

CHAPTER I

COMPARISON BETWEEN POE AND CORTAZAR.

1. INTRODUCTION.

This chapter compares the work by Edgar Allan Poe, North American writer, with the work of Julio Cortazar, Argentinean writer, in order to determine the influence that the former had on the works of the latter. Needless to say that the comparison and contrast of all the literary creation by both writers would be impossible in a paper such as this. In order to be specific and precise and not to speculate at random, the researchers have chosen one work by each of the authors mentioned above. To give a preview of what was discovered, the readers may find in this analysis, similar characters used in their stories. In order to convey the exact feelings of the characters and the times, some words or sentences are given in French.

1.1 THE OVAL PORTRAIT.

1.1.1 SUMMARY.



Two travelers, a landlord and his servant, arrive at a castle during the evening. They force the door and get in. There, each of them settle in a room. When the servant has gone to sleep, the landlord begins to read a strange story from a book.

The story is about a couple, an artist and his wife, in which the artist, in his desire to immortalize his work, decides to paint a portrait of his wife, a young girl with a rare beauty. While portraying his wife on the canvas, the artist was taking her spirit and life. Even though the girl knew what was happening, she allows the artist to continue with his endeavor. So, when the artist finished the portrait, her spirit and her life were, in certain way, absorbed or transferred to the canvas.



1.1.2 ANALYSIS.

When the artist in the story is creating his portrait, he is also destroying his wife's spirit and life. This means that human beings create beautiful things, wonderful devises, but parallel to this, they could be destroyed. And what is more, they could also destroy themselves.

The artist was creating a unique and beautiful portrait, but he did not pay attention to the damage he was causing the model. That was probably a way to demonstrate himself and others his power. This proves that art can be life consuming, as any other activity in life, for instance: work, there are people who become slaves. Like work, human beings can become slaves of sports, vices, love, sicknesses, sex, fears, passions, etc. The artist was a slave to his art as his wife was a slave of his love. He did not care about her and took her life. He demonstrated his eagerness to fulfill his ego only. On the other hand, the wife

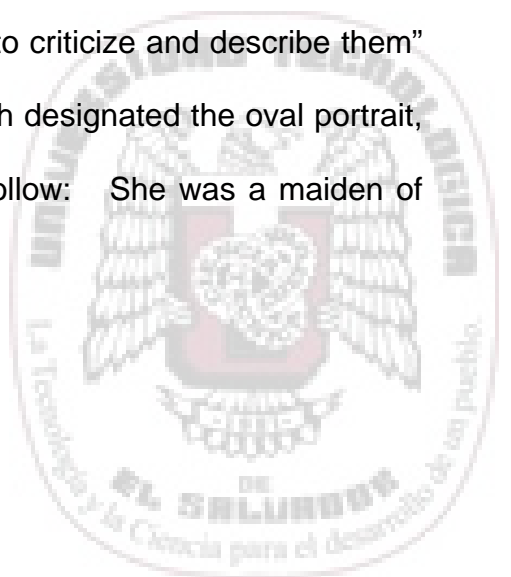
did not care about her own life and let him to take it away. Everything in the name of love.

In this tale, Poe sets the story in a rural place, in an old, ruined and abandoned castle owned by a rich family. The place is described with some details that show the owner's social class. For example, he describes pieces of furniture present only in the home of the rich. The tale is directed to these kind of people. At that time, those who were rich were also educated. Therefore, belonged to the select society of the time.

The story is being read by one of the characters within the story. During his adolescence, Poe demonstrated he was an intelligent student with a superior mental capacity, of course, instead of being an advantage it was a misfortune, because at the University of Virginia, where he was a student, people like him, were not well liked. There, Poe was well known for his love for reading. How important reading was for him, this aspect can be appreciated in the story under analysis through the following quotations: "at least alternately to the contemplation of these pictures, and the perusal of a small volume which has been found upon the pillow, and which purported to criticize and describe them" (pag.291:1999), and "turning to the number which designated the oval portrait, I there read the vague and quaint words which follow: She was a maiden of rarest beauty..." (p.291:1999).

1.2 THE CONTINUITY OF PARKS.

1.2.1 SUMMARY.





It is a tale that talks about a couple of lovers that keep their love affair in secret, which since the beginning it was condemned to the end, in a mountain cabin surrounded by forest. Everything was planned and coordinated. There was nothing else to do, that follow the rules of the game. In this tale, like in Poe's, the man took advantage of the woman's love. The tale is narrated by a man who reads a book while staying in a lonely room. The tale itself is written in the book.

1.2.2 ANALYSIS.

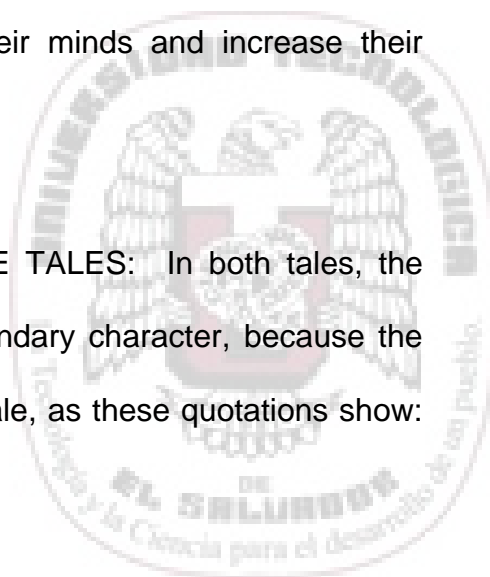
People sometimes get involved in certain situations that guide them to take part in risky activities. Human beings have always had the need to show, to prove others, that they have the power of situations or circumstances. Through history, man has always been so proud that never gives up to challenges unless he knows he is incorrect. In "The Continuity of Parks", a couple of lovers led their love affair as a contract. Their social status allowed for a relationship with clauses, where the rules of the game were established before the relation started, that is the when, the where and the how that relationship was going to finish. All the details for the ending were planned since the very beginning. Positive results can not be taken from this story, because innocent people could be hurt with such behavior. That behavior which would bring only sadness and pain. It can be inferred that this story is directed to educated people, because the tale is narrated by a character who reads the story in an apartment with fine

furniture and a selected location. It is believed that Cortazar directed this story to the social class where he belonged, he directed to people with high education and of course, people who had this kind of education, were only middle-upper and upper social class.

Cortazar, as a child, was already devoted to reading. He loved to read stories of adventure and fantasy. It can be said that books and reading were also his most important activities. For him, letters and words were an interesting game he had to work out. He enjoyed getting into the lines of the books, to analyze the topics and extract the essence of them. He also portrayed this devotion in “The Continuity of the Parks”, where the story is also a story within a book being read. His enthusiasm for reading can be inferred in these quotations: “He remembered effortlessly the names and his mental image of the characters; the novel...”, “Word by word, licked up by the sordid dilemma of the hero and heroine, letting himself be absorbed to the point where the images settled down and took on color and movement...”. As it can be seen both writers had in common their passion for reading; they were dedicated and studious. They focused their interest to the development of their minds and increase their knowledge.

1.3 COMMON POINTS IN THE TALES.

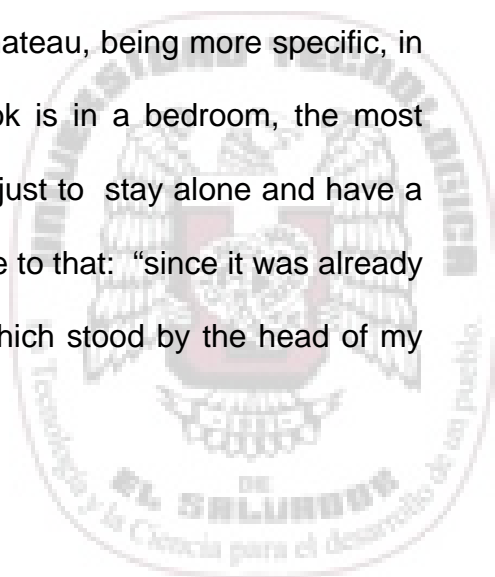
PARTICIPATION OF THE NARRATORS IN THE TALES: In both tales, the narrators take part as a character but as a secondary character, because the main characters are the ones within the second tale, as these quotations show:



“The Oval Portrait”: “long, long I read, and devoutly, devoutly I gazed” (p.290:1999), “I there read the vague and quaint words which follows: She was a maiden of rarest beauty,” (p.291:1999). “The Continuity of Parks”: “he permitted himself a slowly growing interest in the plot, in the characterization...”, and “Word by word, licked up by the sordid dilemma of the hero and heroine, letting himself be absorbed to the point where the images settled down and took on color and movement, he was witness to the final encounter in the mountain cabin.”

CHARACTERS: The first tale in “The Oval Portrait” presents a man and his servant, the man is reading a story in which a couple, husband and wife, are the main characters of this new tale. In “The Continuity of Parks”, a man, after talking with his servant, is reading a book whose main characters are a couple of lovers.

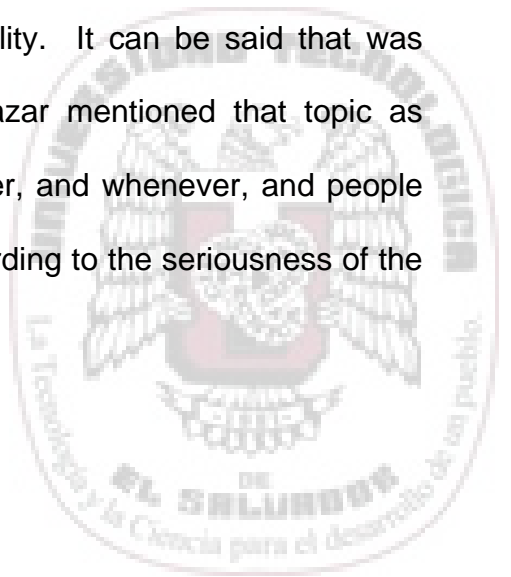
THE STARTING OF THE TALES OCCUR IN SIMILAR PLACES: In “The Oval Portrait”, the narrator is in a peaceful room of a chateau, being more specific, in the bedroom. The character who reads the book is in a bedroom, the most common place for people to rest, think, study or just to stay alone and have a peaceful moment. Next quotation makes reference to that: “since it was already night to light the tongues of a tall candelabrum which stood by the head of my bed” (p.290:1999).



In “The Continuity of Parks” the narrator is in a room of an apartment, being more specific, in the study: “he returned to the book in the tranquility of his studio which looked out upon the park with its oaks.”

SEPARATION: In The Oval Portrait, Edgar Allan Poe deals, in a dramatic and determined form, with the topic of separation. Poe tried to reveal the kind of life he himself lived. For him, life was a constant tragedy; it was always surrounded by sadness, deaths, pain, solitude etc. Poe was a little child when his parents died. Then, he had to face another separation, his adoptive mother died. Another tragic separation came into his life, his wife died too. He had to face these definitive separations, definitive because those people would never be with him again. It can be appreciated how cruel fate was with him. This is the reason why Poe included this topic where death had to make the dirty work. The following quotation can illustrate this point, “Turned suddenly to regard his beloved: She was dead!”. (p.292:1999).

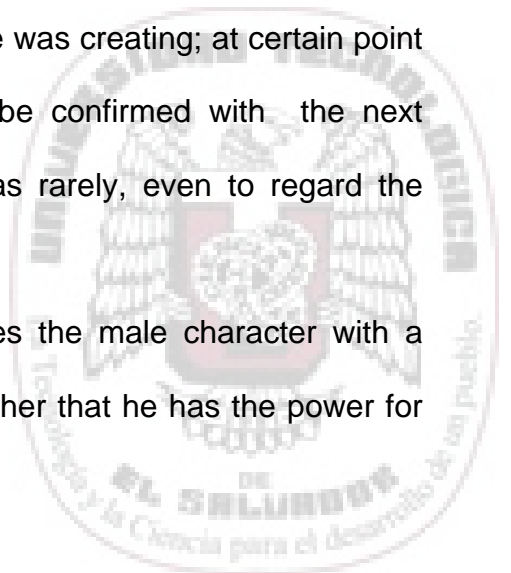
Julio Cortazar deals with this topic too, but in a different way. In “The Continuity of Parks”, separation is softer, nearer to the reality. It can be said that was established with a mature point of view. Cortazar mentioned that topic as something that can happen to anybody, wherever, and whenever, and people have to manage that situation and its results according to the seriousness of the problem.



Poe shows the tragic part, and also includes extreme consequences like death. For Poe, the topic of separation is a dramatic, painful and irreparable event. On the other hand, Cortazar shows the same topic, but in a realistic way, of course, it is painful, but at least, Cortazar is not so determined as Poe. In "The Continuity of the Parks" the couple just separate, each one goes in different direction. Each of them can begin other relationship with another person. But in "The Oval Portrait", separation is forever, people were separated by death. Nothing can be done to avoid it.

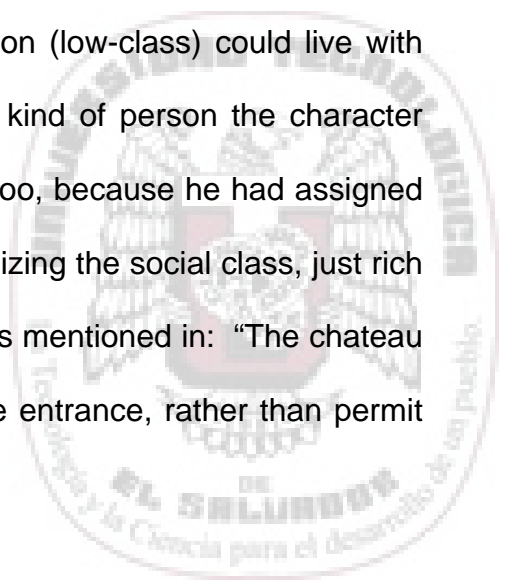
MALE CHARACTERS' BEHAVIOR, PROUD AND SELFISHNESS: Poe provides his male character with arrogance, selfishness, pride and lack of sensibility. In the Oval Portrait, the artist focuses in his art not in his wife. The wife was only necessary for modeling. There was nothing more that called the artist's attention, than his wife's beauty. He wanted to portrait that beauty with his art. The artist took advantage of his wife, forgetting about her feelings and needs, interposing his own needs and desires. He did not direct his look at his wife neither, because he was interested in what he was creating; at certain point he forgot his model was there too. This can be confirmed with the next quotation: "and turned his eyes from the canvas rarely, even to regard the countenance of his wife." (p.292:1999).

In The Continuity of the Parks, Cortazar provides the male character with a sense of pride and insensibility. The man shows her that he has the power for



ending the relationship in the moment he desires it. He also shows no mercy toward his lover. Man is portrayed as taking advantage of the woman's weakness, as it is shown in the following lines: "now the lover came, his face but by the backlash of a branch. Admirably, she stanchd the bood with her kisses, but he rebuffed her caresses, he had no come to perform again the ceremonies of a secret passion."

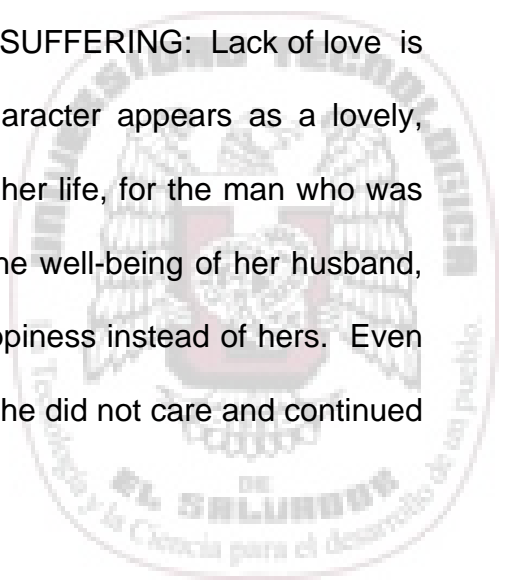
AUDIENCE: The Oval Portrait was a selected tale for selected readers too. It was directed to those people who had a higher education, those who really appreciated reading, those who enjoyed learning through reading. These people were the elite of the social classes of that time. That is why the setting depicts their ways of living: "We established ourselves in one of the smallest and least sumptuously furnished apartments. Its decorations were rich" (p.290:1999), and "Since it was already night the tongues of a tall candelabrum which stood by the head of my bed and to throw open far and wide the fringed curtains of black velvet which enveloped the bed itself" (p.290:1999). There was no possibility that poor or people with no education (low-class) could live with such a luxury. Another important fact about the kind of person the character who reads the story owned was a wealthy family too, because he had assigned at his service a male servant. Again he is emphasizing the social class, just rich could have servants in order to be attended, as it is mentioned in: "The chateau into which my valet had ventured to make forcible entrance, rather than permit



me in my desperately wounded condition to pass the night in the open air” (p.290:1999).

“The Continuity of Parks” was also aimed at the educated people (middle-high social class), because the character who reads the story is in an apartment which has fine furniture, for example: “he returned to the book in the tranquility of his study which looked out upon the park with its oaks”, “sprawled on his favorite armchair, its back toward the door”, “he let his left hand caress repeatedly the green velvet upholstery.” The reader must remember that apartments with the view to a park, had to be located in an exclusive place, even the description of the furniture denotes the social class of the character. Pay attention to the male servant: “and discussing a matter of joint ownership with the manager of his state.” Only rich people could afford servants in those years. Poe and Cortazar came from rich and influent family, as the reader can see in both biographies. Their families moved around the middle-high society, so they wrote for the same people who they grew up with during their lives.

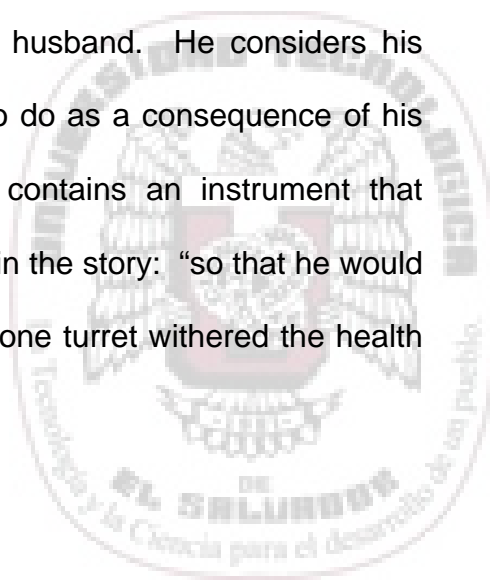
FEMALE CHARACTERS’ BEHAVIOR, PAIN AND SUFFERING: Lack of love is reflected in The Oval Portrait. Poe’s female character appears as a lovely, obedient and humble woman that sacrificed even her life, for the man who was destroying her life. Here the woman interposes the well-being of her husband, before her own. She preferred her husband’s happiness instead of hers. Even though she had begun to feel the consequences, she did not care and continued



modeling for him. Next quotation can confirm it: “because she saw that the painter (who had high renown) took a fervid and burning pleasure in his task and wrought day and night to depict her who so loved him” (p.292:1999). The man was captivated by her beauty, but he did not love her, at least in the same way she did, as it can be inferred in these lines: “It was this a terrible thing for this lady to hear the painter speak of his desire to portray even his young bride” (p.291:1999), and “He passionate, studious, austere and having already a bride in his art” (p.291:1999).

In “The Continuity of Parks”, Cortazar portrays lack of love between the lovers. They keep their love affair in secret, but even though she loved him, he was starting to get bored about such relationship, as expressed in: “but he rebuffed her caresses, he had not come to perform again the ceremonies of a secret passion...”, and “Even to those caresses which writhed about the lover’s body, as thought wishing to keep him there, to dissuade him from it;”.

Dealing with sacrifices, Poe is more drastic. His female character gave her life for a person who does not love her. He characterizes his adoptive mother, in the woman who is being portrayed by her cruel husband. He considers his adoptive mother’s death, as a sacrifice she had to do as a consequence of his adoptive father’s behavior. The Oval Portrait, contains an instrument that damages or affects negatively the other character in the story: “so that he would not see that the light which fell so ghastly in that lone turret withered the health and the spirits of his bride” (p.291:1999).



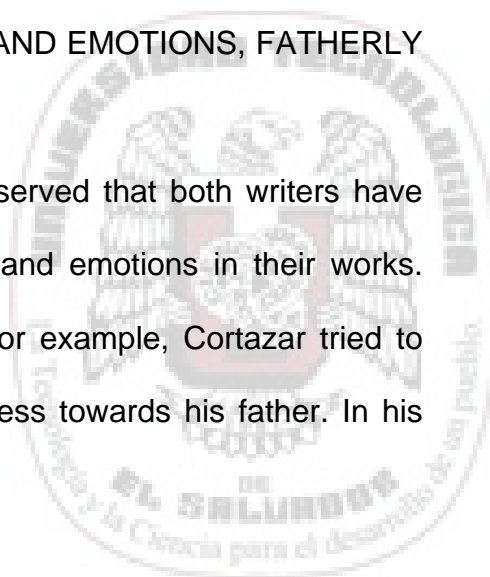
Cortazar is more realistic about this lack of feeling in the man, but he also included a drastic action when they planned to kill the one who was an obstacle for them. But what happened in this tale, is more possible that may happen in real life than in Poe's tale. In *The Continuity of the Parks*, the instrument of damage is a dagger: "the dagger warmed itself against his chest". This instrument would help finish the secret relationship with the woman. It's secret since they have to hide it, since they meet in a cabin in a forest surrounded by bushes and dry leaves.

SETTING (PLACE): Both tales are developed in isolated places. In "The Oval Portrait" takes place in a dark and abandoned castle, but sumptuous. "The Continuity of Parks" is settled in a hidden hut in the middle of a forest, surrounded by trees.

1.4 TECHNIQUES USED IN THE TALES.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL ASPECTS: FEELINGS AND EMOTIONS, FATHERLY FIGURE AND MOTHERLY FIGURE.

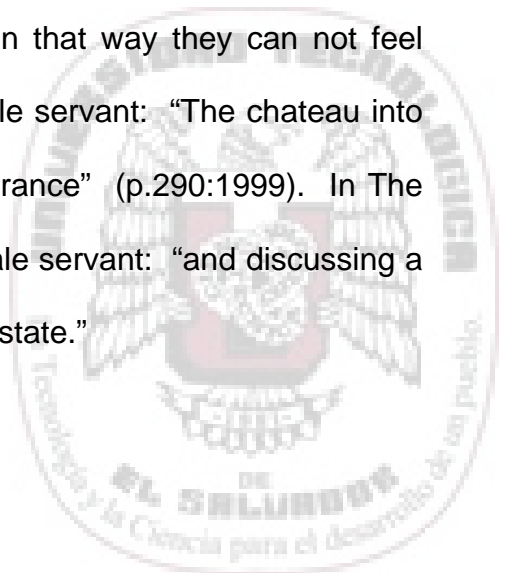
FEELINGS AND EMOTIONS: It can also be observed that both writers have portrayed their personal lives with their feelings and emotions in their works. Hate is present in the works of both authors. For example, Cortazar tried to portrait his personal life, especially his resentment towards his father. In his



tale, he sets a character with similar irresponsability than his father's. The male character in the tale abandons the girl, with no care of her emotions or feelings, the same thing happened with his parents, his father abandoned his mother, and Cortazar tried to retell his own experience but focusing in a tale. The main topic of the tale is the unconsciousness about wrong behavior which ends hurting one or more innocent people.

In a similar way, Poe also took some sad events from his life and depicted them in his tale. Poe's adoptive father did not give him any love, however, he got love, comprehension and tenderness from his adoptive mother.

FATHERLY FIGURE: Both tales show the need for having someone who one can trust. In the tales, the servants take the place of the father, who in real life did not play any important role in the writers' lives. Poe's father abandoned his wife and children. Little Poe was given in adoption, but his adoptive father did not love him ever. In the other side, Cortazar's father also abandoned Mrs. Cortazar. Both families had to face life without the figure of a father. Both writers show this need of a father, portraying in the tales a "man" who accompanies each landlord when reading. So, in that way they can not feel alone. In *The Oval Portrait*, the narrator has a male servant: "The chateau into which my valet had ventured to make forcible entrance" (p.290:1999). In *The Continuity of the Parks*, the narrator also has a male servant: "and discussing a matter of joint ownership with the manager of his estate."



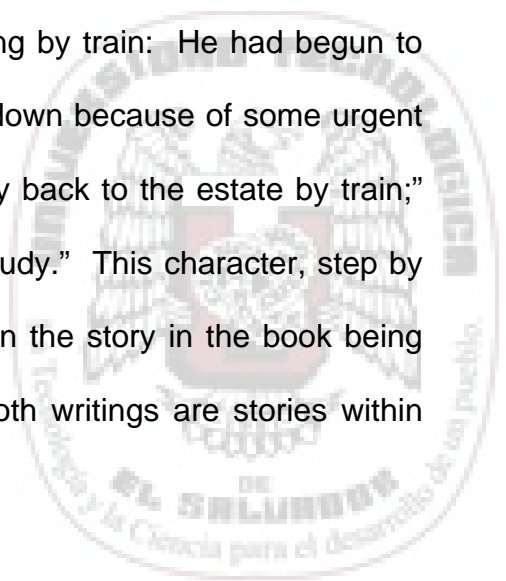
The writers tried, in certain way, to avoid facing their frustrated lives. In the tales, they preferred being the characters who read the main story in a book, so they were involved in the situation indirectly, but taking part in it too. Doing this, they avoided being hurt again, because the first time they were hurt, was when their fathers ran away from home. At least in the tales, they will be protected, because they acted just as observers and narrators of the story where other people will be hurt instead of themselves. The authors would look at the problem very closely but without any risk. In *The Oval Portrait*, the narrator is a male character reading a strange book . It is affirmed that the narrator is a man, because the way he expresses referring to the female model on the portrait. Also in the way he describes how he felt while admiring the portrait: “and even the ends of the radiant hair melted imperceptibly into the vague yet deep shadow which formed the background of the whole... (p.291:1999). At length, satisfied with the true secret of its effect, I fell back within the bed.” “I had found the spell of the picture in an absolute lifelikeliness of expression, which, at first startling finally confounded, subdued, and appalled me...” (p.291:1999). Similarly, in *The Continuity of the Parks*, the character that is reading a book is a man, “He had begun to read the novel...” “He had put it down because...”

MOTHERLY FIGURE: In his tale, Poe expresses how much he needed his mother. His natural mother died when he was two years old, and his adoptive mother died when he was a teenager. That was the reason why he looked for

maternal love in his aunt Mrs. Maria Clemm and also it was the reason why he got married with his cousin, in order to find a substitute for his mother. We can appreciate the lack of this love in these lines from "The Oval Portrait": "The portrait ... was that of a young girl." (p.291:1999), and "She was a maiden of rarest beauty, and not more lovely than full of glee." (p.291:1999).

In "The Continuity of Parks", Cortazar also presents a female character in the story: "The woman arrived first, apprehensive;". Even though Cortazar was not so careful in describing the woman, he believed that women should be seen with respect and consideration.

FRAME TALE: Both writings are short stories, so they are clasified as tales. "The Oval Portrait" first began with the arrival of the narrator and his servant, at a dark and abandoned castle. But the story itself is part of a book the narrator found under his pillow: "and the perusal of a small volume which has been found upon the pillow, and which purported to criticize and describe them" (pag.291:1999). In the case of "The Continuity of Parks" the narrator settled a male character reading a book while he is traveling by train: He had begun to read the novel a few days before. He had put it down because of some urgent businnes conferences, opened it again on his way back to the estate by train;," "he returned to the book in the tranquility of his study." This character, step by step, is remembering the events and characters in the story in the book being read, so he can see the images in his mind. Both writings are stories within



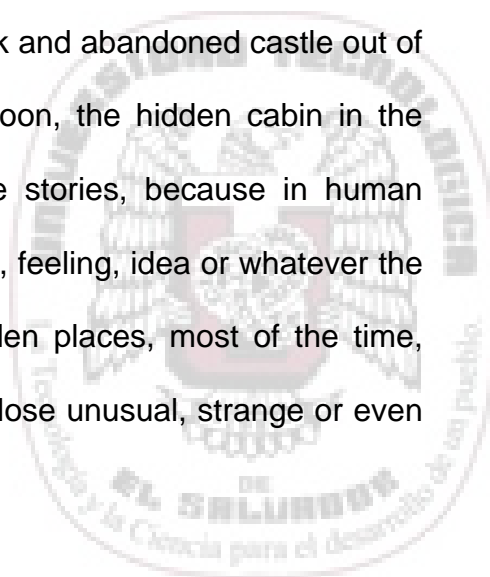
stories, this mean that the real tale is the second one, included in the book the first character is reading.

LANGUAGE: Both tales were written with the kind of language spoken by the educated people (upper and middle class). As the stories progress, we can see how the writers described the things and the furniture that the rooms had.

CONFLICT: The women's love against the men's selfishness and men's selfishness against women's feelings.

ANTAGONISTS: "The Oval Portrait" has the following antagonist: The art, the brush, the pallet, the portrait and the husbands's ambition and selfishness together destroy the wife's love and even her life, as a consequence of her husband's obsession. In "The Continuity of Parks" the antagonists are the dagger, the secret passion and the man's rejection and selfishness. All together avoid the woman's love. They end the story with a separation.

SYMBOL: In "The Oval Portrait" the night, the dark and abandoned castle out of the city. In "The Continuity of Parks" the afternoon, the hidden cabin in the middle of the forest forecast evil throughout the stories, because in human beings' inner (mind or soul) there is a kind of myth, feeling, idea or whatever the reader wants to call it, that solitary, dark or hidden places, most of the time, represent or create the belief that such things enclose unusual, strange or even



bad situations or behaviors. People, in any way, is often afraid of darkness, solitude or things, people, places, etc, they do not know or are not accustomed to. The dagger often represent damage or pain. Men ended doing what they wanted to do and women ended dead and abandoned. In this tales, women were victims of the men's bad feelings.

