

# #11

# FANTASY AND REALITY: RELATIONS BETWEEN WORDS AND IMAGES IN *ELOGIO DE LA MADRASTRA* BY MARIO VARGAS LLOSA

**Carlos Andrés Quintero Tobón**

*Universidad Eafit, Colombia*

**Illustration** || Carmen De Andrés

**Translation** || Patrick Munoz

**Article** || Received on: 05/11/2013 | International Advisory Board's suitability: 05/05/2014 | Published on: 07/2014

**License** || Creative Commons Attribution Published -Non commercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 License.



**Abstract** || This paper aims to show the type of relation that exists between words and images in the novel *Elogio de la Madrastra* by Peruvian writer Mario Vargas Llosa. To this end, it employs the concepts of simultaneity and literary ekphrasis, developed by Áron Kibédi Varga and Michael Riffaterre, respectively. In connection with the above, it delves into the symbolic functions that images carry out within the work, and the link that these draw between the characters that form the erotic triangle present within the novel: don Rigoberto, doña Lucrecia and Fonchito.

**Keywords** || Mario Vargas Llosa | *Elogio de la madrastra* | Painting | Literary ekphrasis | Symbolic functions

«Siempre es así: aunque la fantasía y lo cierto tienen un mismo corazón, sus rostros son como el día y la noche, como el fuego y el agua».

(Vargas Llosa, 1998: 7)

## 0. Introduction

Mario Vargas Llosa's *Elogio de la madrastra* is a novel in which word and image establish an intense relation of reciprocal dependence. It does not involve a relation in which, on account of being situated within a literary work, painting simply acts in the service of literature with an illustrative intent (Giraldo, 2011: 253). On the contrary, the two jointly foster one other, complementing each another and, by forming a sort of chain, impact the development of the novel as well as the interpretations that can be gleaned from it. Faced with this chainlike structure, it is possible that the relation between the chapters of the novel's story, and those chapters that allude to the images, is not given exclusively in sequential terms, although as Concepción Reverte Bernal puts it, «los monólogos interiores de los personajes y los planos de la acción central y su versión simbólica se suceden en forma de contrapunto» (1992: 570). Moreover, in *Elogio de la Madrastra*, images do not solely carry out a role with their appearance in a specific location, but rather have the additional function of highlighting or coloring determining elements throughout the whole of the work.

That said, it is necessary to indicate that the present article pursues two goals. The first of these is to try to make visible the type of relation existing between the images that appear in the novel, the chapters pertaining to these images, and those chapters in which the story strictly speaking develops. What we aim to show is how the relation between words and images in *Elogio de la Madrastra*, more than the product of a sequential relationship, in fact is the result of a relation of simultaneity. In emphasizing this concept, the taxonomy of relations between word and image, established by Áron Kibédi Varga in his paper «Criterios para describir las relaciones entre palabra e imagen» (2000: 113) will appear as theoretically fundamental.

The second goal of this article is to demonstrate the function that images carry out in the development of the novel. We intend to show which specific elements highlight the images and their respective literary manifestations harmoniously with the related chapters and, in connection with this, how the images link with the principal characters of the novel. One concept that turns out to be pertinent toward this end is that of the rhetorical device of ekphrasis, a category whose definition was established in antiquity<sup>1</sup> and that is understood by contemporary literary criticism<sup>2</sup> «como un proceso por medio del cual se describe un objeto plástico» (Agudelo, 2012: 72). Michael

## NOTES\*

1 | According to Pedro Agudelo (2012: 72), the word 'ekphrasis' «is composed of two elements, the Greek preposition *ek*, which means 'out,' and *phrasein* (from the word *frasso*) which means 'to speak.' In an etymological sense, then, *ekphrasis* signifies the act itself of *un-obstructing*, of *opening*, of *making communicable* or of *providing access* and *coming close to something*, which was a very valuable strategy for ancient orators: *to make one see what is absent*." With respect to the meaning of ekphrasis since antiquity, see De la Calle, R. (2005): "The mirror of ekphrasis. Closer to the image. Further from the text," *Escritura e imagen*, 1, 59-81; Lozano-Renieblas, I. (2005): "The ekphrasis of the armies or the limits of enargeia", *Monteagudo*, 3, 10, 29-38; and, Alberio, D. (2007): "Ekphrasis as mimesis," Buenos Aires: Universidad Nacional de San Martín. Instituto de Altos Estudios sociales.

2 | According to Isabel Lozano-Renieblas (2005: 30), "it was the critics of the twentieth century that generalized the term *ekphrasis* to refer to the description of objects of art.» For a complete review of ekphrasis in current literary criticism, see Agudelo, P. (2011): «The eyes of the word. The construction of the concept of ekphrasis, from ancient rhetoric to literary criticism,» *Lingüística y Literatura*, 32, 60, 75-92.

\* Translator's note: Quoted texts from authors referenced in the Notes section are offered in English for the reader's benefit; the citations, however, refer to the original publication.

---

Riffaterre gives the name 'literary ekphrasis' to the type of ekphrasis that has for its object «[...] obras de arte reales o imaginarias insertadas en una obra literaria —por ejemplo, en una novela. Forman parte del decorado, o bien tienen una función simbólica, o pueden incluso motivar los actos y las emociones de los personajes» (Riffaterre, 2000: 162). With this construal in mind, we can say that literary ekphrases appear in *Elogio de la madrastra* insofar as all of the elements indicated by the French author in his definition are present. The term will be used consistently in this sense throughout the development of this article to make reference to the chapters of the novel that are inspired by images.

We will attempt to develop both concepts—simultaneity between words and images, and the symbolic function of images and their literary ekphrasis—by means of an analysis of the chapters of the work grouped into four parts. These result from the intersection between two dichotomies that emerge over the course of the novel, to wit: Fantasy-Reality, I-Other. It is important to note that by *fantasy* we do not understand in this paper exclusively what has to do with the images, nor by *reality* solely that which refers to the «real» events of the novel, even if in both cases this is the more well-known and widely-used sense of the term. To sketch roughly a preliminary example: the chapters connected with the hygienic practices of don Rigoberto correspond to events in the novel's narrative and, in turn, are impregnated by the manifestation of fantasy in the character. It will be appropriate, therefore, for the sake of clarifying the proposal, to bring up some considerations concerning the notion of fantasy over the course of this article. Finally, it must be said that the relation between these two opposing domains depends on whether a single character is concerned, such as don Rigoberto, or several, generally the three characters forming the erotic triangle, with the figure of doña Lucrecia acting to a large extent as a meeting point. It is in this way that the presence of an I or of the other acquires sense in this analytic proposal.

## 1. Relation between word and image: Simultaneity

Before bringing forth any considerations with respect to the relations that appear between word and image in *Elogio de la madrastra*, it must be said that this is a novel composed of four sections and an epilogue, and whose plot can be summarized in the following core themes:

- a) Indications and materialization of the erotic relationship between doña Lucrecia and Fonchito.
- b) Don Rigoberto's solitary periods of time dedicated to the

hygiene of his body as preliminaries to relations with doña Lucrecia.

- c) Discovery on the part of don Rigoberto of the sexual relations between doña Lucrecia and Fonchito.

As the story advances, oscillating between the first two themes, chapters are interspersed that allude to images and in which the voices of the characters, in the form of a monologue, occupy the place of the narrator. These literary ekphrases correspond to what transpires in the story and reinforce it. With respect to the relation that words and images weave in the novel, it is appropriate to indicate three fundamental premises.

First, the images are present in the interior of the work; they form part of its body. The literary ekphrases emanating from the paintings do not make their appearance alone; rather, the images themselves are additionally included in the novel by the author's decision, with the clear intention of being related in the story. In this way, the reader must not assume merely the role of a reader, but also that of a viewer. As Kibédi Varga would say (2000: 114), s/he is therefore involved as a reader-viewer.

Second, several pictures appear in the novel and are related to the story, not just one. Six images are involved which, it is fitting to say, obey a selective rigor worthy of a collector, as they trace a complete course through the history of art. Efrén Giraldo comments on this matter in his article, «*Elogio de la madrastra* de Mario Vargas Llosa, obra de arte total, límites y vecindades» when he points out that

[...]intercaladas en los capítulos, aparecen reproducciones pictóricas [...] pertenecientes a obras que abarcan un amplio período de la historia de la pintura: desde el gótico tardío de las anunciaciones de Fray Angelico hasta la desgarrada pintura de mediados del siglo XX de Francis Bacon, pasando por el flamenco Jacob Jordaens, el maestro veneciano del Renacimiento Tiziano Vecellio, el artista moderno peruano Fernando de Szyszlo y el pintor cortesano del siglo XVIII François Boucher. (Giraldo, 2011: 244)

Finally, we must emphasize that all of the chapters in which these literary ekphrases appear are announced in anterior chapters, generally in the final lines of the previous chapter, constituting a sort of introduction to what follows. This announcement occurs in either a direct or indirect manner. One example of direct announcement is given in the chapter «Doña Lucrecia's Birthday.» In the final words of this chapter, in the midst of sexual intercourse, doña Lucrecia asks don Rigoberto, «[...] '¿Quién dices que he sido?', y este, extasiado le contesta: 'La esposa del rey de Lidia, mi amor'» (Vargas Llosa, 1998: 6). The following chapter is titled precisely «Candaules, King of Lydia,» in which appears the literary ekphrasis of the painting

*King Candaules of Lydia Showing his Wife to Gyges* by the Flemish painter Jacob Jordaens. On the other hand, an example of an indirect announcement is given in the chapter «Eyes like Fireflies» when the servant Justiniana confesses to doña Lucrecia that she is being spied on by Fonchito (1998: 15), which forms the theme of the chapter «Diana After Her Bath» in which appears the literary ekphrasis of the eponymous painting by François Boucher.

Taking into consideration the three premises outlined above, and attending to the taxonomy of relations between word and image proposed by Áron Kibédi Varga (2000: 113), we can say that the relations between word and image in *Elogio de la madrastra* correspond to primary relations at the level of object.<sup>3</sup> Taking into account the categories of time, quantity and form that Kibédi Varga establishes, in Vargas Llosa's novel a relation of simultaneity is given between a series of images in which a co-reference becomes evident. Simultaneity shows itself in that the words and images are present for the reader in the same space, even if this cannot all be encompassed in the same instant. In the body of the work, the images are just as present as the literary ekphrases derived from them, interspersing themselves throughout the development of the story. A series is involved, as it is not a lone image but several forming a whole. Finally, co-reference is given, for although «palabra e imagen no están presentadas en la misma página», “se refieren independientemente la una de la otra, al mismo acontecimiento» (2000: 120).

## 2. Fantasy and image

Since antiquity, the concept of fantasy has had an intimate relationship with images. According to Ferrater Mora in his *Diccionario de filosofía*, fantasy was conceived from very early on «como una actividad de la mente por medio de la cual se producen imágenes» (Ferrater, 1965: 634). Fantasy is a concept with a long tradition, as demonstrated by Guillermo Serés in his article «El concepto de fantasía, desde la estética clásica a la dieciochesca» (1994), and one of its principal problems, from Plato and Aristotle to Husserl, has been the definition of the origin of said mental images. This concerns whether they emanate from other representations of reality and, consequently, whether they depend on perception, or whether on the contrary they are autonomous, and disconnected from it.

In *Elogio de la madrastra*, the production of mental images that constitutes fantasy depends on the perception of pictorial works on the part of the characters. This is something that occurs in greatest measure in the novel with don Rigoberto. Beginning with what

## NOTES

3 | Áron Kibédi Varga distinguishes in his analysis between relations between objects and relations between commentaries on those objects. In this regard he says the following: “If we undertake a review of the entire modern field of investigation regarding relations between word and image, we will be able to affirm that a very fundamental distinction should be made between the possible relations and parallels between objects, on the one hand, and the possible relations and parallels between commentaries about those objects, on the other. With ‘objects’ I refer to visual and verbal artifacts; with ‘commentaries’ I refer to texts (or rarely, images) that critically treat of those artifacts. This distinction is very familiar in the philosophy of language, which separates *the level of objects* from the *meta-level of discourse*» (Kibédi Varga, 1989: 111-112).

---

he sees in his collection of images and what he engraves in his memory, this character constructs an erotic universe in which his wife and he himself are present. However, the above is not relegated exclusively to don Rigoberto; doña Lucrecia, who has the possibility of contemplating the reproductions of the paintings in the private life of her marriage, also projects herself into images that she has seen with her husband. The visual is thus decisive in the development of the personal and shared fantasies of these two characters. The analysis of fantasy further on will be established especially in terms of them.

### 3. The symbolic functions of images

As already indicated above, a grouping into four parts is proposed for the analysis of the symbolic functions present in the relation between words and images in the novel. These are a product of the intersection of the dichotomy Fantasy-Reality with the dichotomy I-Other. This intersection involves the chapters concerning the story just as much as those chapters in which the literary ekphrases, along with the respective images connected to them, appear. The following therefore proceeds with the analysis of each one of these four parts:

#### 3.1 Fantasy and the Other: Lucrecia, nudity, and the gaze

The relation between fantasy and the other is characterized by the gaze. The body of doña Lucrecia is something that is looked at, which sets itself before multiple spectators as an object of desire, as much in the chapters of the story as in the literary ekphrases and their respective images. Doña Lucrecia is an image in the fantasy of don Rigoberto, who exposes her to another gaze in addition to his own; she is a body that is observed and awakens the naïve yearnings of Fonchito. In the first chapter of the novel, entitled «Doña Lucrecia's Birthday,» there appear some key elements that the images and their respective ekphrases will be responsible for elucidating in what follows. From there, though without any seductive intent, doña Lucrecia displays herself before the eyes of Fonchito:

[...]doña Lucrecia sorprendió —¿adivinó? — en los ojos de su hijastro una mirada que pasaba de la alegría al desconcierto y se fijaba, atónita, en su busto. “Dios mío, pero si estás casi desnuda”, pensó. “Cómo te olvidaste de la bata, tonta. Qué espectáculo para el pobre chico» [...] (Vargas Llosa, 1998: 3)

With respect to this same incident, don Rigoberto daydreams about the possibility that his son has seen the body of his wife: «Has Fonchito seen you in your nightgown? —the voice of her husband fantasized, aroused—»(1998: 5). This possibility does not intimidate

---

don Rigoberto so long as it does not transcend the boundaries of his fantasy, as will be seen later. Don Rigoberto's fantasy, in which he imagines his wife being observed in the nude, materializes visually and literarily in *King Candaules of Lydia Showing his Wife to Gyges* (See image 1), where the queen is offered to the eyes of his minister. The relations that the gaze establishes with the body of Lucrecia oscillate between exhibitionism and voyeurism. While she is looked upon, Lucrecia shows herself off, conscious of the gaze that invades her. This proves significant in the sense that, in Jordaens' painting, the wife of Candaules directs the gaze of the spectator as if she were completely aware that he is present and observing her. In this way, Lucrecia also delivers her body completely «con largueza y obscenidad» (1998: 17) over to the gaze of Fonchito in the chapter entitled, tellingly, «Eyes like Fireflies.»

Whether being viewed or displayed, Lucrecia is an object of desire considered from several angles. She is viewed from the left or from the right by the implicit observer in the paintings, be it the king's minister, Justiniana or the musician. The three images in the novel in which nudity is represented offer a different perspective on the body of Lucrecia depending on the viewpoint of the observer: standing and from the back in *Candaules*, seated and from the side in Boucher's *Diana getting out of her bath* (see image 2), lying down and from the front in Tiziano's *Venus and the Lute Player* (see image 3). Seen as a whole, the three images may constitute a kind of homage to Ingres' *The Turkish Bath* (see image 4). In one of his proposed interpretations of the eroticism of this painting, Edward Lucie-Smith points out that «a pesar de ser una multitud de mujeres, es una sola exhibiéndose ante nosotros en una muy concebible variedad de actitudes» (1992: 181). Although Ingres' painting is not present in the novel, it is mentioned in the moments prior to Fonchito's revelation to his father (1998: 48).

Doña Lucrecia is not only exposed to the gaze of multiple spectators; rather, she herself represents a spectacle. «Improvised spectacle» before the gaze of Fonchito in the chapter «Eyes like Fireflies» (1998: 17), «spectacle for the gods» in the chapter «Candaules, King of Lydia» (1998: 9), or «spectacle orchestrated by don Rigoberto» in the chapter «Venus and the Lute Player» (1998: 29). Likewise, she performs for Fonchito in the ekphrasis of the chapter «Diana After Her Bath» (1998: 29). Lucrecia, in the novel's story, is in effect an actress that embodies roles in order to satisfy the fantasies of don Rigoberto.

### **3.2 Fantasy and the I: The individual world of don Rigoberto, hygiene and the fragmented body**

Don Rigoberto, immersed in his hygienic rituals and his fantasies,

---

distances himself from what surrounds him. Concentrated on himself, he is isolated from everything else, like the monstrous body enclosed within a cubicle of glass in Francis Bacon's painting *Head I* (see Image 5). He sees himself in precisely this way in the literary ekphrasis of the chapter «Profile of a Human:» «El cubo de vidrio donde estoy es mi casa. Veo a través de sus paredes pero nadie puede verme desde el exterior: un sistema muy conveniente para la seguridad del hogar, en esta época de tremendas asechanzas» (1998: 35).

This separation of don Rigoberto from the world, this notion of isolated individuality, is outlined clearly as a philosophical mantra in the chapter «Don Rigoberto's Ablutions» when the voice of the narrator says:

[...] Entonces, conjeturó que el ideal de perfección acaso era posible para el individuo aislado, constreñido a una esfera limitada en el espacio (el aseo o santidad corporal, por ejemplo, o la práctica erótica) y en el tiempo (las abluciones y esparcimientos nocturnos de antes de dormir). (1998: 21)

In both spheres, space and time, don Rigoberto's mental and physical relationship with himself is circumscribed within a deep and detailed relation with his body. That body is conceived in his monologues as forming part of a whole that is fragmented at the same time as it is held together. As Lescano points out, for don Rigoberto «la fantasía del personaje fragmenta el cuerpo. Es suficiente una parte para aludir al todo» (Lescano Allende, n.d. 14). Don Rigoberto, furthermore, cleans all the parts of his body as if he were removing them and then returning them to fit together in a whole: «Hoy era martes, día de pies. Tenía la semana distribuida en órganos y miembros: lunes, manos; miércoles, orejas; jueves, nariz; viernes, cabellos; sábado ojos y, domingo, piel» (1998: 23).

This bodily segmentation is for don Rigoberto conceived in terms of pleasure and therefore in service to his erotic fantasies. Don Rigoberto eroticizes each of the body parts, and their sensory aspect is strengthened. This occurs in his interminable monologues. This can be read in the literary ekphrasis of «Profile of a Human» when the body says: «Tengo un olfato muy desarrollado y es por la nariz por donde más gozo y sufro. ¿Debo llamar nariz a este órgano membranoso y gigante que registra todos los olores, aun los más sutiles?» (1998: 35).

Just as he deals with his own body in parts, he revels in every last corner of doña Lucrecia in his fractured bodily fantasy:

[...] glándulas, músculos, vasos sanguíneos, folículos, membranas, tejidos, filamentos, tubos, trompas, toda esa rica y sutil orografía

biológica que yacía bajo la tersa epidermis del vientre de Lucrecia. “Amo todo lo que existe dentro o fuera de ella”, pensó. “Porque todo en ella es o puede ser erógeno” [...] (1998: 11)

This last suggestion, a kind of erotic motto for don Rigoberto, appears faithfully reflected in the literary ekphrasis of the chapter «Profile of a Human: «Conmigo aprendieron que todo es y puede ser erógeno y que, asociada al amor, la función orgánica más vil, incluidas aquéllas del bajo vientre, se espiritualiza y ennoblece» (1998: 36).

Nevertheless, it is important to observe that don Rigoberto's aseptic obsession, along with his effort to attribute an erotic function to each part of the body, cause his fantasy to flow into the scatological. As he emphasizes his hygienic discourse, the dirtiness of the body is enhanced:

[...]Casi podía ver el espectáculo: aquellas expansiones y retracciones, esos jugos y masas en acción, todos ellos en la tibia tiniebla corporal y en un silencio que de cuando en cuando interrumpían asordinadas gárgaras o el alegre vienteillo de un cuesco. (1998: 22)

The conjunction between erotic fantasy and hygiene thus implicate, for don Rigoberto, a «descenso a la mugre» (1998: 36) in order to be elevated into pleasure.

### 3.3 Reality and the Other: Fonchito and the eruption of instinct

In contrast to what transpires with don Rigoberto, for Fonchito eroticism is not mediated by fantasy, but rather by physical contact with the other. Fonchito, over the course of the entire novel, has a need to touch; he is the point of the erotic triangle for which eroticism is manifested in reality and not in the imagination. Although don Rigoberto and doña Lucrecia join together in carnal acts, these are subordinated to a projection of don Rigoberto's fantasy. Fonchito, for his part, in contrast to his father, realizes the erotic act with his stepmother not from what he imagines but rather simply in following the dictates of his instinct. Regardless of how much Fonchito may appear as a kind of innocent seducer, for him eroticism does not proceed from a preconceived fantastical image; it derives from an explosion that links man with his animal condition. Fonchito represents the eruption of the flesh ignorant of all norms, an eruption that, in becoming manifest in a child, acquires enormous proportions insofar as it is accompanied by innocence.

The testimonies that the narrator provides about doña Lucrecia's sexual experience with Fonchito, in the chapter «After Dinner,» highlight the correspondence between a growing valuation of instinct and the detriment of remorse or blame: «[...] ¡Ah, quién pudiera actuar siempre con esa semiinconsciencia animal con la que él la acariciaba

---

y la amaba, sin juzgarla ni juzgarse!» (1998: 43). This brings with it an identification and over-valuation of the vital in doña Lucrecia, a conquest of “la soberanía” (1998: 42). This is reiterated in «After Dinner,» when doña Lucrecia, amazed, thinks to herself following her acts with Fonchito: «Esta es la vida latiendo, la vida viviendo» (1998: 42), or, when later on she says: «El mundo es hermoso y vale la pena vivir en él» (1998: 43). Life, for doña Lucrecia, in this carnal contact with Fonchito, becomes an «ilusión encarnada» (1998: 44). As Hernán Sánchez points out, Lucrecia feels «que su cuerpo se separa de la conciencia, se objetiva» and in it the ideal «se convierte en pura materia» (1994: 316).

There are elements that powerfully link the previously described to the literary ekphrasis of the painting *Path to Mendieta 10* (see Image 6) by Fernando de Szyszlo. In the first instance, the painting has a close relationship with Fonchito and not with don Rigoberto. In contrast to the rest of the paintings referenced in the novel, this is not a reproduction that don Rigoberto keeps under lock and key, but rather a «real» painting that is present in the living room of the house. The image is placed within Fonchito’s view, and it is he who brings it up, when in the afterglow of sex he says to doña Lucrecia: «Es tu retrato secreto [...]. De lo que nadie sabe ni ve de ti. Sólo yo. Ah, y mi papá, por supuesto» (1998: 43).

In a way it is Fonchito who indirectly assigns the voice of the painting to doña Lucrecia, and that voice, in the ekphrasis of the chapter «Labyrinth of Love,» serves to enunciate in a language that corresponds to the abstraction of the painting, the implications of the erotic triangle: «este aposento triádico [...] es la patria del instinto puro y de la imaginación que lo sirve» (1998: 47). Doña Lucrecia, Fonchito, and don Rigoberto are sculpted in a discourse in which time and space are turned on their head. There is likewise given, in that labyrinthine ekphrasis, something akin to a forceful mantra which, in its own way, tries to give an answer to what happened between doña Lucrecia and Fonchito: «¿Somos impúdicos? Somos totales y libres, más bien, y terrenales a más no poder» (1998: 46).

### **3.4 Reality and the I: Don Rigoberto and the collapse of his individual fantasy**

The universe of don Rigoberto’s fantasy comes crashing down upon the discovery of what has happened, outside of his own world, between Fonchito and doña Lucrecia. The narrator relays what occurs within don Rigoberto in the chapter «Bad Words»: «Alcanzó a pensar que el rico y original mundo nocturno de sueño y deseos en libertad que con tanto empeño había erigido acababa de reventar como una burbuja de jabón» (1998: 52). Paradoxically, it is not in fantasy, but in reality, that a relationship crystallizes which exceeds

the entire scope of don Rigoberto's imagination.

Discovering what happened represents for don Rigoberto a grounding in the reality of his own existence, and the realization that his ideals can have a place in his imagination but not in reality. Faced with a situation in which his moral considerations are compromised, his role as father and husband, don Rigoberto experiences in his own flesh the metamorphosis from erotic fantasizer into chaste moralist:

[...] Y, súbitamente, su maltratada fantasía deseó, con desesperación, transmutarse: era un ser solitario, casto, desasido de apetitos, a salvo de todos los demonios de la carne y el sexo. Sí, sí, ése era él. El anacoreta, el santón, el monje, el ángel, el arcángel que sopla la celeste trompeta y baja al huerto a traer la buena noticia a las santas muchachas. (1998: 52).

This moral notion, that is to say these roles that are linked to purity and in which his fantasy is transformed, not only correspond to, but also justify the presence in the novel of, the painting *The Annunciation* by Fra Angelico (see image 7), as a sort of finale, as much as its respective literary ekphrasis does: «Me gusta la vida y el mundo me parece bello tal como es» (Vargas Llosa, 1998: 53), says the voice in the chapter «The Rosy Youth,» tracing a connection with this feeling of vitality that was previously indicated with respect to doña Lucrecia and what she was experiencing in the midst of her insatiable passion with Fonchito. In effect, the figures of Maria and the archangel are contrasted in the painting, separated by the column in the middle, «de la misma manera en que se separa la carne del espíritu luego de que don Rigoberto descubre lo que, a escondidas, Lucrecia hacía con Fonchito» (Giraldo, 2011: 261).

Those very things that don Rigoberto experienced himself in his imagination, without any moral constraint to condemn him, are treated by him as «suciedades indecentes» (1998: 50) in the written praise that his son creates for his stepmother. Words appear there that match the precise definition, almost out of a dictionary, that he had communicated to Fonchito in response to his «innocent» questions concerning the meaning of orgasm and the erotic. At this point there appears a confluence between two contrary positions: that of don Rigoberto, who only conceives of what is said and written by Fonchito as a product of his fantasies, and that of Fonchito, who, ignorant of these incursions of the imagination, reveals to his father without shame that all that he recounts is true (1998: 51). Fantasy and reality are ultimately an opposition between two ways of approaching life and the erotic, whose respective life lessons, in words and images, bear witness to this.

## 4. Conclusion

The words and images in *Elogio de la madrastra* establish an intense relationship in which they complement one another. Insofar as several images are present in the body of the novel and they refer to the same events, in light of Kibédi Varga's taxonomy, they involve a relation of simultaneity between a series of images in which a co-reference presents itself. In this way, the chapters of the narration strictly speaking, and the images and their respective literary ekphrases, explicate one another and weave relationships in order to grant meaning to the work as a whole. In addition, the images carry out a symbolic function in the novel and highlight determining elements related to the characters of the erotic triangle composed of don Rigoberto, doña Lucrecia and Fonchito. In this sense, the concept of fantasy, connected from the time of the Greeks with an internal image generated from what is seen, proves fundamental for understanding the relation given between the characters and the images.

From this point of view, while the literary ekphrases and the images of nudity (Jordaens, Boucher, Tiziano) highlight for doña Lucrecia a condition as object of desire exposed to the gaze of the other, for don Rigoberto, Bacon's monstrous head emphasizes his isolation from the world, his conception of the body and his erotic mantras bound up in fantasy. On the other hand, for Fonchito, in contrast to his father, eroticism is not mediated by an internal image, but rather he simply obeys his instincts, the dictates of the flesh. The erotic relation between Fonchito and doña Lucrecia emphasizes in her a notion of vitality divorced from moral or cultural considerations, an underlying aspect of the painting by Fernando de Szyszlo. These considerations, so absent from the fantastical individual world of don Rigoberto, surface for him once he discovers what has happened between his wife and his son, a circumstance that the image of Fra Angelico is responsible for highlighting.

## Works cited

- AGUDELO, P. (2011): «Los ojos de la palabra. La construcción del concepto de ecfrasis, de la retórica antigua a la crítica literaria», *Lingüística y Literatura*, 32, 60, 75-92.
- AGUDELO, P. (2012): «Entre realidad y ficción. La ecfrasis literaria en *El engañoso cuadro* de Pedro Gómez Valderrama», *Co-herencia Revista de Humanidades*, 9, 17, 71-93.
- ALBERO, D. (2007): «La écfrasis como mimesis», Buenos Aires: Universidad nacional de San Martín. Instituto de Altos Estudios sociales.
- DE LA CALLE, R. (2005): «El espejo de la ekphrasis. Más acá de la imagen. Más allá del texto», *Escritura e imagen*, 1, 59-81.
- FERRATER MORA, J. (1965): *Diccionario de filosofía*, Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana.
- GIRALDO, E. (2011): «Elogio de la madrastra de Mario Vargas Llosa, obra de arte total, límites y vecindades», *Co-herencia Revista de Humanidades*, 8, 15, 239-268.
- KIBÉDI VARGA, Á. (2000): «Criterios para describir las relaciones entre palabra e imagen» en Monegal, A. (ed.), *Literatura y pintura*, Madrid: Arco Libros, 109-135.
- LESCANO ALLENDE, G: «Elogio de don Rigoberto: un estudio sobre el erotismo en Mario Vargas Llosa», *Coloquio Literario de la Feria Internacional del Libro de Monterrey*, <<http://cflf.mty.itesm.mx/docs/FormatoModelo.pdf>>, [23/09/2012].
- LOZANO-RENIEBLAS, I. (2005): «La ecfrasis de los ejércitos o los límites de la enérgeia», *Monteagudo*, 3, 10, 29-38.
- LUCIE-SMITH, E. (1992): *La sexualidad en el arte occidental*, Barcelona: Ediciones Destino.
- REVERTE BERNAL, C. (1992): «Elogio de la madrastra de Mario Vargas Llosa, un relato modernista», *Revista Iberoamericana*, 58, 159, 567-580.
- RIFFATERRE, M. (2000): «La ilusión de écfrasis» en Monegal, A. (ed.), *Literatura y pintura*, Madrid: Arco Libros, 161-183.
- SÁNCHEZ, H. (1994): «Erotismo, cultura y poder en el *Elogio de la madrastra*, de Mario Vargas Llosa», *Anales de Literatura Hispanoamericana*, 23, 315-323.
- SERÉS GUILLÉN, G. (1994): «El concepto de fantasía, desde la estética clásica a la dieciochesca», *Anales de Literatura Española*, 10, 207-236.
- VARGAS LLOSA, M. (1998): *Elogio de la madrastra*, México: Editorial Grijalbo S.A.

## Images



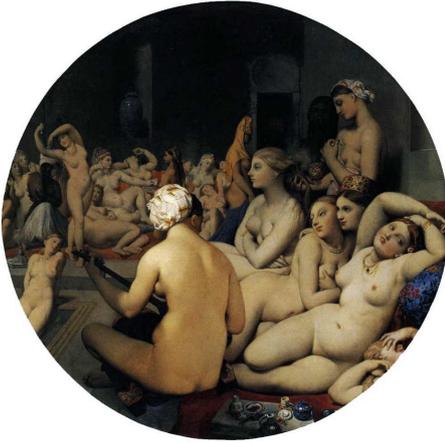
**Image 1.** Jacob Jordaens, *King Candaules of Lydia Showing his Wife to Gyges*, 1648.



**Image 2.** François Boucher, *Diana getting out of her bath*, 1742.



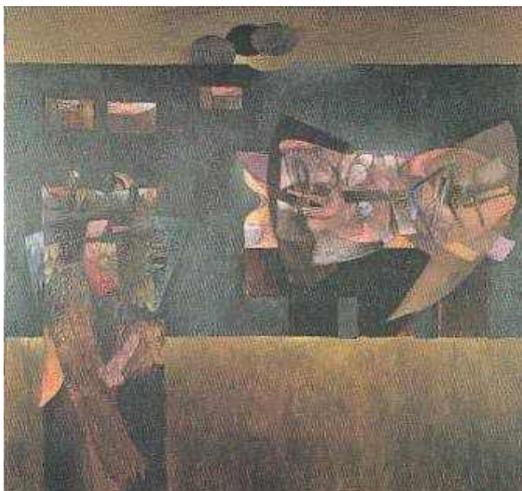
**Image 3.** Tiziano, *Venus and the Lute Player*, 1548.



**Image 4.** Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres, *The Turkish Bath*, 1862.



**Image 5.** Francis Bacon, *Head I*, 1948.



**Image 6.** Fernando de Szyszlo, *Path to Mendieta 10*, 1977.



**Image 7.** Fra Angelico, *The Annunciation*, 1437.