

ABSTRACT

Title: Quand les mots font image. Une lecture iconotextuelle de *La Modification* de Michel Butor.

English title: From words to images. A reading of Michel Butor's *La Modification* as an iconotext.

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In the present dissertation, Michel Butor's third novel, *La Modification*, published in 1957, is studied as an iconotext in which the images are conveyed by the verbal medium alone. Focusing on the relationships between verbal and visual elements in the novel, the study distinguishes three main categories of the verbal transformation of images: ekphrasis, pictorialism and iconicity. While ekphrasis, being the verbal representation of visual representation, makes an explicit reference to the visual arts, pictorialism and iconicity are of a more allusive nature. In the first case, the dynamic world is described so as to suggest to the reader analogies with a painting, whereas in the latter case the material dimension of the text is exploited for iconic purposes.

The unity of text and image thus brought forth in *La Modification* is analyzed in the light of an emblematic mode with its origins in the Renaissance emblem. The emblem was a hybrid art form with didactic aims in which known motifs, recycled from the Bible, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and various symbolic manuals, were put together in new configurations in order to bring about new meanings. In the emblematic composition, each component refers to another, thus prompting a circular, ongoing reading-process in which the different elements comment and nourish each other throughout the reading. The study of *La Modification* as an emblematic iconotext sets out to establish in what ways the unity of text and image may prepare a certain mode of reading while inscribing the reader into the text, as a co-author.

Keywords: Nouveau Roman, Michel Butor, *La Modification*, iconotext, ekphrasis, pictorialism, iconicity, emblem, emblematic mode.