



Portrait Stories

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INTRODUCTION

"Portrait is a curious bastard of art, sprung on the one side from a desire which is not artistic, nay, if anything, opposed to the whole nature and function of art: the desire for the mere likeness of an individual," wrote in 1885 the art critic Vernon Lee in an essay entitled, somewhat self-contradictorily, "The Portrait Art" (212).¹ While in ancient times the desire "for the mere likeness of an individual" could have been judged useful since the individuals depicted were "great men," whose example could inspire posterity,² in the modern period this is no longer the case: everyone can have his or her portrait painted—that is, everyone who can pay. And though throughout history painters of all sorts have been paid for their work, and some of them even grew very rich, the portrait painter's situation was perceived as different: the reversal of cash flow whereby the painter is paid by the sitter (rather than paying the model) compromises the painter's freedom and authority. A comment to a portrait sitter attributed to Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres—"I would like to be able to give you 5 francs, Madame, for then you would be forced to hold the pose like the poor girls we pay expressly so to do"—captures this reversal of power relations whose ultimate outcome is the painter's "servitude" to the whims of his subject.³

But what has prompted “aesthetic purists” to consider portraiture an inferior form of art (or no art at all)—its interest in particular individuals and its entanglement with worldly interests and monetary transactions⁴—is precisely what makes it a compelling subject of narrative and gives stories about portraits their unique characteristics. For one, since portraiture itself is far from a purely aesthetic practice, stories that center around portraits do not deal with purely aesthetic issues; indeed, they often undermine the very idea of a purely aesthetic realm (of production or consumption). This does not mean that portrait stories do not sometimes represent a painter’s ambivalence toward the “portrait art” or the desire (of the painter, the sitter, the person who commissions the portrait) to transcend the individual—the particular, contingent, real—that is, the desire to “idealize.” Such stories, however, often show the dangers or impossibility of this attempt.

Centered around the portrait as a particular form of visual representation, portrait stories deal with transactions and exchanges among painters, sitters, and viewers—all interested parties, whose interests, moreover, are often conflicting and whose interactions are shaped by power differentials (especially those determined by gender). The conflicts these interactions produce are particularly charged precisely because the portrait is a representation of a particular individual: what is at stake is this individual’s identity or subjectivity as well as that of the painter and/or viewer(s) whose interests are inscribed in the portrait.

That portrait stories are primarily about the relation between subjectivity and representation may seem obvious, as may the idea that representation is a social practice inflected by particular interests and power relations. And yet both have been obscured by two interpretative tendencies among critics. The first is the tendency to discuss stories about portraits as stories about “art,” thus ignoring and erasing the specificity of the portrait as a particular form of representation. The second tendency is that of linking portraits to the supernatural or the fantastic, which often inhibits further interpretation: since the portrait’s power is said to be supernatural, since the events surrounding it are said to be fantastic, there seems to be no reason to ask about the nature of the portrait’s power or the reasons for these events.

In this book, by contrast, I will show how, in the stories I analyze, the portrait’s role is inseparable from its specificity as a visual representation of a particular individual. I will argue that portrait stories deserve our attention because they provide us with varied and differentiated accounts of the ways in which subjectivities are formed in relation to a particular kind

of image, whose own production is complicated by intersubjective relations, themselves inflected by social determinants. In telling about the portrait’s production these stories show the interestedness of the painters and the power that can accrue to them from the act of representation (often at the expense of the portrait’s subject) while also exposing the vulnerability of the portrait painter’s sense of self. In telling about the viewer’s relation to the portrait (and the viewer can double up as subject and/or painter) they show how the portrait functions as a site for the formation of subjectivity, problematizing the very act of seeing with its attendant acts of identification, misrecognition, projection, and imitation.

That portrait stories are, in a general way, about the relation between subjectivity and representation does not, of course, mean that all portrait stories deal with the same problems or tell the same story. In narratives about portraits, I will argue, the portrait functions as a topos, that is, a set of variables that can be combined in different ways and with different emphasis in order to articulate a variety of issues. These variables do not have a predetermined meaning that remains always the same but rather receive different meanings as well as different valuations in different contexts. So while a certain family resemblance can be found among portrait stories—a resemblance that gives them their specificity as a subgenre—there is not one overarching issue, theme, or problem that they can all be said to exemplify.

In what follows I analyze nineteenth-century portrait stories—short stories and novellas—from a variety of literary traditions (American, British, French, German, Russian). Though portrait stories are as old as portraits themselves (and those, in turn, go back to the very beginning of the art of painting),⁵ if we limit ourselves to Western literature of the modern period we can see that the nineteenth century functions as an important watershed in the history of this subgenre. In narratives from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the portrait appears as an object already existing in the world and about whose producer and process of production not much (most often nothing) needs to be said. In such texts the portrait appears as an incontrovertible token of the identity of its subject. In Madame de Lafayette’s *Zaïde* (1670–71), for example, the portrait that captivated Zaïde’s attention and that Consalve was thought to merely resemble is proven to be in fact his own portrait. Thus the prophecy that Zaïde will marry the subject of the portrait, though grounded in error and deceit, proves ultimately to be “a true prediction” (235). As a result, Zaïde and Consalve can marry and Zaïde’s father is finally convinced to convert to Christianity, an act upon which he has decided before Zaïde’s birth but

neglected to accomplish. In Horace Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* (1764), to take another example, there is no doubt that the portrait that at the beginning of the narrative "quits its panel and descend[s] on the floor with a grave and melancholy air" (22) is that of Manfred's grandfather, whose criminal acts are the cause of all the disasters related in the narrative. There is also no doubt that the other portrait featured in the narrative is that of Alfonso, the rightful ruler who was poisoned by Manfred's ancestor. The resemblance of Theodore to the portrait, first observed by Matilda, establishes Theodore as the rightful heir so that as the crimes of Manfred's grandfather are revealed they are also redressed (even if belatedly). In *The Portrait*, "a novel in two volumes by Miss Elliott, Novelist" (1783), there is no doubt that the portrait the heroine, Maria, sees at the picture gallery in her grandfather's castle is that of her dead father, who was cast away by his own father for marrying against his wishes. Maria's reaction to the portrait—"She faintly exclaimed, while her eyes, filled with tears, were fixed on it, oh! My father, my revered, my beloved father, and instantly sunk to the floor in a swoon" (2: 193)—shows that her love for her father is stronger than any selfish wishes she may have had to ingratiate herself with her grandfather; the grandfather, convinced by her filial duty and reconciled with his granddaughter, removes his opposition to her marrying her cousin, who is also his heir.⁶

In all these examples (drawn from the traditions of romance, gothic, and sentimental narrative, respectively) the portrait is perceived as referring unambiguously to a real, existing, specific person. It also embodies unresolved residues of past conflicts and helps bring about their resolution (or dissolution). For this double purpose the figure of the artist who painted the portrait and the process of its production are irrelevant; indeed, including these elements would bring to the fore the status of the portrait as the product of someone's act of representation, and this might cast ever so small a doubt on its purely referential status.

This view and use of the portrait does not die out at the end of the eighteenth century; far from it. Indeed, many nineteenth-century portrait stories that feature a "haunted" or "magic" portrait conform to this model and do not include a painter.⁷ Nevertheless, it is still the case that, unlike the preceding centuries, the nineteenth century also produced a considerable body of narratives about portraits, primarily short stories and novellas, that pay as much attention to the painter as to the portrait itself and deal with the circumstances and process of production in addition to the subsequent effects of the portrait. This shift testifies to the emergence, toward the end of the eighteenth century, of the painter as a likely hero

for fiction, an emergence that owes much to the Romantic myth of the artist and that, in prose works, we usually associate with the appearance of the *Kunstlerroman*.⁸ Stories about portraits, however, should be distinguished from "portrait of the artist novels," which rarely feature portraits. This point is often missed because critics tend to conflate painted portraits with verbal portraits (that is, character description). Thus neither James Joyce's *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* nor Henry James's *The Portrait of a Lady* are portrait stories (although the former is a *Kunstlerroman*).⁹ One important difference between the two subgenres is that, unlike *Kunstlerromans*, portrait stories are rarely about the formation, or aesthetic education, of the painter (one exception is George Sand's story "Le Château de Pictordu," which I discuss in chapter 6).¹⁰

With the introduction of the painter, the status of the portrait changes: it can no longer be seen as an unmediated document of the past presence of its subject since it also bears the imprint of its producer, whose way of seeing and view of the subject are inscribed in the portrait. The inclusion of the painter calls attention to the fact that no portrait is simply a portrayal of its subject (is never purely "denotative," to use Richard Brilliant's terminology); it is also, to a certain degree, a portrait of the painter. The represented subject, in addition, is to some extent the construct of the painter. For these two reasons, the act of viewing, or seeing, can no longer be (as it was in portrait stories of previous centuries) a simple identification of the "real subject."¹¹ Indeed, the subject can no longer be seen as prior to and independent of its representation, as having an "identity" of which the portrait is merely the token; rather, subjectivity (of sitter, painter, and viewer) is seen as produced by and in relation to representations.

Though portraits represent both their subjects and their painters, they do not do so in quite the same way. Charles Sanders Peirce's typology of signs can be helpful in articulating this difference since it defines signs (or more precisely sign-functions) according to the kind of relation they entertain with their object.¹² Using Peirce's terminology, we can say that in the modern European tradition, the relation between a portrait and its subject is primarily iconic, that is, grounded in resemblance: the portrait is a "likeness." However, since resemblance is relative rather than absolute, the degree of resemblance necessary for a representation to count as a likeness is determined in a general way by cultural conventions (conventions of portrait painting prevalent at the moment of production or of viewing, which, in turn, may depend on specific understanding of what constitutes subjecthood). Therefore, to use Peirce's terminology again,

the relation of portrait to its subject is also symbolic (that is, grounded in convention).¹³ The impossibility of absolute resemblance to the original is, of course, not unique to portraits; but the interests and desires that motivate the production of a portrait render disagreement over resemblance anything but a theoretical issue.

Disagreement over resemblance is not limited to the rendering of physical traits since a great portrait is supposed to show the sitter's true self (variously defined as social status, character, soul, etc.). Such features are never unequivocally coded, so the mere demand for their pictorial representation leaves open the possibility of disagreement and conflict. Moreover, whereas we normally assume that a portrait merely re-presents the sitter's physical aspect, when it comes to portraying moral or psychological traits, such an assumption cannot be automatically made. The painter may be bringing out a hidden truth about the sitter or merely imagining he is; he may be imposing his own view, unconsciously or deliberately. Thus the iconic dimension of the portrait—its status as a likeness—is fraught with ambiguity and is subject to differing, even conflicting interpretations.

While the relation of the portrait to its subject is iconic-symbolic, the relation of the painter to the portrait is primarily, in Peirce's terms, indexical (grounded in causality).¹⁴ As the portrait's producer, the painter leaves his or her trace in the work. Whereas art history sees the imprint of the painter in the portrait as having to do with the "tell-tale signature of his personal style" (Brilliant 142), portrait stories show that the painter's presence in the portrait has to do with motives, intentions, and interests that are not exclusively artistic. Such motives and interests can very well be in conflict with those of the portrait's subject. This is most obvious in portraits that do not simply strive to represent the physical aspects of the subject, his or her appearance at a specific moment in time, but rather to bring out the subject's spiritual, psychological, or moral qualities, sum up a life, or present the subject as a general type. Not only is it equally possible that the painter reveals what the subject would like to hide or that the soul or character so revealed are only the painter's own vision, inspired by various motives; the very attempt to transcend the merely physical, ephemeral aspect of the subject (by summing up a whole life or bringing out the subject's essence), appears, from this point of view, as a manifestation of the painter's will to power over his particular, contingent subject, if not at the expense of this subject.

Both the subject's iconic presence and the painter's indexical presence in the portrait may or may not be recognized by the portrait viewer or viewers. What the viewer sees or does not see has now to do with the

viewer's relation to either the subject or the painter (or to both). To put it in the Peircean terms I have been using: the viewer can be inscribed in the portrait iconically if he or she sees himself/herself in the portrait's subject (that is, if he or she "identifies" with the subject's image); if what the viewer sees in the portrait is his or her traces (that is, his or her influence on either the subject or the painter), then the viewer is present in it indexically.

The clear distinction between the way the subject and the painter are inscribed in the portrait gets complicated, however, since the portrait is an index or a trace not only of the painter but also of the subject's past presence.¹⁵ The subject, then, is represented in the portrait both iconically and indexically. Indeed, in the history of art, the idea of portraits as iconic signs of their subjects, as likenesses, emerged relatively late; until the late Middle Ages the identity of the portrait's subject was indicated primarily by emblems.¹⁶ Some scholars hypothesized that resemblance emerged as the defining relation between the portrait and its subject when the belief that the portrait retains something of its subject—that is, a certain understanding of the indexical relation of the image to its subject, associated with magic and ritual use of images—declined.¹⁷ The belief in "the identity of picture and depicted" is often attributed to primitive belief in the power of images.¹⁸ And yet common practices in our own day, such as the ubiquitous display, under certain regimes, of the image of the ruler, the desecration or destruction of images or statues of hated or deposed rulers, as well as that of images of rejected or unfaithful lovers, all testify that this view of the portrait's "power," produced by its indexical (rather than iconic) relation to its subject, has not been entirely left behind or overcome. At the same time, as we shall see, the idea that subjectivities are produced by and in relation to representations endows the portrait with a different kind of power.

The status of the portrait as both icon and index of its subject is expressed with great clarity in the story about the origins of the portrait (and of all plastic arts), told by Pliny the Elder in his *Historia naturalis*.¹⁹ This is the story of the daughter of the potter Butades, who, on the eve of her lover's departure for war, traced his profile on the wall while he was asleep, following the outlines of his shadow;²⁰ her father later made a clay model out of this tracing. As a tracing of a person's shadow, the portrait is an icon—a perfect replica of the body's contours.²¹ But the story also emphasizes the existential (or indexical) relation between person, shadow, tracing, and clay model: like the shadow, the portrait is not only a likeness but also a trace of the person's presence. That the portrait is drawn as the lover is

about to leave for war suggests that the portrait's function is to keep the person present (alive) even in his absence (death). But drawing the portrait while the lover is asleep suggests that the painter is "stealing" her lover's likeness; and the indexical relation between body, shadow, and portrait strengthens the impression that painting the portrait constitutes an appropriation of some part of the subject's being and hence may constitute a threat to his integrity as subject: "It is as if Butades' daughter has appropriated an actual part of her lover by furtively tracing the shadow of the sleeping young man, acquiring some essential part of his being that she would be able to possess even in his absence" (Bertini 43).

The story of Butades's daughter brings to the fore the uncanny aspect of the portrait's indexical and iconic dimensions. It is therefore important to remind ourselves that the portrait's indexical relation to its subject makes it a prime example of referential representation (as Peirce puts it, as an index of its subject the portrait signifies the subject's existence). In addition, a portrait that is a likeness—that is, has an iconic relation to its subject rather than referring to its subject by emblems, for example—is a clear example of mimetic representation (which in the story about Butades's daughter appears as a perfect copy, unmediated by convention).²² It is thus within (a certain understanding of) referential and mimetic representation that the magic or uncanniness of the portrait resides—a point that the common association of portrait stories with the supernatural or the fantastic tends to obscure.²³ But the portrait painted by Butades's daughter is neither supernatural nor fantastic; if it is uncanny, it is because tracing the shadow, as an extreme instance of the portrait's indexicality and iconicity, risks erasing the difference and upsetting the hierarchical relation between sign and object that is at the foundation of representation. It shows us the uncanniness that lurks within referential and mimetic representation.

The story of Butades's daughter also shows the intimate relation between portraiture and death: the portrait is painted against death, against time, decay, and oblivion; its function is to re-present the subject, keep it present in its absence, extend its presence beyond physical life. But portrait stories that in one way or another convey a resistance to the "overcoming" of the individual—contingent, particular, subject to death—bring to the fore a different understanding of the relation between the portrait and death: death not as the opposite of life but as immanent in life, the portrait as registering death rather than overcoming it.

The very few previous studies of the portrait story as a distinct category took the form of historical surveys. Both Theodore Ziolkowski and Sergio

Perosa see the portrait as a "motif" that undergoes changes over time.²⁴ Ziolkowski discusses what he calls "the haunted portrait" under three categories—genius loci, figura, and anima—and argues that they go through four stages of "disenchantment": "from conventional acceptance of magic through rationalization and psychological internalization to inversions of various sorts" (145). Perosa, for his part, studies the "ghostly, telltale, uncanny, and finally killing portraits" as projecting and expressing a growing uneasiness with assertions about the superiority of art over life: "The killing portrait becomes a figurative and figural image of the anxiety, the dread, the unexpected torment which irrepressibly arise when Art claims to substitute Life" (93). Maurizio Bertini's study, though also a survey, is somewhat different: his corpus consists primarily of texts from classical antiquity, and he considers the portrait not as a motif but as a scenario—what he calls "the fundamental story"—consisting of two lovers and a portrait. Bertini argues that "there are very many ways in which these elements can be combined, a large number of stories that can be told about these characters" (4), and his book follows these mutations and combinations.

My approach is different from that of Ziolkowski and Perosa primarily in that I do not see the portrait as a "motif" that has a life, or a history, of its own. In my opinion, studying the portrait as a motif—that is, a detachable textual element that can be traced historically from text to text—results in separating it from other aspects of the text, thematic and formal, and therefore flattens its meaning.²⁵ Rather than attributing the differences among the portrait stories I analyze to the evolution of a detachable motif, mirroring a broader historical process, I see them as resulting from the particular concerns (thematic and formal) of each text and the choices each author makes in manipulating the topos of the portrait in order to explore these concerns. I therefore do not detach the portrait from the rest of the text but rather analyze its role in relation to the text's plot, narrative structure, and thematic concerns.

Like Bertini, I see the portrait story as a set of variables that can be combined in different ways. My scope, however, is broader than his "fundamental story" since the corpus of portrait stories in the nineteenth century cannot be reduced to stories about two lovers and a portrait (just as it cannot be limited to Ziolkowski's "haunted" or Perosa's "killing" portraits). Moreover, my focus on the role the portrait plays in each particular text also means that, unlike Ziolkowski, Perosa, or Bertini, I am not interested in a survey where, necessarily, the relation of one text to others in a tradition is more important than each text's particular choices. It is worth noting that though Ziolkowski and Perosa write historical surveys,

neither one remarks on the literary-historical change in portrait stories that occurs in the nineteenth century with the introduction of the painter.²⁶ My approach, by contrast, is attentive to the specificity of each text; I offer close readings where comparison among texts is in the service of illuminating their differences, as well as similarities.

Besides studying the portrait as a motif or a scenario, critics also have discussed portrait stories in the context of the relation between the "sister arts" of painting and literature, the principle of "ut pictura poesis," and the capacity of language to describe art objects and the use of such descriptions in literary works (ekphrasis).²⁷ Such studies tend to consider the portrait as an object of description, and therefore see the representation of a portrait in a literary text as marking the place where language attempts to rival painting in the art of making objects visible, or as the place where writing reflects upon itself. There is no doubt that the presence of an image in a literary text raises, at least implicitly, the question of the relation between image and text, and I will be discussing this question in texts where it seems particularly important. But studies of portrait stories as sites for literature or language self-reflection tend to subsume the portrait within broader categories. Thus Françoise Meltzer, in her introduction to *Salome and the Dance of Writing*, a book that investigates how literature imagines representation by looking at literary texts featuring a portrait, says: "The choice of the portrait is essentially arbitrary on my part; I could as well have considered music, landscapes, tactile expressions and so on" (1). Though she concedes that there is something "curiously alluring" about the way "eidetic images" function in literature, she firmly asserts that "The portrait qua portrait is not at issue" in her book (2).²⁸ By contrast, what interests me is precisely the way the portrait, as a very particular kind of visual representation, a material object, and a complex sign, functions in a literary text. I see the portrait's function as residing not in foregrounding the literary text's ability to describe and produce an object for the reader's viewing (the reader views nothing except black marks on white surface) but rather in its serving as the site where intersubjective relations of desire, identification, rivalry, projection, aggression, guilt, idealization, misrecognition, get organized.

I have been arguing that the study of portrait stories has been impoverished by considering only those texts that fitted within certain preconceived ideas about this subgenre and that this limitation has obscured what is both distinct and important about these stories. In constituting the corpus for this study I tried to remedy this situation by deliberately

choosing texts that do not conform to these preconceived ideas (such as Honoré de Balzac's *La Maison du chat-qui-pelote* or Theodor Storm's "Aquis submersus") as well as texts that have received very little critical attention of any sort (such as Henry James's "The Special Type" and "The Tone of Time," Thomas Hardy's "Barbara of the House of Grebe," or George Sand's "Le Château de Pictordu") while also including some obvious and much-analyzed examples of this subgenre (such as Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*).

The book's first three chapters center around the portrait's defining feature—its status as a representation of an individual—and the attending impulse to go beyond this particularity, which manifests itself as the tension between the real and the ideal or that between the portrait's subject and the painter's "vision." The first chapter, "Poe's 'Oval Portrait,'" deals with the challenge that a representation of a particular individual poses for interpretation. I argue that critics' tendency to conflate the puzzling story of the portrait's viewer (the frame narrator) with the more conventional, allegorical story of its painter in a way that subordinates the former to the latter arises from the desire to go beyond the particular individual—in other words, from the very desire that has led to the death of the woman in the painter's story. Chapter 2, "The Portrait's Two Faces: James's 'The Special Type' and 'The Tone of Time,'" deals with the tension between two views of the portrait: the first considers it as a re-presentation of a real person that preserves the likeness of that person in his or her absence, whereas according to the second the portrait's subject is the product rather than the ground of representation; hence, according to the latter view, the portrait is not a re-presentation but rather a simulacrum, a double, or a ghost. The comparison between the stories shows that the first view is linked to the portrait's entanglement with worldly interests and desires while the second (the portrait as a ghost) is linked to the withdrawal of portrait and painter from these entanglements. Whereas Poe's "Oval Portrait" dramatizes the danger the portrait entails for its subject, and James's stories show the power that can accrue to the painter from the act of portraiture, chapter 3, "The Portrait Painter and His Doubles: Hoffmann's 'Die Doppelgänger,' Gautier's 'La Cafetière,' and Nerval's 'Portrait du diable,'" analyzes the different ways in which the portrait painter's own subjectivity is problematized by the act of portraiture, whether it is understood as reproducing the real or as an attempt to merge an ideal with the real.

Chapters 4 and 5 address more directly the question of gender difference (which is already discussed in chapters 1 and 2). Chapter 4, "On

Portraits, Painters, and Women: Balzac's *La Maison du chat-qui-pelote* and James's 'Glasses,'" presents us with the common scenario in which a male painter paints a woman's portrait (or portraits); it thus invites us to explore the way the power to represent another person (and thus construct or produce subjects) relates to gender. I argue that as stories that demonstrate the social function and power of the portrait qua representation and show the painter's artistic production to be inseparable from his interests and desires, they also show how, and under what conditions, the power to represent is gained, kept, or lost. Chapter 5, "Portraits of the Male Body: Kleist's 'Der Findling,' Hardy's 'Barbara of the House of Grebe,' and Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*," presents us with the less common scenario in which a man is the object, rather than subject, of vision and desire. In all three texts, we find a full-body representation of an idealized male that is kept hidden (as opposed to the texts discussed in chapter 4 where we have portraits of women's faces that are exhibited in public). These full-body representations are the sites of conflicting desires and identifications for multiple viewers, male and female. I argue that though we can understand some of these viewers' relation to the image in terms of narcissistic identification and mimetic desire, this paradigm cannot fully account for what takes place in these stories.

The issue of gender is crucial also for chapter 6, "Portraits, Parents, and Children: Storm's 'Aquis submersus' and Sand's 'Le Château de Pictordu,'" in which I discuss the way portraits function as means of transmission—of traits but also of authority, knowledge, and the past. I argue that both Storm's story, centered around the relation between father and son, and Sand's fairy tale, dealing with the relation between mother and daughter, question prevalent ideas about the relation between gender and transmission. Storm's story puts into question genealogical transmission and the power of the father while Sand's story de-idealizes the father and represents a successful transmission from mother to daughter.

Nikolai Gogol's "The Portrait," discussed in the final chapter, deals with the relation between portraits and money. I argue that the story has two conflicting strands: in one strand, where representation is understood as a relation between original and copy, money is seen as what destroys art; in the other strand, where representation is understood as a relation of adequation, art is seen as analogous to money.

Finally, in the afterword, I reflect on the relation between "portrait" and "story," between the characters' experience of seeing the portrait and the reader's experience of reading about it.

CHAPTER I

Poe's "Oval Portrait"

As we have seen in the introduction, portrait stories expanded their scope in the nineteenth century to include, besides the viewer and the portrait, the painter and his subject. This means not only that the story of the portrait's production is now added to that of its after-effects but also that the portrait can no longer be considered as purely referential. The attenuation of the portrait's referential status, in turn, means that viewing it cannot be reduced to an identification of its subject. Edgar Allan Poe's short story "The Oval Portrait" (1845; originally published as "Life in Death" in 1842) is a good example of this expansion and complication of the portrait story: it features, besides the oval portrait, the full array of character-positions—a painter, a subject, and a viewer—and in three short pages tells the story of both the portrait's production and its subsequent effect on a viewer. Moreover, the experience of the viewer in Poe's story is dramatically different from the one typical to portrait stories in pre-nineteenth-century texts, whether in the gothic, sentimental, or romance tradition. Indeed, though the story opens with an explicit allusion to the gothic novel, this allusion, I will argue, serves to mark the *difference* of the viewer's experience in the story from the one we find in the gothic novel.¹