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## UNCANNY HYPOTYPOSES: ON WRITTEN PORTRAITS BY PIRANDELLO AND POE

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My approach to the short story *Candelora* (1917) by an eminently modernist author, Luigi Pirandello, aims at studying its particular treatment of certain consecrated literary, mythological, anthropological, and especially poetical and aesthetical topics, which are in the whole of Pirandello's work submitted to an almost imperceptible rereading, rewriting, or reframing. The plot is built using a traditional thematic inventory, widely present in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century drama and narrative - the story of a great artist espoused to his painting, whose alienation from the so-called real life is repaid by his wife's adulterous behaviour; this group of motifs, in its turn, elaborates the mythical pattern of "Pygmalion's power" (Gombrich 1996: 80 ff.), and also exploits the illusionistic potential of an equally consecrated rhetorical figure, hypotyposis (ekphrasis) or "written image". As I will try to show, Pirandello's procedures are regularly based on the literal reversal of his intertextual heritage, leading to a reemployment of the citational material in a subversive key.

The apparently realistic story tells of a painter named Nane Papa, who's "arte nuova" (Pirandello 1994: 1094; cf. 1095), relying on his Pygmalionic capacities to give its pictorial products a metaphorical "life", has won critical acclaim<sup>1</sup> and public consent thanks to the profusions of gratitude accorded by his beautiful wife Candelora to important art critics and rich admirers. The indulgent painter feels superior to life's banalities and to social codes, and therefore unwilling to exert his marital right or, better, duty to punish his wife's paradoxical infidelity. Nevertheless, it is precisely his lack of jealousy which turns out to be murderous: disappointed by his inhuman refusal to love her and/or to repay her sacrifice of honour (as the painter's interior monologue suggests: "If he really loved her, he would have to kill her", Pirandello 1994: 1095),<sup>2</sup> the angry Candelora bites her husband's arm, leaving a blood-stained imprint of her teeth on the "tela" (canvas) of his shirt, and then commits a double suicide: a symbolic one, by drinking the bottle of medicine which was supposed to cure the painter's red-coloured wound, and a "real"

<sup>1</sup> "Art criticism? Come on, it is but a word, art criticism! A word living nowhere except in the trousers of a critic" (Pirandello 1994: 1094). - All the translations of Pirandello's text are mine.

<sup>2</sup> Paradoxically, though indirectly, that is what must happen anyway, regardless of love or its absence.

(i.e. literal) one, using her husband's revolver. He is overwhelmed with despair and remorse: why did her wealthy lovers have to be so stupid as to make her want *him* to love her?

The late recognition of the moral, emotional and intellectual shortcomings of his wife's lover(s) echoes, in a reversed way, his opening sentence, by which he asserted that the interest they had in Candelora was merely a result of mimetical rivalry which made her a vacuous and tentative object of mutual (homoerotic) desire:

"Be reasonable. It means that he values you only insofar as you take gleam [*lustrò*] off me. [...] If I were not your husband [...], all the pleasure, don't you understand? would vanish" (1093).

The word *lustrò* - semantically debased by Candelora's irritated reaction ("Gleam? [...] Yes, the shining gleam of these - she points at her shoes", *ibid.*), identifying the "illustrious" painter with her shoe-shiner - soon returns in the description of Nane Papa's manifestation of pain caused by the bite which branded his arm ("His eyes are gradually becoming more and more sparkling [*lustrì*] and more acute", *ibid.*), implying several undecidable or even contradictory senses: his eyes may both be acquiring "lustrality", i.e. a purified condition induced by a cathartic pain, or becoming inebriated (another sense of *lustrì*) with sado-masochistic pleasure; either gaining superiority (*lustrò*) over his mimetic rivals, by his own mimetical move of reaching a more passionate reaction of the object of desire, or in the acute capacity of his gaze to penetrate some "true" meaning (of the mimetical triangularity? of the structure of his relation to his wife? of the inanity of life, or of himself, or of the situation?) or even in the visual refinement of his artistic skills.

Although the short story employs ekphrasis to depict verbally only Nane Papa's technique of rendering "still life", and not an intradiegetic portrait of his wife as a model, I find it legitimate to refer *Candelora* to a narrative precedent, Poe's *Oval Portrait*. The analogies, of course, do not concern the respective plots in themselves: unlike Pirandello's short story, *The Oval Portrait* recounts *en abyme*, through a narrator who is himself wounded in advance, the contemplation of the astonishing life-likeness of a young woman's portrait in the form of a vignette with a fading border or frame, and the narrator's subsequent discovery of a book describing in a hypotyposis the deadly fate of the model, once "all light and smiles and frolicsome as a young fawn" (Poe 1994: 190), killed by the strong flow of light to which she had been exposed while posing to her husband.

Poe's gothic device provides an anticipated inversion of Pygmalion's life-giving mythical parable (cf. Bettini 1992: 94): the artistic mimesis, in an ambiguous tension between the perfect reproduction of resemblance and the

radical life-supplanting creativity, puts to death - through the very agency of light, supposedly metaphorical source of life and the cognition of truth.<sup>3</sup>

In Pirandello's version of the reversed Pygmalion myth, the same result not only has no fantastic motivation, but its narrative structure does even not involve a diegetical portrayal of the model. However, Pirandello's story signals, by means of a series of indices, that it is a reconsideration of Poe's text in terms of an allegorical critique of the fallacy of lifelikeliness, related to what Plato defined as "zoography"<sup>4</sup> (including both writing and painting of life, cf. Plato 1997: 63). The hypotypotic transposition of the "zoographical" problem, in the Italian modernist text, goes beyond Poe's critique of mimesis, becoming a more general critique of representation as such.

The indices of metatextual and symbolical investment begin with the very title: "Candelora", also called "Loretta", a name which links a diminutive form of Petrarch's Laura, on the one hand, and, on the other, the name "Candida" (the chaste, the pure one), also related to the word "candle". In fact, degradingly opposite citational or allusive shadows of Laura's etymology are cast upon the female protagonist: as the name of the unreachable woman loved and hypotypotically depicted by Petrarch, Candelora's name alludes to the laurel, the symbol of fame/glory which she procures for her "author", and yet invert the first Laura's chastity through the adulterous nature of the means her successor uses for that purpose. Not only, as Nane Papa says to himself, "will she not be able [...] to become pure again", but "perhaps she has never been pure at all" (Pirandello 1994: 1095). That is why, semantically, the other onomastic component, the "candour", is the exact opposite of her predecessor's meaning; and yet, she is candidly - naively - convinced that it is possible to escape the contaminating consequences of her non-conformistic use of the social currency of female charms. But the name of "Candelora" may also be derived from "candle", clearly assigning the attributes of life and light, akin to the "all light" of the young woman in *The Oval Portrait*: it was by the delusional light of a "candelabrum" that Poe's (wounded) narrator observed the beautiful picture of a woman killed by light; the picture, its outlines fading, merged (perhaps in a hallucination) with the space of the observer. One cannot but think of Macbeth's definition of the brevity and the frailty of life as a precarious candle ("Out, out, brief candle!" V, v). Since in Pirandello's context a reversal of the matrimonial triangle (typical of the verismo and of

<sup>3</sup> Poe denounces the pictorial excesses of vision that present themselves as an ideal the illusionist achievements of Zeuxis and Parrhasios; closing their eyes in front of a landscape should permit artists to observe the "real beauty" through the "'veil of the soul'" (E.A. Poe, *Marginalia*, in *The Complete Works of E.A. Poe*, p. 164, ed. by J.H. Harrison, New York, 1902, quoted in Bettini 1992: 95).

<sup>4</sup> Neither a painted picture nor a graphic sign, both constructed upon a simulation, can really reproduce true life (cf. Bettini 1992: 266). "Zoography has brought death" (Derrida 1967: 413).

the 19th century literature in general) regularly appears, a reversal in which the husband, normally coded as the guardian of order and stability, renounces to act jealously and to claim his spouse's fidelity, or to punish her transgression with death, the "candle" alludes also to Othello's monologue preceding the extinction of Desdemona's life as a "light" (or candle: "Put out the light, and then put out the light..."). Once the light of a candle is put out, it can be easily rekindled; but if one puts out the light of a human (female) life, the extinction will be irreversible, because the inverted Pygmalion does not, just like Othello did not, possess Prometheus', nor the original Pygmalion's creationist skills (cf. V, ii).

But the motif of light concerns Candelora in a number of metaphorical ways: in the text, the character appears - under the rhetorical mode of hypotyposis - as burnt by the sun, to which she exposes herself passionately on the beach; she is close to elementary nature, and spoken of as "terrible", aggressive, and impulsive in the midst of "this black august sunlight, all fractured with violent sharp-edged shadows" (Pirandello 1994: 1093; cf. also 1094). The Dionysian posture - her terrifying anger, the high-noon atmosphere of her background, her bacchantic half-nakedness (she "wears a frail, tight little dress of blue veil, bursting at seams with her burnt flesh", 1094) - is completed with her beastly "aspect of a she-goat asleep in her voluptuousness". In other words, apart from the danger of an immediate encounter with her, "a little beast of the kind that bites" (1093), as representing the fearful contradiction of the Nietzschean Dionysos (a kind of "zoon" without the mediacy of "zoography"; then it could not bite in response when addressed, cf. Plato, cit.), she is also endowed with the traits of another Dionysos myth, the Orphic one, in which the infant Dionysos (Candelora is called "bambina" by her husband while he is trying to bring her to her senses) is dismembered by the Titans in the very moment that the young god looks at his reflection in the mirror insidiously given to him by his murderers (cf. Burkert 1985: 297), who are destined to give origin to humankind (cf. Burkert 1985: 298; Freud 1990c: 216); the "sufferings of the divine goat, Dionysus" (Freud, *ibid.*, 219) are connected to sacrificial rituals in which the victim or the scapegoat assumes its killers' guilt and makes possible through its death the appeasement of collective violence. Thus, Candelora - light, life, dangerous contradiction, unsolvable disorder - is designed to be a sacrificial victim, at once animal and human (cf. Burkert 1985: 65), the one bound to expiate and redeem with her own flesh and blood the dishonour, or possibly some other sin, of her husband.<sup>5</sup> It is remarkable to notice that the anonymous young woman of Poe's

<sup>5</sup> Candelora's status of a *pharmakos* (sacrificial victim) is linked to the ambivalence of *pharmakon*, poison and remedy, the term by which Plato describes writing (cf. Derrida 1972: 69-197): bit by her, the painter declares that he knows her to be "a little beast of the kind that bites"

short story, though pale, being the doubly abysmal character of an ecphrastic portrait, bears a sign of an equally sacrificial fate: "all light and smiles and frolicsome as a young fawn" (Poe 1994: 190); the goat-like divinity, fawn, is an equivalent of the goat god Pan, interchangeable with Dionysos-Zagreus' sacrificial role, and its sacrifice is followed by a ritual resurrection requiring an identification of the killers masked as the dismembered victim.<sup>6</sup> The coincidence between the two goat-godlike victims in Poe and in Pirandello, implies a different interpretation of their respective deaths, involving their marital relationships with painters. What the two of them share, might be the identificatory substitution of themselves, by the projection of their respective gazes in the images of their "original" models, each killed by becoming his maker's "image of himself" (Warner 1996: 238).

Unlike Poe's anonymous and inadvertently homicidal painter, Pirandello's painter does not kill by virtue of his ambiguous power of lifelike zoography in painting; loved or rejected, Candelora does not have to be portrayed: she *is* a picture, insofar as "in the scopic field, the gaze is outside, I am looked at, that is I am a picture" (Lacan 1973: 12; cf. also Barthes 1977: 192). As the picture of a woman ("always potentially representing the mother to the man", Pacteau 1994: 158) performed by gaze, she represents at once his child, his daughter ("bambina", Pirandello 1994: 1096; cf. Warner 1996: 239), his wife, like Galatea, and ultimately himself (cf. Bettini 1992: 182; Warner 1996: 238), in brief: "she 'represents'" (Bettini 1994: 146), she is a representation, a sign, a code through which the man expresses himself (cf. *ibid.*, 147). Candelora is Papa's "daughter", while he is her "papa" in an sense that inverts Pygmalion's narcissistic "fatherhood" of Galatea, whom he preferred over other disgusting women because of her purity (cf. Warner 1996: 227-8), or to any creator of an automaton, ever present to master its doing and guarantee for its offspring (cf. Derrida 1972: 149; Bettini 1992: 266), as a father happily recompensed in his desire to shape "his ideal [...] substitute for the lost narcissism of his childhood in which he was his own ideal" (Freud 2001: 94; quoted in Pacteau 1994: 49).

Nane Papa's strange name possibly alludes to the fact that, even if he were a great artist (which is not unequivocally clear), as a man, he is irrep-

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(1093) and for that reason he holds "a provision of urgent medicines", like the iodine tincture, which serves to "remove the poison [of her bite]"; (*ibid.*); but the alleged poisoning beast ingests voluntarily the medicine to poison herself (and afterwards she shoots herself, probably because the poison has been insufficient). The connection could be explained in two ways: 1) *zoon* is just as ambiguous a remedy-poison as *zoography* (writing/painting) is according to Plato; 2) the female character as a *zoon* has been transformed into a zoographical representation, and shares all its curative and pernicious attributes.

<sup>6</sup> "The sacrificer conceals himself by assimilating himself to the victim, and at the same time he seems to bring to life again the creature killed earlier" (Burkert 1985: 65).

rably a “nano”, a “dwarf”, or otherwise “inane”. His family name - “Papa”, “Pope” - could refer to his paternalistic moralism, which can only be surpassed by sublimational repression in his creative work, qualified as “arte nuova” four times. In his art, he manages to reveal the pain inflicted by constrictive forms, capturing the flux of life. The pain is overcome by his almost total identification<sup>7</sup> with his art, resulting in the complete alienation from the “foolish phantasmagoria of life swirling around him” (Pirandello 1994: 1095). Otherwise, in the so-called “real life”, the painful awareness of the closure which social conventions, “forms”, the irrevocable “completedness” and irreversibility impose on human beings (the sense of which is rendered in the very terms of Pirandello’s own programmatic essay on *Humourism* of 1908),<sup>8</sup> does not reach the alleged superiority of his art, which could allow him to embrace the impurity, the contradictions, the paradoxes in which his private relationships (that is, his matrimonial “dishonour”) are entangled. In response to the disgrace of the hideous forms and malformation, he can only distance himself into indifference, non-participation and cynicism.<sup>9</sup> The artistic cognition of the unavoidable impurity of everything does not abolish his personal claim to purity, “nostalgia di purezza” 1994: 1095). That is why Pirandello’s impersonal narrator insists on the hypotypotical representation of the *hortus conclusus* as sunlit and “fractured with sharp-edged shadows”, visually intersected with decisive contrasts in which Nane Papa continues to perceive the binary oppositions of values, such as purity/impurity, life/art, I/the other, honour/dishonour. The major paradox of the split between his creation and his attitudes to social and personal life is the fact that his percep-

<sup>7</sup> “All his life, all that which is alive in him, he puts it, he gives it, he spends it for the pleasure of making a leaf fleshy, transforming himself into the fleshy pulp, the fibres and the veins of that leaf; stiff and naked a stone, so as it feels and lives as a stone on the canvas; and that is the only thing which matters to him” (Pirandello 1994: 1095). The description of his painting procedures implies a hyperrealistic mimetism; nevertheless, the aim of the programmatic “novelty” of his art does not seem to be an exact representation of a presumed “reality” (“foolish phantasmagoria”), but a research on the expressive possibilities within the framework of the coded discourse of art.

<sup>8</sup> In fact, in his interior monologue, the painter distinguishes two moments of his experience: sensing the burden of life’s shame and disgust, and feeling pity about it. In the essay on *Humourism*, the first of the two attitudes is the characteristic of ironical and satirical modes, while the second is the privilege of humourism (cf. Pirandello 1993: 127; 145-6); the latter, unlike the mere sense of otherness and difference with respect to one’s presumed normality, decomposes the opposition between the self and the other through the “pity”, involvement and compassion, which reveals the interchangeability of the opposites.

<sup>9</sup> “The only solution is this, not to pay attention [...] Things of life, fatalities... In one way or another, they pass away without leaving any trace. To mock, meanwhile, all the things born wrong, stuck suffering in their ungracious or twisted forms, until, with time, they crumble in dust. Everything bears within itself the pain of its form, the pain of being that way and of not being able any more to be otherwise. This is precisely what the novelty of his art consists in, in its making one feel this pain of the form. [...] And acts are just like forms. When an act is performed, it is like that, it cannot change any more” (Pirandello 1994: 1095).

tion of life's values is also based on a representation which he is almost unaware of: he "sees" Candelora only through pictorial representation:

"She is a marvel of forms and of colours, that Candelora, a spiteful challenge to his eyes of a painter, which find her perpetually new and different" (1093).

That is precisely the marvel achievable by the "arte nuova" of the painter, but ironically unattainable by the old habit of all "ordinary" men: to represent the necessity of representing the Other as a distant picture, an image shaped in the moulds of hereditary forms, by the projection of stereotypes and without self-involvement, reducing the variety of the Other to the pattern of what Gombrich calls a "mental set" (cf. 1996: 190) of distinctive oppositions, adapting what one sees to what one "knows" in advance by way of the tacit frame of irreconcilable differences, briefly: contrasts. The wild and adulterous Candelora, therefore, is a representational creation of Nane Papa's own doing - a picture on the canvas of his mind - his daughter (child, "bambina", 1096), while he is her creator, father, papa, "papà", "the one who knows" (Plato 1997: 62; cf. Bettini 1992: 266).

"Angrily, she notices the admiration in his eyes, and instinctively gets a complacent smile, which, nevertheless, exasperates her immediately. That smile becomes a sneer; a sneer which, suddenly, bursts to sobbing" (1094).

Flattered by being admired, she suddenly discovers that the admiration refers to the image of a surface with its forms and colours: if she feels her self dissolved while being looked at, exposed to a gaze which shapes her accordingly to prefabricated pictorial, cultural and social binary formulas, it is because "the ego is [...] a mental projection of the surface of the body, [...] representing the superficies of the mental apparatus" (Freud 1991: 451; cf. Pacteau 1994: 152). What "she represents" (Bettini 1992: 146) is other than herself, and therefore should observe the requirements of decorum of the person ultimately represented, who is her husband and author/father. Instead of representing to themselves a harmonious communion of an ideal perfection and innocence, or candour, between the representation and the referent, the painter's eyes (localised by the narration) dazzled by light, cannot help assigning clashing signifieds to the representation: the garden "*represents* the fortune of the baron Chico" (Pirandello 1994: 1094, my italics), and Candelora herself - or the surface of her contaminated flesh, so different from the reassuring still life - becomes the encumbrance of "the shame which she *represents* for him by his side" (1095, my italics).

In fact, the representing image is filled up with its paradoxical double, deprived of its claims to primacy: the body beneath the surface of the tiny cerulean dress. If only the body left the image whole and intact; instead, uncannily exuberant, it makes the little dress "burst at the seams", thus spoiling the



ideality of the maker's image that should be "seamless" (Pacteau 1994: 27). It is the "natural" body which is the uncanny double of the (hypotypotic) image; it is its "naturalness" that is being killed as an intruder. The image (the "dress") made "burst at the seams" by the body, retroactively provokes the decomposition of that same body. In fact, the gaze controlled by desire yearns for the "'seamlessness' of the painted image" (*ibid.*), as a promise of return to a celestial unity and peace between the referent and the representation, as a child longs for his mother's breast.<sup>10</sup> Yet, "all representation is, after all, destined to failure" (Pacteau 1994: 30), i.e. to difference, or to adultery, similarly to the frailty of the gown which becomes "ridiculous": "How can it hide now the bursting nudity, that tiny c erulean dress?" (Pirandello 1994: 1094). Without knowing her body already dead, the expert eyes of the painter are "offended" (1096) by the sight of Candelora's naked thighs, uncovered by the tight little dress. The gaze is shocked by its own extraction of the image of a body part out of the entirety of the picture, which was already "bursting at the seams"; what it cannot prevent itself from accomplishing is the emulation of the phallic procedure of art critics (cf. note 1), cutting and dismembering the body of a representation. Candelora's image is now nothing but the image of undisciplined and protuberant female thighs, evoking the 19th century exposals of "steatopygia", as the proof of the monstrosity of the Other - the Hottentot Venus, pleasantly scandalising "normal" European public by the "abnormality" of her buttocks (cf. Pacteau 1994: 126-7).

As the inverted double to pure Galatea, Candelora is a wife/representation repudiated for her loss or even total lack of purity; according to Ovid, Pygmalion's statue made of ivory "lost its hardness, and grew soft" (Warner 1996: 228); Candelora will end up hardened by "death spasm" (Pirandello 1994: 1096). Pygmalion's ideal woman had the unique luck to be absolutely unique; Candelora, on the contrary, even if not literally portrayed as Poe's model, suffers the fate - implicit or potential - of all doubled beings, beings virtualised by their replicas and put to death by inversion of primacy and "reality". "The portrait kills the referent" (Bronfen, quoted in Perosa 1996: 101); "the double always evokes death" (Bettini 1992: 265). Not only do clones, twins, masked individuals or mirror-images, pictorial or plastic "zoographical" representations function as the "murderous" doubles; the "murder" may be performed by a simple act of naming,<sup>11</sup> or a hypotyposis - always a trans-

<sup>10</sup> The image by which Nane Papa would like to replace Candelora's image is precisely that of a mother-figure: "And so, as from a distance, he said to Loretta this morning that he would have liked, of course - oh, but without giving any weight to the thing - to have in his life a companion who would be good, to whom poverty would not have inspired all that anger; a companion humble and meek, on whose breast he could rest" (Pirandello 1994: 1095).

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Blanchot's and Koj ev's comments on Hegel, quoted in Borch-Jacobsen 1999: 199-201; 233.

lation, a duplication, an interpretation: it separates the zoographic trace from the *zoon*, reshapes the model to fit in the mind's frame, supplants the "original" with an image, and finally rejects the "real" referent.

The painter, in his turn, has a similar uncanny sensation of being the object of a gaze after she has impressed her bite on another canvas, the painful one of his shirt glued to his skin, and then left, a sensation of being a pictorial effect or a narrative character, which he is, as he unexpectedly perceives the "nature" of the once "agitated" inventory of the garden reflected in the little "pool surrounded by a circle of artificial rocks and provided with that green mirror of stagnant water", so distant from the *lustral* purity he yearns for:

"But how strange! He feels as if he were being looked at by all those immovable things around him, and not just looked at, but also tied up by the hostile, almost ironical fascination that emanates from their astonished immobility, and which makes his being able to leave appear vane, stupid, even funny" (1094).

Such is the reversible power of the gaze: as far as one deludes oneself of being installed at its fixed core as its privileged subject, the objects seem pitifully doomed to instability and disarray; as soon as the onlooker's position is vacant, even if there is nobody to impersonate and fill up the scopophilic point of view, one begins to feel one's presumed stability as the effect of being nailed down by an overdetermining gaze, assumed by a prosopopeia of the sudden fixity of the "things" which surround him. The sharp contrast between the subject ("I") and the object ("the other") of the gaze is suspended in the midst of the "funny phantasmagoria", where the other's lack (of purity, of stability, of subjective authority) is mirrored back at the onlooker, transforming him into a lack: a lack which makes ridiculous "his being able to leave", since his absence is being already accomplished in advance.

Apparently, Pirandello's Nane Papa (and it cannot be a coincidence that painting was one of Pirandello's hobbies) has attained the (Promethean-Pygmalionic) ability of conferring life to his still natures by following the advice, reported by Gombrich (1996: 44), given in 1877 by the scientist Brücke to painters, to observe their models in a "little less midday sun", that is, to respect their nuances, and not to counterfeit slight differences by sharp contrasts of pictorial representation. Brücke's advice, implicitly active in Pirandello's story, is akin to Nietzsche's invitation (cf. 1978: 114-115; 1986: 326) to soften the excessive brightness of light, in order to become aware that the visual contrasts, and thus ontological opposites we perceive, are mere products of optical illusions, derived from culturally constructed frames. Either Candelora and Poe's model die of light, which penetrates beneath the surface of their body images through the agency of the cutting, dismembering, phallic, Apollonian gaze: "It is through gaze that I enter into the light, and it is by

gaze that I receive its effects. From what it ensues that gaze is the instrument through which light incarnates itself, and through which [...] I am *photographed*" (Lacan 1973: 121). What the gaze sees, then, is not a referent, but a photo-graphical representation, which renders "the nature of vision [...] curiously linked to implicit [...] blindness" (Schwenger 1999: 112); there remains in it so little of the "original" object of vision, mere supplement of its own image, entirely constructed by pre-existing representational frames encrusted in the mind, that for the sight it would almost be preferable to exercise itself "closing one's eyes to see the [narcissistic?] pictures that are generated there" (Schwenger 1999: 113). It may be for that reason that Poe's observer closed his eyes and removed the candelabrum from the portrait, although unable to explain his gesture to himself.

Paradoxically, what the pictorial art teaches can never be accepted nor applied to what we fallaciously take for "reality"; the so-called reality is nothing but the picture we represent to ourselves - secretly hoping of never being involved in it - conforming to patterns, by projecting a shape which they do not have by themselves, and by performing narcissistically, therefore, their alleged referentiality out of our own phantasms. Nane Papa only removes his eyes when the presumed referent of his gaze has lost its colours, "in order not to see her mouth turn so utterly black" (Pirandello 1994: 1096).

The frame of *The Oval Portrait* was uncertain, melting away in contact with the presumed "real" ontology, in its turn framed by the narrative hypotyposis which contained it. The frame of Nane Papa's paintings, as well as of his involuntary pictorial representations of Candelora, is also represented by the narrative hypotyposis of Pirandello's short story in which they exist: as a reminder that all referents are illusions performed by discourse and modelled by the pictorial pre-programming of their enunciation. As we are reading - or looking at - the case of Nane Papa and Candelora, we may be watched by someone who is reducing us, at this very moment, to fictional representations.

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