

# The Pictorial Paradigm of La Vallée: A Text-Image Reading of the Incipit of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*

---

Alice Labourg, Rennes-II University (France)

*On the pleasant banks of the Garonne, in the province of Gascony, stood, in the year 1584, the chateau [sic.] of Monsieur St. Aubert. From its windows were seen the pastoral landscapes of Guienne and Gascony stretching along the river, gay with luxuriant woods and vine, and plantations of olives. To the south, the view was bounded by the majestic Pyrenées, whose summits, veiled in clouds, or exhibiting awful forms, seen, and lost again, as the partial vapours rolled along, were sometimes barren, and gleamed through the blue tinge of air, and sometimes frowned with forests of gloomy pine, that swept downward to their base. These tremendous precipices were contrasted by the soft green of the pastures and woods that hung upon their skirts; among whose flocks, and herds, and simple cottages, the eye, after having scaled the cliffs above, delighted to repose. To the north, and to the east, the plains of Guienne and Languedoc were lost in the mist of distance; on the west, Gascony was bounded by the waters of Biscay.*

(Radcliffe 1794: 1)<sup>1</sup>

A liminal space between reality and representation, the incipit is the narrative threshold that immerses the reader into the imaginary world of fiction (see Del Lungo 2003). *The Mysteries of Udolpho* opens onto the seminal landscape of La Vallée, the heroine's idyllic birthplace. The scenery is evoked through a pictorial description which provides an emblematic example of what critics

---

1 In the following, all quotations without any reference specified are taken from this literary excerpt.

have called Ann Radcliffe's "word-painting" (see Flaxman 1987: 9).<sup>2</sup> Going beyond mere *paragon*-esque comparisons by redefining that notion from a text-image perspective based on a close formal reading of the text,<sup>3</sup> this paper will examine how the very first paragraph of the novel registers like a "painting in words", in other words an iconotextual landscape, that is to say a metaphorical landscape painting which emerges through the use of a pictorial writing.<sup>4</sup> From the structuring movement of the gaze to the evocation of the landscape as a pictorial matrix generating iconic and plastic forms, painting imbues the text on a structural, thematic, symbolic and semiotic level. Fulfilling its function as a strategic locus, the incipit on La Vallée establishes the foundations of a pictorial paradigm which sustains the whole novel, furnishing the reader with the essential tools to apprehend the narrative as a picturesque composition which melts the beautiful and the sublime.

## 1. "The Eye" or The Picturesque Gaze: From Point of View to Pictorial Composition

The visual dimension of Ann Radcliffe's writing has prompted such critics as Adriano Elia to read the incipit of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* in cinematographic terms (see Elia 2005: 65–67).<sup>5</sup> Painting, even more than an anachronistic filmic model, actually proves the aesthetical framework which defines the Radcliffian Gothic (see Lévy 1968: 292–295). The incipit indeed operates a *mise en abyme* which aims at generating a "picture" for the readers to "look at"

---

2 For the use of the expression as applied to Radcliffe, see Rogers 1994: 189, and Elia 2002: 78.

3 The *paragone* is the traditional comparison between the arts, especially between painting and poetry, and painting and sculpture.

4 The pictorial is "the inclusion of a reference to the visual arts in a literary text, a reference which can be more or less explicit, and whose citational value produces an effect of textual metapictoriality" (Louvel, 2011: 73). By "iconotext", Louvel designates the merging of text and image in pictorial descriptions according to their various degrees of "pictorial saturation" (ibid.: 15, 89).

5 Elia reads the passage as an example of "dynamic cinematic word-painting" which involves a tracking shot from a bird's eye view followed by zooming. See also Elia 2002: 76–84.

and imaginatively step into.<sup>6</sup> Such an opening fits within the author's general conception of 'the novel as picture' (see Durant 1980),<sup>7</sup> or rather, as a series of pictures, turning the reader into a spectator led from one picture to the next in a picture gallery (see Louvel 2011: 172).

The passage is carefully built around the dynamics of the gaze which merges the thematic and narrative point of view with pictorial composition through focalisation. The reader is led to follow the movement of an omniscient "eye" — which could be assigned to the omniscient narrator — that surveys the landscape ("were seen", "the view", "seen and lost", "the eye", "lost"). For the cultured eighteenth-century reader, the expression "the eye", associated with the description of a natural scenery, would bring to mind William Gilpin's writings on the picturesque, "that peculiar kind of beauty, which is agreeable in a picture" or "capable of being *illustrated by painting*" (Gilpin 1768: 2, 1792: 1).<sup>8</sup> The picturesque "eye" happens to be proleptic as its circular, expansive progress visually traces a metatextual shortcut which anticipates the future peregrinations of the heroine. Emily will indeed be literally confronted with those "awful forms" perceived in the distance, during her terrifying stay in the Apennines, before coming back "to repose" in the pastoral landscape of La Vallée, where the novel concludes its happy end.<sup>9</sup> The incipit thus institutes the aesthetics of the picturesque as a programmatic reading grid, with painting and landscape as central interpretative keys of the novel.

---

6 There is a picture (the view from the windows) within the picture (the larger view on Gascony) framed by the overall "picture" of the paragraph; hence the idea of the *mise en abyme*.

7 "The novel as picture" is the title of the chapter on *The Mysteries of Udolpho*.

8 The picturesque may be understood as a sort of mediating aesthetical category between the beautiful and the sublime. In his books relating his tours of the English countryside, Gilpin popularised various ideas about "picturesque beauty", instructing the reader on how to look at nature from a pictorial point of view. Those writings established a certain rhetoric, echoes of which can be found in Radcliffe's descriptions. Disregarding the picturesque aesthetics and its discourse, Elia assimilates "the eye" to the camera eye (see Elia 2005: 67).

9 This overall structure is revisited on a micro level throughout the various sections of the novel. Those sections involve initiation crossings of mountains (the Pyrenees, the Alps, the Apennines, and again the Pyrenees) and alternative periods of "repose" in different plains and valleys (return to La Vallée after St. Aubert's death, Toulouse, Venice, Tuscan interlude in the Udolpho section, Chateau-le-Blanc). All the sections contain appropriate landscape descriptions.

Painting in effect pervades the text formally. On a structural level, the reader enters the text through a series of embedded frames which delineate various pictures operating at different levels of representation. The description is first of all contained within the semantic unit of a paragraph, which helps frame the view as a picture (see Louvel 1998: 99–100). Placed as an epigraph, a quote from James Thomson emphasises the framing effect by acting as a parergon.<sup>10</sup> The picture thus delineated is actually double. The prospects seen from the “chateau” at the heart of La Vallée are inserted within a larger panorama on Gascony, evoked in the first and last sentences:

On the pleasant banks of the Garonne, in the province of Gascony, stood, in the year 1584, the chateau of Monsieur St. Aubert / To the north, and to the east, the plains of Guienne and Languedoc were lost in the mist of distance; on the west, Gascony was bounded by the waters of Biscay.<sup>11</sup>

The picturesque view is thus literally framed within the paragraph by its larger geographical context. That framing picture roots the landscape within a known and culturally-determined reality through the use of actual toponyms (“Gascony”, “Guienne”, “Languedoc”, “Biscay”). The first sentence, thereby, takes the reader from extradiegetical to diegetical “reality”.<sup>12</sup> It factually establishes the Bakhtinian chronotope, namely the place (Southwest of France) and time (1584) of the story. The systematic use of the anaphoric operator *THE* before noun phrases referring to both actual and imaginary places (“*the* pleasant banks of the Garonne”, “*the* province of Gascony”, “*the* chateau of Monsieur St. Aubert”) creates a network of memorial exophoras which imposes La Vallée as a “reality” within Gascony.<sup>13</sup> The use of French words (“chateau”, “Monsieur St. Aubert”, “Pyrenées”) enhances the effect.

10 On the notion of parergon, see Derrida 1978: 71–72.

11 Gascony, Guienne and Languedoc were former provinces in the southwest of France.

12 In poetics, the diegesis is the universe designated by the narrative (see Genette 1972).

13 In enunciative linguistics, *TH-* is an operator indicating that something is “already known” because already mentioned in the context (anaphora). In a “situational anaphora” or “memorial exophora”, the reference is not textual but extra-linguistic (see Lapaire 1991: 122–23). Although a new element in the narrative, the chateau is introduced by *THE*, as opposed to the presentative operator *A*, which creates the illusion that the mansion does exist and that its existence is part of common knowledge, just as it is the case with the Garonne and Gascony. It is “already there” as an intrinsic part of the landscape, which helps define La Vallée as a microcosm.

The thematisation of “the chateau of Monsieur St. Aubert” at the end of the opening sentence make readers expect a subsequent description of the mansion, or some particulars regarding its owner. Instead, the second sentence operates a shift of point of view. From a position outside the picture, readers are brought within. They virtually come to occupy the place of a spectator who contemplates the prospect from one of the windows of the mansion. A second picture then emerges, thematically framed by the casements, and semantically designated as the true protagonist of the story. The passive form “were seen”, by suppressing the origin of perception, plays on focalisation and on the eye/I analogy to ensure the imaginary substitution of the omniscient narrator’s eye with the reader’s eye. The view from the windows is then constructed like a painted picture. The “chateau”, topicalised at the end of the sentence, is placed at the fixed point assigned in classical linear perspective to the viewer facing the picture (“stood”). It is the equivalent of the monofocal eye at the summit of the cone of vision, as the synecdoque which substitutes the windows for the eyes suggests (“From its windows were seen”). The progress of the gaze then metaphorically follows the projection of the spectator’s eye onto the canvas as constructed by linear perspective, with the veiled summits at the central vanishing point (ill.1).<sup>14</sup> The use of the verb “scaled” backs up the idea by evoking a geometrical construction of space. Following the progress of “the eye”, the reader is thus mentally projected into the landscape as if it were a picture.

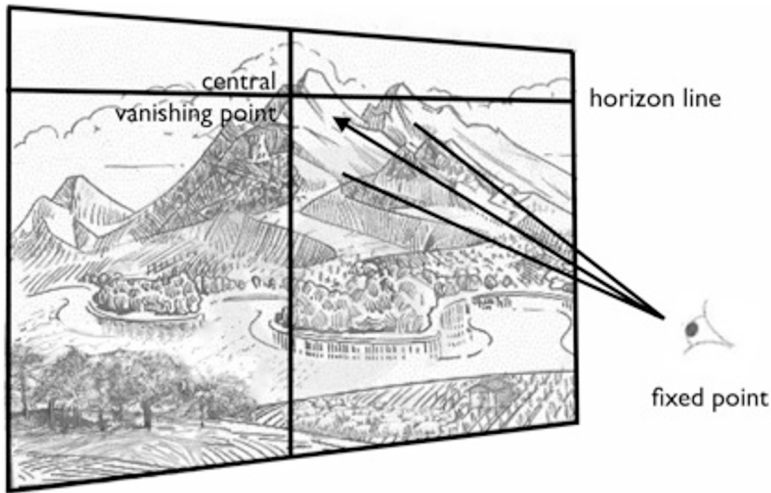
Since Alberti, the window has been a conceptual metaphor for the delineation of a pictorial space of representation (see Alberti 2011). In landscape theory, the framing of the window is also a device of artialisation which turns the land into a landscape.<sup>15</sup> It has likewise been identified as a literary topos in descriptions, conjuring up the analogy with a picture, and, more generally speaking, as a metaphorical space of creation.<sup>16</sup> The windows-eyes thus mark the opening of a scopic field that envisions the prospect as a landscape painting. The idea is reinforced by the syntactic inversion (“From its windows were

14 In linear perspective drawing, the vanishing point is the spot on the horizon towards which all the receding parallel lines in the composition converge. In classical painting the pictorial space is constructed through linear perspective with the vanishing point as the projection of the viewer’s eye onto the canvas.

15 See Roger 1997, Cauquelin 2000, and Stoichita 1999. On the window as a scopic device, see Charbonnier 2007: 86, 94.

16 See, among others, Barthes 1970: 56, Hamon 1993: 165, 172–175, and Del Lungo 2014: 65–66.

Ill. 1 View From The Windows As A Landscape Painting



Adapted from ID 114522781© Microvone/dreamstime.com © Alice Labourg.

seen”) which enables the long grammatical subject (“the pastoral landscapes of Guienne and Gascony stretching along the river, gay with luxuriant woods and vine, and plantations of olives”) to unfold after the verb of perception. This produces an iconicity effect: form mirrors meaning as the reading of the long syntagm is evocative of the seminal act of perception which turns a stretch of land into a landscape. The references to vision describe a truly picturesque process that transforms natural scenery into a picture, from mere physical vision (“were seen”), to artialisation (“the view”), and final aesthetical appreciation (“the eye *delighted to repose*”, emphasis added). The prepositions also help to sustain the progress of the gaze. “On” (“On the pleasant banks of Gascony”) initially asserts the fixity of the viewpoint, “from” (“From its windows, were seen”) establishes the origin of perception, while “to” (“To the south”, “to the north and to the east”) describes its panoramic expansion, and lastly “on” sets its final limits (“on the west, Gascony was bounded by the waters of Biscay.”). Incidentally, the overall composition, with the Garonne meandering through the plains in the middle-ground and the mountains in the distance,

recalls the tripartite organisation of classical seventeenth-century landscape paintings.

Besides, the embedded structure of the paragraph mirrors the zooming in and zooming out of the gaze. The eye focuses on the summits of the Pyrenees symbolically placed at the vanishing point of the perspective, as they are at the heart of the paragraph. A picture within the picture, the evocation of the mountains is framed by two sentences referring to the pastoral landscape at their skirts. A system of symmetrical echoes help move from one sentence, or frame, to the next, as elements belonging to one frame are taken up and expanded upon in the next (ill.2). The evocation of the veiled summits at the core of the description, reflects the very structure of the novel which places the Gothic section at Udolpho at its centre: in the castle in the Apennines, Emily will indeed face “awful forms”, of which the veiled picture is the most notorious. The blurring of vision (“seen, and lost again”) also recalls what spectators experience when they move too close to a canvas to see its details. The last two sentences open the scopic field again as if the reader were “stepping back” to take an overview of the whole canvas. The oscillation of the gaze, inherent to the experience of contemplating a painting, is thus instituted as the structuring principle of the novel. The reader will indeed progress through the narrative from one pictorial scene to the next, each one being first seen from a distance and then experienced from within.

## 2. The Landscape as Pictorial Matrix

The gaze, Philippe Hamon explains, is often used to open or close a description (see Hamon 1993). More importantly, it enables to organise its internal structure by introducing a distribution, a taxonomy, an order in the lexical nomenclature. A window stands as a “frame” but also as a “casement”, prompting a vision that is also a division. The landscape perceived through the window is divided, surveyed and registered according to a grid which organises its different parts (ibid.: 180). That grid is here manifold: from geography to cartography to painting. The mention of the cardinal points provides the basic layer for the mapping of the geographical space (“the province of Gascony”). Out of this imaginary cartography, emerges a pictorial landscape through an aesthetical reading based on the recognition of predetermined visual and cultural elements. On a thematical level, the view on La Vallée indeed stands as a pictorial matrix, introducing a repertoire of motifs which will recur through-

*Ill. 2 Embedded Structure Of The Paragraph.*

On the pleasant banks of the Garonne, in the province of **Gascony**, stood, in the year 1584, **the chateau** of Monsieur St. Aubert. **From its windows** were seen **the pastoral landscapes of Guienne and Gascony** stretching along the river, gay with luxuriant **woods and vine, and plantations of olives**. To the south, **the view** was bounded by the **majestic Pyrenées**, whose **summits**, veiled in clouds, or exhibiting awful forms, seen, and lost again, as the partial vapours rolled along, were sometimes barren, and gleamed through the blue tinge of air, and sometimes frowned with forests of gloomy pine, that swept downward to their base. **These tremendous precipices** were contrasted by the **soft green of the pastures and woods** that hung upon their skirts; among whose flocks, and herds, and simple cottages, the eye, after having scaled **the cliffs** above, delighted to repose. To the north, and to the east, the plains of **Guienne and Languedoc** were lost in the mist of distance; on the west, **Gascony** was bounded by the waters of **Biscay**.

© Alice Labourg.

out the novel. Radcliffe's landscapes are the combination of a set of emblematic elements of which the picturesque view offers a literal and metaphorical overview. The description not only isolates the particulars of a singular landscape but it draws a list of the distinctive features of an ideal landscape model, making the Edenic valley of the well-named *La Vallée* ("The Valley") a symbolic crucible, a generative matrix from which all other landscapes will derive.

Two isotopies define two types of landscapes: the beautiful pastoral landscape, after Claude Lorrain (c.1600–1682), and the sublime rocky landscape, after Salvator Rosa (1615–1673). Very popular among the elite of eighteenth-century Britain, Claude's and Rosa's paintings were regarded as the visual illustrations of the new aesthetical categories of the beautiful and the sublime as defined by Edmund Burke (ill.3 and 4) (see Burke 1998). Following the *ut pictura poesis* tradition, early critics, and after them later commentators, mentioned the seventeenth-century landscape masters in relation to Radcliffe's natural scenery, arguing that her evocations created verbal equivalents



Ill. 3 Claude Lorrain, *Pastoral Landscape: The Roman Campagna*, c. 1639, oil on canvas, 101.6 x 135.9 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



© Creative Commons Zero.

of their paintings.<sup>17</sup> Dubbed “the sister of Salvator Rosa”, the Gothic novelist was particularly praised for having added to “the wild landscape of Salvator Rosa [...] the softer graces of a Claude” (Rogers 1994: 129, 57). The explicit mention of “*Salvator*” during the crossing of the Pyrenees (Radcliffe 1794: 30), by acknowledging the extradiegetical pictorial model, seems to support such analogies, although this needs to be evidenced through a linguistic and stylistic text-image approach (see Labourg 2014: 21–51).

The contrast between “Claude” and “Salvator”, taken as operative concepts, is exemplified through a series of structural oppositions (“were contrasted”). To the horizontality of the plains (“stretching *along the river*”), associated with

17 See Rogers 1994 and Epstein Heller 1980. Horace’s formula, *Ut pictura poesis*, “poetry is like painting”, has been variously interpreted in literature and the visual arts, within the context of the *paragone*, to compare poetry and painting, often to the detriment of their intrinsic specificities.

Ill. 4 Salvator Rosa, *Bandits On A Rocky Coast*, 1655–1660, oil on canvas, 74.9 x 100 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York



© Creative Commons Zero.

beautiful Claudean pastoral scenery, is opposed the verticality of the sublime Salvatoresque mountains (“swept *downwards*”/“the cliffs *above*”). The opening of the plains (“lost in the mist of distance”) contrasts with the closeness of the mountains which “bound” the view like walls. The ancient opposition between the *locus amoenus*, the “pleasant place”, and the *locus horridus*, the “horrible place” is reactivated. Nature is either bounteous, sustaining cultivation and pastoral life (“luxuriant woods”, “vines”, “plantations of olives”, “pastures”, “flocks”, “herds”, “simple cottages”) as befits the beautiful, or a sterile wilderness (“barren”, “forests of *gloomy* pine”) as suits the sublime.

The emotional response to the landscape is codified within the description through the use of adjectives with psychological connotations, either referring to the pleasing experience of the beautiful (“*pleasant* banks”, “*gay* with”, “*soft green*”) or the awe and fear inherent to the sublime (“*majestic*”, “*awful*”, “*tremendous*”). “Feeling through the eye”, as Christopher Hussey puts it, is a

distinctive feature of the picturesque (Hussey 1967: 4). Those adjectives, associated with the natural elements, personify the landscape, turning the object of the gaze into a feeling subject thus facilitating the reader's psychological involvement. Such a process culminates in the image of the pines frowning back at the viewer ("frowned with forests of gloomy pine"). The polysemy of the word "gloomy" turns the trees, evoked as a singular, generic entity, into a colour expressive of a mood, fusing the idea of a pictorialised landscape with the psychological idea of "feeling through the eye". The alliteration of /f/ ("frowned with forest"), combined with the doubling of the /r/, heightens the subjective emotional effect as the harsh physicality of the sound adds to the sinister undertone while suggesting the shiver of pleasurable dread induced by the sublime. The reader's psychological involvement is reinforced by the suggestion that the progress of the gaze is a physical experience. It entails exhaustion ("the eye delighted to *repose*") as if the crossing of the mountains has actually been performed ("having *scaled* the cliff above"). This dialectics between distance and imaginary involvement, along the model of the walk or the hike, which the progress of the gaze suggests, is precisely at the heart of the pleasurable embodied experience of gazing at a landscape painting (see Arasse 2005: 249).

By playing on well-known visual codes associated with the Claudean and the Salvatoresque landscapes, the opening view provides readers with the aesthetical clues to read and "see" the Gothic novel as a picturesque composition which melts the beautiful and the sublime. By its very nature as a description, the incipit helps the reader identify those clues visually. For Hamon, a description, or rather a "descriptive system", is a hierarchical series of syntactic and semantic equivalences between a word, or common denominator (the object of the description), and an expansion, or the list of all the elements used to characterise it (see Hamon 1993: 127). Radcliffe makes this system a series of iconic equivalences, as the landscape components are turned into emblematic pictorial motifs. To borrow from visual semiotics, the linguistic syntagms which connote them acquire the status of "iconemes", units of iconic significance (see Cosette 2006: 135). Linguistic determination plays an essential role in their visualisation. The use of the anaphoric operator TH- points to known cultural models which contemporary readers would identify as either Claudean ("the pastoral landscapes", "the pasture and woods") or Salvatoresque ("the majestic Pyrenées", "these tremendous precipices", "the cliffs above"). On the other hand, the zero-article, referring to the notion beyond the noun, establishes the emblematic elements which compose them as

archetypes. The pastoral landscape is made up of “ø luxuriant woods and ø vines and ø plantations of ø olives”, “ø flocks and ø herds, and ø simple cottages”. The repetition of an accumulative conjunction “and” conveys the idea of a bountiful nature. Similarly, “ø clouds”, “ø awful forms”, and “ø forests of ø gloomy pine” characterise the mountainous landscape and become archetypal throughout the novel as they are used to evoke the same kind of sublime Salvatoresque landscapes.

Throughout the novel, every time these, or similar elements, reappear in the description of a natural scenery, they act as linguistic and visual stimuli to help generate a picture. The coordinative “or” (“veiled in clouds, *or* exhibiting awful forms”), at the core of the description in the zooming in on the summits, an essential pictorial element, proves metatextual as the principle of linguistic permutation and variation is at the crux of the landscape matrix. The description unfolds along internal substitutions, from generic nominal phrases (“the majestic Pyrenées”) to their metonymic components (“whose summits”, “these tremendous precipices”, “the cliffs”) (ill.2). Throughout the novel, the mountains — the Pyrenees, the Alps or the Apennines — are synecdotically described through the same images of “rocks”, “precipices”, and “cliffs”, coupled with various adjectives connoting the sublime (“tremendous”, “terrible”, “awful” etc.). These semantic (pictorial) units are variations of the same conceptual idea and ideal picture of a Salvatoresque mountainous landscape. Likewise, pastoral scenery is conjured up through recurring images of “flocks, and herds”, or alternative “herds and cattle” (Radcliffe 1794: 32), “simple cottages”, or similar “shepherd’s cabin” (ibid.: 51), and variations around “vine”, “plantations of olives”, and other “groves of orange and lemon” (ibid.: 55). The description of La Vallée thus entails a programmatic reading pact in which landscape, as a pictorial genre and a literary topos, becomes central for the novel’s overall picture-like effect, all the more so as landscape description proves the emblematic iconotext by combining an iconic and figurative form of pictoriality, as previously described, to a more plastic form of pictoriality.

### 3. From Iconic Figurality to Semiotic Pictoriality

For Groupe  $\mu$ , an image is an “icono-plastic utterance”, the combination of an iconic sign and a plastic sign (see Groupe  $\mu$  1992: 269).<sup>18</sup> Radcliffe’s “pictures” seem to function along similar terms. From a semiotic point of view, the relationship to painting is indeed inscribed within the very fabric of the text through a pictorial writing which operates on two complementary modes. First, it works on an iconic and figurative level, presenting the reader with various picture-like scenes, such as La Vallée. The relationship to painting also functions on a more diffused, semiotic dimension which translates painting as a plastic signifier within the linguistic “materiality” of the text. This is symbolised by the detail of the veiled summits. The summits are both a *particolare*, the particular element of a pictorial composition as a whole, and a *detaglio*, an element singled out by the gaze of the viewer. The image of the veiled summits marks the shift between what art historian Daniel Arasse calls “iconic details”, that is to say items significant for their mimetic resemblance to the referent they represent, to “pictorial details”, details which enable us to see the plasticity of painting as a pictorial material on the surface of the canvas — or the text (see Arasse 2005: 11–12, 268). The landscape of La Vallée thus proves to be the linguistic equivalent of what Thomas W. J. Mitchell calls a “metapicture”, a picture “used to show what a picture is” (Mitchell 1994: 35). Its reflexive character points at the crucial importance of landscape description for the inscription of the pictorial in the novel, as the evocation of natural scenery turns out to be the quintessential Radcliffean iconotext in its coupling of what I shall call iconic figurality (the metaphorical description of La Vallée as a landscape painting), with semiotic pictoriality (the metaphorical expression of painting as a plastic signifier within the text).

A text-image reading enables to complement the idea of the iconotext as an “icono-plastic utterance” and explore the idea of semiotic pictoriality from a linguistic point of view. Liliane Louvel details the various modalities for the pictorial to permeate the text, from explicit to more allusive references to

---

18 Borrowing from the linguistic and semantic triangle signifier-signified-referent, Groupe  $\mu$  defines the iconic sign as the relationship between an iconic signifier, a type and a referent. Besides, Groupe  $\mu$  aims at defining the specificity of the plastic sign through the system of colour, texture and form. Both iconic and plastic dimensions are interrelated to form the visual sign.

painting (see Louvel 2002: 33).<sup>19</sup> Here, such references include the perspective of the gaze, the use of the word “landscapes”, and the allusion to colours, light and aerial perspective (“soft green”, “gleamed”, “blue tinge of air”, “lost in the mist of distance”). Painting also pervades the text through what the intermedial critic calls “pictorial substitutes”, such as the map, suggested with the mention of the cardinal points (see Louvel 2002: 45 & 2011: 155). A pictorial paradigm is indeed superimposed onto a topographical grid as we move from the realm of geography (“the *province* of Gascony”) to the realm of painting (“the pastoral *landscapes* of Guienne and Gascony”).<sup>20</sup>

Two other substitutes are introduced which will prove essential to the pictorialisation of nature throughout the novel: the veil, evoked through the image of the clouds, and the mirror, conjured up through the reflection of the sunlight on the barren surface of the mountain-peaks (see Labourg 2006).<sup>21</sup> The summits of the Pyrenees are the domain of the uncanny as suggested by their metamorphosis under the veil of clouds into terrifying spectral forms. They introduce a mysterious, threatening element into the idyllic landscape of La Vallée. They proleptically hint at the “veiled picture” of Udolpho. Their veiling and unveiling (“veiled”, “or exhibiting”) symbolically anticipates Emily’s lifting of the veil. This dialectics sustains what Maurice Lévy calls “the poetics of the hidden” (see Lévy 1996: 19–34). The veil also emblematises the theme of the supernatural animation of the canvas which gives the impression that the novelist “brought ‘the landscape with figures’ to life” (Hussey 1967: 231–232).<sup>22</sup> Both notions are central to define the Radcliffian Gothic.

Moreover, the veiled mountains mark the space of another reality which is also that of another pictoriality. They no longer partake of the reassuring realm of figuration, but depict a terrifying disfiguration (“awful *forms*”). They represent the dissolution of forms under the gaze. They symbolise constant change, the instability of signs and meaning (“seen and lost again”). They are

19 See also Louvel 2011: 89–90.

20 The word “landscape” originally designated a landscape painting. Landscape theory explains that, historically and culturally, the very notion of “landscape” implies the mediation of painting. In western culture, “real” landscapes started to be seen in the natural world because they were first represented in art.

21 For the mirror as a pictorial substitute, see Louvel 2011: 147 and 2002: 45–46. The veil and the mirror are potent “metapictorial” symbols as they are at the mythological origins of painting through the story of the competition between Parrhasius and Zeuxis and through the myth of Narcissus.

22 See also Lévy 1995: 293–294.

the place of the unknown, of the undecipherable, of alterity, the very place of the ontological experience of the Gothic. From an object gazed at, the mountains are turned into a subject gazing back at the reader-spectator (“exhibiting”, “frowned”). Placed at the vanishing point, at the projection of the viewer’s eye onto the canvas, they metaphorically stand where the gaze is reversed and the painting, as a symbolic structure of vision and representation, “looks back” at the viewer, destabilising him or her with a feeling of the uncanny (see Lacan 1973: 111–123). The veiled summits thus appear to be the symbol of an impenetrable sublimity which sets the limits for any transgression associated with the gaze, which the novel then develops in relationship to knowledge, sexuality, identity, gender, and death.

The peaks are introduced in the longest and most complex sentence of the paragraph. This inflation of language allows for the creation of a picture within the picture, a landscape within the landscape, in which the pictorial becomes associated with the poetic. Although they occupy a marginal position in the view and are introduced as an additional agent (“bounded by the majestic Pyrénées”), the summits then become the active subject of a long subordinate which introduces the central metaphor of the veil: “whose summits, veiled in clouds, or exhibiting awful forms, seen, and lost again, as the partial vapours rolled along.” Parataxis enables the unfolding of the clause in an ample movement which translates their animation under the clouds. It is sustained by two syntactic parallelisms, the first one articulated by the conjunction “or”, and the second one by the repetition of “sometimes”. A succession of embedded phrases marking oppositions creates an uneven balance which suggests constant motion. The first appositive clause (“veiled in clouds, or exhibiting awful forms,”) alternates passive (“veiled”) and active forms (“exhibiting”). The second appositive (“seen, and lost again,”) plays on the contrast between syntactic similarity, with the repetition of two monosyllabic past participles, and semantic opposition. The commas detach “seen”, creating a “1”, suspension, “2,3,4” acceleration which suggests the evanescence of perception. The time subordinate reintroduces a more regular tempo with its four successive strong stresses (“as the partial / vapours / rolled / along”), which may evoke the steady passing of the clouds. The alliteration of /p/ and /l/ heightens the effect by contrasting the explosion of the plosives with the fluidity of the liquids mixing with the vowels (“as the partial vapours rolled along”).

Likewise, the repetition of “sometimes”, draws a parallelism which underlines opposition and change (“sometimes barren, and gleamed through the blue tinge of air, and sometimes frowned with forests of gloomy pine,



that swept downward to their base"). The summits and the forests become subjects of action verbs ("rolled along", "gleamed through", "frowned with", "swept downward") while more static verbs and passive forms dominate in the framing sentences evoking the pastoral scenery ("stood", "were seen", "was bounded", "were contrasted", "were lost", "was bounded"). Those follow a more regular and mainly ternary pattern which suggests classical order and harmony. The first sentence repeats the same basic structure of the + noun + of + noun ("On the pleasant banks of the Garonne", "in the province of Gascony", "the chateau of Saint-Aubert"). In the second and fourth sentences, the pastoral components unfold in a similar succession of three nouns, with a slightly expanded third syntagm, around the coordinative "and": "woods and vine, and plantations of olives"/"flocks, and herds, and simple cottages". On the contrary, the instability at the summits disrupts this regular rhythm as a somewhat trochaic pattern emerges: "[veiled in clouds], [or exhibiting awful forms], [seen, and lost again], [as the partial / vapours / rolled / along]". The phrase "frowned with / forests of / gloomy / pine" almost registers like a trochaic tetrameter. Besides, echoes in sonorities add to the majesty and mystery, with the /f/ alliteration in "awful forms" being repeated in "frowned with forests", complemented with the vowels.

Modulations in sounds also sustain the metaphor of the veil and the image of the mirror. Alliterative and assonant repetitions bring "veiled" and "vapours" together, facilitating the visualisation of the image. In "gleamed through the blue tinge of air", the modulations in the succession of the vowels create variations in sound suggestive of the variations of light on a reflective surface. The tense front vowel /i:/ ("gleamed") is made longer with the initial /g/ + /l/. Two rounded back vowels /u:/, mellowed with /r/ and /bl/, then create a softer, more muffled sound continuum, which makes the following lax /ɪ/ of "tinge", with the support of the dental consonant /t/ and the stress, tinkle, evoking a sparkle of light. The final monosyllabic "air", and its "suspended" diphthong, adds to the impression by suggesting a form of dissolution.

As the poetic thus emerges at the core of the description to evoke pictorial effects, the *paragone* is revived. Hearing converges with seeing as visual images are translated through sounds and the materiality of language perceived as a plastic form. This reflects on the whole passage, supporting the reader's impression that Radcliffe literally "paints" with words.



## 4. Conclusion

Close formal analysis enables to circumscribe the very nature of Radcliffe's "word-painting". The pictorial impression many readers have felt is created through language and the use of a pictorial writing which generates powerful iconotexts. The opening of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* fulfils its strategic function as an incipit by providing a metatextual — or rather "metapictorial" — illustration of such phenomena. The view on La Vallée subsequently transforms into a palimpsest as Emily takes away the landscape of her childhood in her memory — as well as in her drawings — and projects it onto the new places she is brought to throughout her initiatory journey, revisiting them as utopian and dystopian versions of this original composition (see Besson 1999: 66). The description of La Vallée is but contained within one, yet skilfully constructed, paragraph. Longer descriptions, such as the famous arrival at Udolpho, provide ampler textual space for the linguistic expression of Radcliffe's "pictorial" skills, justifying Walter Scott's assertion that she combined "the eye of a painter, with the spirit of a poet" (Rogers 1994: 114).

## References

### Corpus

Radcliffe, Ann (2008): *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

### Other Works

Alberti, Leon Battista (2011): *On painting*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Arasse, Daniel (2005): *Le Détail, Pour une histoire rapprochée de la peinture*, Paris: Flammarion.

Barthes, Roland (1970): *S/Z*, Paris: Seuil.

Besson, Françoise (1999): "Les Pyrénées dans *The Mysteries of Udolpho* ou les mystères du paysage déplacé", in: Max Duperray (ed.), *Les Mystères de Mrs Radcliffe, Nouveaux essais sur les Mystères d'Udolpho de Ann Radcliffe (1794)*, Aix-en-Provence: Publications de l'Université de Provence, 63–81.

- Burke, Edmund (1998): *A philosophical enquiry into the origin of our ideas of the sublime and the beautiful*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Charbonnier, Louise (2007): *Cadre et regard, généalogie d'un dispositif*, Paris: L'Harmattan.
- Cauquelin, Anne (2000): *L'invention du paysage*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- Cosette, Claude (2006): *La publicité de A à Z dictionnaire technique français anglais*, Quebec: Presses de l'Université Laval.
- Del Lungo, Andrea (2003): *L'incipit romanesque*, Paris: Seuil.
- (2014): *La fenêtre, sémiologie et histoire de la représentation littéraire*, Paris: Seuil.
- Derrida, Jacques (1978): *La vérité en peinture*, Paris: Flammarion.
- Durant, David (1980): *Ann Radcliffe's novels: Experiments in setting*, New York: Arno Press.
- Elia, Adriano (2005): "Sublime and word-painting in Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*", in: *Textus, English Studies in Italy*, 18 (1), 61–76.
- Elia, Adriano (2002): *Ut pictura poesis: Word-image interrelationships and the word-painting technique*, Pescara: Libreria dell'Università Editrice.
- Epstein Heller, Lynne (1980): *Ann Radcliffe's Gothic landscape of fiction and the various influences upon it*, New York: Arno Press.
- Flaxman, Rhoda (1987): *Victorian word-painting and narrative: Towards the blending of genres*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Research Press.
- Genette, Gérard (1972): *Figure III*, Paris: Seuil.
- Gilpin, William (1768): *An essay on prints*, London: R. Balmire.
- (1972): *Three essays*, Farnborough: Gregg International Publishers Limited.
- Groupe µ (1992): *Traité du signe visuel, Pour une rhétorique de l'image*, Paris: Seuil.
- Hamon, Philippe (1993): *Du descriptif*, Paris: Hachette.
- Hussey Christopher (1967): *The picturesque: Studies in a point of view*, London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd.
- Labourg, Alice (2006): "(Dé-)peindre la nature: 'peinture de mots' et paysages iconotextuels dans les romans gothiques d'Ann Radcliffe", in: *Textimage, Revue d'études du dialogue texte-image*, "Varia 5", [http://revue-textimage.com/12\\_varia\\_5/labourg1.html](http://revue-textimage.com/12_varia_5/labourg1.html) (Last accessed: 23.04.2021).
- (2014): "'Such a scene as Salvator would have chosen': Metapictorial naming in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Italian*", in: Jakub Lipski/Jacek Mydla (eds.), *Ann Radcliffe, The enchantress of words, sounds and images*, Palo Alto: Academia Press, 21–51.
- Lacan, Jacques (1973): *Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse*, Paris: Seuil.

- Lapaire, Jean-Rémi/Rotgé, Wilfried (1991): *Linguistique et grammaire de l'anglais*, Toulouse: Presses Universitaires du Mirail.
- Lévy, Maurice (1995): *Le roman "gothique" anglais, 1764–1824*, Paris: Alban Michel.
- (1996): "À propos des *Mystères d'Udolphe*: Ann Radcliffe et la poétique du caché", in: Max Duperray (ed.), *Les Mystères de Mrs Radcliffe, Nouveaux essais sur les Mystères d'Udolphe d'Ann Radcliffe (1794)*, Paris: CNED, Didier-Érudition, 19–34.
- Louvel, Liliane (1998): *L'œil du texte, Texte et image dans la littérature de langue anglaise*, Toulouse: Presses Universitaires du Mirail.
- (2002): *Texte/Image, Images à lire, textes à voir*, Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes.
- (2011): *Poetics of The Iconotext*, Farnham: Ashgate.
- Mitchell, Thomas W. J. (1994): *Picture theory: Essays on verbal and visual representation*, Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Roger, Alain (1997): *Court traité du paysage*, Paris: Gallimard.
- Rogers, Deborah (1994): *The critical response to Ann Radcliffe*, Westport: Greenwood Press.
- Stoichita, Victor (1999): *L'instauration du tableau: métapeinture à l'aube des temps modernes*, Genève: Droz.

