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# "A Skilful Artist has Constructed a Tale"<sup>1</sup> Is the short story a good instance of "word/image"? Towards intermedial criticism<sup>2</sup>

Liliane Louvel

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- 1 Here we find ourselves with two objects under scrutiny: the short story and image taken in a broad sense (such as painting but also photography and "substitutes of the pictorial"), a perfect subject for literary research and word/image theory, we must admit, as it has been remarked that the short story has often used the image in more ways than one, thus offering a case in point, a true combination of the two media, a hybrid object.
- 2 We may start with asking a question: is there a strong affinity and an analogy between the short story and the visual? Is the short story the perfect locus for "the infinite dialogue" between word and image? In terms of instant effect as defined by Poe, as a "detachable" piece entirely grasped as a whole as a painting or a photograph apparently are, it may be so. These are some of the traits that might liken one medium with the other and reopen the discussion about Lessing's too neat cleavage between the arts of time and the arts of space. Is it possible then to envisage a formal analogy between short fiction and pictorial, photographic or any other form of image? I will try to explore how some short stories have materially realized the relationship between the visible and the legible. This will inevitably lead to a dual theoretical interrogation: one bearing on short-story writing and the other on image in a back-and-forth movement between the modalities of seeing and writing. Might the pictorially-saturated short story be a perfect instance of "word/image", a hybrid form in between one medium and the other, neither one nor the other, but located at their meeting-point on the mode of oscillation which is its true mode of being? Examples will provide their pragmatic space to check this "idée de recherche" à la Barthes which finds its place in a wider field, that of intermedial studies.

- 3 After interrogating the possible analogies between the shape of image and of the story I will try to see what shapes it may take in terms of form and/or art history and propose a pictorial poetics *ut pictura poesis* davvero. I will then try to propose a typology of some sort and see what happens when the image offers itself as a short story and the short story as an image. "The pictorial third", a term I will define, will also be a leading thread.

## 1/ "Oh to be Silent ! Oh to be a Painter", Virginia Woolf<sup>3</sup> :

- 4 To start with, an instance of the visible combination of word and image and an illustration of the sisters' arts: Virginia and Vanessa's example of collaboration beyond the *paragone*. Vanessa did the illustration for "Kew Gardens", her sister's famous short story. It is an interesting instance in the manner of W. Blake where image and text are closely associated (see his *Laocöon*). The two sisters often took up similar topics, each one treating them in her own medium : thus they both elaborated a portrait of Roger Fry (a picture and a biography), and drew up historical pictures of their friends : Vanessa in her painting of *The Memoir Club*, (in which pictures appear on the wall behind the sitters, thus exemplifying the self-referentiality of painting). Virginia Woolf in *Orlando*, "painted" a portrait of Vita Sackville West and in her diary she composed "a gallery of little bright portraits hanging against the wall of my mind" (156).
- 5 Both sisters indulged in the still-life genre : the cover of "Walter Sickert : A Conversation" by Vanessa, represents a fruit-dish reminding one of a similar fruit-dish in *To the Lighthouse* held under the intense gaze of Mrs Ramsay. The lighthouse motif inspired Vanessa who painted it on the tile fireplace at Charleston. Each sister portrayed the other one : Vanessa appears under the guise of Lily Briscoe, the painter of *To the Lighthouse*, whereas Vanessa Bell painted several portraits of her sister.
- 6 Beyond this facile example, it is interesting to note that quite a number of writers have expressed a wish they could have been painters. This is commonly linked with the question of the limits of language. As Valerie Shaw remarks : "To try to express such sensations and forms is the aim of many writers who attempt to overcome the limitations of their prose medium" (15). I have had occasion to study how V. Woolf described Sickert's paintings as being "full of pictures that might be stories", but how also she expressed her awe in front of painting and its silence, what she called "the silent kingdom of paint", how she thought that "not in our time will anyone write a life as Sickert can paint it. Words are an impure medium"<sup>4</sup>. Despairing about expressing colours, "the effects of those combinations of line and colour" (Shaw 16), she nonetheless reaffirmed the superiority of language.
- 7 Sherwood Anderson also recalled : "I had always wanted to be a painter, I was always having sensations and seeing forms that could perhaps have been expressed in paint and in no other way".<sup>5</sup> In the case of Anderson, it was his contact with modern art and Stieglitz as well as with modern painters which influenced him, in particular the compactness and quickness of photography. Hence the consequence V. Shaw comments upon : "Among certain writers there is a strong inclination to make compression an opportunity to push language to a limit where it begins to shed its literary qualities and seek non-verbal ways of communicating meaning" (Shaw 15).

## 2/ Is there an analogy between the form of the short story and that of an image?

8 Quickly first, if we consider *ekphrasis* and its shape, there is. Originally, *ekphrasis* was a vivid description putting the object under the reader's eyes, it was a rhetorical exercise. In describing an object (the walls of a city, a ship, a shield...) the writer or orator managed to tell a story, to narrativise a description. Little by little, in modern times, it lost its original meaning for a more restricted one (at least in anglo-saxon literary criticism) and became the description of a work of art (see Murray Krieger's famous book). *Ekphrasis* was and is a "detachable piece", an autonomous piece, like the short story. It is compact and a unit.

9 Here it is important to examine a theoretical aspect of the word/image relationship: a kind of little drama as it were. When a dream is transposed into language, in a way similar to the one art historians speak of image, as Hubert Damisch shows it, and once the work of elucidation has been completed, the image seems to have disappeared: language has replaced the dream images.

Le texte du rêve ne s'accompagne, quant à lui, d'aucune illustration: et si reproduction il y a, en l'espèce, elle procède d'une transposition, d'une traduction, d'une conversion de sens inverse à celui du travail du rêve, ne s'agissant pas d'autre chose pour l'analyse que de prendre le rêve aux rets de la langue, de le transformer en objet de discours, soit une opération qui ne saurait demeurer sans reste. Ainsi en va-t-il de tout discours sur l'art, lequel n'a jamais de sens qu'à courir le risque d'un court-circuit. [...] il est interdit en principe de toucher à la peinture. Mais la décrire, et plus encore l'interpréter, c'est bien là une autre manière d'y toucher, avec tous les risques que cela implique, à commencer, par celui, sous le couvert des mots qui en célèbrent la présence, de sa disparition. (Damisch 53)

10 On the contrary, for Jean Rousset, in transposition, it is descriptive language, *ekphrasis* for instance, which conjures up the image. Hence the text recedes in the background as if erased by the nascent image. For Rousset this is particularly difficult to theorize:

What happens in the head of the person reading a description? If he transposes the written words into (absent) things, he transforms them into a mental simulacrum, in other words: he visualizes them. So doing, he substitutes this mental simulacrum to the text, reduced to the role of support, which actually means erasing it, and eventually destroying it. Let us acknowledge this is a real risk. (163)

11 It is of note that art historians and literary critics tend to give an account of what happens when text and image are pitted one against the other in totally opposed and apparently incompatible ways: if the text appears, the image disappears and vice versa... As for myself, I see things in a much less dual manner: word and image may coexist in a fruitful sort of oscillation, a kind of twinkling effect. J.L. Nancy also spoke of an oscillation and went as far as entitling one of his chapters of *Au Fond des images*: "The distinct oscillation" to account for what happens between text and image:

Entre texte et image la différence est flagrante. Le texte présente des significations, l'image présente des formes. Chacun montre quelque chose: la même chose et une autre. En montrant, chacun montre soi-même, donc montre aussi bien l'autre face de lui. Donc aussi se montre à lui: image se montre au texte qui se montre à elle. [...] Chacun tire l'autre vers soi ou se tire vers lui. C'est toujours en tension. Il y a du tirage, de la traction: pour tout dire, du trait. Ça tire et trace de part et d'autre de la

ligne invisible, non tracée, qui passe entre les deux sans passer nulle part. Ça tire et trace peut être rien d'autre que cette ligne impalpable... (121, 123)

- 12 Like in the work of dreams, an animated image plays once more a role in the theological discussion raging around the transubstantiation of species and the role of images in religious doctrine. The hallucination or the hystericization of images is another way of envisaging the gaze. Hans Belting writes:

Images send us back our gaze, a fact signs are incapable of. Therefore there lies, inherent in images, an ambivalence between life and what pertains in them of their medial character : it differs from the readability of signs and addresses our capacity to animate things.<sup>6</sup>

- 13 The doctrine of transubstantiation is also particularly fruitful for considering images. S. Tisseron recalls this when he insists on the role of the body in the visual process and its link with the Holy Trinity : "Like Christ who in Christian theology occupies an essential position as mediator between God and men, image is the essential mediation between bodies and words" (125-126). The reader's body then will be the sieve (like that of enigma) through which this transmutation will be achieved, a fact or event pertaining to the "pictorial third"<sup>7</sup> also.

- 14 Hence the link between the dream, the animated image (lifelike) and the fantastic which favours it, may be reaffirmed. A living painting, or *tableau vivant* of some sorts, we find in Le Fanu's "Carmilla", Poe's "The Oval Portrait", P. Dick's "The Reaper's Image" or even V. Woolf's "The Lady in the Looking Glass", something she probably recognized when she chose *A Haunted House* for the title of her collection. In "Carmilla", the young lady who narrates the story announces : "I forget all my life preceding that event, and for some time after it is all obscure also ; but the scenes I have just described stand out vivid as the isolated pictures of the phantasmagoria surrounded by darkness" (211). She then rediscovers a strange picture which has just been cleaned and thus is revealed in all its clarity :

I remembered it; it was a small picture, about a foot and a half high, and nearly square, without a frame; but it was so blackened by age that I had not been able to make it out.

The artist now produced it, with evident pride. It was quite beautiful ; it was startling ; it seemed to live. It was the effigy of Carmilla. (232)

- 15 For Belting, "Our imagination finds its place in the gaze we cast on images."<sup>8</sup> Image is perceived as rebellious, escaping forms of control, a feature she might share with the short story.

### Poe's stance:

- 16 And this is when, back to basics, the idea of unity brings us back to Poe's seminal study, for it's all there already. In 1842, reviewing Hawthorne's *Twice Told Tales*, Poe defines the tale thanks to its "unity of effect or impression" ; it must be "read at one sitting", and "a certain unique or single effect [has] to be wrought out" (refce p 26). "Unique", "single", "wrought" are key terms for the short story for V. Shaw. For Poe then, already at the origin of the genre, a "desired effect" must be obtained and everything in the story must contribute to it. It is as if an image, a scene, got hold of a writer's mind and that the narrative only came next as a means to recapture this first impression and communicate it to the reader as V. Shaw recalls:

So too does Poe's insistence that only when the desired effect or impression is clear in the writer's mind should he go on to invent incidents and arrange them in the order best calculated to establish this effect. Whatever the subject the aim is to pull the reader along towards a single moment when he finds impressed on his mind an effect identical to the one 'preconceived' by the writer. (9)

- 17 Poe resorts to a pictorial term to express this idea: the writer must "withhold the full impact of his design until it is complete" as well as when he defines the "Enjoyment for the reader who sees the image whole":

And by such means, with such care and skill, a *picture is at length painted* which leaves in the mind of him who *contemplates it with kindred art*, a sense of the fullest satisfaction. The idea of the tale has been presented unblemished, because undisturbed; and this is an end unattainable in the novel. (382, my emphasis).

- 18 For V. Shaw: "By means of careful contrivance, the idea has become an image, and reader and writer are brought into a rare state of intimacy as they share an identical perception" (10). This idea is close to John McGahern's way of envisaging his work when a central image condenses the whole story, as he puts it in "The Image":

When I reflect on the image two things from which it cannot be separated come: the rhythm and the vision. The vision, that still and private world which each of us possesses and which others cannot see, is brought to life in rhythm—rhythm being little more than the instinctive movements of the vision as it comes to life and begins its search for the image in a kind of grave, grave of the images of dead passions and their days.

Art is an attempt to create a world in which we can live: if not for long or forever, still a world of imagination over which we can reign, and by reign I mean to reflect purely on our situation though this created world of ours, this Medusa's mirror allowing us to see and to celebrate even the totally intolerable. (McGahern 1991: 12)

- 19 This fine text perfectly applies to most of his stories and in particular to "Love of the World" or "Wheels" as we shall see. It holds before the reader's eyes a Medusa's mirror in which "the totally intolerable" is reflected. In this text he develops one of his favourite ideas, that of the link between image and imagination and how one strong image often triggers the writing of a story or a novel.
- 20 A short remark: Valerie Shaw analyzes the shape of the short story in its production context. Conditioned by the space allocated to it in newspapers, the short story had a limit of 2000 words. Compression then was necessary, what Kipling called "economy of implication" (Shaw 7). Valerie Shaw remarks that immediacy, compression, vitality, all those qualities are also shared with journalism, to which we could add the importance of the visual and of the image both in text and alongside of it. Wasn't one of the XIXth and beginning of the XXth century's favourite magazines entitled *The Illustration*? *London Illustrated News*? *Leslie's*, a self-termed "Illustrated Weekly Magazine" Norman Rockwell worked for in 1917?
- 21 Its "single-minded concision" goes hand in hand with its quality as a hybrid genre. The short story has its own aesthetic. Could we see then its use of strong images as short cuts, as short-circuits to reach meaning more quickly and more efficiently? (cf the function of image) This is a topic I will address later on.
- 22 The analogy of "shape" between short story and image – a telling metaphor as it also pertains to the arts – and a particular shape at that, requiring density and tightly-knit effects, reveals the short story's affinity with the unity of effect of the visual arts, that is, when an image has to be seized instantly. V. Shaw quotes Henry James who was keen

on visual analogy not only for thematic or metaphoric purposes but also for formal reasons :

Individually, each story might be self-contained and limited in representational power, but when accumulated these "illustrations" could make up a comprehensive survey, comparable to the inclusive though wandering vision afforded by a *camera obscura*. James himself drew the visual analogy when he wrote in 1888 to tell Stevenson that for the next years he planned to concentrate on short fiction : "I want to leave a multitude of pictures of my time, projecting my small circular frame upon as many different spots as possible."<sup>9</sup>

- 23 "[P]rojecting my small circular frame", says James. The use of this small frame one now often sees riveted to the eye of film directors shows to what extent James would fragment the real in as many small vignettes and give birth to a short story. A story combined with another one and then another one would then constitute a *montage* resembling a panel or panorama, so popular in the late 19th century that Paris counts amongst its "passages" that of the Panoramas. Walter Benjamin will make great use of them as we know.
- 24 When Valerie Shaw insists on the parallel between painting and short story, she sees it as a working concept. "One of the aims of the present study is to suggest that such comparisons between the short story and the visual arts are not merely rhetorical" (12). She recalls that when James writes in his notes for "The Coxon Fund" : "The formula for the presentation of it in 20,000 words is to make an *Impression* – as one of Sargent's pictures is an impression"<sup>10</sup>, he draws attention to the most significant aspect of the short story as distinct from the novel. "Impression" (in italics), the unity of which Poe recommended, reappears under James's pen as a phenomenon typical of the double articulation between the textual and the visual. Finally, that James should evoke Sargent is in itself of primary import, for this fruitful word/image comparison springs from the writer's fancy itself. It speaks volumes on his pictorial tastes but also on the way he conceived his work and its aesthetic mores. Sargent provides both a model and a reflection of what James was trying to do. And *The Portrait of a Lady*, be she in white or not, kept both artists busy. According to James, because of its sudden effect, the short story produces an impression of totality and triggers the need to grasp it all at one glimpse. Moreover, "impression" refers to a new mode of painting which was changing the way of looking at the world and consequently the way of writing it.

## Critical discourse

- 25 So we can conclude that if the link between literature and painting is constantly reaffirmed in literature, the same goes with critical discourse as Valerie Shaw's example among others, testifies to. Even though she too quickly assimilates Woolf's or Mansfield's writing to Impressionism, the links between *pictura* and *poesis* build up a theoretical standpoint from which to examine the text : "because it leaves a sense of something complete yet unfinished, a sensation which vibrates in the reader's or spectator's mind and demands that he participates in the aesthetic interchange between the artist and his subject" (Shaw 12), the interaction between the two arts is fruitful and the dialogue a neverending one.
- 26 In Valerie Shaw's own discourse it is easy to pin down to what extent she resorts to the visual to speak of literature, not only by referring to schools of painting or to manners or styles, but also by tracing analogies resting on practice and pictorial techniques. We



have seen that she envisages a collection of stories as a series of illustrations which put together produce a cumulative effect. They project a complete vision of the subject she compares to the full although hazy vision offered by *camera obscura*, a contraption widely made use of by painters and probably by Vermeer. A variation on this kind of box used for perspective purposes is Hoogstraten's box kept in the National Gallery of London. For painters it was a practical way of reducing three-dimensional space to two dimensions and to solve problems of perspective and illusionary space.

### 3/ So now has come the time to wonder how the use of the image in short story writing bears back upon intermedial studies?

- 27 If criticism has for a long time assimilated the image to a form of language going as far as saying that it had to be "read" in terms of its grammar, its lexicon, its syntax, can't we now turn the topic upon its head and argue that we may apply *ut pictura poesis* davvero that is to say, see what kind of idiom pertaining to painting may be applied to the text to open the eye of the text? Asking this question we may notice that the vocabulary of literary criticism has made free use of painterly terms which we will find both in criticism and also in works.
- 28 I propose to distinguish among the analogies between the shape of the short story and that of images and the references to art history we may find in short stories building up a poetics of the pictorial and introducing intermedial criticism.

#### Technical analogies: formal approach:Pictorial Markers

- 29 Actually critical discourse has already used formal terms proper to painting or the image such as canvas, colour, the window and frames or framing effects, anamorphosis, perspective and so on. I will select a few examples.

#### A. Informal borrowings:

##### i. *The white square of canvas*

- 30 In Karen Blixen's "The Blank Page", an analogy is established between a white canvas and a blank page that is the mystery of the unsaid which bears no trace, as silent and mysterious as Malevitch's *White square on white square*. "The Blank Page" by Karen Blixen blends together the blank page and a white canvas. An old crone tells an age-old story transmitted from mother to daughter : in a convent in Portugal, a portrait gallery exhibits within heavy frames the names of young princesses together with a piece of the linen sheet cut off on the day following the royal wedding. "Within the faded markings of the canvases people of some imagination and sensibility may read all the signs of the zodiac [...]. Or they may there find pictures from their own world of ideas : a rose, a heart, a sword—or even a heart pierced through with a sword" (Blixen 101). One of these pieces of linen sheet remains blank and blank is the frame deprived of the princess's name. Faced with this absence, the befuddled spectators remain speechless but keep on furiously thinking whereas no explanation is provided. Thus is staged the process of interpretation, the sudden dazzling effect produced by the empty blank



"page" as meaning indefinitely wanders, is differed without ever being fixed. For if the stained sheets offer an opening onto the future, the blank sheet remains inviolable, mute and enigmatic because of the presence of the absence it exhibits. "What happened?", to quote Deleuze in his analysis of the difference between tale and short story.

## ii. Colour: a challenge.

31 "What a poet you are in colour", writes V. Woolf in 1940 to Vanessa about a portrait of Quentin.<sup>11</sup>To which Vanessa answers : "I don't see how you use colours in writing, but [...] perhaps you don't really describe the looks but only the impression the looks made upon you" (Gillespie 277). Colour for Woolf will remain an enigma. Yet she will write stories close to the instant seizure of painting or of snapshots ; she will try to render colour in particular as in the very short story "Blue and Green".

32 In this story, the two paragraphs stand as a diptych in which the two colours would stand facing one another each on their own panel. Once more the title *Blue & Green*, in italics overhangs the two subtitles GREEN BLUE (in block capitals) as in a diptych. This short story is a case in point as it develops the adventures of colour *per se* in the form of a series of tiny vignettes, —somewhat like in "Three Pictures" but on a smaller scale—, juxtaposing "views" cleanly separated by semi-colons and told in the present tense:

All day long the ten fingers of the lustre drop green upon the marble. [...] But the hard glass drips on to the marble ; the pools hover above the desert sand ; the camels lurch through them ; the pools settle on the marble ; rushes edge them ; weeds clog them ; here and there a white blossom ; the frog flops over ; at night the stars are set there unbroken. (Woolf 1989 : 142)

33 With the passage of time, blue takes precedence: "It's night; the needles drip blots of blue. The green's out" (142). A beginning, a middle and an ending ; a story has been told but its *tour de force* rests on the fact that its main characters are colours, the colours of a tale. So colour is another of the "pictorial markers" I offer as critical tools to open "the eye of the text". Blue and green are the two colours typical of Woolf's imagination and apparently favourites of hers. In the poem-like "piece" considered here, green is repeated six times in the text and twice in the title and subtitle ; blue, nine times and twice more as well. Blue and green figure in innumerable other instances in Woolf's stories. In "The Fascination of the Pool", "green [...] rippled from bank to bank" (226). In "Slater's Pins", Miss Craye wears "blue in winter, green in summer". In "Nurse Lugton's Curtain", "the blue stuff turned to blue air" before reverting back to its material quality : "the air became blue stuff." (160-161)

## iii. Frames and framing effects:

34 Poe's "The Oval Portrait"'s frame is an incomplete one. The first narrator arrives wounded at the castle ; he finds the book which contains the story of the portrait. But at the end of the story there is no return to the first narrative and the last words of the short story are "she was dead —" signalling at the same time the death of the narrator incapable of going beyond the stretch of the dash, bleeding to death in his turn after the last touch of the brush and of the pen. The story remains unclosed, unhinged. In the same way "The Fall of the House of Usher" opens and closes with the description of the house and of the tarn. From fissure to breaking apart, and their coincidence.

- 35 Circular frames are recurrent in McGahern's short stories, a trait which is a kind of signature also pointing to his vision of life as a wheel, something already apparent in one of his early short stories, "Wheels". This story begins with the evocation of "loose wheels rattling, and nothing but wait and watch and listen, and I listened to the story they were telling" (McGahern 1992 : 3) and ends with a description of the countryside with "[...] all the vivid sections of the wheel we watched so slowly turn, impatient for the rich whole that never came but that all preparations promised" (11). "Like all Other Men" ends upon a variation on T. S. Eliot's own phrase in "East Coker" as the chiasmus pinpoints the ineluctability of the death-trap life is : "In my end is my beginning, he recalled. In my beginning is my end, his and hers, mine and thine" (McGahern 1992: 280).
- 36 On the narrative level, Woolf's short pieces often are very tightly held together by verbal clasps as it were. Like a picture frame, they play the part of a *parergon*, in between the reader's world and the *œuvre* itself. In "Nurse Lugton's Curtain", order, disorder, return to order, are clearly indicated by the paragraphs' setting, and the function of the "blue stuff" which undergoes the different metamorphoses of the blue fabric. Of course, an echo of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* - "We are such stuff as dreams are made of" - cannot be ignored.
- 37 Structurally speaking, beginnings and endings often stand in an echo system, coupled together in the coda with general truths uttered by the narrator. In "The Lady in the Looking-Glass : A Reflection", the same sentence ("People should not leave looking-glasses hanging in their rooms...") opens and closes the story. "It is impossible that one should not see pictures" is echoed by "What a picture it made !" in "Three Pictures". In "Slater's Pins Have No Points", Miss Craye's ambiguous opening question "Slater's pins have no points—don't you always find ?" finds its answer in her final surrender when she affirms, laughing : "Slater's pins have no points". The second paragraph of "The Fascination of the Pool", which opens with "pools have some curious fascination, one knows not what", meets a possible answer in the explicit: "That perhaps is why one loves to sit and look into pools".
- 38 The short "stories" often adopt the same kind of structure: as in "the Symbol", a beautiful image is cruelly found to be deceptive. Illusion is opposed to reality in the very last lines of the story : this is the case with "The Lady in the Looking-Glass" or "The Fascination of the Pool", among other very "visual" or "pictorial" stories. In "Three Pictures", the cruel opposition between the euphoric first picture and the dysphoric last one is brought about by the text which voices the fragility inherent in human life : "All was as quiet, as safe [as] could be. Yet, one kept thinking, a cry had rent it ; [...] This goodness, this safety were only on the surface" (Woolf 1989 : 230).
- 39 K. Mansfield too favoured this kind of neat framing effect. "At The Bay" for instance opens as an overture with "Very early morning. The sun was not yet risen" (201) and ends up with "A cloud small, serene, floated across the moon. In that moment of darkness the sea sounded deep, troubled. Then the cloud sailed away, and the sound of the sea was a vague murmur, as though it waked out of a dark dream. All was still" (236). The enclosure technique follows the plot from dawn to dusk and brings unity to the different fragments.
- 40 Besides the narrative level, framing effects may be found within the diegesis itself. In Woolf's "The Fascination of the Pool", the vision is framed and darkened by the neighbouring rushes : "Round the edge was so thick a fringe of rushes that their

reflections made a darkness like the darkness of very deep water" (Woolf 1989 : 226). Frames are also referred to under the guise of windows, door frames or thresholds "framing" characters. Two fine examples can be analysed.

#### iv. The window

41 The window is reminiscent of Alberti's famous prescription: "to make a picture one has to draw a *quadrangolo* which is like a window open onto composition (*la storia*)". A window may be seen as a metaphor of creation and may substitute for the pictorial.

42 S. Milhauser's "Snowmen" opens with a description of a scene as already framed and divided into smaller rectangles by a window. This very pictorial description, as I have defined them elsewhere, has its pictorial quality confirmed by the oncoming reference to prints.

One sunny morning I woke and pushed aside a corner of the blinds. Above the frosted, sun-dazzled bottom of the glass I saw a brilliant blue sky, divided into luminous rectangles by the orderly white strips of wood in my window. Down below, the back yard had vanished. In its place was a dazzling white sea, whose lifted and immobile waves would surely have toppled if I had not looked at them just then. [...] [the icicles] reminded me of *glossy and matte prints* in my father's albums. (my emphasis)

43 In "Slater's Pins Have No Points", after Fanny Wilmot has eventually found the lost pin on the carpet, she has a glimpse of a new Miss Craye lost in ecstasy:

She sat there, half turned away from the piano, with her hands clasped in her lap holding the carnation upright, while behind her was the sharp square of the window, uncurtained, purple in the evening, intensely purple after the brilliant lights which burnt unshaded in the bare music room (Woolf 1989: 220)

44 Miss Craye's figure is delineated by the "sharp square of the window" behind her. She clearly stands as the portrait of a lady while her true nature is revealed in the equation between the intensely purple London night and her passionate self<sup>12</sup>: the purple colour of the background, that is red mixed with blue, suggests the erotic undertone of the evening revelation. In "Three Pictures", a door frame explicitly plays the same framing role as the window: "We cannot possibly break out of the frame of the picture by speaking natural words. You see me leaning against the door of the smithy with a horseshoe in my hand and you think as you go by 'How picturesque!'" (Woolf 1989 : 229). "How picturesque!" This metapictorial comment finds its counterpart in "The First Picture" in which "picture" is repeated fourteen times on one single page. The self-reflexive nature of the story is "mis en abyme" thanks to the hall of mirrors of the different frames: that of the main title: "Three Pictures", that of the three subtitles: "The First (Second then Third) Picture" and that of the sub-subtitle: "The Sailor's Homecoming" embedded in "The First Picture".

45 As we have seen, this list of informal borrowings, by literary writers or critics, of terms proper to painting or the image could also include anamorphosis, perspective, collage...

#### B. Art History: endless borrowings.

46 Of note: References may figure in an overt or a covert way.

47 Phrases like "a Van Dyke beard", "a Tiepolo ceiling" are very compact and offer a great advantage in terms of economy of means, of compression. They achieve what we may call a "shortcircuit effect": that is they dispense the narrator with long descriptions

and thanks to an adjective they condense in one formula a pictorial effect that would be time-consuming. If the reader has the necessary referent, he will immediately "see" what figure this man cuts, what kind of a ceiling this house displays. Of course if he/she does not... this is one of the risks of allusion.

- 48 "Medusa's Ankles", A. Byatt's story, clearly refers to one of the founding myths of representation and painting as L. Marin clearly showed. Byatt's collection *The Matisse Stories* is itself a tribute to Matisse whose *oeuvre* is visibly present in the book.

- 49 In Melville's "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids"<sup>13</sup>, it is a canonical figure of painting, that of Veronica's veils, which appears. The power of this image, which also plays the part of a screen, is ambiguous and enigmatic. Guided by Cupid, a shady sort of guide in the paper mill, the narrator is initiated to the making of the pulp. He discovers different kinds of impressions such as "an impress of a wreath of roses", in relief, then urged on by Cupid he inscribes the latter's name which is then processed through the machine before its "rebirth" :

I saw a sort of paper-fall, not wholly unlike a water-fall; a scissory sound smote my ear, as of some cord being snapped, and down dropped an unfolded sheet of perfect foolscap, with my "Cupid" half faded out of it, and still moist and warm.

- 50 His reverie leads him to think that "all sorts of writings would be writ on those now vacant things". The projection of these future writings on "vacant" paper would turn these "vacant things" into objects : letters, signs indicating the writing of still unborn things. Then contemplating the pulp, he hallucinates the faces of the young girls in pictorial manner :

I seemed to see, glued to the pallid incipience of the pulp, the yet more pallid faces of all the pallid girls I had eyed that heavy day. Slowly, mournfully, beseechingly, yet unresistingly, they gleamed along, their agony dimly outlined on the imperfect paper, like the print of the tormented face on the handkerchief of Saint Veronica.

- 51 The pulp imprisons ("dimly outlined") the print of the pain of the young girls and their flesh the pulp is made of, as well as the consequences of the process: "So, through consumptive pallors of this blank, raggy life, go these white girls to death". The spectral apparition projects the face *par excellence* and Woedolor, the name of the mountain, redoubles the signifier (woe and dolor) as when at the foot of the cross on Mount Golgotha (meaning skull) a death head rests (Adam's). We find again the classical exchange between eros and thanatos, model/painting as in "The Oval Portrait" and the emergence of the paper is described as a birth :

when, suddenly I saw a sort of paper-fall not wholly unlike a water-fall; a scissory sound smote my ear, as of some cord being snapped and down dropped an unfolded sheet of perfect foolscap, with my "Cupid" half faded out of it, and still moist and warm [...]

'Ay, foolscap' handling the piles of moist, warm sheets, which continually were being delivered into the woman's waiting hands (37-38).

- 52 *Titles* may also directly indicate their visual origins. Some of the titles of Mansfield's stories ("Feuille d'album", "Pictures") or of V. Woolf's ("Three Pictures", "The Lady in the Looking Glass : A Reflection", "Portraits", "Scenes of the Life of a Naval Officer", "Nurse Lugton's Curtain") are closely linked to the visual in a metareflexive way. "Three Pictures" even includes three subtitles in keeping with its nature as it adopts the form of a polyptych and more precisely that of a triptych. Within "the first picture" of the triptych another subtitle is mentioned reinforcing the visual trend : "So now at

the turn of the road I saw one of these pictures. It might have been called 'The Sailor's Homecoming' or some such title" (Woolf 1989 : 229).

#### Genres:

- 53 *Still life or aesthetic arrangement:* Bertha's glass fruit bowl in Mansfield's "Bliss" is an example, as is the image of the pear tree delineated against the window-frame: "The windows of the drawing-room opened overlooking the garden. At the far end, against the wall, there was a tall, slender pear tree in fullest, richest bloom ; it stood perfect, as though becalmed against the jade-green sky". Genres such as portrait, as seascape, as still-life painting also may serve as patterns to a short story. "The Lady in the Looking Glass", "Flesh and the Mirror" and "The Oval Portrait" build up portraits for example.
- 54 In this category, the short story moulding itself onto the ancient pictorial form of a polyptych was adopted for V. Woolf's "Portraits", although this group of nine "sketches" was partially arranged according to the editor's choice and guesses (Dick, ed. 307). V. Woolf's "Blue and Green" may be seen as a diptych as we have already seen. Another diptych we have met is Melville's story: "The Paradise of Bachelors and The Tartarus of Maids" with its two panels, one dedicated to the bachelors in Temple Bar, and the other one to the poor exploited maids.
- 55 *The picture gallery* may appear, as in "The Blank Page", or the collection of short stories may take up the form of a picture gallery: examples might be found reading S. Anderson, R. Carver, H. James, E. Welty...
- 56 "*Substitutes of the pictorial*" as I have defined them e.g. mirrors, water (ponds, tarns, pools), miniatures, tapestries, maps, photographs etc. The visual is not restricted to painting but it also includes "semiotic mediators" as as many variations of/on the pictorial. Woolf makes great use of mirrors, tapestries and optical devices or instruments fulfilling a variety of textual or narrative functions such as telescopes, "The Searchlight", magnifying glasses, lenses and other *camera obscura*....
- 57 Given these various devices used by writers, I will venture to offer a typology of pictorial short story according to two types.

## 4/ A typology of the "pictorial" short story:

- 58 *The image as story*, that is the image as described in the short story constitutes the narrative and the body of the story: "The Blank Page" or blank canvas, "The Oval Portrait", Murray Bail's "The Drover's Wife", Byatt's *The Matisse Stories*, just to give a few examples. In those stories, the image stands at the origin of the story and generates the telling. The fantastic may animate the description of the image (link with ekphrasis and narrativisation) which constitutes the body of the story which is moulded on the metamorphoses or anamorphoses of the image. "Snowmen" by S. Milhauser can be read as a description and a narrative, that of the three-day metamorphosis of sculpted images, their story: their emergence, their becoming snow sculptures even more splendid and inventive and then their vanishing after a fantastic episode. Like a story of styles also with a childish stage then a realistic one and then a mannerist even ghoulish one.

Yet even those visions of the morning partook of the world they longed to supplant, and it was not until the afternoon that our snowmen began to achieve freedoms so

dangerous that they threatened to burn our eyes of beholders. It was then that distorted, elongated, disturbingly supple figures began to replace our punctilious imitations. And yet I sensed they were not distortions, those ungraspable figures, but direct expressions of shadowy inner realms.

59 Another instance of the narrativisation of the description in true ekphrastic manner might be "At the Bay" by K. Mansfield. One last example, M.R. James's "The Mezzotint" follows the metamorphosis of a mezzotint on a fantastic mode.

60 *The short story as image* (la nouvelle-image). There the telling engenders an image, the short story itself works as an image, can be seen and read as an image (or a mirror) and leaves the imprint of one on the reader's inner screen, an instance of what I call "the pictorial third". In "The Fascination of the Pool", the story provokes an image-effect. It may read as a long narrative on the theme of contemplation. A character lying by a pool little by little lets his/her fancy evoke events and characters as well as the forgotten voices of the past. It is in and by the gaze that the hypnotic effect of water conjures up those fanciful figures. The sale of the farm of Romford Mill together with its cattle, tools and implements represents the abrupt end of a family. The selling bill is reflected in the water : "One could trace the big red letters in which Romford Mill was printed in the water. A tinge of red was in the green that rippled from bank to bank" (Woolf 1989 : 226). The very visual impression literally shows that the red letters are "printed in the water" and make up an image. The very materiality of the minimal signifier, the letter, is foregrounded although at the same time it is inscribed in a ceaselessly animated fluid element. The tinge of red has brewed and seeped into the green sleeping water.

61 Many details are minutely strung together as if the narrator were using a magnifying glass and almost obsessively noted in only one paragraph:

*Round the edge was so thick a fringe of rushes that their reflections made a darkness like the darkness of very deep water. However in the middle was something white [...] the centre of the water reflected the white placard, and when the wind blew the centre of the pool seemed to flow and ripple like a piece of washing. One could trace the big red letters in which Romford Mill was printed in the water. A tinge of red was in the green that rippled from bank to bank. (226, my emphasis)*

62 These details and the recurring visual apparatus offered by the story also concur with what I call "pictorial markers", that is, textual markers clearly encoding the presence of the visual, of the pictorial (meaning picture in a more restricted sense). The literary text will not only mimic but work along the same lines as painting, image or "the visual" broadly speaking. Let us remember Woolf often wondered "how she could write as a painter would paint" (Lee 370).

63 The text leaves the imprint of an image on the reader's mind : it is the case with McGahern's "Love of the World" or again with the "Fall of the House of Usher". The latter works on a series of mirror effects : the tarn sends back an inverted image of the house which eventually collapses into it. And oral equivalents of the visual, that is to say echoes, also pervade and structure the story : the *Mad Trist* (128) read by Roderick echoes Madeline's slow progression, "the echo" is a "counterpart" figure in the text. Madeline and Roderick are twins and so are Roderick and the narrator to a certain extent. The imprint left by such images as conveyed by texts provoke what I call the effect of "the Pictorial Third", neither here nor there, neither text nor image but in-between on the reader's interior screen.



## 5/ How does all this reflect back upon the short story and the general discussion about its genre?

- 64 I will argue that this twofold phenomenon - image triggering short story (discourse) and short story conveying an image - is most readily achieved in short-story writing. The brevity of the form may encapsulate or radiate an image as a whole in a much easier way than the longer form, i.e. the novel. This is not the case of the poem, a fact Poe saw very well, for he envisaged the short story as an in-between form half-way between the poem and the longer form. V. Woolf would also have agreed with this fact as she strove to find a new form, a playpoem, in *The Waves* or *Between the Acts*. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is an in-between example, a kind of limit of the genre (just as a *novella* is) as it started as a tale and ended as a novel after the rewriting and the two Lipincott's editions. Longer novels would require more work on the part of the reader (and of the writer) to maintain the link between its "shape" and an image. Thus the image is more often *embedded* in a novel whereas it can take up the whole space of a short story. Therefore this could account for the novel's affinity with series of paintings as in D.M. Thomas's *Pictures at an Exhibition*, or with painterly procedures, for example in Urquhart's *The Underpainter*. Most often if an image runs through a novel it works on the intermittent mode, that of oscillation between word and image, the twinkling blinking eye of the text, as is the case with *To the Lighthouse* where Lily Briscoe's painting runs through the novel and ends it up with the famous "I have had my vision". In *Girl with a Pearl Earring*, if the painting is the backbone of the novel it also works alongside other instances of Vermeer's paintings. This is also the case with J. Coe's *The Rain before it Falls* which starts its chapters with the ekphrasis of a photograph described to a blind girl as part of her inheritance, and the novel reads as a film reel or series of "exposures", the title of a short story by V. O'Sullivan.
- 65 So I think we may decidedly conclude that there is a strong affinity between the short story and the image and the rest of this conference will amply prove it I expect, enabling all of us to indulge in the pleasure of making the most of both media, of enjoying both word and image, to our hearts' content. If a "skilful artist has constructed a tale", he/she also has conveyed a fine image, a fine instance of word/image event.

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## NOTES

1. Edgar Allan Poe. "Tale Writing- Twice-Told Tales". *Selected Poetry and Prose*. New York: The Modern Library, 1951: 381.
2. Editor's note: Liliane Louvel's keynote address is published here as it was presented in the opening session of the CRILA Conference on The Image and the Short Story, held at the University of Angers in march 2010.
3. I have already tried to approach the question of the sisters'arts in "'Oh to be Silent! Oh to be a Painter' 'the sisters'arts': Virginia and Vanessa". *Virginia Woolf, le pur et l'impur*.
4. See V. Woolf, "Walter Sickert: a Conversation" and Liliane Louvel, "The Art of Conversation, Conversation as an Art, "The Sisters' Arts"".
5. Sherwood Anderson, *A Story Teller's Story*, New York, 1924, p. 403, quoted by V. Shaw, *op. cit.* p. 15.
6. " (les images) nous renvoient le regard que nous portons sur elles, ce dont les signes sont incapables. Il existe donc, inhérente aux images, une ambivalence entre la vie et ce qui relève en elles de leur caractère médial: elle diffère de la lisibilité des signes et s'adresse à notre capacité d'animation. " (167).
7. The Pictorial Third as developed in Liliane Louvel, *Le tiers pictural, pour une critique intermédial*.
8. "Notre propre imagination vient se nicher dans le regard que nous posons sur les images" (167).
9. Henry James, *Letters*, III, 240 (3 July), ed. Leon Edel, 1974-quoted by Valerie Shaw, p. 12.
10. Henry James, *The Notebooks of Henry James*, ed. F.O. Matthiessen and Kenneth B. Murdoch, New york, p. 19, quoted by Valerie Shaw, p. 12.
11. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, vol VI lettre 381, p. 294.
12. We know that this story was called by Woolf her "little sapphist story" in a letter to Vita Sackville-West. See S. Dick, ed. (306-307). The text is clear enough in this respect.
13. I have studied this text at further length in " La capture de l'ombre: questions posées à la *vera icona*. Du miroir obscur à l'écran. ", *L'obscur*.

## ABSTRACTS

Y a-t-il une affinité entre la nouvelle et le visuel ? Instantanéité d'effet, un morceau détachable, saisie d'emblée de l'ensemble comme un tableau. Autant de traits qui communément semblent le confirmer. Y aurait-il alors une analogie de forme entre la forme brève et l'image picturale photographique ou autre ? On pourra tenter de voir comment les nouvelles ont pu mettre en scène ce rapport entre visible et lisible, ce qui mènera à interroger et la théorie de la nouvelle et celle de l'image dans ce chassé-croisé entre les deux modalités du voir et de l'écrire. La nouvelle à fort coefficient pictural serait-elle alors un parfait exemple de « texte/image » forme hybride entre l'un et l'autre, ni l'un ni l'autre, mais point de rencontre des deux sur le mode de

l'oscillation constitutive de son mode à être ? Les exemples viendront offrir leur espace pragmatique pour vérifier cette « idée de recherche » qui s'inscrit dans une recherche plus large, celui des études intermédiales.

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Liliane Louvel is Professor of British literature at the University of Poitiers and specializes in contemporary British literature and word/image relationship. She has written numerous articles on this particular subject and published five books on the interrelationship between word and image: *L'oeil du texte* (Toulouse PUM 1998), *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, *Le double miroir de l'art* (Ellipses, 2000), *Texte/image, images à lire et textes à voir* (Rennes PUR 2002), *Le tiers pictural* (PUR 2010). She has also published three collections of essays on the subject published in *EJES*, *La licorne* and *PURennes II*. *Word/image*, *EJES*, *ŠLike Painting*, *La licorne* et aux *PURennes II* les Actes du colloque de Cerisy : *Texte/image nouveaux problèmes* with Henri Scepti. *Poetics of the Iconotext*, a translation of L. Louvel's former works by Laurence Petit (University of Montpellier) edited by Pr. Karen Jacobs (Boulder University USA), will be published in August 2011 by Ashgate Publications.