

Comments on *The Dalí Renaissance: New Perspectives on His Life and Art after 1940* and *Danser Gala: L'Art Bouffe de Salvador Dalí*

Mary Ann Caws

Graduate School of the City University of New York

*The Dalí Renaissance: New Perspectives on His Life and Art after 1940*, ed. Michael R. Taylor. Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2008, 226pp.

*Danser Gala: L'Art Bouffe de Salvador Dalí* by Frédérique Joseph-Lowery and Isabelle Roussel-Gillet. Editions Notari, 2008, 164pp.

It is highly unlikely that anything Michael Taylor puts his mind or name to will be anything but fascinating. Period.

However that may be, this compilation of essays on the highly peculiar and showy artist who was Salvador Dalí, and who woke everyday to the joy of being such a splendid and talented person, goes past fascinating. The papers come from a symposium and a retrospective exhibition, both entitled like the book, held in April of 2005. I have always found the attempt to deal with such a phenomenon as Dalí at once provocative (as he always longed to be and was) and a straining in all sorts of directions. (Straining along, I just completed a biography of the painter in Reaktion's *Critical Lives* series.) So I was particularly interested by the combination of personalities who wrote in this collection, among whom Dawn Ades and David Lomas stand out, along, of course, with Michael Taylor himself.

But what have we here, or rather, whom do we have here? Amanda Lear (formerly a nightclub entertainer and model, then and now a recording artist, painter, and performer, a transvestite very close to Dalí in his last fifteen years) and then no other than Ultra Violet, a former pupil of Dalí and then one of Andy Warhol's superstars as well as a painter. They enter into a totally engaging conversation with Dawn Ades, which rounds off the learned essays on the Catalan's "Paranoiac-Critical Mysticism" (by Jonathan Wallis), on Dalí and Leonardo (by David Lomas), and on "The Prodigious Story of the Lacemaker and the Rhinoceros" (by Elliott H. King).

Mary Ann Caws: Cawsma@aol.com

Copyright © 2008 (Mary Ann Caws). Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 Unported License. Available at <http://jsa.asu.edu/>

The illustrations are fabulous, right out of the fabulous show – which was itself a mind-boggling experience. And, as always with Dalí, the overriding issue is the one he himself phrases perfectly, as the showman to end all showmen:

Whatever happens, my audience mustn't know whether I'm spoofing or being serious; and likewise, I mustn't know either. I'm in a constant interrogation: where does the deep and philosophically valid Dalí begin, and where does the looney and preposterous Dalí end?

Where indeed? And that's still saying nothing of his right-right-right wing religion and politics, his friendship with Franco, and his ego somewhat larger than massive: "Myself is paint any subject me like" because myself is, of course, a genius. I went recently to Figueras to the oddest of all museums—his—and it is indeed about the weird and the looney, every inch of it.

Michael Taylor's introduction is a masterpiece of logical-headed and clear exposition of Dalí's evolution and some of his works and ideas, as well as a description of some of his most delightful apparitions. Take the 1965 retrospective at Hartford's Gallery of Modern Art, where he appeared with his cane in one hand and his ocelot in the other. Around him, in the 1950's and 1960's, was gathered the personnel of his "Court of Miracles"—an enchanting combination of "transvestites, hermaphrodites, dwarves, hunchbacks, nymphets, twins" and an assortment of models, actors, and addicts. A photograph of Dalí with Warhol in dark glasses and an immense Native American headdress gives the general picture.

Just as mesmerising, and in somewhat the same way, with outstandingly improbable illustrations – but then everything about Dalí seems improbable, and I expect he would have liked it that way, is a recent and lavish *Danser Gala: L'Art Bouffe de Salvador Dalí*, by Frédérique Joseph-Lowery and Isabelle Roussel-Gillet, published by Editions Notari in 2008, part of the Bibliotheca Daliniana. The positions of dance and the positions of the text meet here, with invaluable statements by Maurice Béhart and Germinal Casado. Particularly interesting are the photographs and commentaries about the great plump dancer from Brooklyn, Loie Fuller, in her veils and extraordinary lighting, and the meditations on the gigantic eye on stage (and by Ledoux in architecture), from which steps Ludmila Tchérina. It reminds me of the gigantic eyes atop the staircase in the Jewel Museum at Figueras. The whole thing is about stage and staging, and this very beautiful bright blue volume bears perfect witness to dance and all the reflections upon it, a new take on Dalinian aesthetics. Its specific richness seems heavily perfumed, like one of its chapters.

What grand additions to the Dalí literature!