

Salvador Dali versus Specialization II: Writing Shoes

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Abstract. There is an objection that can be derived from the opening of Salvador Dali's *Diary of a Genius* against the recommendation of a system of narrow specialists. Tighter shoes improves his oratory and writing, but how are the narrow specialists to realize such connections as this?

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"With these smaller shoes I shall sing

Feeling myself a bird that takes wing"

From the Scottish Enlightenment economist Adam Smith, we have a vision of a society composed of narrow specialists, such as pin-wire-straighteners and pin-head-makers (Bk. 1, Ch. 1). Each person's ends are more efficiently achieved thus.

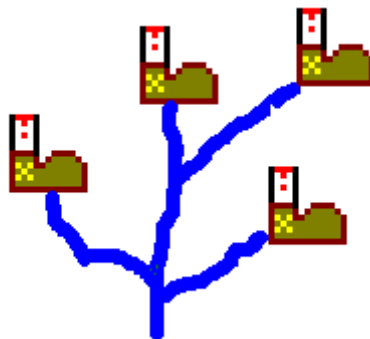
"But what about the opening of Salvador Dali's *Diary of Genius*?" you ask, or at least I do. I should perhaps have noticed this earlier, with my first reference to that text. Probably the general point has been noticed before though – where in the literature you would find it I don't know, however – and the principal gain here is illustration. He writes on writing, as follows:

To write the following, I am wearing for the first time some patent-leather shoes that I have never been able to wear for long at a time, as they are horribly tight. I usually put them on just before giving a lecture. The painful pressure they exert on my feet goads my oratorical capacities to their utmost.

This sharp and overwhelming pain makes me sing like a nightingale or like one of those Neapolitan singers who also wear shoes too tight. The visceral physical longing, the overwhelming torture provoked by my patent-leather shoes, forces me to extract from words distilled and sublime truths, generalised by the supreme inquisition of the pain that my feet suffer. So I put on my shoes and I begin to write down, masochistically and without haste, the whole truth about my exclusion from the surrealist movement. (1966: 19)

In the society of narrow specialists, one kind of specialist is a shoe specialist, or there are even a team of them. Their conclusion will presumably be that these are not the shoes for Dali. They will not be aware of the gain these tighter shoes provide for oratory, for singing, and for writing, because they do not think about improvements here. (Dali seems to move rather quickly between these three, but I don't think it is a problem.)

I have also heard, and read, that there are such things as writing tutors. I have heard that they get involved in such fine matters as "shall" versus "will" or sentences ending with prepositions. But what do they know of suitable shoes? For Dali, smaller shoes are relevant for writing. But the different workers in the society of narrow specialists are unlikely to realize this. The writing tutor never contemplates problems of their field while fitting shoes. Division of labour: any detailed inquiry into shoe-fitting is seen as someone else's job.



References

Dali, S. 1966. *Diary of a Genius*. London: Hutchinson.

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