

LZ's "'Mantis'" Notes

LZ's notes for "'Mantis'" are held among his papers at the Ransom Research Center at the University of Texas at Austin, along with a rough draft of both the poem and "'Mantis,' An Interpretation" (HRC 14.9). It is quite unusual that such drafts and especially notes survive for LZ's early work, as he only routinely began keeping such materials from the 1950s. For the most part these notes are on an essay by Roger Caillois, "La Mante religieuse," published in the French surrealist journal *Minotaure*, no. 5 (May 1934). In addition there are some notes taken from the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, and although he does not appear to have directly used these, they do repeat many specifics he found in Caillois, so it seems worth adding them as well.

The following transcriptions reproduce LZ's notes as closely as possible, so some French accents go missing and the lineation is reproduced. The notes are written front and back on the small, wallet-sized sheets that he was fond of using for notes and often drafts as well. The page numbers of Caillois' essay (as well as the left or right column) from which a given sheet of notes is taken is indicated on the right. Triple arrows (>>>) indicated the break between separate sheets. Slash marks indicate words written one above the other. Words in pointed brackets have been added in the margin or above lines. Question marks indicate that the preceding word is uncertain, and a double-question mark that the word/phrase is entirely unreadable. Overall, however, there are few problems with deciphering the notes with the help of Caillois' original, despite LZ's typical scrawl and what are obviously hastily taken notes.

Louis Zukofsky materials are copyright © Musical Observations, Inc. Used by permission. For permission requests, go to: www.musicalobservations.com/

JTW 16 May 2021

Notes on Roger Caillois, "La Mante religieuse," *Minotaure* 5 (May 1934):

first to appear on globe [p.23L - pencil]
Mantis - carboniferous
- against an ear
of wheat
- Eleusean mysteries
-lived in rose
bush
- as a medicine
legend
- pointed the way for
lost children

?? [p.23R - pencil]
canticle foot
- the case of a man
whom it fortunately
prevented returning
where he came from
- <nest> considered in Provence
as a remedy for chilblains + toothache
provided it's gathered under the
full moon
<[along left margin:] La mante Religieuse
Roger Caillois>

>>>>

also ringworms (in Mentonnais)
called italienne
spectre
fraise
madeleine

[p.23R - pencil]

prégo-Diéou
prégo-Diablé
menteuse - bigote
devineresse which
knows where the wolf is
prays because its mother is
dead or drowned
(father old) under foot of the door

Melanesia - as totem
(Fraser Totemism + Exogamy
also in Mexico

[p.24L]

Hottentots at certain time of year
given to lascivious dances worship
the mantis + children engendered at time
<[cont. along right margin:] of year are put to death>

>>>>

Hottentot - the supreme being of
the Khoi-khoi - Boschimans <Bush?> -
creatrice du monde - its love
makings pleasant - the moon
belonging to it, made out of its old
shoe (bushmen folk lore
Its principle function is to
bring food to those who implore
it + on the other hand it has been
eaten + vomited alive by Kwai
Hemm le dieu devorateur

[p.24L - pencil]

killed by thorns (once men) + eaten
by ants - it is resurrected
its bones being reassembled
(Osiris myth)

possesses a tooth all powerful -
(Samson' hair myth mèche de
Minos

>>>

Chinese raise them in cages
+ watch their fights -
the Turks are persuade <that> the
mantis always ~~is turned~~ <faces>
Mecca

[p.24L - pencil]

anthropomorphic
resemblance

Elles aiment beaucoup
l'amour, mais plus encore
la chair humaine.
elles allèchent par la
volupté ceux qu'elles
veulent dévorer

[p.24R - ink]

on Métaponte money.
(reproduced in the antique animal
world) mantis clusters on
<(ear)> spike of wheat

[23L]

>>>

Devours all but the organs of
digestive tract of the allured?

[p.24R - ink]

human anguish before
love

[p.25L]

devoured by a prostitute before
approaching it

Quaerens quem devoret
Baudelaire

<fear of> castration complex -
dented cunt (love mouth)
assimilating the virile organ

above similar to nuptial female
habits of mantis - blending
male in their couplement

Celles qui dans l'amour entendent
le vent passer dans les peupliers
Celles qui dans la haine sont
plus élancees que les mantes religieuses
<[along left margin:] Breton - Ralentic Travaux>

>>>

Eluard - The act of love
weakening the male +
strengthening the female.

[p.25L-R - ink]

mantis unites sexual
voluptuousness with
nutritive voluptuousness
the female during coitus
eats a fly offered by the
male. (or perhaps eats the
content of a special gland of
his

[p.25R]

female? to decapitate the
male before coupling +
to eat him after
needing for the albumin
+ protein of its eggs its own
species - also probably
an automatic prolongation
of inhibited centers of the brain
<[along right margin:] (when male is decapitated) naturally prolonging spasms of coitus>

>>>

The amorous murderess

[p.25R - ink]

like a machine with
perfect wheels (wheel-
work) functioning automatically

android - automaton
resembling human being
adj: having human shape.

its assumed rigidity
like armor - in face
of danger simulating
death - similarly
when decapitated without
centers of representation
or voluntary activity

[p.26L]

yoke <itself>, pair, lay eggs
hinder excitation from?
periphery

>>>

phenomena of differential
sensibility limited to
tetanic catalepsy +
characterized by it
mimetic qualities
underspotted white like leave
indiscernible from bark
color of desert
anémone verdâtre - +
simulate its action upon?
wind agitated sweetly
feet spotted with carmine
white + green blue
+ some violet pale
bordered with rose like a (painting/portrait)
of a bursting flower balancing
by moments + turning the
most beautiful colors to
the sky
<[along left margin:] some indistinguishable from orchids - human desire for
reintegration into the original insensibility>

[p.26L - ink]

>>>

return to the vegetal reign
thru mimicry
prophetess or spectre-vampire
compromising individual immediate
sensibility before
marriage or death

[p.26L - ink]

but it's attitude not of
prayer - one does not pray
on the stomach - ~~but~~ rather of
the male in love

La Mante Religieuse
Roger Caillois
De la Biologie à la Psychanalyse

note: ces pages, qui forment
le chapitre 5 d'un ouvrage a
paraître, sur les mécanismes
de surdétermination dans la
pensée automatique et lyrique

[p.23L note]

>>>

et le développement des thèmes affectifs dans la conscience individuelle, et intitulé La nécessité d'Espirit, ne prennent leur véritable sens que dans la perspective des idées qui y sont exprimées. Aussi me faut-il ici préciser que je ne prétends pas que les hommes ayant soigneusement observé les mantes ont été impressionnés par leurs moeurs; je me contente d'affirmer que ces insectes et les hommes faisant partie de la même nature, je ne m'interdis pas de faire appel au comportement des premiers pour rendre compte, si besoin est, de celui des seconds en telle circonstance. Car enfin l'homme n'est un cas particulier [que] pour lui et cette étude ne comporte au fond que de la biologie comparée

[p.23L note (cont.) - ink]

Notes from *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11th edition (1910-1911), Vol. 19, entry for "Mythology," section on "African Savages." These notes are written onto the front and back of a single sheet that was already used for miscellaneous practical information (e.g. addresses):

mantis = cagn or Ikaggen
He has a wife, an adopted
daughter, whose real father
is the "swallower" in Bushmen
swallowing myths, + the
daughter has a son, who is
the Ichneumon. The mantis
made an eland out of the
shoe of his son-in-law. The
moon was also created by
the Mantis and of his shoe, +
it is red, because the shoe
was covered with the dust of
Bushman-land. The Mantis
is defeated in an encounter
with a cat which happened
to be singing a song about
a lynx. The mantis (like
Poseidon, Hades, Metis + other

[p.135R]

>>>>

Greek Gods) was once swallowed,
but disgorged alive. The swallower
was the monster Ilkhwai-hemm.
Like Heracles when he leaped
 into the belly of
 the monster
 which was
 about to swallow
 Hesione, the
Mantis once jumped
down the throat
of a hostile elephant
+ so destroying him

>>>>

as a creator Cagn is said to have "given
orders + caused all things to appear to be
made." He struck snakes with his staff
+ turned them into men, as Zeus did with
the ants in Aegina. Tho animals, these gods have
human passions + character, + possess the usual
magical / powers / attributed / to / sorcerers.