Picasso in the twenty-first century; 5. Dematerialization near the nose of Nero; 6. Flying giant demi-tasse, with incomprehensible appendage five metres long; 7. Leda with disintegrated swan; 8. Battle around a dandelion; 9. The God of the Bay of Roses; 10. St. George the Dragon-Killer; 11. Intra-atomic equilibrium of a swan's feather; 12. Rock and infuriated horse sleeping under the sea; 13. Meditation on the harp; 14. The Three Sphinxes of Bikini; 15. Three apparitions of the visage of Gala; 16. The Basket of Bread; 17. St Georges and the Dragon (etching). *New Paintings by Salvador Dalí* exhibited at the Bignou Gallery, New York, from 25 November 1947 until 3 January 1948.

[20] Salvador Dalí, "Appendix. History of Art, Short but Clear" (New York: Bignou Gallery, 27 November 1947-3 January 1948 [exh.cat.]), n.p.

[21] See Kenneth Dover, *Greek Homosexuality* (New York: 1978), 125. On the Greeks' abhorrence towards circumcision, see David Friedman, *A Mind of Its Own: A Cultural history of the penis* (New York: The Free Press, 2001), 13–14.

[22] Aristophanes, *The Clouds* (Moses Hadas, trans.), in *The Complete Plays of Aristophanes* (New York: Bantam Books, 1962), 129. On various theories as to how this preference for smaller genitals may have come about, see Abigail Solomon-Godeau, *Male Trouble: A Crisis in Representation* (Thames and Hudson, 1997), 182.

[23] Salvador Dalí, "Truman, Marshall, Picasso, Dalí, In Artistic Crisis and Rebellion Spread," *Dalí News* (Bignou Gallery, New York, 1947). Published in *La vie publique de Salvador Dalí* (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, Musée National d'Art Moderne, 1980), 124.

[24] Under this interpretation, the soft breasts – conspicuously lacking nipples – may be read alternatively as testes.

[25] See Timothy J. McNiven, "The Unheroic Penis: Otherness Exposed," *Notes in the History of Art*, vol. 15, no. 1, special issue of 'Representations of the "Other" in Athenian Art, c.510-400 B.C.', fall 1995: 10–16. Aristophanes refers to the large penis's comical connotation as well, writing that unlike other playwrights, he has not resorted to an "appendage of leather, red-tipped and gross, to arouse adolescent laughter" (Aristophanes, *The Clouds*, 117). While it was common to connect a large penis to stupidity and other lesser-attributes, a special case was made for the gods of sexuality and fertility, for whom a pronounced sex might indicate lust and virility. The most famous example is Priapus, a minor Greek fertility god ever identifiable by his permanent erection, who became particularly popular amongst ancient Romans.

[26] Dalí, *Dalí on Modern Art*, 17. Emphasis added.

[27] It is worth noting Picasso's 1937 etching, *Sueño y Mentira de Franco*, in which he depicts General Francisco Franco as an anthropomorphic turd with a gargantuan penis, possibly signifying his stupidity.

[28] A. Reynolds Morse, *Dalí: A Study of His Life and Work* (Greenwich: New York Graphic Society, 1958), 81.

[29] Dalí with Parinaud, *Comment on devient Dalí*, 257.

[30] *TV Times*, London, August 5, 1960, p 6-7. Quoted in Morse, *Dalí and Picasso*, loose insert.

[31] Josep Pla, *Manual d'hiparxiologia. El sistema de Francesc Pujols* (Barcelona: Llibreria Catalonia, 1931). Special thanks to Jordi Salat of the Associació Francesc Pujols for providing me with this text and for his immensely helpful citations and explications of Pujols' philosophy. The term "hiparxiologi" has been a point of great confusion in Dalí studies, especially since Dalí himself mistakenly translated it into French as "*hyperaxiologie*" (Salvador Dalí, manuscript for *Ma révolution culutrelle*, Centre d'Estudis Dalinians, Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí, Figueres). This changes the Greek root, suggesting an extension of "axiology" (the branch of philosophy

dealing with values [i.e., ethics, aesthetics, religion], derived from the Greek *axios* (“worthy”) (see Haim Finkelstein, *The Collected Writings of Salvador Dalí* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998], 439). In fact Pujols created the term from the Greek words *hiparxis* and *logos*, “the science or study of existence.” He later changed it to *Pantologia* (“the science of everything”).

[32] Dalí with Pauwels, *Les Passions selon Dalí*, 81-82.

[33] Dalí with Parinaud, *Comment on devient Dalí*, 148.

[34] Guillaume Hanoteau, “Dalí est l’homme plus sérieux que je connaisse,” *Paris-Match*, no. 1015, 19 October 1968: 62-65.

[35] John Richardson, “Great Late Picasso,” in *Picasso Musqueteros: The Late Works, 1962–72* (New York: Gagosian Gallery with Rizzoli, 2009), 29.

[36] Salvador Dalí, *Open Letter to Salvador Dalí* (London: Heineman, 1968), 11-12. Originally published in French as *Lettre ouverte à Salvador Dalí* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1966).

[37] See, for example, John Richardson, “Between Picasso and Matisse,” *Vanity Fair*, February 2003. Accessed online at: <http://www.vanityfair.com/culture/2003/02/picasso-matisse200302> (accessed 1 March 2015).

[38] In 1935, Picasso described Velázquez to Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler as “the real painter of reality” (*Picasso Propos sur l’art* (Paris: Gallimard, 1998), 91. Quoted in William Jeffett, “Picasso and Dalí: From Vanguard to Velázquez,” *Picasso/Dalí. Dalí/Picasso (The Salvador Dalí Museum and Museu Picasso, Barcelona, 2014)*, 106.

[39] Michel Leiris, “Picasso et les Ménines de Velasquez,” *Picasso: Les Ménines 1957* (Paris: Galerie Louis Leiris, 1959). Translated and published in Marilyn McCully, *A Picasso Anthology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 257.

[40] Jeffett, 106—107.

[41] Salvador Dalí, “Velázquez,” *Studium* (Figueres) 1 June 1919: 3. Translated and cited in Robert S. Lubar, *Dalí: The Salvador Dalí Museum Collection* (Boston, New York and London: Bulfinch Press, 2000), 145.

[42] Salvador Dalí, “Cher Breton” (Paris: Galerie Pierre Colle, 19-29 June 1933 [exh.cat.]), n.p.

[43] Salvador Dalí, “Ecumenical ‘chafarrinada’ of Velasquez,” *Art News* (New York), vol. 59, no. 10, February 1961: 55.

[44] Salvador Dalí, “The Secret Number of Velasquez Revealed,” *Art News* (New York), vol. 59, no. 9, January 1961: 45.

[45] Dalí with Parinaud, *Comment on devient Dalí*, 258.

[46] I am grateful to William Jeffett for remarking on the comic element in Picasso’s series, when he quotes Michel Leiris’ journal: “Picasso surpasses all of his contemporaries – Matisse, Derain, Gris Braque, Léger – because with him the comic intervenes” (Michel Leiris, *Journal* [8 January 1967] [Paris: Gallimard, 1992], 619—620. Quoted in Jeffett, 111).

[47] Pablo Picasso, quoted in *Museu Picasso Guide* (Barcelona: Museu Picasso, 1998), 94.

[48] Associated press and France 24, “Picasso et les maitres” (8 October 2008). Quoted in Alexandra George, *Constructing Intellectual Property* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

[49] Reviewing the National Gallery of Victoria’s 2009 exhibition, *Dalí: Liquid Desire*, writer Robert Nelson lauded Dalí’s 1981 painting *The Pearl, After the Infanta Margarita*, as ‘surprising contemporary’ (Robert Nelson, “Salvador Dalí Rolls into Town,” *The Age* [Melbourne], 12 June

2009. Accessed online at <http://www.theage.com.au/executive-style/culture/salvador-dali-rolls-into-town-20090612-c51y.html> [accessed 9 March 2015]).

[50] Jaime Sabartés, *Picasso Variations on Velázquez's Painting "The Maids of Honor" and Other Recent Works* (New York: Abrams, 1959).

[51] Dalí, "Ecumenical 'chafarrinada' of Velasquez," 55.

[52] Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" (1939), in John O'Brian (ed.), *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), 9.

[53] Salvador Dalí with Alain Bosquet, *Entretiens avec Salvador Dalí* (Paris: Pierre Belfond, 1966), 27.