Alina MIU
Universitatea din Piteşti

LITERARY MEANING IN PROSE TRANSLATION: A CASE STUDY ON EDGAR ALLAN POE'S *THE OVAL PORTRAIT*

Abstract: *Since our interest lies on the one hand in the semiosis of reading and literary meaning as well as in the way in which they contribute to the translation process from a theoretical point of view, and on the other hand in pointing out the sine-qua-non character of the reading-interpretation stages of literary prose translation, in our paper we aim at making a socio-semiotic translation-oriented approach to Edgar Allan Poe's The Oval Portrait by means of Nida's three levels of interpretation, i.e. the immediate understanding and evaluation of a discourse piece without any act of reflection, the analytic study of the text, of its structure and of its socio-cultural context, and, finally, the interpretative level reached only when the symbolic significance of the text is rightly comprehended. Our study also analyses the way in which the findings of the three levels of interpretation are present in the TL translation by Mihu Dragomir and Constantin Vonghizas.*

Key-words: *literary meaning, prose translation, levels of interpretation*

The meaning-centred approach to the study of prose translation assimilates the translator with a reader faced with the plurality of meanings of the SL text which he/she has not only to "decode" but also to "encode" in the TL for the TL readership, preserving as much as possible of the literariness of the SL text while enabling the TL readership to feel the 'illusion' (in Iser's terminology) at every particular act of reading. Still, however carefully a translator tries to read a text with the intent of embodying the point of view of the most generic reader, he or she, as a human being, has many limitations and is still an individual, with individual tastes, preferences, dislikes. The translator cannot *deny* his personality just because his/her reading is not solely for personal interest but a prelude to the use of the text by a wider group of readers. From this viewpoint, reading is the first of a series of unfortunate enough processes that transform the TL text into a subjective, fallible interpretation of the SL text.

Nida's (1982) sociosemiotic approach takes into consideration various aspects of the philological, linguistic, communicative, and other approaches of translation, and extends considerably the base for recognizing the meaningfulness of both lexical content, rhetoric form and the cultural-social value.

The sociosemiotic approach helps one understand better not only the meanings of words, sentences and discourse structures, but also the symbolic nature of distinguishing between designative and associative meanings. It also emphasizes the fact that everything about a message carries meaning.

The theoretical basis for the sociosemiotic approach is Halliday's (1973) sociosemiotic theory of language. He emphasizes the unity of the text (language), context (linguistic or non-linguistic), and social structure and advocates that language is a unique system of signs with a social function, capable of expressing the meaning of all the other sign systems. However, Peter Newmark's (1993) classification of the functions of language into *expressive function*, *informative function*, *vocative function*, *aesthetic function*, *phatic function* and *metalingual function* is much superior to Halliday's classification into *ideational function*, *interpersonal function* and *textual function*. The core of this approach is Charles Morris's (1946) semiotic approach to meaning. He treats a sign as a tripartite entity

BDD-A5371 © 2005 Universitatea din Piteşti
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:01:07 UTC)

and classifies meaning in three dimensions of semantics, syntax and pragmatics, namely designative/referential meaning, linguistic meaning and pragmatic/associative meaning. The most significant part of this approach is that social semiotics does not just concern itself with what people say and do and how they do it; it also focuses on *when* (in what context) and *why*, i.e. the large-scale social consequences of such words and actions.

The semiotic approach to the study of meanings implies, in Nida's opinion (in agreement with the same theory first developed by Charles Peirce (1931-1935, 1958)), at least three levels of interpretation as follows: *the first level* which represents the immediate understanding and the evaluation of a discourse, without any act of reflection. In other words, this first level deals with the spontaneous reception of a text. *The second level* envisages the analytic study of the text, of its structure and of its context. *The third level* of interpretation is reached only when the text is regarded from the point of view of its symbolic significance, often in light of its universal implications. (our transl., 2004:49)

In view of all this, we consider that such a sociosemiotic approach to meaning is suitable for the translation of fiction. According to the sociosemiotic theory, verbal signs have three types of meaning: *designative meaning* which indicates the relationship between verbal signs and their referents, *linguistic meaning* which indicates the relationship between signs, and *pragmatic meaning* which indicates the relationship between verbal signs and interpretants. Thus, a text may simultaneously have three types of meaning, or just two types of meaning, or only one type of meaning.

The clear distinction of those three meanings is helpful for fiction translators to recognize the entire style that a novel/short story conveys. By examining the author's choice of words and sentence patterns, fictional translators can have a clear idea of the designative and linguistic meaning, and thus may better reproduce the text style of the original by exploring the author's intention, the reader's interpretation, and the potential social consequences of the novel/short story. Translators can recognize the pragmatic meaning which indicates the relationship between the author and reader, and thus can properly reproduce the authorial style of the original.

According to the sociosemiotic approach, the text is a semantic unit with meaning and function. It is a product in the sense that it is an output, something that can be represented in systematic terms. It is also a process in the sense of ongoing semantic choices, a movement through the network of potential meanings, with each set of choices constituting the environment for a further set. A novel/short story actually is a unity of meaning, style (how to convey meaning) and function (why to convey meaning) which we cannot discuss separately.

Most prose fiction works may contain all three types of meaning and the five functions mentioned previously, through which fictional translators can easily and thoroughly analyze the SL prose fiction and have a better understanding of the authorial and text style of the novel/short story, thus achieving equivalence in meaning and similarity in style and function in the translation.

However, the whole process involved in the translation of fiction is rather complicated, including encoding of the message by the prose fiction writer, and decoding and re-encoding of the message by the fictional translator. The message, including meaning, style and function, is what the *prose fiction author* wishes to convey through his/her fiction in the order of *pragmatic level* (intention of the author or the theme of the fiction), *semantic level* (choice of words), *syntactical level* (choice of sentence patterns, etc.) and *discourse level* (integrating the former three levels into the entire discourse). This is the process by which the fiction writer encodes his/her message. The *translator* in his or

BDD-A5371 © 2005 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:01:07 UTC)

her own turn decodes the message in the reverse order. At first, the translator comes across *the whole discourse* of the prose fiction, and then he/she analyzes it at *the syntactical, semantic* and finally *pragmatic levels.* At the end, the translator perceives the message conveyed by the SL text. The most important thing is how the translator re-encodes the message he/she understands, which is the basis of the translating activity. The order is very similar to the fiction writer's encoding process, but the language employed is different.

From the above it is to be noted that the translation criteria deriving from the sociosemiotic approach are "correspondence in meaning and similarity in style and function," which turns out to be well suited to verify the quality of fiction translation. "Correspondence in meaning" is actually correspondence in designative meaning, linguistic meaning and pragmatic meaning; "similarity in style" is similarity in both authorial style and text style, "similarity in function" is similarity in the six functions advocated by Peter Newmark. The translation of meanings and reflection of styles and functions, therefore, should rely on both linguistic context and non-linguistic context, i.e. culture and society. From this point of view, a qualified translator should acquire language competence and cultural knowledge of both TL and SL, and take pains to reduce the loss and distortion in his/ her translation.

To end with, we consider that the sociosemiotic approach is unique in its ability to shed light on the various functions of the linguistic medium of prose fiction, on the literary, cultural conventions and authorial individualism, on the author's worldview and social consequences of the fiction.

Since our own interest lies on the one hand in the semiosis of reading and literary meaning and in the way in which they contribute to the translation process from a theoretical point of view, and on the other hand in pointing out the sine-qua-non character of the reading-interpretation stages in the case of literary prose translation, in the following we aim at making a socio-semiotic translation-oriented approach to Edgar Allan Poe's *The Oval Portrait* by means of Nida's three levels of interpretation, i.e. *the first level* which represents the immediate understanding and the evaluation of a discourse, without any act of reflection, *the second level* envisaging the analytic study of the text, of its structure and of its socio-cultural context, and finally, *the third level* which is an interpretative one reached only when the text is regarded from the point of view of its symbolic significance, with the observation that we will continue our study by analysing the way in which the findings of the three levels of interpretation are to be found in the TL translation by Mihu Dragomir and Constantin Vonghizas.

Putting it differently, we could say that a translator should give the same SL text three different translation-oriented "readings" before any attempt to translate it:

- a ***first reading*** or ***basic reading*** (corresponding to Nida's first level of interpretation) meant to familiarize the reader-translator-decoder with the text and enable him to grasp at least some of the enclosed meanings attributed to the SL text by its author;
- a ***second reading*** or ***interpretative rereading*** (corresponding to Nida's second and third levels of interpretation) meant to reveal to the reader-translator-interpreter both the "enclosed" and "disclosed" meanings of the SL text;
- a ***third reading*** or ***surreading*** which in fact represents the translator's version of the SL text, also called the TL text, and which, according to many translation theorists, is a new piece of writing wearing the mark of the translator's personality, on the one hand, and of his readership's cultural characteristics, on the other hand.

In light of the above, a *basic* cursory *reading* of Poe's short story reveals an apparently simple plot: a narrator in a wounded condition and his valet are spending the

BDD-A5371 © 2005 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:01:07 UTC)

night in a château where the narrator cannot help admiring the gallery of paintings displayed on the walls of the château. His admiration is accompanied by the "perusal of a small volume which had been found upon the pillow, and which purported to criticize and describe them." Next the narrator turns about the candelabrum hanging from the ceiling and discovers with the help of its light the existence of a painting portraying a young girl "just ripening into womanhood". Quite impressed by this oval-shaped portrait after a mere hurried glance at it, the narrator replaces the candelabrum in its former position and reads the story of the portrait as presented in the volume he found on that pillow. It is the story of a young maiden who married a passionate, studious and austere painter who was so preoccupied with his portraying his beautiful wife that he failed to notice that the finishing of the portrait came along with her dying little by little, both physically and emotionally, because of her own inability to prevail over her husband's other "love", that is Art itself.

This basic reading leaves room to several questions which even a proficient or learned reader would find difficult to answer without at least a rereading of the text followed by a more thorough stage of interpretation:

a. Why is the narrator so deeply impressed by this painting in particular out of all the paintings hanging on the walls of the château?
b. What distinguishes this painting from the others? Is it its style, its shape, its content?
c. How could he give so minute details about the physical characteristics of the young maiden on the one hand and about the style of the painting on the other hand after a mere glance at it?
d. What is the relevance of the story of the painting presented in that volume for him?
e. Who is the narrator? Is he the author himself?
f. If the narrator is the author himself, is there any chance for the painting to represent a beloved person in his life or someone who sometime made a great impression on him?
g. What is the meaning to be decoded from the final remark in the story, i.e. "*She was dead*"?

A *second reading* or *rereading* implying a careful semantic analysis will certainly reveal to the trained reader several details that his first content-oriented reading failed to provide.

This second, vocabulary-oriented rereading will reveal the fact that the text abounds in *adjectives*, *adverbs* and *nouns*, with *verbs* used only to designate the actions that place the narrator first in the château, then in the apartment in the turret and finally in front of the much admired painting. This analysis may be further detailed by taking into consideration the meanings of the already mentioned predominant parts of speech. Thus, it may be noted that most of the *adjectives* and *nouns* denote the objects in that apartment on the one hand, and on the other various technical features of the oval portrait (*the least sumptuously furnished apartments, manifold and multiform armorial trophies, rich golden arabesque, the frame was oval, richly gilded and filigreed in Moresque* etc.). The *adverbs* on the other hand are only meant to emphasize in one way or the other the meanings of some verbs (*Long, long I read – and devoutly, devoutly I gazed*) or some adjectives (*desperately wounded condition, unusually great number of very spirited modern paintings,* etc.). In as far as the meanings of the adjectives and nouns are concerned, we could pinpoint the fact that both the adjectives and the nouns have positive semantic connotations (describing as we have mentioned before either the grandeur of the château or the splendour of the oval painting) with the exception of the adjective *black* in *fringed curtains of black velvet* which, if analyzed in context, loses much of its possibly negative connotation due to the fact that at the time the black velvet stood for something stylish and classy usually

BDD-A5371 © 2005 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:01:07 UTC)

associated with various decorations characteristic of a large residence such as a château. More than that the very use of the noun *château* with the French spelling and not with the English spelling which tends to replace the French sound *[â]* with a circumflex accent on it with the English sound [a] contributes itself to the general idea of bon goût grandeur that the narrator wants to induce to his reader.

Poe's "artistic" vocabulary range is described by Silvia Simone Anspach in *Poe's Pictoric Writing.* In her own words the pictorial elements of Poe's writing are "more vivid and powerful than words so that the latter fail to capture the former's communicative value and only manage to translate them into feebler and more restrictive signs ... ." (1985-1987:17). By constructing the story with these particular elements, Anspach feels that Poe wanted to reveal that perception is manipulated by the object that is seen, as well as by what is seen in relation to it.

Another semantic observation concerns the use of such technical painting terms such as *Moresque, vignetting* and *lifelikeliness of expression* which, besides drawing the reader's attention to the particular style of painting that impressed him so, are also meant to raise his curiosity as to the motif for such a preciseness of technical description on the part of the narrator.

A further semantic analysis will reveal that the predominant positive connotations pertaining to the vocabulary used at the beginning of the story of the oval portrait gradually become negative. Thus, what begins as a radiant story by the mentioning of her beauty and her glee (*She was a maiden of rarest beauty, and not more lovely than full of glee*) continues quite tragically by the very mentioning of the word *evil* in connection with the hour when she had seen, loved, and wedded the *painter (And evil was the hour when she saw, and loved, and wedded the painter*). Further on the narrator makes ample use of antithesis in order to present to the reader the tragicality of the plot: *"(…) He, passionate, studious, austere, and having already a bride in his Art; she a maiden of rarest beauty, and not more lovely than full of glee; all light and smiles, and frolicsome as the young fawn; loving and cherishing all things; hating only the Art which was her rival; dreading only the pallet and brushes and other untoward instruments which deprived her of the countenance of her lover. It was thus a terrible thing for this lady to hear the painter speak of his desire to portray even his young bride. But she was humble and obedient, and sat meekly for many weeks in the dark, high turret-chamber where the light dripped upon the pale canvas only from overhead. But he, the painter, took glory in his work, which went on from hour to hour, and from day to day. And he was a passionate, and wild, and moody man, who became lost in reveries; 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, who pined visibly to all but him. Yet she smiled on and still on, uncomplainingly, 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, yet who grew daily more dispirited and weak (…)".* Again in point of vocabulary it is to be noted that the antithesis holds true in this respect as well since the narrator makes use of only positively charged words to render her reactions and actions and of negatively charged words to describe his state of mind.

From the above it is to be noted that this second reading or rereading reveals some information about the narrator in the sense that he is obviously an art-addict, who not only understands art but also consumes it, and who, faced with such a work of art as the oval portrait, is capable of sensing its moral value by a mere glance at it. As far as the narrator's readership is concerned, his story is not addressed to the common *ingenuous* reader who would just consider it simple and boring, but to the elevated reader who would

BDD-A5371 © 2005 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:01:07 UTC)

automatically be in the know as to who Mrs. Radcliffe (whom the narrator mentions in the beginning) is and besides his knowing her by name knows that her name can easily be associated with the Gothic novel, which by its definition is a type of romance very popular from the 1760s onwards until the 1820s and which was of much importance in the evolution of the ghost story and horror story. This type of knowledge helps the learned reader to understand from the very beginning that there must be a terrifying subplot beyond the main story which he must disclose during the process of rereading.

What the reader may fail to grasp, however, after this cursory semantic analysis, is the motif which lies behind the narrator's admiration for this work of art and which is much more than the art lover's veneration of Art.

In order to make the final semantic decoding of the SL text or, to put it differently, to "see" even beyond the deep structure of the text, the reader has to approach the text from the point of view of Poe's general and more particular narrative mode.

Thus, any trained reader of Poe's should be aware of the fact that *life* and *death*, and especially *death* are the predominant themes of Poe's writings. Starting from this, the reader should ask himself whether the association of a work of art with the tragic end of a young maiden, and more than that the tragic end caused by an art-maker, are pure coincidence or they are the very purpose of such a minute and yet tragic description of events.

The answer to this potential question may be found in the opinion of Robert N. Mollinger and Shernaz Mollinger who, in their *Edgar Allan Poe's* 'The Oval Portrait': *Fusion of Multiple Identities*, consider that Poe, the narrator, the artist, the artist's wife, Poe's mother, and Poe's wife are all inter-connected to the tale of 'The Oval Portrait'." According to them, these parts of Poe's come together, creating the whole which is revealed in 'The Oval Portrait'. They suggest that Poe's tale describes his own artistic dilemma, that art imitates life and that artists are destroyers as well as creators: "Artistic creation is, in a sense, murder" (1979:152). Despite the deaths of those he loved, in fact, because of their deaths, Poe lived on and continued to create just as the artist in his tale did. Mollinger reports that this inescapable fusion of life, death, and creation is what Poe depicts in his tale.

Their theory is sustained by Sylvie L. F. Richards in *The Eye and the Portrait: The Fantastic in Poe, Hawthorne and Gogol*: "Art is no longer just an enterprise or a perception, but it becomes an actual woman who will rival with the young woman who serves as model for the affection of the painter. Along with the personification of Art, there occurs a de-personification of the woman ... . The copy becomes the reality, thereby achieving the ultimate of man's ego fantasies: the need to preserve himself, and that which he loves, against the ravages of time, to create a stasis, but at the same time to enclose and capture the ephemeral beauty of life. Thus the inanimate painting gains life from the living model through the efforts of the artist who is responsible for the model's expiration." (1983:307-315)

Another question that is to be answered after the first and second readings of the text is why the narrator, whom we have already identified with Poe himself, is so impressed by the portrait of the young maiden besides its artistry. In order to answer this question the trained reader should get in touch with the social and cultural context in which Poe-the narrator wrote his story. In *In the Prostitution of Paris: Late Capital of the Twentieth Century*, Michael Rothberg considers that Poe's tale contains three themes as follows: "representation and mechanical reproduction, representation and the city, and representation and sexual difference." (1992:5). From this point of view Rothberg feels that

BDD-A5371 © 2005 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:01:07 UTC)

'The Oval Portrait' is an allegory which reveals how the public sphere operates on representation of the individual which takes autonomy away from the individual and leads to negation or death. In particular, Rothberg notes that women in Poe's time were barred from the public sphere altogether and were thus denied power and identity. Further on he shows how Baudelaire and Godard expand on these themes in their works and he cites a Godard film *Vivre Sa Vie* in which men exploit women in order to profit in the marketplace while women have no control over their exploitation and allow themselves to be drained of their own life so that men may prosper. Even the body of the woman - as in Poe's story - becomes public domain in the selling of it as art.

Thus, in light of the above, the ingenuous reader's impression after the first and second readings according to which the tale is nothing more than a successful description of a young maiden's portrait is proven wrong by the fact that possibly the narrator's admiration is directed towards the painting as an work of art and not towards the splendour and the beauty of the young maiden. More than that, we could say that the woman does not really exist for him, since she was only a tool that helped the painter give his painting life and eternal beauty. This latter theory may also be sustained by the fact that at a closer look the text abounds more in technical art descriptions than in the description of the womanish features of the young maiden.

Another theory belongs to G.R. Thompson, in *Dramatic Irony in* 'The Oval Portrait': *A Reconsideration of Poe's Revisions*, who considers *The Oval Portrait* a psychological tale that depicts the imbalance between reason and madness. His theory is based on the fact that the first version of the tale entitled *Life in Death* had a lengthy introduction in which the narrator confesses that he has eaten opium to offset painful injuries sustained by an attack. However, in the second version this introduction is eliminated and the narrator admits only that he is suffering from fever, all of which make Thompson consider that the perceptions of the narrator in the second version seem more grounded in reality than they would have been if he had been under the influence of a narcotic. Further on, he mentions that Poe's first intention was to paint a portrait of a disturbed imagination, which "does not, however, necessarily lead to the view that because Poe reduced the *obviousness* of his narrator's imbalance of mind he had shifted his intent from the psychological to the occult. 'The Oval Portrait' may be read, just as it stands, as an ironic, fully dramatized, psychological portrait." (1968:108)

The last phase of the translation process, which we called in the beginning *surreading*, consists of the translator's version of the SL text, which is supposed to be the result of the other two translated-oriented "readings" and which is represented in our case by the translation variant of Poe's *The Oval Portrait* by Mihu Dragomir and Constantin Vonghizas.

Thus, while a first reading of their translation variant reveals that there are no differences of semantic content and general theme between the SL text and the TL text, a second translation-oriented analysis will disclose their dilemma of having to choose at times between observing the "opacity" of Poe's language and translating "adequately" taking into account, on the one hand, the type of readership they address to and, on the other hand, the "commerciality" of the translation final product.

From this point of view, a cursory and then a more detailed "reading" of their translation reveals the following adequacy-based adaptations or "openings" in the TL text as compared to the original SL text:

- The footnotes of the Romanian variant offered by the two translators and which concern on the one hand Poe's source of inspiration, i.e. a portrait of the American painter

BDD-A5371 © 2005 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:01:07 UTC)

Thomas Sully (mentioned in the original text, but not in the form of a explanatory footnote, but only as a term of comparison in the text), and, on the other hand, Ann Radcliffe's identity show that the Romanian translation is addressed to a somewhat different type of readership as compared to Poe's elevated, learned reader who would be in the know as to the identity of the two real life characters mentioned in the shortstory. It is to be noted, however, that the translators' disclosure of the two identities is directed specifically towards observing Poe's intention to bring into the reader's mind the idea of a subplot arousing from the very mentioning of the ghost-like Gothic shortstory so characteristic of Ann Radcliffe on the one hand, and of the type of mysterious story-bearing vignette portraits painted by Thomas Sully on the other hand.

- The modality-charged statements are once in a while transformed into less strong or even neutral reality-based statements due to the predominance of lexical modality into Romanian as compared to a rich grammatical modality in English. Thus, for example, the original *That I now saw aright I could not and would not doubt* finds its equivalent into a partially modal statement like *Nu mai era nici o îndoială că ceea ce vedeam era aievea* instead of a possible translation variant *Nu mai era nici o îndoială şi nici nu voiam să am dubii că ceea ce vedeam era aievea* which would faithfully render the English modal auxiliary *would not* expressing the author's refusal in doubting what had become certainty by the placing of the light in a proper position. A possible explanation in point is to be found in the translators' attempt to maintain the shortness of the original message explained by the synthetic character of the English language which may very well express two modality nuances by means of only two words preceding the notional *doubt* as compared to the analytical character of Romanian which would necessitate quite a lot of lexical means to express the same content, all of which would finally result in a break in point of narrative style.
- The technical terms of the original (i.e. *vignette, Moresque, lifelikeliness*) are partially given Romanian equivalents due to the translators' attempt to preserve as much as they could the preciseness of the description of the oval portrait by preserving the English form in the case of the noun *vignette* instead of preferring its Romanian technical equivalent *vinietă*, by avoiding the technical Moresque and replacing it with *încrustații în arabescuri* which does not translate it, but rather explains it and, finally, by rendering the English *lifelikeliness* by the Romanian phrase *asemănare cu viața* which seems quite unnatural as compared to the original which, alongside with *vignette* and *Moresque*, would very concisely and precisely describe the oval portrait. It is to be noted, however, that the translators succeed in "translating" the same sub-text associated with these words as the original by preserving the italic-character graphics which draws the reader's attention to the fact that they are key words meant to portray for them the oval portrait.
- The translators also fail to observe very closely the narrative fluidity of the original and choose once in a while to break the narrative cumulative pattern, possibly because of the specificity of the Romanian language which does not have, for example, the growing cumulative effect obtained in English by the mere repetition of the conjunction *and* several times. Thus, in such statements as *And evil was the hour when she saw, and loved, and wedded the painter*, the translators broke the pattern offered by three past tenses connected by the conjunction *and*, giving the following translation variant *Blestemat a fost ceasul când l-a cunoscut şi l-a iubit pe pictor, cu care apoi s-a căsătorit.* It is to be noted that, although structurally and syntactically different, their variant is a quite inspired version of the original, taking into account that whereas in

BDD-A5371 © 2005 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:01:07 UTC)

English there are three transitive verbs, all having the word *painter* as their direct object, in Romanian there are only two such transitive verbs, i.e. *l-a cunoscut şi l-a iubit*, and one intransitive verb, i.e. *s-a căsătorit*, all of which would lead to the repetition of the word *pictor* functioning first as a direct object and then as an indirect object – i.e *când l-a cunoscut şi l-a iubit pe pictor şi când s-a căsătorit cu pictorul* which sounds unnatural and redundant in Romanian. Similarly, the introduction of the exclamatory Romanian sentence *Cât de nenorocită s-a simţit când pictorul şi-a arătat dorinţa de a imortaliza pe pânză chipul tinerei sale soţii* as a translation variant for *It was thus a terrible thing for this lady to hear the painter speak of his desire to portray even his young bride* also constitutes a break in the narrative fluidity of the story, which even more than the shortstory itself is constructed to sound like a fairy-tale with a musicality of its own rendered by the abundance of connectors such as *and* – repeated six times at the beginning of the sentence with a cumulative narrative value, *but* – repeated three times and *yet* – once as an adversative introduction to the opposition between the countenance and nature of the young bride and the painter's passion for Art at the expense of everything and everybody, his wife included. A cursory analysis of the connectors used in the Romanian variant reveals that unlike in English, in Romanian we find only two adversative connectors (i.e. *dar* and (*şi*) *totuşi*), while in the rest of the cases the translators chose to find other ways of obtaining the *and*-based musicality of the original story taking into account the fact that in Romanian one cannot speak of such a polyfunctionalism of the copulative conjunction *şi* which acquires a cumulative value mainly in verbal forms enumerations and less in front position like in English.

- A last observation concerns a break in the repeated modality pattern rendered in English twice by the modal auxiliary *would* in the negative in order to stress out once more the painter's inability and consequent refusal to see the devastating effect of his Art on his wife and which finds no equivalent in the Romanian version where the *would*+infinitive construction is translated by the Romanian „imperfect" *nu vedea* without any modal connotation or italic-character graphics. The translators' choice in the matter is to be explained by the inexistence of a perfect grammatical modal equivalent in Romanian which has at its disposal, as we have already mentioned, mainly lexical means to express the idea of refusal (*nu voia, refuza*), and which lexical means sound quite unnatural in a narration, especially when repeated.

To end with, we consider that the trained elevated reader-translator should adopt at least some if not all of the already formulated theories since any text is the sum total of all the interpretations or readings given to it along the centuries, all of which leaves room for Umberto Eco's final remark at *The Italian Academy for Advanced Studies in America* that "between the mysterious process of textual production and the uncontrollable drift of its future readings, *the text qua text* still represents a comfortable presence, the point to which we can stick." (1996)

Bibliography :

ANSPACH, Silvia Simone, *'Poe's Pictoric Writing'* in *Estudos Anglo-Americanos* 9-11 (1985-1987): 17-28.

BASSNETT, Susan and Harish Trivedi, *Post-Colonial Translation: Theory and Practice*, Routledge, London and NY, 1999.

BEAUGRANDE, de Alain Robert and Wolfgang Ulrich Dressler, *Introduction to Text Linguistics*, Longman Group Limited, London and New York, 1981.

BDD-A5371 © 2005 Universitatea din Piteşti
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:01:07 UTC)

CATFORD, J. C., *A Linguistic Theory of Translation*, London, Oxford University Press, 1965.
CAWS, Mary Ann, '*Insertion in an Oval Frame: Poe Circumscribed by Baudelaire (Part I)*' in *The French Review* 56 (April 1983): 679-687.
Halliday, M.A.K., *Explorations in the Functions of Language*, Edward Arnold, London, 1973.
HALLIDAY, M.A.K., Hasan, R., *Language, Context and Text: Aspects of Language in a Social-Semiotic Perspective*, Deakin University Press, Victoria, 1985; repr. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1989.
HATIM, Basil and Ian Mason, *Discourse and the Translation*, Longman, London and New York, 1990.
HERMANS, Theo (ed.), *The Manipulation of Literature: Studies in Literary Translation*, St.Martin's Press, New York, 1985.
ISER, W., *The Implied Reader*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1972.
MOLLINGER, Robert N. and Shernaz Mollinger, '*Edgar Allan Poe's The Oval Portrait: Fusion of Multiple Identities*' in *American Imago* 36 (1979): 147-53.
NIDA, Eugene A., '*Translation: Possible and Impossible*' in Marilyn Gaddis Rose (ed), *Translation Horizons: Beyond the Boundaries of Translation Spectrum*, Translation Perspectives IX, Center for Research in Translation, State University of New York at Binghamton, Binghamton, 1996, 7-23.
NIDA, Eugene A., Taber, Charles, *The Theory and Practice of Translation*, E. J. Brill, Leiden, 1969.
NIDA, Eugene A., *The Sociolinguistics of Interlingual Communication*, Les Editions du Hazard, Brulles, 1996.
NIDA, Eugene A., *Toward a Science of Translating*, E. J. Brill, Leiden, 1964.
NIDA, Eugene A., *Traducerea sensurilor*, Institutul European, Iaşi, 2004.
NIDA, Eugene A., *Translating Meaning*, English Language Institute, Gouangzhou, 1982.
PEIRCE, C. S., *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, edited by Charles Hartshorne, Paul Weiss and Arthur W. Burks, 8 vol., Cambridge (Massachusetts), Belknap, 1931-1966.
PEIRCE, C. S., *Writings of Charles S. Peirce: A Chronological Edition*, edited by Max Fisch, Edward C. Moore, Christian J. W. Kloesel et al, Bloomington (Indiana), Indiana University Press, 1982.
RICHARDS, Sylvie L. F., *'The Eye and the Portrait: The Fantastic in Poe, Hawthorne and Gogol'* in *Studies in Short Fiction* 20 (Fall 1983): 307-315.
ROTHBERG, Michael, *'The Prostitution of Paris: Late Capital of the Twentieth Century'* in *Found Object* 1 (Fall 1992): 2-22.
SCHEICK, William J., *'The Geometric Structure of Poe's 'The Oval Portrait''* in *Poe Studies* 11 (1978): 6-8.
THOMPSON, G. R., *'Dramatic Irony in 'The Oval Portrait': A Reconsideration of Poe's Revisions'* in *English Language Notes* 6 (Dec. 1968): 107-114.
TOURY, Gideon, *In Search of a Theory of Translation*, Porter Institute for Semiotics and Poetics, Tel Aviv, 1980.
TWITCHELL, James, '*Poe's 'The Oval Portrait' and the Vampire Motif*' in *Studies in Short Fiction* 14 (1977): 387-93.

BDD-A5371 © 2005 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:01:07 UTC)