

The Oval Portrait

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Summary

A traveler gets wonded at night while travelling with his valet (personal servant). They find shelter in an old, empty castle. He stays in a room with lots of paintings on the walls. One painting catches his eye - a portrait of a beautiful young girl.

The traveler can't stop looking at the girl's face. It looks so real, like she's alive! This surprises and scares him at the same time.

He reads about the painting and learns the girl's story. She fell in love with an artist man. The man got so focused on painting her portrait that he forgot to take care of her.

For weeks, the man had the girl sit for her portrait. But he didn't see that sitting there was making her sick. As he finished painting, all he cared about was making it look real.

When the portrait was done, the artist was very happy that it looked just like real life. But when he turned to the girl, he saw she had died from being sick so long.

The painting looked so real because it took the life from the real girl. The story shows how being too focused on art can hurt the people you love. It's creepy that the portrait seemed alive like the dead girl.

Understanding the text

Answer these questions.

a. Where did the narrator and his servant make forcible entrance?

Ans: The narrator and servant forcefully entered a locked room they found in the abandoned chateau.

b. Which special picture did the narrator notice in the room?

Ans: The special picture the narrator noticed was an oval portrait.

c. Describe the portrait that the narrator saw in the room.

Ans: The portrait showed a beautiful young woman with long hair. She looked both alive and dead. Her features were delicate and see-through. Her eyes looked out vividly. It captured her beauty and liveliness very well.

d. What is the relationship between the portrait painter and its subject?

Ans: Portrait painter and its subject have a husband-and- wife relationship. The subject's (lady's) husband is an accomplished artist who created a portrait of his wife.

Reference to the text

A. What is the story's primary theme? In the oval portrait, who is the lady depicted?

The main idea of Edgar Allan Poe's short story "The Oval Portrait" is about the destructive nature of obsession and the conflict between art and life. The woman in the oval portrait is the wife of the artist. Her beauty and liveliness are important to the central theme of the story.

B. "The Oval Portrait" is a short horror story by Edgar Allan Poe involving the disturbing circumstances surrounding a portrait in a chateau. Elaborate.

"The Oval Portrait" is a short horror story about a portrait in an abandoned mansion. It is written in a nested story format, also called story within story format. It has two, ie. outer and inner narrative.

The outer story is about a narrator and servant taking shelter in the mansion.

The inner story is about an artist who becomes obsessed with painting his wife's beauty in a portrait. As he works, he doesn't see her health becoming worse. When the portrait is done, she has already died. It seems like the portrait took her life force.

So the story centers around the creepy circumstances of a portrait found in an empty mansion. It shows an artist so focused on his art, he fails to help his dying wife.

C. "The Oval Portrait" suggests that the woman's beauty condemns her to death. Discuss.

"The Oval Portrait" shows how the woman's beauty led to her death. Her husband was so focused on sketching her looks in his painting, he neglected her existence. His drive for artistic perfection made him ignore his wife's failing health. This neglect caused her death. Though her beauty was captured forever in the portrait, it came at the price of her life.

The story warns that an obsession with beauty can be dangerous if it makes someone ignore another person's welfare. The artist's passion for his art led to his wife's death because he didn't care for her well-being as she got sick. Her portrait preserved her looks but took her actual life.

D. Discuss the story as a frame narrative (a story within a story).

"The Oval Portrait" uses a frame narrative technique. This means there is an outer story that contains an inner story.

The outer story is about a narrator and servant sheltering in a mansion. There, they find a book describing the portrait.

The inner story focuses on the artist and his wife. It follows their lives and the sad events leading up to the portrait's completion.

By using this frame narrative, the story has more layers. We see the events from the outside perspective of the narrator finding the book. And from the inside view of what actually happened to the artist and wife.

This added depth by showing both the external discovery and internal portrayed events unfolding. The frame narrative structure provides complexity to the tale.

E. The story is told in a descriptive style, with plenty of imagery and symbolism. Which images and symbols do you find in the story?

"The Oval Portrait" employs a descriptive style rich in imagery and symbolism. Some of the notable images and symbols in the story include:

The oval portrait itself, which symbolizes the conflict between art and life, as well as the idea of capturing fleeting beauty.

The chateau in the Apennines, representing a decaying and isolated world.

The book within the story, serving as a narrative device and a symbol of hidden knowledge.

The woman's beauty and her portrayal in the portrait, symbolizing the artist's obsession and the cost of artistic perfection.

F. What does the expression "She was dead!" mean? The expression "She was dead!" in the story signifies the moment of realization by the artist that his wife has died.

It is a crucial and haunting moment in the narrative, highlighting the tragic consequences of his obsession with creating the perfect portrait, which he achieves only at the expense of her life.

Reference beyond the text

a. Do you think there is life in art?

Ans: People have discussed for a long time whether there is "life" in art. Some think art can make us feel very emotional and show what life is really like. Others think art only shows life, it's not life itself. It depends on how you see art.

In Edgar Allan Poe's short story "The Oval Portrait," he explores the idea that art can capture how alive a person is. But it may take away their real life.

b. As a thing of art nothing could be more admirable than the painting itself. Explain.

Ans: Painting is one of the most impressive artistic mediums. The picture speaks for itself in a very direct way. Regarding painting, this statement is appropriate. As we saw in this story, when the narrator first saw the painting, he was flabbergasted. The oval picture is one of the most impressive and has taken the storyteller completely by surprise in this story as well.

Similarly, The artists put in a lot of time and effort to produce beautiful works of art that have deeper significance. Good painting makes viewers curious about both it and the painter. So, painting is one of the most admirable art.

c. A more intense look at the painting reveals the illusion. Have you noticed any such painting?

Ans: I have not seen such a painting in real life. But I had heard a lot about the Monalisa portrait of Leonardo Da Vinci. Around six million people each year visit to see this picture, which is protected behind bullet-proof glass at the Musée du Louvre in Paris. The proportions and measurements of the woman's body in the painting match principles of the universe. So in a way, it shows what the "perfect" human body should look like based on things like symmetry. That's why art experts say it's such an accurate portrait of a real person

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