

Structural Parallels Between the Composition of Salvador Dalí's

The Secret Life and his Paintings

By Frances Pool-Crane

In his scathing review of Salvador Dalí's autobiography, *The Secret Life of Salvador Dalí*, George Orwell writes that "[Dalí] is a symptom of the world's illness. The important thing is [...] to find out why he exhibits that particular set of aberrations. The answer is probably discoverable in his pictures, and those I myself am not competent to examine"¹. Though Orwell was, by most standards, far from a moralist, his disgusted commentary does not come as much of a surprise: from an account of eating the head off a decaying bat to lengthy descriptions of murderous desire, Dalí certainly does not shy away from taboo topics in his often self-contradictory autobiography. But what is most interesting about Orwell's discussion of the "aberrations" found in *The Secret Life* is how he recognizes that we can better understand them by placing them in comparison with his paintings. And yet, most critics of *The Secret Life* have taken an opposite route, generally arguing that the Dalí who narrates *The Secret Life* is to be separated from Dalí the painter. In other words, as critic Frédérique Joseph-Lowery titles her 2016 article, "Dalí Does Not Write What He Paints". However, I believe this position to be ultimately counterproductive. To gain a deeper understanding of Dalí's works, we must leave behind the idea that *The Secret Life* exists in some abstract conceptual space, removed from his other artistic endeavors and instead read it as an extremely valuable tool through which to understand the intentions and thoughts behind his other works.

¹ George Orwell, "Benefit of Clergy: Some Notes on Salvador Dalí", *The Saturday Book for 1944*, 1944.

There is a reason that we study the letters of authors, the poetry of playwrights, and the photography of painters—we believe that there is something essential that carries across all of an artist's creations, even when these creations span vastly different mediums and levels of popularity. With that in mind, one can therefore examine whether there are connections to be found between *The Secret Life* and Dalí's paintings. Furthermore, beyond the obvious fact that Dalí's writing and painting often address the same subjects, there is a sense of broader structural links that can be found between the two art forms. Many of the rhetorical patterns in his writing, for instance, have clear visual equivalents in his paintings. In this paper, I will explore a few of these patterns and draw connections between structural motifs in Dalí's writing and visual motifs in Dalí's works. Though by no means an exhaustive list of syntax patterns found in *The Secret Life*, I will specifically focus on repetitive structures found in extended appositional sentences, doubled exclamatory phrases, and parentheticals, and how these structures can be compared to repeated imagery and iconography in Dalí's paintings. These patterns reveal connections between Dalí's writing and his painting, thereby deepening our understanding of his overall artistic process.

1. Repetition in Appositional Phrases

One of the most constant and noticeable features of Dalí's writing in *The Secret Life* is the length and complexity of the sentences, sometimes containing upwards of 150-200 words. These sentences are characterized by the presence of extended cataloguing and repetition, and are often made up of sequences of adverbial and adjectival phrases. This sequenced structure is often found within appositional phrases, using repetition as a way of listing the qualities of a subject. Daniella Sanader writes that "Dalí's flowery language only emphasizes this notion of 'concealing by revealing', wherein his life becomes less accessible as it grows more incredible"², arguing that Dalí's extended and heavily detailed writing style

² Daniella Sanader, "A Strip-Tease Act Conducted in Pink Limelight: Salvador Dalí, George Orwell, and the Construction of a Surrealist Self", *SURG Journal* 4.1 (2010), 31.

does not necessarily give the reader a better understanding of his arguments. Rather, he uses these unique sentences as a tool to aid in the construction of his purposefully enigmatic persona, taking the reader on a linguistic journey in every extended passage. I believe that what Sanader calls “flowery” is in reference to the way that Dalí constructs these appositional phrases, using this structure as a way of creating complexity through repetition.

One clear comparison to be made between Dalí’s sentence structures and his paintings is through the presence of decay in both mediums, whether through imagery of decay or structural decay in writing. Decay is often present in both Dalí’s writing and his paintings, whether featured through the visual of swarming ants or through the unfortunate story of a bat. And though perhaps it is most easily found in its grotesque visual form, syntactic decay—the breakdown of either the rules of grammar or the meaning of a sentence—can work to a similar end, evoking that same imagery which Dalí so heavily emphasizes in his works. Dalí writes that:

I do not understand why, when I ask for a grilled lobster in a restaurant, I am never served a cooked telephone; I do not understand why champagne is always chilled and why on the other hand telephones, which are habitually so frightfully warm and disagreeably sticky to the touch, are not also put in silver buckets with crushed ice around them. Telephone frappe, mint-colored telephone, aphrodisiac telephone, lobster-telephone, telephone sheathed in sable for the boudoirs of sirens with fingernails protected with ermine, Edgar Allan Poe telephones with a dead rat concealed within, Boecklin telephones installed inside a cypress tree (and with an allegory of death in inlaid silver on their backs), telephones on the leash which would walk about, screwed to the back of a living turtle...telephones...telephones...telephones...³

Both grammar and meaning decay as the second sentence in this passage goes on, eventually ending with the drone of “telephones...telephones...telephones,” a kind of

³ Salvador Dalí. *The Secret Life of Salvador Dalí*, New York: Dial press, 1942, 272.

repetition which leaves the reader in a state of semantic satiation, placing the word so far from its original definition that it hardly maintains a meaning at all. The repetitive appositional form of the opening of the sentence creates momentum and complexity, but it slows to a stop as the telephone becomes a vehicle by which to convey meaning rather than an object in its own right. The reader can certainly find concrete significance in a mint-colored telephone, but can one intuitively understand how that significance relates to the telephone screwed to the back of a living turtle? The “telephone”, despite being the original topic of the passage, becomes more obscured as Dalí assigns it more and more qualities. The repetition which characterizes this sentence is a kind of decay in and of itself, changing and eroding meaning over the course of extended appositional phrases. As discussed at the opening of this paper, Dalí’s fixation on decay also did not go unnoticed by critics of his writing: “George Orwell unceremoniously described [*The Secret Life*] as foul: ‘It is a book that stinks’ perhaps because he did not realize that in an age of decomposition, pure or obvious stench, that is, literary stench, can come to have a certain moral value”⁴. The humorously matter-of-fact declaration that the book “stinks” seems to exemplify the kind of effect that this appositional sentence structure has upon Dalí’s overall argument. The syntactic decay achieved through this technique creates a paradoxical effect: that the greater presence of detail does not help the reader understand the narrative. Rather, this structure displaces the narrative meaning through its repetitive structure, leading to a decay in meaning.

In these extended appositional structures, each individual quality which Dalí lists in a sequence becomes both a vehicle for meaning and a tool in the dissolution of meaning. He seeks to create familiarity in the repetitiveness of the structure, and yet disorients the reader as a sentence extends further and further from its original subject. He writes in the final chapter that:

⁴ Felix Fanés. “The secret life of Salvador Dalí as a Literary Text.” *Avant-garde Studies* Issue 2, Fall 2016, 24-25.

From the Corinthian capitals, what life of tradition is that of the acanthus leaf, dying under the Christ, born again heavy and fecund with classicism with Palladio, nuptial in Rome, apothotic in style under Louis XIV, hysterical under Louis XV, orgiastic and aphrodisiac in the Baroque, guillotined by the French Revolution, modest and haughty under the Napoleonic Empire, neurotic and mad in the Modern Style, confined to an insane asylum throughout the Postwar, forgotten by all today during the present new war!⁵

Once again using a technique of sequencing adjectival phrases, Dalí emphasizes the subjectivity of time by traveling from Christ to Postwar over the course of one list, contributing to a sense of rhythm and momentum. The original subject of the sentence—the acanthus leaf—becomes the vehicle through which to convey his further argument over the course of the passage. Dalí bends a reader's perception of his sentence structure in the same way that he bends time, using this sequenced technique to combine a familiar structure with unfamiliar subject matter, and using that familiar structure as a tool in the creation of meaning through structural extension. This quotation contains a sequence of adjectival phrases (such as “nuptial in rome, apathetic in style”, etc.), a familiar and repetitive structure which aids in holding a reader's focus as one is taken along on this passage's journey through time. The repetitive appositional structure creates a backdrop on which Dalí can place meaning, which visually correlates with how repetition manifests across Dalí's works. The most notable example of Dalí's construction of a familiar structural backdrop across multiple works is that of the rocks and water of Cadaqués, which appears in some form in the majority of his paintings. The presence of the rocks in the background of *The Disintegration of the Persistence of Memory* provides an element of familiarity for the viewer, both through the relative realism of the image compared to the foreground, and through the presence of the same rocky backdrop across many—if not a majority—of Dalí's other works.

⁵ Dalí, 397.



The Disintegration of the Persistence of Memory, 1952-4,
Collection of The Dalí Museum, St. Petersburg, FL.

The sentence structure of these repeated, sequenced phrases becomes familiar as the autobiography goes on, working as a vehicle through which to convey an argument as the rhythmic, repetitive form becomes more recognizable to the reader. The repetition in this literary structure occurs both on a macro and micro level, both through the structure's repeated use throughout the book, and in the fact that the appositional structure itself is one of repetition. And in the same way, the repeated presence of the rocks of Cadaqués in Dalí's paintings becomes a structural backdrop on which to place new meaning, a familiar image to be recognized in the face of otherwise bizarre and unfamiliar imagery. These two structures work in a similar way, using a tool of structural familiarity to aid in the reader or viewer's overall understanding of an image or passage.

I believe it is useful to continue this discussion of structure in Dalí's writing with the help of a visual aid, as the objective of this argument is to draw direct visual connections between Dalí's writing and his works. A graphic way to do that is through sentence diagrams, which I will use on some relevant phrases in order to help illustrate patterns which emerge in Dalí's writing. I will make use of syntactic trees, as used by Noam Chomsky in his work

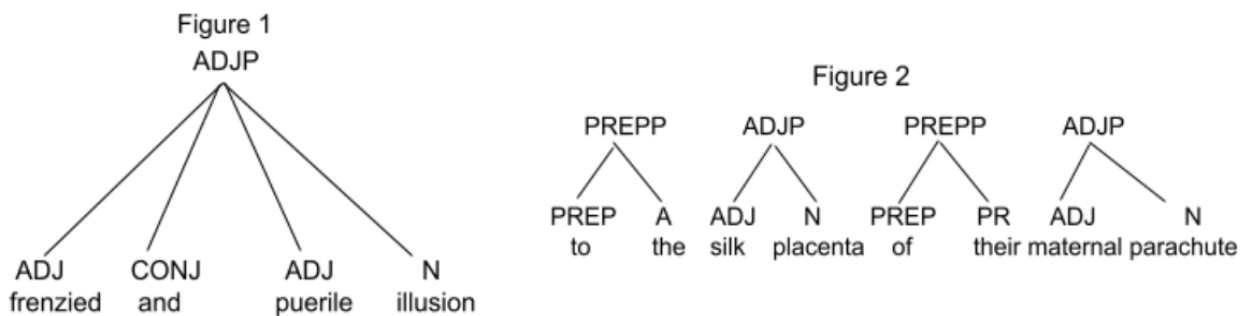
Syntactic Structures, as this structure helps to preserve the dimensionality of Dalí's writing by placing all words in a sentence on the same level at the bottom of the tree. Chomsky's structure splits a sentence into its noun phrase (NP) and verb phrase (VP), and then further breaks those sections down into smaller components, such as adjectival and adverbial phrases. Diagrams of entire extended passages are generally too convoluted to shed new light on the use of specific syntactic structures, so I will instead use these tree diagrams to illustrate syntax patterns found repeatedly within Dalí's writing, rather than to diagram entire sentences. Visual representations of these phrases will prove helpful in our overall understanding of Dalí's use of repeated structures, as they will create a sense of how he uses repetition—not just of words, but of structures as well—that is much clearer than simply reading the sentences without a visual aid could convey.

I have selected one sentence from *The Secret Life* which I found to be archetypal of Dalí's extended literary style, and I have broken it down into its syntactic components for the purpose of investigating how he uses these structures with similar intention to visual elements in his works. In the early pages of the book, he writes that:

Nothing, indeed, is clearer than the paradisiacal significance of dreams of 'flight', which in the unconscious mythology of our epoch only mask that frenzied and puerile illusion of the 'conquest of the sky,' the conquest of paradise incarnated in the messianic character of elementary ideologies (in which the airplane takes the place of a new divinity), and in the same way that we have just studied in the individual pre-dream the frightful fall that awakens us with a start—as a brutal recall of the precise moment of our birth—so we find in the pre-dream of present day those parachute jumps which I affirm without any fear of being mistaken are nothing other than the dropping from heaven of the veritable rain of new-born children provoked by the war of 1914, frightful traumatism of their first birth, desperately attempt to hurl themselves into the void, with the infantile desire to be reborn at all costs, 'and in another way', all the while remaining attached to the umbilical cord which holds them suspended to the silk placenta of their maternal parachute.⁶

⁶ Dalí, 30.

This is, obviously, a very intimidating sentence to diagram and analyze. However, the exercise of diagramming this full sentence, though yielding initially impractical results, proved valuable in my larger investigation into the nature of Dalí's syntactic structures and how they compare to his visual structures. In this sentence, Dalí sequences shorter adjectival, adverbial, and prepositional phrases in order to simultaneously keep the reader's attention and disorient one in one's overall understanding of Dalí's argument. Simple individual phrases, such as "pre-dream of present day", "parachute jumps", and "fear of being mistaken", are sequenced together so that the reader may understand each concept individually. But when viewed as part of a larger sentence, we must draw connections and find meaning on our own.



Figures 1 and 2: Diagrams of structures found in the above passage (see key below)

The diagrams above illustrate a few patterns found commonly in Dalí's extended sentences. Figure 1 denotes a typical structure of an adjectival phrase, with multiple descriptors attached to one noun—exemplifying what Haakon Chevalier meant when he declared that Dalí "never use[s] one word where two will do"⁷. The other structure, Figure 2, is taken from the end of the sentence, illustrating the often rhythmic nature of Dalí's writing

⁷ Fanés, 8.

through alternation between prepositional and adjectival phrases. While the full diagram of the 183-word sentence is too large to practically use for analysis, these smaller sections of the passage, broken into one or a few phrases, can reveal patterns in Dalí's writing which would go unnoticed without structural analysis of this nature. These phrase diagrams reveal more of the nature of the rhythmic, repetitive patterns found in Dalí's writing than would be understood through simply reading the sentence without a visual aid.

Taking into account the specific structures discussed above, what visual motifs are most comparable to the syntax of Dalí's long sequenced sentences? Some of Dalí's works contain an equivalent structure, making use of empty space between images to encourage a view of the work through its individual components, rather than through a top-down understanding of the painting as a whole. In other words, Dalí is asking us to examine a litany of qualities rather than a concise illustration of a single subject. One painting that exemplifies this concept is *The First Days of Spring*.

ADJP: adjectival phrase, ADJ: adjective, CONJ: conjunction, ADJ: adjective, N: noun, V: verb, PREPP: prepositional phrase, PREP: preposition, A: article, PR: pronoun



The First Days of Spring, 1929, Collection of The Dalí Museum, St. Petersburg, FL.

A viewer of this painting may understand the visual presence and significance of individual images found in the work, but when these images are placed in a single painting, separated by abstract spatial commas made of an empty gray background, this cumulative understanding is challenged. The viewer is led into a state of heightened disorientation when no immediate connection between the images within this dreamscape can be established. Figures like that of Freud, a grasshopper, and one man mounting another have obvious relevance to Dalí's typical themes, and can be clearly understood by the viewer when seen in isolation. These images work like many of the sequenced adjectival phrases in the sentence above, such as the individual phrases "unconscious mythology", "infantile desire", and "maternal parachute", in that they can be generally understood in isolation by the reader. However, the coherence of these individual adjectival phrases does not necessarily mean that they make the overall sentence less bizarre or more understandable. And this lack of clear connection between individual images is also present in the surreal imagery found within the gray dreamscape of *The First Days of Spring*. In both works, the reader or viewer is left to make the connections between individual concepts or images on one's own, looking for the subtextual links found in the syntactical or spatial commas in the sentence and the painting, respectively.

Another way to understand *The First Days of Spring* in comparison to this sentence is through a broader analysis of the overall structure, rather than through smaller individual components, on which I have been focusing so far. The sentence is divided into two fairly clear sections, but rather than being grammatically divided into noun phrase and verb phrase, I believe that a division in meaning occurs surrounding the em-dash separated syllogism near the middle of the sentence, in "the frightful fall that awakens us with a start—as a brutal recall of the precise moment of our birth—so we find in the pre-dream of present day those parachute jumps". This false syllogism in the middle of the extended sentence

moves the content from theory into example, creating a shift from concept towards reality which increases the reader's comprehension of Dalí's overall argument. Returning to *The First Days of Spring*, this sort of syntactic 'dividing line' in the sentence can be clearly related to the darker gray stairs which divide the painting into two sections. The disconnected images in the painting cluster around this darkened gulf which divides it, working similarly to the syllogism which divides the sentence into its two major phrases. The phrase between the em-dashes is equivalent to the darkened shadow of the stairs in *The First Days of Spring*, creating a stark division between parts of the sentence. Do these dividing lines really represent a change in meaning, though? Or are they simply tools to provide the illusion of structure, leading the viewer or reader down a rabbit-hole of searching for connections between disjointed images? Ultimately, the answer to this question is less relevant than the fact that these connections exist at all. The very ability to make this comparison reveals an essential link between how Dalí works in the two mediums of writing and art, using abstract structures and divisions to encourage a viewer or reader to seek through lines between seemingly unrelated ideas and images. Whether or not that search is fruitful is ultimately a much more abstract matter than can be productively discussed in this context. Rather, I argue that the search is, at its core, the same, whether it is for literary or visual through-lines.

2. Double Exclamations

A shorter but similarly prevalent rhetorical structure found throughout *The Secret Life* is that of double exclamations: two phrases in a row, both ending in exclamation marks. Exclamation marks indicate a voiced exclamation, developing a sense of shock, a "jolt" to the reader that sets an exclamatory phrase apart from the rest of a passage. They draw a reader's attention in the same way an artist will draw a viewer's eye to an image, indicating points of highest importance in a passage or work. And Dalí uses this concept to create a new sense of juxtaposition through two exclamatory phrases in a row: if an exclamation mark indicates highest importance, and we are faced with two exclamatory phrases in a row, which

of the two phrases is more important? Through repetition both of and within the structure, we become desensitized to the highlighting power wielded by the exclamation mark. These doubled phrases serve as a major contrast to the extended sentences found in part 1, as they are often fragments, and are almost universally made up of very short phrases. Visually, this exclamatory pattern creates an association with shock, standing out from the rest of a passage due to the uniqueness of the rhetorical structure. If patterns of appositional phrases can be compared to decay and dissociation, these structures are the opposite: they represent flashes of time, epiphanies, and movement. This pattern can be generally put into two categories of intention: one, to increase an argument's credibility, and two, to depict moments of epiphany. In the earlier referenced article ironically titled "Dalí Does Not Write What He Paints", Frédérique Joseph-Lowery states, "The textual linearity is indeed broken by an onomatopoeic sequence that ruptures the sentence"⁸. Joseph-Lowery speaks to an effect similar to that which the double-exclamations have on a reader: a breaking of textual linearity. As a distinctive punctuation mark, especially when used twice in a row, these exclamation marks disrupt the flow and linearity of Dalí's writing, evoking images of quick movement, violence, and epiphany.

In the former category of these sentences—aiding in the credibility of a seemingly unbelievable argument—one can draw a visual comparison to Dalí's use of realistic compositional techniques of perspective, color, etc. in the visual depiction of the bizarre or impossible. He maintains a fairly traditional compositional style of painting in order to depict highly non-traditional imagery, "following the rules" of composition so that moments of rule-breaking are especially highlighted for the viewer. He writes of his childhood that "I loved to have Angina! I would look forward impatiently to its recurrence—what paradises those convalescences were!"⁹ Dalí uses the doubled exclamatory phrases to draw a seemingly

⁸ Frédérique Joseph-Lowery. "Dalí does not write what he paints: Reading with a magnifying glass." *Avant-garde Studies Issue 2*, Fall 2016, 310

⁹ Dalí, 67.

contradictory metaphorical comparison between illness and paradise, encouraging the reader to engage with the idea of seemingly contradictory images—using this structure to the same effect as the painting *Nature Morte Vivante (Still Life - Fast Moving)*.



Nature Morte Vivante (Still Life-Fast Moving), 1956, Collection of The Dalí Museum, St. Petersburg, FL.

The work features some of Dalí's clearest portrayals of movement in the form of flying fruits and tableware, with the doubling of these moving objects reflecting the same imagery which Dalí constructs through his double exclamations. The moving cherry and its stationary double in the upper right quadrant of the work create a similar sense of momentum and surprise that is evoked by doubled exclamatory phrases. The fruits are at once realistic and impossible, either hanging idly in the air or being hurled towards the sky, both maintaining a high level of visual realism in their composition. The title of the painting works in a similar way: though it lacks exclamation marks, its use of two back-to-back contradictory phrases evokes a parallel idea as is emphasized through both visual doubled fruits and written doubled exclamatory phrases. Both the painting's title and its content generate an effect similar to Dalí's repeated use of exclamatory phrases, using illusions of movement to make an image or argument more convincing, encouraging one's trust in seemingly impossible visions, like that of a simultaneously stationary and moving still-life. The work itself has a

thematic focus on the nature of particle motion—that one can know where an object is or how fast that object is going, but never both at once. This idea, as conveyed in the painting, works similarly to the way Dalí manipulates the use and rhetorical purpose of the exclamation mark in his writing. By placing equal emphasis on two back-to-back phrases, we are being told that each one is the most important in a passage, and yet can only believe that one of the phrases at a time is truly the most important. This paradoxical relationship creates a distinct link between the doubled exclamatory structure and the physical concepts which inform the work. Both thematically and structurally, *Nature Morte Vivante* clearly presents connections between elements in Dalí's paintings and his use of the doubled exclamatory structure.

Dalí repeats words within doubled exclamatory phrases in order to further convince the reader of seemingly unbelievable or unlikely concepts. Such a structure is found in Dalí's use of the word "fool". Dalí writes "Professor of painting—professor! Fool that you were!"¹⁰, and on the next page, "Students of the School of Fine Arts! Fools that you were!"¹¹. The repetition of the word "fool" shows Dalí's hope to convince the reader of his assertion of superiority over his peers and his professors, subverting the reader's expectations in regards to Dalí's opinions on authority figures. These sentences use twinned phrases to aid in one's willingness to leave behind the logic of reality. Repetition creates comfort and continuity even when used subtly, and this holds true in both Dalí's writing—through repeated syntactic forms as well as repeated words—and his paintings. However, what makes the repetition found in these exclamatory sentences different from the repetition discussed in Part One is, of course, found in the presence of the exclamation marks. The distinctiveness of the rhetorical device still creates a sense of shock, even when taking structural familiarity into account. This kind of shock, which is generated despite familiar subject-matter, is like that which is experienced when viewing a piece like *Aphrodisiac Telephone*. Despite understanding the meaning behind a telephone and a lobster individually,

¹⁰ Dalí, 161.

¹¹ Ibid., 162.

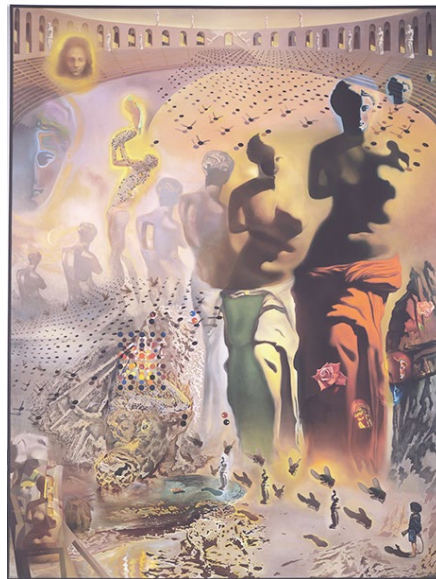
we are still met with shock when seeing them together in an unfamiliar context. The two components of the piece, lobster and telephone, operate like two exclamatory phrases. The otherwise convincing structural continuity of the piece through similar color and texture function like the repetition of the word “fool” in these sentences, and the bizarreness of the work as a whole functions like exclamation marks by generating a sense of shock despite familiarity of structure. In the same way that back-to-back exclamatory phrases leave it up to us to decide which phrase is more important, the two components of the piece force us to consider which one of the objects defines the work: whether it is more of a lobster-telephone or a telephone-lobster. The structural impact of repetition within doubled exclamatory phrases works very similarly to the structure of *Aphrodisiac Telephone*: both use a blend of the familiar and the bizarre to convince the reader or viewer of something otherwise unbelievable.



Aphrodisiac Telephone, c.1936-38, Collection of The Dalí Museum, St. Petersburg, FL.

Another concept evoked by Dalí’s use of double exclamations is that of epiphany. This concept is supplemented by visuals of violence, movement, and a general sense of quickness. Dalí writes, in a sequence of three exclamatory phrases, that “I had just that instant

discovered the morphological secret of Freud! Freud's cranium is a snail! His brain is in the form of a spiral—to be extracted with a needle!"¹², conveying an epiphany through repeated exclamations. The structure of these sentences centers on the idea of ephemerality, with epiphany-like realizations featured between the exclamation marks, noted especially in the choice of the word "instant" and in the violence in the phrase "to be extracted with a needle" in reference to Freud's brain. The three phrases are presented as a kind of sequence of thought, an increasingly frantic series of realizations which cause the exclamation mark's impact to dull with each subsequent use. Epiphany as an abstract concept may not have a one-to-one visual equivalent in Dalí's works, but it can be most closely compared to bright, striking images which leave the reader or viewer in a state of shock or confusion, seeking to convince us of an unrealistic or unbelievable idea, forced to distinguish on our own which of these images should be seen as most important to the overall work. The rhetorical purpose of the exclamation mark—as an indication of the most important or notable part of a passage—works similarly to the way artists seek to draw a viewer's eye to a specific element in a painting.



The Hallucinogenic Toreador, 1969-70, Collection of The Dalí Museum, St. Petersburg, FL.

¹² Dalí, 23.

For example, in viewing the painting *The Hallucinogenic Toreador*, the viewer's eye is immediately drawn in multiple directions, creating a sense of disorientation in the same way that repeated use of exclamation marks dulls a reader's sense of what should be read as most important in a passage. A bright pattern of small colorful circles expanding outward in the lower right corner evokes the idea of transition and sharpness, working in a similar way to doubled exclamatory phrases in *The Secret Life* by surprising the reader through extreme contrast against surrounding structures. And yet, at the same time, our eyes are also pulled towards other distinct images in the work, such as the bright green tie/cape in the middle, the double image of the Toreador, and the small childhood self-portrait in the lower right corner. The viewer experiences a kind of sensory overload as the painting draws our eyes towards multiple visual elements which could be feasibly deemed "most important" or "most striking", in the same way that repeated use of exclamation marks leaves a reader unable to discern which emphasized phrase is actually worthy of the most attention. The multiple emphasized images which are present in *The Hallucinogenic Toreador* disrupt the expected linearity and general palette of the work in the same way that doubled exclamatory phrases lead to a heightened sense of disorientation in a reader.

3. Parentheticals

The phrases found between parentheses in Dalí's *The Secret Life* consistently reveal a new voice which is distinct from the writings of the main narrator, often containing interjected opinions or additional details that add reality to fantastical storytelling. The parenthetical voice provides not only a structural contrast to the overall narration, but also embodies an entirely different persona to the general narrator, one who often reveals new information or beliefs to the reader amidst otherwise seemingly unbelievable narratives. Visually, this feature is correlated with self-portraits in the works, both in terms of direct comparison through explicit self-portraiture and in more symbolic revealing of the self through double imagery and repeated iconography. Haim Finkelstein writes of Dalí's

constructed persona that “the rigor with which this stance is sustained may imply some hidden seriousness. The mad Dalí and the lucid Dalí chase each other in a circle, and it is impossible to tell where one ends and the other begins”¹³. I argue that, while this confusion between the mad and the lucid is undoubtedly an intended feature of the narration, we can gain a much greater understanding of the distinction between these personas by looking at what Dalí decides to emphasize, and de-emphasize, through his use of parentheticals.

Early in the autobiography, Dalí reveals the fact that he has “false memories”—putting the reader immediately on edge and making one aware of the fact that presenting a story as truthful does not make it so. However, through his frequent parentheticals, one can briefly peer through the curtain in hopes of a look at the “true” artist, rather than a carefully crafted persona. And while both narrators could very well be equally constructed personas, the parenthetical voice's consistent interjections of truths and confessions point towards this narrator offering glimmers of truth through his contrasting narrative voice, writing more frankly than the general storyteller of the rest of the autobiography. Dalí writes that “My love for Dullita (whose face I had not yet seen) spread over all things and became a sentiment so general that the idea of the slightest possibility of her real presence would have horrified and disappointed me”¹⁴. Dalí provides a technical truth—that he has not seen Dullita's face—to reveal an overall unspoken truth: never seeing her face, because she is a part of a false memory, a personification of his desires and fantasies rather than a real woman. The parenthetical narrator reassures that he has never seen her face, while the general narrator references her “real presence”, something which cannot exist in reality. Such a pattern holds true throughout the autobiography, hiding confessions of self-awareness between parentheses. For example, Dalí writes “rather less on the contrary (for the simulation of coldness was one of my most formidable weapons) to her own constantly prodding love

¹³ Haim Finkelstein. “Dali's Paranoia-Criticism or The Exercise of Freedom.” *Twentieth Century Literature*, vol. 21, no. 1, 1975, 68.

¹⁴ Dalí, 79.

undoubtedly contributed to maintaining that state of growing amorous tension"¹⁵. The reader can find reliable self-analysis in the parenthetical, providing them another clue that a more honest voice is narrating these phrases between the implied unreliability of the writing surrounding it. Critic Daniella Sanader writes that she seeks to "consider Dalí as a "textual entity", a historicized, constructed figure that exists quite separately from the flesh, blood and moustache of the Catalan artist"¹⁶. Within my proposed understanding of Dalí's parentheticals, a line between the "textual entity" Dalí and the "Catalan artist" can be found in the form of parentheses, rather than in the distinction between writing and painting. Parentheses draw borders between moments when the reader is reading the narrator's storytelling, and when one is reading the comments made by the artist.

However, none of this is to say that the persona of "the artist" is inherently a truth-teller, or a consistent reliable source of Dalí's true beliefs. Rather, as parentheticals reveal a new narrative voice, the reader can find the cracks in Dalí's constructed persona, the general narrator of the work, revealing a second persona behind the cracks, and showing the confusion which is caused in the construction of these two voices. For example, in a passage of reflection on a false memory, Dalí writes that:

I felt that the real absence of the male sex organs in the idealized Dalí (whom I saw come to life again before me) constituted one of his more advantageous attributes, for I have desired ever since to be 'like a beautiful woman,' and this in spite of the fact that since my first disappointed love for Buchaques I have continued to feel a complete sexual indifference toward men. (No! Let there be no misunderstanding on this point—I am not a homosexual)¹⁷

Who is he trying to convince in these parentheticals: the reader or himself? This sentence, with its notable use of two parenthetical phrases, sticks out as especially odd. He calls for "no misunderstanding" on the singular point of his being "not a homosexual", despite

¹⁵ Ibid., 144.

¹⁶ Sanader, 30.

¹⁷ Dalí, 170.

generally seeming to want a level of unclarity and misunderstanding by the reader in the rest of the autobiography, as conveyed through his unmistakably self-contradictory and heavily ornamented narration throughout the majority of the book. But, once again, these parentheticals reveal a piece of the true self, or, at least, one which is distinctly different from the general narrator—in this case, a self that is more insecure than the confident persona found outside the parentheses. The phrase “the idealized Dalí (whom I saw come to life before me)” is another half-truth, as it is in partial reference to what is likely a false memory, and yet also reveals the nature of the revelation regarding “the idealized Dalí” who is described in the passage. He clearly acknowledges the distinction between himself and his persona in this quotation by following his declaration of the existence of these two selves (idealized and true Dalí) with another parenthetical interjection, portraying an interaction between those two voices in one sentence. His use of parentheticals in this context clearly works to illustrate the larger idea of Dalí’s two selves coexisting in one narrative: one, the persona, who serves as the main narrator, and the other, more self-conscious voice, who is revealed only between parentheses.

So, visually, what images do these parentheticals evoke? One of the clearest comparisons that can be made is that of self-portraiture. For example, the embryonic soft self-portrait found in both *Daddy Longlegs of the Evening - Hope!* and in *The Disintegration of the Persistence of Memory* evokes some of the same ideas as the reflective parentheticals in *The Secret Life*.



Daddy Longlegs of the Evening - Hope!, 1940, Collection of The Dalí Museum, St. Petersburg, FL.

These insertions of the self are double images in and of themselves, and when they do reveal the artist, it is from beneath a layer of dreamlike alteration and decay. Just as parentheticals reveal a seemingly more authentic voice amidst otherwise self-contradictory narration, these portraits hide in plain sight as a way of physically seeing Dalí from within his works. The embryonic self-portrait is still a representation of the artist, but it hides and distorts in the same way that Dalí's parentheticals, despite often containing new details or commentary, do not necessarily help to orient the reader. Rather, they reveal a hint of the truth without sacrificing mystery. The painting's embryonic form contains a simultaneous level of vulnerability and distance, working to both entice and confuse the viewer. Yes, it reveals a self, but the "truthfulness" of that self remains in question—much as parentheticals reveal a new voice, but cannot prove its authenticity. On top of that, the title of *The Disintegration of the Persistence of Memory* works similarly to a parenthetical: Dalí places the title of another work (*The Persistence of Memory*) within the painting's overall title, using a repeated preposition ("of") to distinguish between the parts of the title. And like the soft self-portrait in the work itself, this syntactic doubling once again works to "conceal by revealing": the precise title, despite its accuracy, still reveals little about the intentions behind the work itself. In both the painting's title and its content, Dalí represents the conflict between his

constructed persona and his true self, who hides behind iconography and half-truths, keeping the viewer in the dark as to which version of the self is being portrayed at any point in his writing.

A similar visual equivalent to Dalí's parenthetical phrases is found in his frequent insertion of strikingly realistic self-portraits, especially of himself as a boy, as small details within a larger surreal landscape. These portraits are similar to the embryonic portraits discussed above, illustrating another developmental stage which emphasizes a sense of vulnerability to the viewer. The tiny childhood portrait in the bottom right corner of *The Hallucinogenic Toreador* serves as a surprising view into the true perspective of the artist, revealing a (literally) childlike figure from beneath Dalí's heavily curated persona. This specific category of self-portraiture especially compares to how Dalí's parentheticals can often reveal a shockingly reflective or even self-conscious narrator, as found in the passage discussed earlier in this section regarding his sexuality. The reader gains the same conception of his true versus constructed selves through parentheticals that a viewer gains upon seeing the artist as a child in the corner of an extremely large and complex painting. A similar portrait also appears in extreme miniature in *The Average Bureaucrat*, this time alongside his father, even further emphasizing a sense of insecurity and worry in the context of their strained relationship. And so while parentheses do not always reveal an entirely true self in Dalí's writing, they do represent a "dropping of the curtain" of the narrative persona to a certain extent, especially in comparison with these childhood self-portraits, giving the reader or viewer a look into the childhood anxieties that inform Dalí's works and writing well into adulthood. The revealing of an insecure, self-conscious voice through parentheticals serves a purpose similar to embryonic or childhood portraits in his paintings, both inviting us to peer through the cracks in his constructed persona, in search of a piece of the "true" artist.

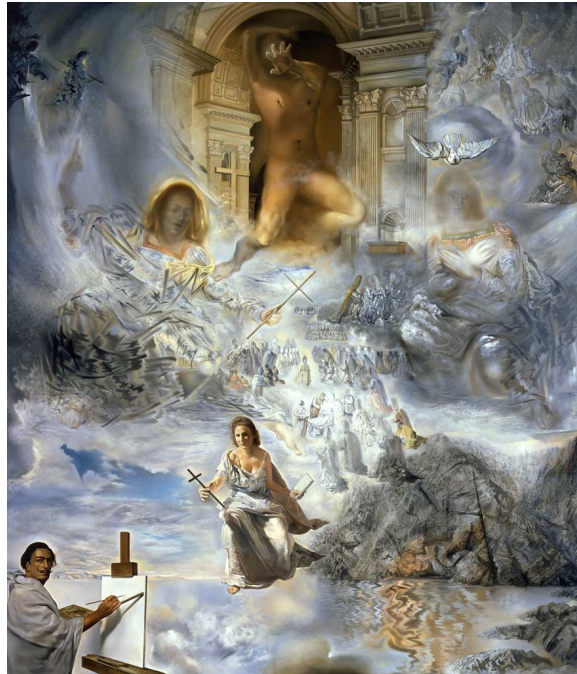


The Average Bureaucrat, 1930, Collection of The Dalí Museum, St. Petersburg, FL.

On a broader topic than childhood self-portraiture, Dalí occasionally includes a realistic and accurate self-portrait within a larger surreal work. Adult portraits, in contrast to their childhood equivalents, achieve a different goal when placed in comparison with Dalí's use of parentheticals. After all, parenthetical phrases do not reveal an exclusively self-conscious or insecure narrator—they also reveal moments of heightened self-awareness and restraint. When Dalí writes “My friends, who took a much more decided pride in my person than I (since my immeasurable arrogance always immunized me against being affected by anything), were eager to defend my truculent appearance”¹⁸, he displays an ironic sense of awareness in acknowledging his “immeasurable arrogance” in the face of his friends' appreciation of his false persona, which, at this point in the autobiography, is that of the Dandy. Visually, this declaration compares favorably to the self-portrait found in the bottom right corner of *The Ecumenical Council*: a representation of Dalí looking back at the viewer, acknowledging his role as artist as he looks away from a blank canvas. He paints himself

¹⁸ Dalí, 177.

engaging in the creation process, in the same way that the reader is made aware of Dalí's role as the writer behind the narrator in *The Secret Life* when that narration takes a brief shift towards self-awareness. Breaks from self-contradictory narration through parentheticals mirror visual moments of extreme realism or traditional composition in Dalí's works, specifically through his rare use of hyper-realistic self-portraiture in a larger surreal work.



The Ecumenical Council, 1960, Collection of The Dalí Museum, St. Petersburg, FL.

In her article "Poe Visits Dalí: Doubles in Autobiography", Professor Carmen García De la Rasilla writes that moments of contemplation and reflection in Dalí's *The Secret Life* signal the way "victory over narcissism extinguishes the autobiographical urge and brings down the curtain on autobiography"¹⁹. That is, in essence, what I am arguing with specific reference to Dalí's use of parentheticals—with "victory over narcissism" meaning that the presence of multiple voices in the narrative signals a departure from the narcissism found in the

¹⁹ Carmen García De la Rasilla. "Poe Visits Dalí: Doubles in Autobiography." *The Edgar Allan Poe Review* 4, no. 2 (2003), 7.

construction of the primary narrative persona. The “autobiographical urge” takes on a new shape once the reader understands that the book is not written from the perspective of a single narrator, but rather, by multiple personas, bending the definition of autobiography and establishing a new narrative structure which is facilitated through interaction between the two narrative voices. The contrast between the general and parenthetical voices provides a peek behind the curtain as the narration switches between its two distinct voices, and, importantly, we see a clear shift towards earnestness whenever he breaks up the general narrator’s storytelling with a parenthetical interjection. However, it is worth exercising a level of caution when arguing that the parenthetical self is entirely a ‘true’ self. Instead, it is best described as having a clear sense of verisimilitude—the *appearance* of truth, rather than a complete truth. Is the perceived earnestness and self-consciousness of the parenthetical narrator simply a way of lulling the reader into greater trust in his narration, only to ultimately reveal just as carefully constructed a persona as the general narrator? There is, of course, no clear answer to this question, because of just how well-crafted the autobiography’s verisimilitude is. I believe that, to a certain extent, it is most productive to put a level of faith in the idea that the parenthetical voice plays a role in revealing truths which the general narrator obscures. Or, at the very least, this separate voice functions to illustrate a second view of Dalí’s reality, giving the reader a new perspective on the overall narrative. With these assumptions in mind, much more interesting comparisons between the writings of the parenthetical voice and visual motifs in Dalí’s works can be made. Whether that narrator is a purely “true” narrator or just another construction becomes less relevant when we shift our focus towards how that distinct narrative voice, regardless of its true authenticity, interacts with other elements of Dalí’s writing and painting.

4. Conclusions

In this paper, I have only discussed a few of the many syntactic and rhetorical motifs found in *The Secret Life* for which clear and relevant visual equivalents can be found. However, the three structures of extended appositional phrases, double exclamations, and

parentheticals work to illustrate a general framework for how we should analyze Dalí's writing as often being parallel, rather than in opposition to, his paintings. The visual comparisons between these two art forms reveal essential through-lines in not only how we understand specific works of Dalí, but also how we understand the thought processes behind all of his artistic endeavors. Through a look at the comparison between parentheticals and self-portraits, for example, we gain a clearer understanding of how Dalí seeks to construct his persona, and when and how he portrays authenticity: how narrative selves can remain cloaked, even in moments of genuineness. Similarly, by comparing doubled exclamatory phrases with the way that traditional compositional techniques combine with surreal imagery, we can see how Dalí works to convince the reader or viewer of something seemingly impossible or bizarre—creating a sense of credibility through both visual and rhetorical structures. And when seeking to understand the way Dalí's artistic visions carry across from writing to painting, the connection between his seemingly disjointed use of bizarre imagery and the way he structures his extended appositional sentences reveals how he represents his thought patterns across mediums. These comparisons illustrate just how fruitful a cross-medium analysis of Dalí's works can be. Dalí's syntactic motifs, and how they compare so clearly to visual motifs, reveal how, even across multiple mediums, Dalí's stylistic choices and thought processes contain the same essential ideas—that the 'core' of his artistry is embedded into all of his works, not just those for which he is best known.

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