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"THE OVAL PORTRAIT" ON ART AND ART ON "THE OVAL PORTRAIT": A CASE STUDY OF EKPHRASIS AND BOOK ILLUSTRATION

"EL RETRATO OVAL" SOBRE EL ARTE Y ARTE SOBRE "EL RETRATO OVAL": UN ESTUDIO SOBRE LA EKPHRASIS Y LA ILUSTRACIÓN

Beatriz Garrigós García
Universidad de Salamanca, España
beatriz.garrigos@usal.es
http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4802-0946

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Abstract

This article explores the relationship between ekphrasis and book illustration. To this aim, it analyses Edgar Allan Poe's "The Oval Portrait" and discusses four different pictorial renditions of it made by Jean-Paul Laurens, Arthur Rackham and Santiago Caruso. After some theoretical considerations to clarify what is understood by ekphrasis, this paper proves how it is possible to understand "The Oval Portrait" as an example of ekphrastic literature. From this standpoint, and drawing from secondary literature on how the vampiric undertones of the short story explore the relationship between art and life, I analyse how the relationship between art and literature is portrayed in the story. These notions lead to the analysis of how the tale's topic and its ekphrastic nature have influenced the way readers engage with the story and how it is depicted by book illustrators.

Keywords: Edgar Allan Poe; "The Oval Portrait"; *ekphrasis*, book illustration, art/literature relationship, readers' engagement

Resumen

Este artículo explora la relación entre la *ekphrasis* y la ilustración literaria. Para ello, el análisis se centra en el relato de Edgar Allan Poe «El retrato oval» y

lo compara con las ilustraciones de Jean-Paul Laurens, Arthur Rackham y Santiago Caruso. Tras algunas consideraciones teóricas para aclarar lo que se entiende por *ekphrasis*, el artículo pasa a probar que es posible entender «El retrato oval» como un ejemplo de literatura 'ekphrástica'. Con esta perspectiva, y apoyándome en la literatura secundaria que analiza cómo el subtexto vampírico del relato se manifiesta en la forma de tratar la relación entre el arte y la vida, analizo cómo la relación entre arte y literatura aparece representada en el texto. Esto lleva a un análisis de cómo el tema y la naturaleza 'ekphrástica' del relato influyen en la forma en que los lectores se relacionan con él y cómo lo representan los ilustradores.

Palabras clave: Edgar Allan Poe; «El retrato Oval», *ekphrasis*, ilustración literaria, relación arte/literatura, implicación del lector

1. Introduction

For a long time, painting and poetry have been described together as the "sister arts", which points out to a relationship that, as Brylowe playfully remarks "can be friendly or antagonistic" (3). The same can be assumed when we are to analyse the relationship between all genres of literature and the visual arts, where their "[s]isterhood invites comparison but it does not suggest equality" (Brylowe 3). Among the different relationships that can be established between literature and art there are two that can be thought of as symmetrical: the literary description of an art piece and the visual depictions of literature in book illustration.

Bearing this in mind, this essay will explore the relationship between literature and art by examining the short story "The Oval Portrait" and how it has been depicted by three different illustrators: Jean-Paul Laurens, Arthur Rackham and Santiago Caruso. The three artists have been chosen because they belong to different time periods and have thus approached the short story from different cultural contexts. As Rigal-Aragón and González-Moreno remark, "Poe drew on *ekphrasis* in several of his tales as a main part of the plot" (94, original emphasis) and "The Oval Portrait" is, from its very title, an obvious example. This use of ekphrasis may influence the way in which the illustrators approach the story, since they are working with a piece of literature where "the power of language to guide interpretations by what is omitted as well as by what is said" (Kafalenos 253) plays a crucial part.

Edgar Allan Poe's "The Oval Portrait" was first published in 1845 as a reworking of his 1842 tale "Life in Death" (Gibian 110), both versions being part of an artistic dialogue with Hawthorne on "vision of art, aesthetic

figuration, and the figure-making artist" (Gibian 110). In the final version of the short story, an unnamed first-person narrator breaks into a castle where he finds a room full of paintings which, according to a book that he finds "upon the pillow" of the bed (Poe 209), were created by a painter who lived there. Half asleep, the narrator is enthralled by an oval painting that depicts a beautiful young girl, whose story he proceeds to read in the art book.

Critical analysis of this short story is often concerned with the "vampiric undertones" (Twitchell 392) and the way in which it addresses how the death of a woman can turn her into art (Haselstein 440). The story has also been analysed in terms of how it reflects the relationship between art and real life by Cannon and Miyazawa, whose views have helped me address this topic, as well as the parallelism that can be found between the narrator and the young girl (Nielsen). Even if, as Freedman claims, "the view that the principal subject of "The Oval Portrait" is the nature of art and its perplexed relationship with the life it copies, alters, or transcends continues to dominate" (7), the implications that the way the short story addresses the 'sister arts' may have on its visual representations remains little studied, which makes the analysis of its illustrations all the more necessary.

My working hypothesis is that the two ekphrases contained within the short story, the description of the painting made by the narrator (Poe 209) and the passage about it in the art book (Poe 209-10), are not only relevant to understand how Poe comments on the relationship between literature, art and life, but significantly influence the way in which "The Oval Portrait" is rendered in painting by subverting the readers' expectations on how each of the ekphrasis should be.

2. Theoretical Framework

Since my analysis will be carried out from the standpoint of ekphrastic literature, it is important to start by giving a short definition of what is understood by 'ekphrasis' and what a text needs in order to be considered an example of such literature. A clear and concise definition of ekphrasis is the one proposed by Heffernan: "the verbal representation of graphic representation" (299), which means that it is sometimes understood as a "poetic description of a pictorial or sculptural work of art" (Spitzer 207). Nevertheless, there is yet another characteristic that I find crucial to the definition of ekphrasis: the need for the description to engage with the work of art in a significant way. As Cheeke points out, "the act of describing art is always an act of interpretation" (19). This feature of ekphrasis is exactly the

one that is reciprocated by book illustration, "the cross-section of word and imagination in a space where the artist visually realizes a moment of written narrative" (Douglass 57).

Once an artist has created a work devoted to a piece of literature, the two become indivisible. This is exactly what happens with the text about the portrait that the narrator finds, which as Ginsburg remarks, makes his position unique, for he is the only one with the privilege of seeing the portrait and reading about it, unlike the readers, whose takes on the painting are limited by the ekphrases. The narrator's experience within the tale can thus be seen as a mirror of the supplemental theory on book illustration:

Supplemental theory is built on the ekphrastic interchange that occurs between the *parergon* and *ergon*, more simply referred to as the frame and the work, respectively. As the frame or supplemental entity, a parergon, simultaneously stands to the side of the ergon, or stand-alone work, while irreversibly altering it once added. By nature, illustration exemplifies this relationship; visual art serves as a supplemental frame for the text it accompanies, separate yet indivisible once seen together (Magistrale and Slayton 4, emphasis in original).

For this reason, it is usually understood that book illustrations are subordinate to the text in a world that "has tended generally to view illustration as a second-class art form, inferior to the 'high arts' of painting and sculpture" (Magistrale and Slayton 2). However, Poe himself believed that "illustrations enhance the pleasure derived from reading, even if [they] do not match the reader's interpretation of the text" (Cantalupo 125). That may be the reason why he infused his texts with a "graphicality" that has turned him into one of the most illustrated authors (Cantalupo 4-5). Despite that, most of his works were not illustrated until after his death (Magistrale and Slayton 5), which could have allowed artists to add new levels of meaning in ways that they may not be able to explore when they are supervised by the authors. Moreover, illustrations "are also critically important in the microcosm of [a] book, for although they are often overlooked on contemporary criticism, they have in fact the power to subvert the text" (Douglass 61). This is related to the fact that, as has been already hinted in the definition of *illustration*, "the illustrator was first a reader, and his or her art is a response as such," which will lead artists "to provide a visualization of the moment when the reader is arguably most engaged—and in the case of Poe, possibly overwhelmed—by the text" (Magistrale and Slayton 14). In the case of "The Oval Portrait", moreover, not only are the illustrations to be influenced by the artists' interpretation of the tale, any attempt to represent the title's portrait will be influenced by its

ekphrastic representation in the text, "which makes it impossible for readers to envision it except through the double lens of the narrator's perceptions and the narrator's words that describe his perceptions" (Kafalenos 261).

3. Analysis of "The Oval Portrait" and its relation to art

3.1. On the ekphrastic nature of "The Oval Portrait"

Although Cheeke's analysis focuses on actual art ekphrasis (descriptions of real art works), he also acknowledges that notional or non-existent pieces of art can "be described within a story, perhaps produced or crafted by a character within the story, or revealed to another ... to be understood or half-understood, sometimes even misunderstood" as was frequently done by Shakespeare (20). This is precisely the case of the painting in "The Oval Portrait," a remarkable piece of art that the narrator tries to understand and whose story is revealed by the art book in the turret.

Despite Haselstein's claim that a detailed description is strictly avoided in Poe's short story (449), it is my belief that the narrator's words about the painting are precisely an instance of ekphrasis. Moreover, as Rigal-Aragón and González-Moreno point out, by mentioning Sully's paintings, Poe introduces "onto the reader's mind an already existing image" which allows him to make his ekphrasis more visual (104). Therefore, even if we never get to know how the girl looked, since no descriptions of the colours of her hair, eyes and dress are given, it is possible for readers to get a clear image of her and the portrait. The narrator states that the painting "was done in what is technically called *vignette* manner" (Poe 209, emphasis in original) including only head and shoulders, which made the girl melt "imperceptibly into the vague yet deep shadow that formed the background of the whole" (Poe 209). The narrator is thus giving us a vivid and exact description of the style in which the portrait was painted, where "the vividness of the image is gradually reduced at its periphery ..., which implies the gradual fading of life" (Miyazawa 93). However, the narrator does describe the girl too, by saying she was "a young girl just ripening into womanhood" (Poe 208), with a countenance of "immortal beauty" (Poe 209) and "an absolute *life-likeness* of expression" (Poe 209, emphasis in original). Even if it is true that the readers will have to imagine the girl by themselves, without further reference, as Meek points out "all modes of aesthetic experience ... require a certain amount of imaginary work on the part of the reader or viewer" (25). Therefore, readers have a very clear image of the girl's aspect: their own idea of a radiant maiden

of immortal beauty. Despite this apparent freedom readers possess to imagine the girl, their mental image of the portrait will be deeply influenced by both the story's title and the detailed technical description of the painting given by the narrator, as well as, if they are familiar with them, Sully's portraits.

The portrait's entrance in the volume about the castle's paintings can be considered another example of ekphrasis. If, as Heffernan claims, "picture titles can express precisely what ekphrasis so often delivers: a radical critique on representation" (304), no less can be expected from picture descriptions in museum stands or art volumes. According to Cheeke, this kind of prose ekphrasis may work "as a form of incantation or evocatory magic that replaces … the subjective experience of the gallery visitor, instructing that visitor in the correct aesthetic response" (171). In the case of "The Oval Portrait," the volume about the artworks is not concerned, as should be expected, with the technical facts, but with the story of who the girl was and how her portrait came to be. This is accomplished in such a subjective way that it reads as a fictitious story intending to make the reader feel for the girl, as Nielsen also remarks (244). Thus, the entrance fulfils another of Cheeke's criteria, that "[i]n the strongest examples of ekphrasis there is always therefore a sense of extension or enlargement, but one which brings with it a pressure to discriminate and differentiate between the two kinds of experience" (3). Thanks to the volume, readers can feel that they know more about the painting than before, but the experience is totally different from seeing the portrait, which is the one described by the narrator.

Thus, as I have argued, it can be ascertained that the short story is made up of two ekphrases, different in nature but complementary to each other, that make both the portrait more real and the tale more vivid. Moreover, it is interesting to remember how the ekphrases completely subvert the readers' expectations about what to find in each one: the unnamed narrator, while focusing on his feelings, gives the technical description, whereas the art volume surprises both narrator and reader with a non-technical account of the girl's identity and death. Illustrators aiming to depict the short story may find themselves trapped between both ekphrases because they create a "disjunction between portrait and book [that] appears as a difference that cannot be overcome: there cannot be a synthesis between [them] that would allow the narrator (or us) to grasp them together", as Ginsburg explains.[1]

1 Since the digital version of Ginsburg quote is unnumbered, I am unable to provide the exact page of the quote.

3.2. The oval portrait in "The Oval Portrait." A study of the relationship between literature and art

As was mentioned in the introduction, Poe wrote "The Oval Portrait" in the midst of an artistic dialogue with Hawthorne in which both produced tales that dealt with a male artist who becomes obsessed with his art fetish in a way that troubles their relationship "with an inspiring female figure of desire" (Gibian 117). The celebration that the story thus makes of "the artist as a god-like creator" and the power of "image-based art to transfigure life" (Gibian 116) has implications on the relationship between art and literature discussed in the tale, as will be argued.

An analysis of the relationship between the painter, his wife and his art in the short story leads to the vampiric undertones present within it. The very colours that the painter "spread upon the canvas were drawn from the cheeks of her who sat beside him" (Poe 210), so that the portrait is effectively stealing the girl's life. Here it can be seen how the "vampire myth was an ideal paradigm for love that is too demanding or, in the case of 'The Oval Portrait,' art that is too life-consuming" (Twitchell 388). This vampiric relationship between art and life can be transposed to that between art and literature, because in "the most extreme cases the relationship between painting and description becomes almost parasitic or vampiric" (Cheeke 177), which is the case in Poe's tale. Once the narrator and the reader have read the art volume's ekphrasis, there is no return to the turret and nothing more is told about neither the narrator nor the painting. As Freedman argues, "the tale undermines its own apparent claim" (9) and seems to subvert the image of art consuming life by letting literature become art's vampire. The framed story of the artist and his wife has devoured the framing narrative, which is left without conclusion as if it had never been relevant, which as Ginsburg criticises, has made the frame narrative be understudied by critics. The devouring attitude is developed from the moment the narrator sees the portrait, when he becomes so interested in the girl that he stops providing details about his circumstances and focuses on what seeing the painting makes him experience.

Also important to this analysis is how the painter was unable to see what was in front of him, a dying girl who "grew daily more dispirited and weak" (Poe 210), because he was too consumed with his art to see or to want to see, as the repetition of "*would*" (Poe 210, emphasis in original) seems to indicate. As Cannon remarks, the artist "does not represent the reality in front of him, since his wife is dying rather than ripening" (49). This topic, the tendency to

see not what is true, but what one wishes were true, was a common concern in Poe's literature (Cantalupo 107) and in this tale it seems linked to a criticism of the obsessed painter while hinting at art's impossibility to depict nature as it is. If we transpose this situation to the conflict between stories and illustrations in magazines at the time when the tale was written, the artist's denial to see real life by focusing only on his painting may be linked to Poe's fear that there was an "imbalance between word and image" that made texts seem secondary to the images as if they were taking the illustrations' role (Cannon 40). Here we witness a situation where the sisterly relationship between arts can turn antagonistic when illustration subverts its secondary role and threatens to usurp literature's main role.

In spite of Poe's above-mentioned views on how illustrations could enhance the reading experience, his short story seems to challenge that. In "The Oval Portrait" we encounter both a painting and a narrative about its creation, both placed in a layer of meanings resembling the oval frame "richly gilded and filigreed in Moresque" (Poe 210), which links the portrait with the arabesque, a style that produces a tri-dimensional illusion (Letalleur-Sommer 110). Both painting and narrative are completely intertwined in the short story in a way that, even if as Cannon argues "the book and the portrait are separate entities" (49), they need each other to reach their full potential to move and engage the reader/viewer, an experience that remains unique to the narrator's experience. The "absolute *life-likeness*" (Poe 209, emphasis in original) of the portrait may cause the viewers deep agitation by startling, confounding, subduing and appalling them, as it does to the unnamed narrator of the short story (Poe 209), but the portrait by itself is not enough to break the narrative. To reach that point, both the narrator and the reader need to go through the experience of getting to know the Art-obsessed painter and the "maiden of rarest beauty, and not more lovely than full of glee" (Poe 209) who gave her life to make the portrait such a remarkable piece (Miyazawa 95).

As Cannon states, viewers of the portrait do "not necessarily read the history book and learn of the discrepancy between the portrait and its subject" (49), which means that without reading the art volume's words, viewers will never know what the portrait really is and entails. Therefore, what "The Oval Portrait" suggests is that, even if art can have a vampiric influence over life, literature can become art's vampire: an ekphrastic paragraph about an unsettling piece of art turns out to be even more unsettling, making the narrative break without going back to the painting.

What is more, as will be argued in the next section, it is the painter's story, and not the portrait, that has had a bigger resonance in illustrators' renditions of the short story. In these depictions of "The Oval Portrait" the illustrators endeavour to show the tale's "interplay between the two media" (Kafalenos 259), the visual representation, denied to all but the narrator, and the verbal representation that, in the two already discussed ekphrases, gives the reader/artist complementary information.

3.3. Depicting "The Oval Portrait"

Since every reader engages with the text in a different way, it can only be expected that the same will hold true for illustrators who, "like visual artists working anywhere, infuse their subject images with a uniquely personal and era-reflective style and vision—an interpretation of Poe that is their own" (Magistrale and Slayton 14). According to these authors, the illustrators' aim is to "provide a visual encoding of what Derrida defines as the *parerga* serving to deepen the memory of a scene from the *ergon* that lingers with the reader long after the Poe story is finished and the book is closed" (14). Maybe for this very reason, instead of drawing the title's oval portrait, Poe's illustrators are more concerned with the death scene described in the art volume, which also allows them more creative freedom.[2] Moreover, given the supernatural air that surrounds the title's portrait, depicting it alone in a satisfactory manner that would awaken in the viewer the feelings experienced by the narrator could prove a hard task. Nonetheless, this underrepresentation of the picture may also be linked to the perception that portrait painting, like illustration, has sometimes been regarded "as inferior to other art forms because of the particular, singular nature of its subject. A portrait ... would not be of much interest [unless] it is more than a painting" (Ginsburg).

I will start my analysis with Jean-Paul Laurens's rendition of the short story because, according to Magistrale and Slayton, the "French introduced Poe to literary Europe and beyond via the Charles Baudelaire and Stéphane Mallarmé translations in the second half of the nineteenth century" (15) and this work belongs to that period. One important detail when analysing illustrations is to pay attention to where the image is placed within the book. In the case of Laurens's illustration, it is located just before the beginning of

2 Notwithstanding that in the web we can find plenty of drawings of the oval portrait, I have chosen to analyse the renditions of three professional book illustrators, considering that fan art would be beyond the scope of this article.

the short story, which could risk giving away the turn of it. However, the final effect is not so, because in the black and white illustration, where we see the painter working steadily on his portrait while, in the background, his wife poses and stares at the viewer, there is no clue as to what is going to happen. The room where the characters are seems dark and is full of heavy curtains and "armorial trophies" (Poe 208), which links it with the description of the turret where the narrator finds the painting. The moment depicted in the illustration may be the exact moment when the portrait is finished, which is hinted at by the fact that the portrait, although still being worked on, is already placed in its Moresque frame. Also remarkable is the likeness between the girl model and her portrait: they look exactly the same, which links the illustration with the *life-likeness* described by Poe's narrator without giving away that the portrait has sucked the girl's life. Thus, Laurens is depicting the climactic point in the short story without revealing what is to come; instead, he links it with the narrator's description, combining the two ekphrases of the story in one image that does not entirely match any of the two narrative moments that inspired it. It could be argued that, in doing so, he has managed to combine the moment when the reader is most engaged with the tale (the art volume's ekphrasis) with the one when the narrator is so engaged with the portrait he has just discovered that he seems to forget everything else. The fact that the room is depicted as it is described by the narrator, full of other art pieces and armours makes it more difficult for the viewer (who has not yet started reading the tale) to discern why the oval portrait of the title is so significant and recalls the fact that, as Cantalupo argues, Poe used heavily decorated interiors to hide the uncanny (113).

Arthur Rackham "produced in 1935 12 haunting color plates and 17 black-and-white drawings of multiple [Poe's] tales" (Magistrale and Slayton 10). In this volume, "his best work is reserved for Poe's short stories that emphasize horrific and violent action or a combination of the two, and these selections often appear in color" (Magistrale and Slayton 130), however, in the colour plate devoted to "The Oval Portrait" there is nothing violent or horrific at first glance. Like Laurens, Rackham chose to represent the artist and his wife in the turret, where we can see how "the light dripped [...] from overhead" (Poe 209), but at a slightly later moment of the narrative. His picture corresponds to the exact moment of realisation when, in the last line of the story, the painter understands that his portrait has taken his wife's life. This is implied by the paleness of her body in contrast to the brighter colours present in the painting and the surprise shown in the painter's face. The fact

that, unlike Laurens, Rackham chose to focus only on the second ekphrasis puts a stronger emphasis on the portrait and its relationship with the sitter, although the viewer's understanding of it is mediated by the text that surrounds the image. In this case, the illustration is placed in an independent page right after the art volume describes the young girl's hate of Art, which she considers her rival for her husband's love. Therefore, readers that do not know the story might think that Rackham is representing the girl sabotaging her portrait by not taking the sitting seriously, realising the truth only after reaching the end. If we take into account supplemental theory, Rackham's illustration is a great example of how word and image interact with one another to cause a deeper effect on the reader/viewer and how indivisible they can become. The illustration invites the readers to make assumptions about what they are seeing, but these change once they reach the end of the short story, which forever affects the way in which the illustration is perceived.

Although a professional illustrator, Santiago Caruso's renditions of "The Oval Portrait" are independent oils, as can be ascertained by their descriptions (which include the hashtag "oils") and the fact that no Poe volume is listed among his illustration work on his website (Caruso, "Curriculum"). An interesting detail about his work is that, despite devoting two paintings to "The Oval Portrait," unlike the previously discussed illustrators, Caruso never shows the portrait to the viewers, which reinforces the fact that seeing the painting remains an experience unique to the narrator. The first painting represents the moment when the narrator, who holds the art volume in his hand, moves the candelabrum (here an oil lamp) in such a way that it allows him to discover the oval portrait. Thus, this painting represents the first ekphrasis from the short story and, although the viewer can only see the "richly gilded" (Poe 209) oval frame and guess that its content is the portrait of a young girl in the vignette style described by the narrator, it is possible to see in his expression how the sight of it affects him. Caruso's way of representing this ekphrasis shows a concern for readers' engagement and the feelings that the portrait evokes by focusing on the narrator's reaction to the painting and ignoring the technical details that he so meticulously described. The second painting shows the same scene depicted by Laurens and Rackham; however, because we are not allowed to see the final stage of the portrait, it is the girl's posture that makes a viewer familiar with Poe's tale infer that she is exhaling her last breath. The absence of the portrait forces the viewers to focus all their attention on the interaction between painter and subject, therefore, raising the question, as the art volume does, of how the

painter could be unable to see that his wife was growing weaker by the day and suffered during the sittings. The undisturbed expression of the painter and the fact that he still holds the brush seem to imply that he is about to place the last fatal tint, which emphasises how art inspired by literature needs its written source to be fully understood.

4. Conclusion

In this essay, I have analysed Poe's "The Oval Portrait" to prove that the story includes two ekphrastic parts different in nature: while the first one is technical, the second one is a narration that describes the events that led to the painting looking as it does. This gives us further proof that imaginary works of art can inspire ekphrastic writings, as is the case of Keats's famous Grecian Urn. As stated above, a crucial requisite of ekphrasis is to engage with the artwork in a meaningful way, which both ekphrases in the tale do. The technical description made by the unnamed narrator is intertwined with the description of how the portrait enthralled him and made him feel. The second ekphrasis, which is the one in the art book is also engaging with the painting, because, by telling the reader the story of its conception from a point of view intended to induce sympathy for the girl, it provides a narrative that forever changes the perception of the portrait and lingers in the readers' minds. More importantly, the fact that the ekphrases subvert readers' expectations (the narrator's one being technical and yet emotional and the one in the book enlarging the mystery of the painting) seem to influence not only how readers remember the story, but also how illustrators approach it.

This essay also proves that the way the vampiric undertones of the short story are replicated in the relationship between art and literature portrayed in it are as important as the ekphrastic nature of the text. Whilst the tale is about a portrait that takes its model's life, the art book's ekphrasis, with its climactic, turning point, takes the focus away from the portrait, making the death scene the most memorable part of the short story in the readers' minds, as well as in the narrator's, who is unable to resume his own story. Therefore, the effect that the second ekphrasis has on the tale is that it takes away all attention from the frame narrative in a similar way as the one in which the first-person narrator seems to forget himself when he sees the portrait. After contemplating the portrait, he does not seem to care about his situation anymore and, after reading what happened to the girl, so is the reader expected to do, as Poe anticipated when he did not return to the frame narrative in an attempt, as Kafalenos argues, to prove "the power of narratives

to shape interpretations" by choosing "the sequence in which information is revealed" (253).

Therefore, despite the fact that the story is about a portrait, it is the second ekphrasis that has gained more attention from illustrators aiming to represent the short story. As stated above, illustrators are readers first, and it is only natural that they should feel inclined to depict the moment when readers are most engaged with the text because illustration, like ekphrasis, requires engagement with the original work and can become a way of interpretation. Thus, in their own styles and representing different moments of the narrative, they all chose a scene from the tragic sitting for the portrait to illustrate the short story. In all renditions, the focus of the image is on the painter and his wife, whereas the portrait is placed in a corner (Laurens), in the background (Rackham) or hidden (Caruso, *II*). Even in Caruso's painting representing the narrator's discovery of the portrait, it is blurred and the focus of the artwork is placed on how the narrator reacts to it, so that instead of focusing on the painting, the scene is more concerned with the frame narrative and how its narrator discovers the painting that gives the title to the story.

The two ways in which art and literature relate to one another explored in this essay prove how both arts are deeply intertwined and connected to one another. For this reason, I believe that it is interesting to analyse not only ekphrasis and book illustration independently, but that an exploration of how both phenomena can change and influence each other could be deeply enriching to the study of both literature and the visual arts.

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