

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA  
IN SEARCH OF THE WHITE QUEEN:  
A STUDY OF THE NOVELS OF AUDREY THOMAS

by  
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## Abstract

This thesis is an attempt to clarify the function of the Alice model in Audrey Thomas' fiction. In a series of four novels she refers the reader repeatedly to the works of Lewis Carroll.

Audrey Thomas' heroines all exemplify Alice's reactions to the madness and chaos that reign in Wonderland and the Looking Glass world. For instance, Mrs. Blood (Mrs. Blood) dresses her children like Alice and the White Rabbit or remembers Alice's dilemma about the Christmas presents she should send to her feet. The Isobel of Blown Figures travels like Alice through the Looking Glass (Africa becomes a gigantic chess game). Alice, as well as Isobel Cleary (Songs My Mother Taught Me) and the more adult Mrs. Blood and Rachel (Latakia), all undertake a search in order to better comprehend their relation to the mad worlds they inhabit. In particular, they try to decipher the language spoken by their fellow-characters; in this sense, their search is also for the literal meaning of words, through the linguistic labyrinths that imprison them. However, if the narrative of the Alice books indicates a re-ordering of Alice's universe, Thomas' narratives point in the opposite direction, to a refusal "to go home".

There will be three chapters in this thesis. Chapter One will examine the correspondences that exist between Thomas and Carroll's fictions at the level of the story. Chapter two

will focus on the two authors' common method of dealing with the language of their fiction. Chapter three will emphasize the divergence between Thomas and Carroll at the level of myth and genre. In this last chapter, I shall analyse both the Alice books and Blown Figures from a (fairy-tale) genre perspective in order to situate exactly the function of Carrollian elements in Thomas' writing. This study will enable the reader to develop some wider hypotheses as to the nature of a feminine mode of writing in contemporary literature.

To Danny and Anushka

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## Introduction

The origin of the word "search" goes back to the Old French cerchier which means "to go around, to surround," to the Latin circ-are: "to go round" which itself comes from circus: "circle."<sup>1</sup> Thus, the etymology of this word is rooted in a most basic archetypal image, that of the circle, which evokes "une rondeur pleine," to borrow Bachelard's words, that of the womb.<sup>2</sup> The French mythocritic Gilbert Durand notes after Bachelard the narrow relation between the circular refuge and the womb. Whereas the square ("le refuge carre") is that of the fortress, the citadel, Durand points out that "l'espace circulaire est plutôt celui du jardin, du fruit, de l'oeuf ou du ventre, et déplace l'accent symbolique sur les voluptés secrètes de l'intimité."<sup>3</sup> Hence, my statement that search is female in essence. In addition, "circus means "cirque" and by metonymy, it designates the "spectator" of the "circus." "Search" is also observation, female curiosity.

"Quest" comes from the past participle quaesitus, a of the Latin verb quaerere: "to seek." For the original form and etymology we are drawn further back into another Latin verb quaeso, ere with an even older Sanscrit origin cish-: "to hunt out."<sup>4</sup> Interestingly enough, a reading of the OED under the term "quest" further reveals that "quest" refers essentially to an external type of action. It indicates that the quest is oriented towards the outside. Its semantic space is male. In everyday classical Latin, quaeso means "to look for" ("chercher à se procurer"). It points to a male need. In Medieval Romance, the word serves to define the type of expedition or adventure undertaken

by a knight to procure something or achieve some exploit.<sup>5</sup> 2  
History loads the term with male powers.

Even though common usage confounds "search" and "quest", mostly in the use of such synonymic phrases as "in search of" or "in quest of", these two words appear to have different ranges in meaning. The OED does emphasize the possible internalisation of the term "search," but not of "quest." Among other definitions, the OED states that "to search" means "to look through, examine internally (...A receptacle of any kind) in quest of some object concealed or lost." <sup>6</sup>  
As I shall show, this definition describes accurately the situation of Thomas' characters in her fiction. Similarly, our reading of the French Robert Dictionary serves to confirm the difference between "chercher" and "quêter." The former can refer to a mental activity, within the circle of one's mind, while the latter strictly involves some externa(-ised) action. <sup>7</sup>

Because of its association with the circle, the search implies a circular searching process. It is repetitive, and cyclical, it is an imprisonment within and an eventual acceptance of its own reality, i.e. its round femaleness.

These philological preliminaries which have some foundations in the "Imaginary" serve to explain my title, situate my work. Thomas is a female contemporary novelist writing about female characters searching for a female model who happens to be Lewis Carroll's heroine, Alice, and who at the end of her adventures in Wonderland and through the Looking Glass becomes a White Queen. This thesis shall follow the meanderings of Thomas' heroines and Carroll's Alice until their successful crowning as the White Queen and it will further unveil the dimensions of the White Queen as a Great Mother prot-

-otype in the light of a mythocritical approach.

In his two tales Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass,<sup>8</sup> Lewis Carroll is preoccupied with the notions of madness and chaos. The former can be defined as a form of "unruliness," a non-conformity to the accepted or established rules, an incoherence of behaviour and language. The latter may result from madness or it may provoke and/or emphasize madness. These two notions interrelate in Carroll's prose with the motif of the journey undertaken by Alice. The little girl's travel presents the reader with most uncommon, surprising events, characters or sayings. She not only observes her new environment, she participates in its life and organisation. If she first launches into her journey as a Victorian child, at the end of The Looking Glass she is turned into a queen. Her trip is not only a fun-trip for the sake of pleasing herself or the reader; it has a purpose, which however hidden, must be discovered.

Inasmuch as Alice's trip describes a projection into an outer space, its discovery per se and ~~inasmuch~~ as she reaches her goal by becoming a queen, wherefrom she returns safe to her world, the word "quest" is appropriate. Yet, in the sense that Alice sometimes wanders utterly helpless and is bounced from misfortune into misfortune, her "quest" loses its directing force, becomes circular, caught as it is between the walls of Wonderland and the Looking Glass. Also, as the third chapter of the present study will try to demonstrate, her wish to be the White Queen

betrays her longing for acting out a prominent female role. Hence, her quest becomes internalized, rounded, female. It becomes a search.

In Thomas' four novels Songs My Mother Taught Me,<sup>9</sup> Mrs. Blood,<sup>10</sup> Blown Figures,<sup>11</sup> Latakia<sup>12</sup> which shall be treated here in this respective order, the notions of madness and chaos are equally central. They are woven into the story of the heroines who launch into different journeys in the manner of Alice. Even though they duplicate Alice's reactions in the face of the new environment they visit, their trip possesses a more internalized meaning; it is a psychological search that plunges the heroines into the darkest recesses of their mind, and further, into myth. If Alice's search bears some signs of the quest, that of Thomas' characters is exclusively circular and female. Furthermore, if Alice acts out only for a short time the role of the queen, the "Isobels" of Thomas adopt it till the end of time. The narratives of Audrey Thomas' fiction lead her heroines to their triumphant coronation as "White Goddesses," to borrow Robert Graves' terms. Myth is at the core of Thomas' work; it is dimly sketched out in Lewis Carroll's writing.

Thomas' female characters have the habit of talking like some of the creatures of Carroll's Wonderland. For instance, the heroine of Songs, Isobel, sings:

All Things Bright and  
Beu-uu-tee-full  
All Creatures  
Great  
A-and  
Small (p. 35),

which is an imitation of the Mock Turtle's tune:

Beau-ootiful Soo-oop!  
 Beau-ootiful Soo-oop!  
 Soop-oop of the e-e-evening,  
 Beautiful, beautiful soup! (p. 141).

Or Mrs. Blood is obsessed by Alice's fantastic adventures to the point that she dresses her children "as Alice and the White Rabbit for [a] fancy dress parade" (p. 180). In addition, the Isobel of Blown Figures becomes another Alice as she gets on a train trip which may take her back to departure point "as luggage" (p. 219). Thomas' iterated use of Carroll's technique of language or her adaptation of Carrollian scenes and characters to her fiction indicate her deep affinity for the writing and craft of the Victorian writer. The fact that Audrey Thomas chooses Carroll as the informing model for her fiction raises some fundamental questions. Namely, what exists in Carroll's work that fascinates Thomas and renders her own literary enterprise successful? To what exact extent does Thomas follow her model? Or, what, in Thomas' fiction necessitates at the level of structure the use or adaptation of Carroll's writing?

There will be three chapters to this thesis. Chapter one will consider the correspondences that exist between the searches undertaken by Thomas' female characters and their prototype, Alice. Thomas' deliberate intention to create and sustain an analogy between her heroines and Alice will be analyzed throughout her fiction. Also, I shall pay more specific attention to Carroll's and Thomas' parallel development of "role

reversals." In the case of Carroll, the reversal of roles enables Alice to act out her frustrations as a disciplined child. By overthrowing the Queen and taking over power, Alice assumes the role usually played by adults in her world. This eventually enables her to return to her Victorian environment and accept its limitations. Thomas' characters can also alleviate the pressures exerted on them by heavy male powers. Not only do they get rid of their fears, they also proclaim their freedom against men.

In Chapter Two, I wish to deal in particular with the language aspect of both Thomas and Carroll's tales. Following Carroll, Thomas resorts to puns, homophonic ambiguity, neologisms, portmanteau words, etymology, euphemisms, lexical and structural ambiguity, in order to convey the idea that language has deteriorated and fails to express proper communication between human beings. The madness and chaos the reader has discovered in the worlds visited by the different heroines are now emphasized at the linguistic level. The very language spoken by the characters lacks order, meaning, conformity to grammatical rules. Thus, madness is not a differential behaviour, it is also a language that functions in its entirety in our world. Acts as well as speeches or words are out of focus, dis-mantled. Lewis Carroll shows in a humorous fashion the potential dangers of a world such as Wonderland where no one attempts real communication with his fellow man. Audrey Thomas indicates the actual consequences for her characters of inhabiting an entropic universe. The various heroes are on a search for meaning, the literal or figurative meaning of words. Both Carroll and Thomas inscribe their reflections on the nature and degradation of language in

the body of their prose: they meta-write.

In the Third Chapter, I shall approach the works in question by considering the major points of divergence between Carroll and Thomas. On the one hand, while Carroll gives prominence to the present, that of the journey, with its promises of future **excite-**ment, Thomas emphasizes the hovering, nightmarish presence of the past over the life of her heroines. On the other hand, role reversals will be approached, no longer from a socio-historical perspective, but from a mythocritical viewpoint, in order to demonstrate that Blown Figures, Thomas' most experimental novel, can be seen as a mythic narrative, something foreign to Carroll's tales. Finally, I shall give consideration to both the Alice books and Blown Figures from a genre perspective. I shall determine whether the Alice books qualify for the title of "fairy-tale," as Carroll wished to call them and if Blown Figures constitutes a modern type of fairy-tale for adults or grown-up Alices.

This last chapter will bring back into focus the notion of search. Alice has gone in search of the White Queen but has done so only in the limits allowed by the fairy-tale genre. Thomas' Isobel has assimilated the White/Red Queen's functions and characteristics and become the prototype of the Great Mother. Isobel's or Rachel's completed search draw a well defined circle with attached lunar or ouroboric powers.<sup>13</sup> Finally we shall discover that Thomas and Carroll are counter-reflections of each other through the Looking Glass.

Chapter One:  
A View of the Search

The epilogue of Songs recalls Alice's conversation about madness with the Cheshire Cat in Alice's Adventures:

"But I don't want to go among mad people,"  
                                        Alice remarked.  
"Oh, you can't help that,"  
                                        said the Cat,  
"We are all mad here. I'm mad. You're mad."  
"How do you know I'm mad?"  
                                        said Alice.  
"You must be," said the Cat,  
"or you wouldn't have come here" (p. 89).

The passage is also used to introduce Mrs. Blood's story in Mrs. Blood (epigraph), establishing a connection between Mrs. Blood and Alice's Adventures on the one hand, Mrs. Blood and Songs on the other. Blown Figures, Thomas's third novel, is dedicated to both Isobel and Alice, "all the Alices whatever your mothers called you" (epigraph) and captures the adventures of the same character, a few years later, as she undertakes her second trip to Africa. Some of the events in Blown Figures duplicate those in Mrs. Blood which in turn echo those of Songs or of the Alice books.<sup>1</sup> It can then be affirmed that Thomas deliberately constructs an analogy between Carroll's female character, Alice, and her own as she depicts their progression in life from childhood (Songs) to maturity (Mrs. Blood, Blown Figures). Although

Latakia chooses to focus on the more reflective, self-possessed female character Rachel, the novel also contains allusions to some of the characters or events of Alice's Adventures such as the following Cheshire Cat passage: "And this time it was you I saw as the Cheshire Cat, me talking to you across a table at some distant date, and you, just a disembodied head floating a few inches above your soup plate" (p. 20).

Thomas' obsession with Carrollian figures or scenes pervades the whole of her fiction (particularly Blown Figures)<sup>2</sup> to the extent that it raises some fundamental questions in the reader's mind. Why does Thomas, a twentieth-century female writer, choose Carroll, a nineteenth-century male writer, as the particular model for her fiction? In the following pages, I shall attempt to answer this question and show the network of correspondences that exists between the writing of Carroll and Thomas.

What characterizes the universe that Alice enters after her fall down the rabbit hole--which can be seen as marking a brutal, unexpected change in her situation--is uncommonness. The animal-like creatures Alice encounters address her abruptly, prevent her from justifying herself, or contradict her Victorian logic. Because she belongs to an external world based on rules totally different from those of Wonderland, Alice fails to confront adequately the new world that spreads before her. The series of misfortunes she encounters tells the reader of her externality and foreignness to the land of wonder, her confusion in the face of such disorder.<sup>3</sup> In fact, chaos is what rules Wonderland: no one obeys any of the rules prescribed but his own, which is to say that rules everlastingly shift from

one moment or person or place to the next. The croquet game is one of the best illustrations within Alice's Adventures of Alice's failure to comply with the rules that define Wonderland's organization. Alice complains to the Cheshire Cat that the players "all quarrel so dreadfully . . . and they don't seem to have any rules in particular: at least, if there are, nobody attends to them . . . and you've no idea how confusing it is all the things being alive . . ." (p. 13). The traditional definition attached to games (fair competition, chronological arrangement with a beginning and an end, victory of the winner) is totally inapplicable to Wonderland where "players all [play] at once, without waiting for turns, quarrelling all the while" (p. 112). Even the trial that takes place at the end fails to abide by proper legal rules: the King goes by a "most important piece of evidence" which in fact does not have "an atom of meaning in it" (p. 159) or the Queen requests the "sentence first-- verdict afterwards" (p. 161). From Alice's perspective, the reader can assert that the creatures of Wonderland are marked individually or collectively by madness. This madness is illustrated by the fact that they all act either in the absence of rules (including those of proper language communication) or by constantly undoing them.

However, the Cheshire Cat's comment that Alice too is mad enables the reader to view Wonderland, not as an exclusive, alienated world with its own bizarre happenings, but as a metaphor for our world. The land of wonder is the world we inhabit and Carroll's focus on the daily language problems that arise among Wonderland's creatures (due to their poor interpreta-

tion or conveyance of messages) is a reminder to the reader of our own unsuccessful manner of establishing proper relations with our fellow man. Later, in The Looking Glass, Carroll uses the chess game image as another metaphor for life itself.<sup>4</sup> The chaotic rules that define the game indicate that life is ordered by chaos. Collective or individual madness, chaos, the absence or destruction of rules, alienation (due to improper communication) are Carroll's focal points in the Alice books.<sup>5</sup>

They are also prominent in Thomas' writing, a contemporary female writer preoccupied with women's experiences of childbirth, fear and death<sup>6</sup> which are turned into a nightmarish madland because of our lack of adequate words to describe their condition. Our society "euphemizes" women's situation so that they find themselves alienated within a world that has ceased to cohere. Both Thomas and Carroll seem to address a female listener. Whether young (Isobel Cleary, Alice) or old (Mrs. Blood, the heroine of Blown Figures, Rachel in Latakia), Thomas' female protagonists share with Carroll's Alice the same sense of inferiority (here due to youth, there due to a male-oriented view of society), the same desire to break loose from their imprisonment in silence and to confront themselves with a (reversed) mirror-image of the world they inhabit, so as to overthrow the powerful mechanisms that preside over their alienation. Thomas finds in Little Alice the perfect model for her own creation, "Isobel,"<sup>7</sup> in the very sense that Alice shows "Isobel" the path that leads to "role reversals," the mirror-reflection way by which she usurps adult (parental) authority in order to insert herself better into a society in loss of balance, equality or meaning. The journey

Alice undertakes through madness, chaos, foreignness aims at enabling her to gain more understanding of life's arbitrariness (more precisely in her case, adult's arbitrariness at imposing strict rules on children).

To use Carroll's main metaphor, the mirror, Thomas makes of Alice a mirror reflection of "Isobel." As Alice travels through Wonderland or the Looking Glass world our image of her fuses and interchanges with that of "Isobel."<sup>8</sup>

The correspondences between Thomas and Carroll's texts will now be examined. This will enable the reader to retrace the journeys of "Alice/Isobel." Thomas' four novels will be dealt with in an order that is not faithful to their date of publication, but that follows closely the development of the characters from innocence to experience. Songs portrays the childhood and adolescence of Isobel Cleary. Mrs. Blood is the story of the same character, years later as she goes through the process of losing a child. We follow her again on her second trip to Africa in Blown Figures. As for Latakia, it echoes some of the events and concerns of the previous fiction.

In Songs, Isobel is portrayed as a child for whom the summer trips to her grandfather's cottage represent an escape from the boredom of family and city life or her parents' petty quarrels. Very much like Alice, Isobel finds life unexciting and her only joy consists in waiting for the approaching summer. She admits that "the journey to town, like the journey to the woods itself, was almost a religious experience, with us as children and novitiates, recognizing and genuflecting before the

necessary stations of our ecstasy" (p. 21). Similarly, Alice is fascinated by the presence of a white rabbit "with either a waistpocket or a watch to take out of it, and, burning with curiosity, she [runs] across the field after it . . . . In another moment, down [goes] Alice after it" (p. 26). Both little girls launch into their exciting journeys with the joy of running away from their everyday lives: "Alice was beginning to get very tired of sitting by her sister on the bank, and of having nothing to do" (p. 25) while Isobel sometimes talked with her sister "of leaving home, of going to live with Harry" (p. 33).

Thus, Isobel's entrance into "Journey's End" metaphorically reads as her passage down the rabbit hole into the land of wonder which opens before Alice. The cottage in the mountains or Wonderland itself become the mythical locus where time is, according to the young Isobel Cleary, reduced to an "immortal and circular day" (p. 18). To use Eliade's concepts of sacred time and space,<sup>9</sup> everything converges to designate "Journey's End" as the axis mundi the centre where magic partakes of everyday reality, making nature inexhaustible to the point that "blueberry bushes, are still full, as if by magic, in spite of all our picking" (p.20).

Both children's curiosity is challenged to the extent that it reduces the negative impact that some events may have on them. Alice's encounter with unfamiliar or inhospitable characters, her series of misadventures are made easier for her to cope with by the very fact that she travels through an exciting place. Even when she is confronted with an unhappy event, she declares: "I almost wish I hadn't gone down that rabbit hole--and yet--and yet--it's rather curious, you know, this sort of life! . . .

When I used to read fairy tales, I fancied that kind of thing never happened, and now here I am in the middle of one!"

(pp. 58 - 59). As Isobel comes of age, she avows with nostalgia the charm that the "golden thread of [past] summer[s]" (p. 134) exerted on her youth:

Like a legendary drowning man, I began to relive it all again. Looking back, I saw what seemed to be an endless succession of golden summers. Felt myself running again through pine and tamarack, . . . running until the soles of our feet were on fire and then, still running, quenching our legs in the lake (p. 133).

Alice herself will in time "remember her own child life, . . . the happy summer days . . . [and] the dream of Wonderland of long ago" (p. 164).

However, Wonderland or "Journey's End" do not necessarily equate with perfection or easiness. On the contrary, they present some negative aspects with which the children try to cope. Since the place they visit is new to them its signs appear as new. Alice often falls victim to interpreting the meaning of a sign in relation to the traditional meaning attached to signs in her own Victorian world. She believes the words "eat me" written on a small cake to be meant for her and eats the cake (p. 33). As a consequence of her mistake, she gets into difficulty by "opening out like the largest telescope that ever was" (p. 35). She has to learn that Wonderland is an altogether different universe from her own where "everything is out of the way" (p. 41). Later, after drinking from a bottle which is not meant for her, she is "punished" by "growing and grow<sub>ing</sub>" (p. 57). Similarly, Isobel Cleary, in her childhood years,

misreads the sign "Journey's End." Instead she only knows "that every summer, for as far back as [she] could rember, [they] had packed up . . . and gone to spend the summer in the mountains" (p. 17). She interprets the sign to her own advantage as signifying "Journey's Beginning." Only much later, when she first experiences the reality of the insane asylum, does she comprehend the delusive nature of words in a "new" environment: "I cursed the fates that made Harry grow old and cautious . . . made me seventeen and helpless . . . I refused to go and see Harry who had betrayed me" (p. 134). Ironically enough, Harry has done everything but betray her. On the contrary, he has attempted to teach her about the literal meaning of words and the reality of life—that is, the impossibility of escaping from the temporal progression. "Journey's End" is a metaphor for the end of life which the reader can foresee in the inevitable death of Isobel's once god, Harry (p. 206). Blinded by her experience of newness and foreignness, Isobel or Alice fail to grasp the true meaning of signs.

Furthermore, both Alice and Isobel are afraid of the passing of time. Alice expresses her anguish in amusing terms: "Shall I never get any older than I am now? That'll be a comfort, one way--never to be an old woman-but then--always to have lessons to learn! Oh, I shouldn't like that!" (p. 59). As for Isobel, she is much more aware of the passage of time which is corollary to her fear of death. She constantly repeats to herself: "Isobel you are dying faster than the day" (pp. 18, 33). Neither Alice nor Isobel are endowed with the power to control the temporal progression. Even Harry, who knows how to "take clocks

apart and put them back together" (p. 92) eventually grows old and pronounces the terrifying words: "If I should die this year ..." (p. 206). The progression of Kronos--at the expense of the mythical tempus in which Isobel has lived for a while at Harry's place--leads her to the doors of the asylum which, because of its intrinsic chaos, makes her identify and blink "like Alice down the rabbit hole" (p. 145). The closing passage of Songs which quotes Alice's discussion with the Cheshire Cat serves to situate Isobel Cleary in her new environment, the mad, chaotic ward 88, another Wonderland. Hence Songs describes two different types of journey undertaken by the heroine. The one to Harry's mountain place reads as an Alice-like trip in which Isobel seeks fun and newness.<sup>10</sup> The other to the insane asylum becomes central in its relation to Wonderland in the very sense that madness and chaos--which are Wonderland's most prominent features--pervade the wards of the asylum. In other words, Isobel Cleary's entrance into this mad world not only marks her entrance into experience, but also serves to stress heavily her departure, deviation from Harry's world, or for that matter Alice's fairyland. If Carroll views Alice's environment as a marvelous place (despite its potential dangers), Thomas centers on the reality and immediacy of these dangers in real life and Isobel's mature world turns into a ghostly reality.

With Mrs. Blood, the analogy is further developed between Alice and Mrs. Blood. In this novel, Thomas emphasizes more significantly the resemblance between Mrs. Blood's and Alice's personalities. The former declares: "Some days my name is Mrs. Blood; some days it's Mrs. Thing" (p. 11) or "Sometimes the

unreal me was followed by . . . slightly perfumed Indians . . . but the real me walked alone along a sunless beach" (p. 180). Likewise, Carrol says of Alice that "this curious child [is] very fond of pretending to be two people" (p. 33). He further stresses her identity dilemma:

Let me think: was I the same when I got up this morning? . . . but if I'm not the same, the next question is ' "Who in the world am I?" Ah, that's the great puzzle! . . . I'm sure I'm not Ada . . . and I'm sure I can't be Mabel . . . she's she, and I'm I and--oh dear, how puzzling it all is! (pp. 37-38).

Due to her constant changes in size, Alice at times feels dislocated.<sup>11</sup> She exclaims:

"Good bye, feet!" (for when she looked down at her feet, they seemed to be almost out of sight, they were getting so far off). "Oh, my poor little feet, I wonder who will put on your shoes and stockings for you now, dears? . . . I must be kind to them . . . or perhaps they won 't walk the way I want to go! Let me see. I'll give them a new pair of boots every Christmas" (p. 35).

This scene springs to Mrs. Blood's mind when she is in her hospital room: "My feet seem terribly far away and most unreliable in relation to the heaviness which seems to envelop the rest of me. I remember Alice's debate about how she would send Christmas presents to her feet" (p. 121).

In addition, once in the hospital, she becomes aware that on her boat trip to Africa she (unconsciously) dressed her children "as Alice and the White Rabbit for the fancy dress parade" (p. 180). The excitement of launching into a new world made her misread the signs scattered on her way which were forewords

of an impending disaster provided she could "decipher" them. Unfortunately, Mrs. Blood, like Isobel, or for that matter Alice, admits her past failure at reading the inherent message of signs:

All the signs were there from the beginning if only we had stopped to think. A dead man on each boat . . . . And at LeHavre a rope snapped off a capstan with a terrible crack. That too. . . . So, first a dead man and then a broken rope, And then another dead man . . . . How could we have been so stupid? . . . . It was simply part of the romance and mystery of the whole adventure . . . . It was just another thrill (pp. 18 - 21).

Her fascination for discovering the African land into which she wants to "dive"<sup>12</sup> (p. 155)--as Alice does into the rabbit hole --prevents her from evaluating her journey for what it is: a real trip to a foreign land with its mysteries and dangers. Instead, Mrs. Blood chooses to identify with Alice on her incredible journey, so that anything that may happen "out of the way" becomes part of the whole adventure. Just as Alice can watch the Queen behead her enemies (pp. 105 - 17) without being emotionally affected, Mrs. Blood can watch the dead bodies being carried out of the boat without turning an eye (p. 19). As she says: "Once you're well and truly down the rabbit hole nothing seems incredible" (p. 19).

Thus, the heroine of Thomas' second novel mistakes Africa for Wonderland and pays a heavy price for the illusion, by losing her child. In other words, Thomas departs again partially from her Carrollian model in the sense that she points out to the reader her heroine's errors. Mrs. Blood, unlike Alice's Adventures describes the overlapping of two journeys, the one to Africa undertaken by the main character with her family--and

which I shall call the "Alice-like" trip due to Mrs. Blood's identification with Alice --and the actual journey of the character through pain and death in an African hospital. If the character has first confused Africa for Wonderland she is however right to view the hospital itself as a wonderland of madness. For the most informing features of Wonderland are not--as Alice or Isobel or Mrs. Blood first believed--newness and fun, but madness and destructive chaos. Carroll chooses to deal humorously with these notions although he is perfectly aware that they are inherent parts of reality. Thomas' characters have misread Alice's Adventures, giving in to the illusion that all that happens to Alice is easy. The author thus corrects this misleading Carrollian approach to life by making her characters undertake a second journey in which they come--through a painful experience --to a better understanding of their past errors and confusion. While Mrs. Blood experiences the death of her child, she becomes aware of the significance of the word "end," something she never suspected before because of her Alice-like view of journeying: "I see the tunnel now for what it really was--and yet I thought then it was really the beginning" (emphasis added, p. 34).

Whether on the spatial or temporal levels, journeying is composed of a beginning and an end; the oblivion--or denial--of one of its elements (a perversion of the concept of journey) can only lead to disaster.<sup>13</sup> In the fairy-tale adventure of Alice, the heroine is not severely punished for her oblivion or misunderstanding. On the contrary, in Thomas' prose, Isobel or Mrs. Blood or the main character of Blown Figures are heavily penalized for their fear, ignorance or refusal to acknowledge

the passage of time.

Hence, with Mrs. Blood, Thomas aims at teaching "all the Alices" about the mad reality of life and the impossibility of escaping into fairyland.<sup>14</sup>

Blown Figures is dedicated to both Isobel and Alice. As in Audrey Thomas' previous fiction, the analogy drawn between the main character and Lewis Carroll's heroine serves to suggest that we are dealing again with the same character as in Songs and Mrs. Blood and therefore it emphasizes the sense of unity of character Thomas wishes to propose. I have also pointed to Ms. Thomas' conscious repetitions of scenes from Mrs. Blood in Songs.<sup>15</sup> The same can be said of Blown Figures: references are made in the novel to both the Isobel Cleary of Songs (p. 285) and to the adult narrator of Mrs. Blood.<sup>16</sup> Besides, one of the epigraphs to Blown Figures, a quotation from Sir Thomas Browne, reveals the function of Africa as a metaphor for the mind's unsuspected possibilities, the unconscious, an element already present in Mrs. Blood.<sup>17</sup>

Allusions (under the form of direct quotations or scenes) to Lewis Carroll's Alice books pervade Audrey Thomas' Blown Figures. In this fiction, however, she relies more and more heavily on Through the Looking Glass as it serves her purpose more appropriately than Alice's Adventures. Queens abound in the Alice books. Some are pleasant, compassionate creatures (p. 125), others are pitiless, such as the Queen who wishes to behead her enemies. Thomas warns Isobel and the reader against "Queens who never make bargains!" (p. 121), suggesting "we are

all the White Queen's pawn" (p. 126). She is the one who sets the rules and has the power to destroy the game whenever she feels like it.<sup>18</sup> But one cannot forget either that at the end, both of Alice's Adventures and The Looking Glass, Alice herself becomes a queen with the powers pertaining to that rank.

Isobel is very often compared to Alice as she progresses in her journey inland. The idea that Thomas' character moves in a looking glass world is directly expressed by a quotation from Lewis Carroll: "Oh what fun it'll be, when they see me through the glass in here and can't get at me!" (p. 128). In fact, one can surmise that some of the "steps" Alice takes across the giant chessboard find an echo in Blown Figures. Isobel may be said to encounter Humpty Dumpty, one of Lewis Carroll's interesting characters (p. 124) or the white and black kittens (p. 129). Furthermore, Isobel can get angry the way Alice does in a fit of impatience. Thomas states that "Isobel . . . saw herself breaking out, throwing plates, pulling on the faded tablecloth so that all came crashing down" (p. 220). Alice's misadventure as she gets on the train (pp. 217 ff) is reproduced in Blown Figures as the stubborn Isobel refuses to pay more for the train ticket; the Guard whose anger she arouses appears as a scolding adult figure (p. 143). Alice receives from "the gentleman dressed in white paper" (p. 219) a kind warning, a gentleness also found in the mysterious character who offers to help Isobel by paying her train fare (p. 144). In fact Isobel's train ride is that of Alice as we can read: "Poor Isobel, you'll have to go back from here as luggage!" (p. 307), a statement uttered by one of the passengers (the Goat) on Alice's train ride (p. 219).

Martin Gardner comments that Alice's journey through the Looking Glass world represents the steps which--as a pawn--she must cross in order to move to the next square.<sup>19</sup> The above allusions to Isobel's "Alice-like" trip enable us to make a similar statement about her: her train ride carries her to the next square on the gigantic chessboard that inland Africa suddenly designates, and the reader may try to integrate her chess moves with the story. The journey through Africa which Isobel undertakes becomes enriched by a new association: the chess game imagery.<sup>20</sup> Journeying through Africa equates with making moves on a chessboard in order to reach the other side where the successful pawn becomes queen. According to the logic of Lewis Carroll's chess game in The Looking Glass, once the white pawn (Alice) gets to the other side, she captures the Red Queen, ensuring the victory of the white pieces over the red ones. Martin Gardner reveals the "faint moral" to Alice's victory in the sense that "the white pieces are good . . . characters in contrast to the fierce vindictive temperaments of the red pieces" (emphasis added).<sup>21</sup> However, as soon as Alice becomes queen, she lets her temper explode in a fit of rage directed at the Red Queen whom she fiercely seizes and punishes (p. 336). And despite the fact that her original colour is white, her ferocious attitude toward the Red Queen indicates that she herself has put on the ( red ) "vindictive" attributes of her opponent.<sup>22</sup> Since Audrey Thomas draws a strong analogy of character and situation between Blown Figures and The Looking Glass, it may be profitable to examine the treatment the Can-

adian writer gives her heroines. In this respect, a Jungian approach to Thomas' novel will enable the reader to situate the exact place and function of Isobel. <sup>23</sup>

As in Mrs. Blood, the heroine suffers from a sense of fragmentation. The author explains:

She was dissolving again. Her arm . . . had detached itself and taken on a life of its own, a separateness which terrified her . . . it was not her arm but someone else's arm . . . soon it would be her legs that would go funny, her other arm, her body . . .  
(p. 227). <sup>24</sup>

This description reminds the reader of Alice's change of size after eating a cake (p. 35). And again, as in Mrs. Blood, the boat trip to Africa announces the beginning of her search.

For the reader to conceive of Isobel's journey as a water-journey, through the unconscious, back to the origin of her loss or fear is a task made easy for him by Audrey Thomas' conspicuous use of Jungian concepts. One can easily follow on a map the different stages in Isobel's trip through Africa: Kumasi, the city where her child dies (p. 110), Timbuctu, Dakar (p. 115), a train trip (p. 138) which may take her to Bamako (p. 145), a crossing of borders (p. 160) the taxi-gare at Ouagadougou (p. 164), the crossing of the Volta River (p. 459), then the arrival at an old village (p. 509) where a ritual of exorcism is practised by an African priest on the white woman. However, this device of enabling the reader to locate geographically the places which Isobel crosses serves only as a pretext to divert momentarily the reader's attention from what constitutes in fact Isobel's "real" trip. What is real (and we are here at the

heart of the "Looking Glass" world where everything becomes actual, though in fact unreal, for an objective, reasonable observer) is the journey as a water-journey undertaken by Isobel to get rid of her "demons" (p. 33). In fact, as we progress further inland with the character, "paradoxically" we encounter more water until the water image becomes overpowering toward the end of the novel.

The image of the water journey is introduced early in the novel by the following passage: "Having made up their minds to the journey, they were as twigs upon the water; they must let the journey take them where it would" (p. 115). At the level of Jungian interpretation, it reads as an exemplification of the power of the unconscious to take over what is left of consciousness and submerge it. For this reason, the character encounters the peril of drowning and death. As the character is warned many times against the "depth" of the river (pp. 163, 377) its increasing "wideness" (p. 207), the water becomes charged with negative connotations. The mysterious river that will later be called by its real name, the Volta (p. 471), is described as a "gray water" of a "strange grey color" with "dead trees" floating along its course (p. 461). It is referred to as the mysterious "Quarra river" (p. 351), which becomes in the reader's imagination another name for Styx, the underworld river guarded by Charon (p. 462) which one crosses never to return. Ms. Thomas's description fits the reader's imagination: "the landscape was . . . almost surreal. Tops of dead trees stuck out of the water like withered drowned arms, the flesh collapsed and wrinkled . . . there was no sign of a ferry coming from the other

side" (p. 461). It is not surprising that water as a metaphor for the unconscious has such associations with death, when one thinks of Jung's writing about the inherent danger for the western mind in losing consciousness. The psychologist believes the Eastern mind perfectly capable of "diving" into the unconscious and coming back to "reality" while he warns Western men about the possibility of death pertaining to such an experience.<sup>25</sup> Audrey Thomas uses the semantic iteration of the water imagery as a leitmotif, a rhythm and a warning.

Isobel has to cross the river in order to reach the village (the sacred centre); she has to abandon herself first to the powers of the unconscious before being able to undergo an exorcism (pp. 509 ff). The trajectory of her trip registers a curve inwards (rather than outwards), toward the center of creation, the nucleus (here the egg), putting her into contact with the lost child (p. 514). And it seems that all the paths Isobel has followed only lead her "back to a single point . . . to the mandala" which is the center, "the exponent of all paths."<sup>26</sup> The text reads as follows: "she was no longer afraid . . . 'I have journeyed here,' she said, 'to get my destiny changed' " (pp. 521, 524). In other words, it looks as if the exorcism has enabled Isobel to regain her self-hood and her child.

Unfortunately, the end of Thomas' novel does not reveal such an easy solution to the problem. The reader is presented with two different versions of the exorcism scene. In the first version, "the dead baby began to cry helplessly and root at its dead mother's empty breasts" and "the old man came forward again and

spat in Isobel's open and howling mouth. Then there was nothing but blackness before her eyes" (p. 514). In the second one

she was a witch, there was no doubt about . . . The witch stole the wombs of women and the penises of men. Crops failed; women aborted. A child was born with two heads. Hard times fell upon the village. Isobel remained elsewhere (p. 525).

The reader is left with an utter sense of destruction, the egg being broken,<sup>27</sup> wholeness being forever unachievable. Instead of seeing her destiny changed for the better, it is changed for the worst. She is said to eat "the child in her womb" (p. 518), and the priest admits: "It is too late, Isobel. The witches have eaten up your Kra" (p. 524). It is also noteworthy that the colour "white" that characterizes her at the beginning of the exorcism ritual (p. 514) changes progressively to red, an element emphasized in my analysis of Alice. Red, the colour of blood and sin here is strongly connected with witchcraft: "she dreamt that someone brought her some red firewood and asked her to help light it, but she was frightened by its redness and refused" (p. 517). The same firewood is shortly after used again: "In their clay fireplace they put a human finger for firewood and they pour blood on it, but what they do to make it catch on fire I do not know" (p. 536). Isobel turns into a witch because the exorcism has failed.<sup>28</sup> All his life and in his writing, Jung revered the sacred and strived to reach "the mandala which represents the monad, and corresponds to the microcosmic nature of the psyche."<sup>29</sup> However, he was perfectly aware of the possibility of a failure. Such a failure is contained in Thomas' novel. Thomas has submitted to the conception of time as the destroyer of the sacred,

as the novel's postscript indicates: "Time! You monstrous mole. Why are you doing this to me?" (p. 547). What the drums ceaselessly repeat in the final exorcism scene is "Mmere dane dane Mmere dane dane--Times change change" (p. 522), a phrasing about the inevitability of the passing of time and Isobel's degradation through time. This is perhaps what characterizes most strikingly Thomas' fiction: her concern for the notion of permanence (expressed by narrative circularity) and its destruction by an all-devouring Kronos.

Blown Figures draws a closer analogy between Alice and Isobel than the two other novels and we discover that Alice and Isobel are capable of wickedness and violence. Nevertheless, Isobel appears as a pawn in Thomas' hands in the same way Alice is one for Carroll. Both female characters represent the medium by which the narrative is performed<sup>30</sup> and as such have no other reality than that of a device, a "figure of speech." One must recall Lewis Carroll's technique of inventing and adding new stories to Alice's first adventures "on the way" in order to prolong the entertainment of his little audience and that of Thomas who declares: "According to the artist, the matto did not follow fixed rules but tended to make them up as he went along; he also had the power to destroy the game" (p. 384). She also declares: "I can do anything I want with Isobel . . . frozen like this, as in a snapshot, we pause for a minute to examine the scene" (pp. 140-41).<sup>31</sup> Isobel's adventures resemble Alice's through the Looking Glass world and express the deeper reality of narrative as a mechanism of embedding.<sup>32</sup>

Latakia, Audrey Thomas' last novel, contains a few Carrollian elements. The first page of the novel opens on the description of a Crete landscape and "a giant chess game outside Zorba's bar" (p. 15). The game imagery borrowed from Carroll sustains one of the dominant aspects of Rachel's relationship with Michael. The latter is said to be making the rules (pp. 63, 153) while the narrator is progressively drawn towards madness and absurdity (pp. 65, 168). The world that surrounds Rachel lacks so much order that she sometimes confuses the other characters with Carroll's famous figures. At times, Hester appears to Rachel as "the cat in Alice in Wonderland" (p. 19) but on another occasion Michael is the one that looks like "the Cheshire Cat" (p. 20). In her mental and narrative reconstruction of the past, Rachel becomes capable of identifying herself with Alice and thus dissociating herself from the past 'reality' of her relationship with Michael/Hester. This process, which is one of Thomas' structural devices, enables the heroine to re-situate her love affair. If the narrator's book was meant to be a story about a relationship, it eventually turns out to be a book about a 'landscape.' For what matters to Rachel is not so much "the Relationship, the PROBLEM" (p. 21) as writing. In this sense, Crete and the villagers, every minute, trivial incident becomes part of the texture of the work. And the lovers only integrate it as "just part of the landscape--they are shape, tone, movement or lack of it), not STORY. The trees and rocks are just as important" (p. 30).<sup>33</sup> Similarly, Alice tends to lose her centrality as her adventures get intricately combined with those of the

inhabitants of Wonderland or the Looking Glass world. She is, to use Thomas' image, "just part of the landscape."

However, this is not to suggest that Alice has no power; if she appears to be tossed around on the Queen's croquet ground or during the tea-party, for instance, she eventually gains power over the dominant figures of Wonderland or the Looking Glass world. This reversal of roles also characterizes Rachel's situation towards Michael/Hester. The novel depicts her progressive, deliberate detachment from a man who once looked like a god to her (p. 33), but who eventually became an obstacle to her art (p. 73). The topic of Latakia is not some autobiographical material concerning Rachel/Thomas' ménage à trois with 'Michael' but the attachment and devotion of someone to a demanding art: novel writing (p. 124). Against the pseudo-mythical background of Crete life with its tradition of women's servitude to man, Rachel stands alone (p. 132) after rejecting the roles: "Man of the House and Little Woman" (p. 43). Latakia is the narrative of a deconstruction, that of a male-oriented tradition that fails to see "all the great female powers." "In the beginning Europe had no gods, only goddesses" (p. 49), and yet the tradition Michael descends from is based on the belief that "the great god Pan" is still alive when in fact he is not (p. 90). Thus, the Alice motif which runs through Latakia plays an important function in regards to the reader's understanding of Rachel's adventures.

By crossing the frontier between the concrete and fictive worlds, Alice must be prepared to meet any extraordinary event.

It is the privilege of fiction to open the doors to imagination and dream. The reversal of rules<sup>34</sup> that the fall into the rabbit hole provides enables Carroll's or Thomas' characters to see madness as actuality. If Isobel Cleary in Songs discovers from a foreign perspective the chaotic reality of the asylum, where there are no rules, except those fleeting ones made up by Carrollian figures, Mrs. Blood or Thomas' other characters experience that madness in their own lives through their dissociating encounter with pain and loss. Furthermore, madness is not only a "type" of behaviour, it is also an autonomous code/language inaccessible to the non-initiate, but perfectly comprehensible for the one who uses it. Thomas and Carroll both offer to the reader a wide variety of examples which illustrate this latter point and which will be developed fully in the second chapter of the present study.

Throughout this analysis, I have emphasized the function of madness and chaos in Thomas' and Carroll's writings. The development of these points of concern in their fiction is closely dependent on the fact that the main character is in all cases a female one, who manages to perform a reversal of situation to her advantage precisely by using madness and chaos which man has traditionally attributed to the female. Alice's "unbecoming" triumph (as a well-behaved child) over the Red Queen or Isobel's metamorphosis into a witch are good examples of role reversals successfully achieved by female protagonists with the help of 'disorder.' A brief historical survey of female symbolic inversion is therefore appropriate here for the reader to notice the affinity of Thomas for

Carroll.

Women's disorderliness is a recognized, accepted part of human history, which the feminist movements have exploited and adapted to their purpose in order to propagate women's liberation. Natalie Zemon Davies traces in her article, "Women on top: Symbolic Sexual Inversion and Political Disorder in Early Modern Europe,"<sup>35</sup> the history of women's wildness back to the Garden of Eden, then through a male-oriented European society to our modern times. She emphasizes the fact that the female position in society has, at all times, been used to symbolize hierarchical subordination, but also violence and chaos.<sup>36</sup> The topos of women on top, mastering male monsters, is traditionally viewed as a most enjoyable type of sexual inversion (switches in sex roles) a form of culture play that expresses the inner turmoils of an oppressed society longing for change and revolution. In other words, the function of the unruly woman is to express a temporary release from traditional and stable hierarchy and may favour a change in the basic distribution of power within society.<sup>37</sup> Thus, the disorderly woman becomes the embodiment of the social critic. These elements can serve to inform adequately Thomas' and Carroll's fiction.

Inasmuch as the internal situation of the Alice books is viewed as a reproduction of the conflicts of Carroll's time between adult authority and the world of childhood, the closing episodes of both Alice's Adventures and The Looking Glass witness Alice's assuming control of the situation, of power (she, after all, has become queen) and her decision to judge the Red Queen proportionally

to her mischief. This sound and safe fashion of letting Alice's growing frustration in the face of political authority and tyranny burst into a fit of destructive rage and turn into an effective vengeance (the Red Queen is squeezed into a kitten) embodies the type of "symbolic inversion" I have just described. Alice's (female) disorderliness and rebellion bring about a "temporal release from temporal hierarchy." Accordingly, the distribution of power exemplified in the world of Wonderland is drastically reversed by Alice as she gets "on top." Her success is an outlet for the frustration of the weak (here the child) confronted by the powerful (the Red Queen).

It is also important and relevant to bear in mind that if Alice (child) upsets the socio-political order of Wonderland (authority), freeing herself from subordination, the Red King (male) is perhaps the one who dreamt it, namely who dreamt the overthrow of the Red Queen (female). From a historical perspective this reversal characterizes the reality of the Victorian era as a matriarchal society under the governing of a powerful figure. Yet, from a psychoanalytical vantage point, it reads as the projection of a frustration and it serves to cast an interesting light on the nature of the king's (Carroll's) identification with a child, his submission to authoritative powers and concomitant revolt on the one hand, and the king's (Carroll's) dislike of queens (women) on the other, a fact well known to Carrollian critics. In this sense, Alice appears as one of the writer's spokesmen and masks.

With the same perspective in mind, we can say, then, that the

female characters of the female writer Audrey Thomas, display a propensity for reversing efficiently their roles towards men. Isobel Cleary has a sexual experience in which she enjoys herself while her partner keeps his desire under control. Mrs. Blood betrays both Jason and Richard, the heroine of Blown Figures "sleeps with other men" but denies her unfaithfulness and disappears instead of coming back to Jason, i.e., as a submissive, apologetic cured wife. The Rachel of Latakia sheds Michael like an old skin after cunningly hurting his pride by comparing him to a small dog: "What a small dog in such a big box" (p. 22). The overall impression that Thomas' female characters are the innocent victims of their male partners is intentionally misleading. The writer breaks the conventional molds of the relationship between man and woman and liberates her heroines from overpowering, unjustified bonds. But since woman's sexual unruliness is also symbolic of sociopolitical disorder, her triumph eventually signifies a release from social frustrations, not to mention rigid societal structures. The deviance of Thomas' and Carroll's characters serves to make tolerable, on the collective level, the imposed order of society; also, on a personal level, it helps to make their dramatic situation more acceptable. Alice--as one of Carroll's masks--accepts her deficiencies and physical or psychological shortcomings while Isobel--as Thomas' mask--manages to cope with her motherly guilt and her marriage breakdown. As outsiders, Alice or "the Isobels" of Thomas have found in the male/female role reversal something that "gives their outsider-ness a name." That naming, Bruce Jackson stresses, "permits them

to survive." <sup>38</sup>

Accordingly, the affinities between Thomas' and Carroll's fiction may lie in this unique attempt at naming a certain outsiderness, their characters' (or their own) in life.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, both writers are quite unique in their treatment of madness or communication failure from a linguistic perspective. Studies have been written on the semiotic aspect of Carroll's writings. In the second chapter of this thesis I shall draw parallels between Carroll's and Thomas' texts from this particular angle and show the prominence of Thomas' concern for language in her writings.

## Chapter Two

### Language Play in Thomas: The Wonderland of Words

All fresh is glass and shatters at the touch of a  
barbarian finger

I am Syrious. We are all alike

And I can still remember . . . Jack . . . standing  
outside the New trying to decide . . .

Confronted with these passages from Thomas' fiction the reader faces the choice either of concluding that they are printing errors (one expects something other than "fresh" in the first case, "Syrian" or "serious" but not "Syrious" in the second case and at least a noun to follow "the New" in the third one) or nonsensical statements. However, these are not without precedent in the literary tradition, when one recalls for instance the writing of James Joyce.<sup>2</sup> In fact, at times Audrey Thomas borrows Joyce's parody of religious ritual as in the following passage: "And Rosie is the riveter who nailed me there as a totem in front of the door. And he said why seek ye a living among the bread. He is not here; he has risen."<sup>3</sup> However, Joyce has been preceded, at least in the English literary tradition, by Lewis Carroll who, as I have shown in the first chapter of this study, has exerted a strong influence on Audrey Thomas. Robert Sutherland's extensive analysis of the language in Lewis

Carroll's tales has served to demonstrate Carroll's "serious concern with the nature and functions of linguistic signs, and with the language phenomena that create obstacles to communication."<sup>4</sup> Thus, in Alice's Adventures, the Duchess states: "Never imagine yourself not to be otherwise than what it might appear to others that what you were or might have been was not otherwise than what you had been would have appeared to them to be otherwise" (p. 122). The syntax of this statement is so confused by repetitions of negative constructions that Alice remains baffled and therefore fails to understand its meaning. Similarly, one comes across the following paragraph in Blown Figures which, needless to say, echoes some of Lewis Carroll's experiments with sentence structure.

If you want to buy a thing when you come to the market, whether a horse, or an ass, or cow, or camel, or ram, or goat, or hen, or guinea-fowl, or ostrich, or mule, or of the nature of clothes, or a burnous, or cloak, or tobe with ornamental hems, or strips of cloth, or a second-hand shirt, or a cap, or trousers, or wide-legged trousers, or cloth, or a striped shawl, or any implement of work, or a saddle or stirrup, or girth, or saddle cloth, or bit of reins, or spurs or some thing you wish to buy ——? (p. 439)

I propose in this chapter to demonstrate Thomas' thorough knowledge of Lewis Carroll's technique of language by bringing to light the linguistic elements in her fiction.<sup>5</sup>

On many occasions in the Alice books, Lewis Carroll resorts to punning which he sees as a "Victorian vice." It is well here to define a pun as a "verbal joke . . . created by the conscious use of an equivocal word to produce an ambiguity."<sup>6</sup> Sutherland further specifies:

~~This~~ word will have at least two distinct meanings, each of which will profoundly affect the meaning of the total utterance. For the joke to be successful, the ambiguity of the key word must be recognized, the alternative meanings of both the word and the utterance must be isolated ~~and~~ then juxtaposed in the interpreter's mind.<sup>7</sup>

When studying puns in Thomas' writing I shall abide by this definition of punning.

In Alice's Adventures, misinterpretation of the equivocal word "more" causes an argument between Alice and the Hatter (p. 101). In The Looking Glass, the same happens between Alice and Humpty Dumpty due to their different interpretation of the word "why" (p. 263) or again, between Alice and the White Knight about the word "off" (p. 314). There is no way to avoid a misunderstanding if one of the characters fails to know the other meaning(s) of the uttered word, since there exists only one possible pronunciation for each of these words. Whether "why" has a causal sense or merely means "for what purpose,"<sup>8</sup> its phonetic transcription remains [wai].

In Thomas, puns are also used to create a sense of confusion and a difficulty at establishing proper communication. For instance, the word "can" may be a modal verb or a familiar word for washroom. Because the receiver refuses to acknowledge the first meaning of the word, the issuing conversation in Mrs. Blood becomes a Carrollian debate: " 'Can I call my husband?' (And the voice of the second grade teacher, 'Of course you can. What you mean is may I go to the washroom.') 'I will call him.' " (p. 48). However, the parentheses here indicate Thomas' deliberate inclusion of a past event (the answer of her ex-teacher) in

order to pinpoint her present awareness of the punning nature of "can." 9

The word "kid" possesses an equally equivocal nature since it may refer either to the goat's offspring or to a human infant. Thomas exploits the ambiguity particularly well in Blown Figures when she states repeatedly: "A goat here has given birth to a three-legged kid . . ." (p. 58), "Her child was dead . . . her little goat escaped . . ." (p. 34), and "The child was dead . . . my little goat escaped" (p. 93).<sup>10</sup> Again the author is aware of the existence of at least two meanings to this word and she further emphasizes the shift of meaning it assumes in the narrator's confused mind by using the verb "escaped" which is applicable to both animal or child behavior.

As she lies on her hospital bed, Mrs. Blood ponders over the falseness of her relationship with Jason:

I lie  
 You lie  
     Come love lie  
     beside me lie  
 Your lies  
     Beside me . . .  
 How many lies, then,  
 have we laid together  
     Come (pp. 172-73).

Thomas interweaves skilfully both meanings of "lie" from "to tell lies" and "to lie down" to denounce her character's bitterness at the pretense of love.

In each case examined above, Thomas proves to be perfectly aware of the nature of words to be equivocal and thus misunderstood. But unlike Carroll who largely uses puns to create a

humorous effect, Thomas does so to enforce irony. The only example of a pun produced for the mere sake of joking one may note in Thomas' novels is to be found in Mrs. Blood: "We sat all afternoon in the Place of the Two Fish" (emphasis added, p. 65), which may read as a location but may sound as "in the place of the two fish" (no capitals).

If misunderstanding or ambiguity may be created out of an equivocal word, it may also arise from playing with homophones, "different words which sound the same."<sup>11</sup> In this case, the type of lexical ambiguity produced depends on speech as it is quite impossible to catch the sound of a written word.<sup>12</sup> Lewis Carroll resorts to this device in Alice's Adventures, the most famous example being that of the tale/tail [teɪl] conversation between Alice and the mouse (p. 50). The result of such confusion is another misunderstanding also based on homophonic ambiguity. The text reads: "I had not!" cried the mouse, sharply and very angrily. 'A knot!' said Alice, already to make herself useful . . . 'Oh, let me help to undo it!' " (p. 52). Precisely because the negation 'not' is orally emphasized, it appears phonetically in its "strong form" as [nɒt] which is also the transcription for "knot." Hence, communication breaks down between the two characters with the mouse feeling insulted "by [Alice] talking such nonsense!" (p. 52).

One can evaluate the effect produced by such sound confusion in Carroll's tales to range from comic to grave, with an emphasis on the part of the author on the humorous aspect. If Audrey Thomas also uses homophonic ambiguity the instances remain

scarce. One may quote from Mrs. Blood a piece of nonsense partly based on the homophonic ambiguity of write/right [raɪt]: "It is very meat and write to do so" (p. 212), when the intended meaning may have been: "It is very meet and right to do so." Contrarily to Carroll, Ms. Thomas does not give out the two terms that create the ambiguity. Her purpose is to let the reader discover for himself the origin of the nonsense (the existence of an identically pronounced word spelt "right," for instance), forcing him into comprehending the fragility of human communication based on language and thus understanding better the nature of her character's bafflement in the face of the extraordinary events with which she copes. The other instance of homophonic ambiguity in Thomas' novel, Songs, may engender ridicule. To the question "Jenny who?" corresponds the answer "Jennytalía" (p. 196). Both the personal name "Jenny" and the first part of the word "genitalia" are pronounced [dʒɛni]. One can only infer that Thomas sees the last name "Talía" as pronounced identically to the latter part of "genitalia," i.e. [teɪliə]. If this play on sound here may seem gratuitous and be considered as bad taste, it is enough to recall that every phone book has its "Jewell, Princess, Cockburn, Krapp, Pear," to name but a few! Abnormality, if ever, is part of our daily existence.

When Alice examines the possibility of her being on the other side of the globe "among people that walk with their heads downwards," the word that springs to her mind is "The Antipathies" (p. 28), which obviously indicates the little girl's lack of

knowledge of geographical terms. The context fortunately points to the correct word "antipodes." If the spelling of the former is quite distinct from the spelling of the latter, their pronunciation is almost identical: [æen'tipəθiz] vs [æen'tipədi:z]. The difference is only one of vowel length (i/i:) and consonantal difference (dental fricative/alveolar plosive).<sup>13</sup> Such a mistake can only provoke the reader's amusement. Similar errors in pronunciation and spelling are encountered among the Canadian writer's characters.

Thomas quotes the newscaster's use of a neologism "murrying" for "murdering" and "disgusted" [dis'gəstid] for "discussed" [dis'kəst]. In the first example, the sense of the utterance is not particularly affected by mispronunciation, though it clearly reveals the newscaster's "sloppiness" of statement, something Ms. Thomas condemns as inadmissible.<sup>14</sup> In the second case however, the sense of the utterance is changed to the point that complete failure of understanding could follow. To say, as Joyce makes his character say in Finnegan's Wake, "shave me" [ʃeivmi] instead of "save me" [seivmi], "where an added dimension of meaning is imposed upon the original utterance," leads to the breaking down of communication.<sup>15</sup>

Some of Thomas' characters fall prey to uttering nonsense as a consequence of using an improper phoneme. In itself, a phoneme means nothing and conveys no particular information, but by addition of one phoneme to another the level of the morpheme is reached, a tool for the construction of a sentence. The function of the phoneme is one of differentiation. It is because the phonemes/p/,

/t/, /b/ are different that the morphemes 'pin,' 'tin,' 'bin' are different from each other.<sup>16</sup> The confusion of the phoneme /r/ of "fresh" [freʃ] for the phoneme /l/ of "flesh" [fleʃ] in Mrs.

Blood's assertion: "All fresh is glass" (p. 66), renders her comment all the more whimsical as the presence of an adjective is not expected or attested to in such a position in common English.

"Fresh"-as-a-noun here is a neologism! In addition, the intended import "All flesh is glass . . ." could not be guessed by the reader without the help of an iteration of the correct sentence in other places of the novel (pp. 59, 217).<sup>17</sup> On another occasion,

Thomas means to produce a comic-ironic effect by simply dismissing the first two phonemes of the word "grass" [grɑ:s] so that the resulting morpheme becomes "ass" [ɑ:s], an appropriate shift if one considers Michael's constant switching back and forth between Esther and Rachel.<sup>18</sup> This is also true of Mrs.

Blood's conscious antiphilosophical statement: "I stink therefore I am" (p. 21), where the ironic effect is acquired through an opposition of phonemes /s+t/ vs /θ/--which produces words semantically antithetical: stink vs think. One can only praise Ms. Thomas' for this clever invention which sustains one of the main aspects of her fiction, that is, the treatment of women as inferior and as closer to the "messy things of life" than men.

It becomes apparent then that Audrey Thomas is careful in her choice of "errors in pronunciation or spelling"<sup>19</sup> and that she prefers to the mere neologism ("murryng") the pronunciation of an existing word which will convey a different meaning than the one intended and enrich somewhat the text of her fiction. Thus,



"Diseased" [di'zi:zd] becomes "De-ceased" [di'si:st],<sup>20</sup> stressing the foetus' health degradation and termination. "Killed" [kild] turns into "chilled" <sup>21</sup> [tʃild], an adjective apt to describe the cold that accompanies death. Furthermore, in Latakia the guide's poor English is responsible for an interesting mistake. He says that the king was buried in "the fatal position" (p. 170), unconsciously unearthing the paradox of life (foetal [fi:tɪ]) and death (fatal [feɪtɪ]). Unlike puns which aim at obtaining a comical effect, and which Ms. Thomas does not fancy, these peculiar games played by the author most originally and effectively with sound-sense errors, serve to obtain a dramatic or ironic effect or introduce the reader to the semantic connotations between apparently different words. In this respect, it comes as no surprise to the reader that Mrs. Blood speaks of "doing our exorcises" [eksɔ:saisiz] (p. 68) a neologism when used as a noun to refer to water-exercises [ʔeksəsaisiz], since our knowledge of the theme of exorcism-practise in Thomas' writing has made us quite aware of its inner relation to the water element. The above quotation also helps to pinpoint the narrator's confused identity and her awareness of the need she has of exorcism.

Jason ceaselessly says of Isobel that she "exits" [ʔegzits] when he in fact means "exists" [ɛg'zists];<sup>22</sup> yet his mistake still makes sense to the reader who is aware of Isobel's successive "exitings" from her married life, away from her homeland and other responsibilities.

There are a few examples where such "errors in pronunciation or spelling" are used by Thomas to parody religion in a Joycean

manner. I shall quote from Mrs. Blood: "This is the bloody and bawd of Christ which was riven for thee" (pp. 21, 193). The use of the derogatory term "bawd" [bɔ:d] for "body" [bɔ:di] is here juxtaposed to "bloody" by the conjunction of coordination "and". Because of the very nature of the grammatical morpheme "and," one expects the juxtaposition of two nouns, i.e. blood and bawd/body. If English common usage records the form "the nice and pretty girl" for instance, it does not tolerate <sup>\*</sup>"the nice and girl" no more than <sup>\*</sup>"this is the nice and pretty."<sup>23</sup> Hence the problem arises here because of the association of an adjective (bloody) to a noun (bawd) on the syntagmatic axis of the utterance when one would expect two words of the same grammatical nature, and here two nouns. The fact that "bawd" supersedes "body" is significant in the sense that Audrey Thomas often refers to Christ as a feminine figure rather than a male one. Though "riven" is here possible <sup>24</sup> it may well be that the intended morpheme was "given."<sup>25</sup>

Hence, some of the displayed confusions are created by distorting or changing a (sound of) consonant in initial, middle or final position in the word. As previously shown, on other occasions, the confusion arises from a change in (sounds of) vowels, long or short, or diphthongs. While Lewis Carroll uses this device for comical purposes, without necessarily establishing a meaningful connotation between the two elements (for instance, antipathies vs. antipodes), Thomas aims at emphasizing the irony or the tragic of a given situation or utterance. She adapts Lewis Carroll's skill to her purpose and displays more

facility in this particular field of "errors in spelling or pronunciation" than Lewis Carroll as she not only replaces a word by another one similar in sound, but also by one whose meaning is connected-at some level-to the one replaced, a process which we could call "semantic gradation." This judicious way of perverting the pronunciation and meaning of given words (for example, "think" becomes "stink," "grass" becomes "ass," etc.) serves to substantiate or give stronger support to her ideas and themes.

Like Lewis Carroll, Audrey Thomas also plays with portmanteau words which supposedly contain in their signification "the individual significations of the words which comprise"<sup>26</sup> them. The Jabberwocky poem of The Looking Glass serves to offer the reader an amusing list of such coined words.<sup>27</sup> Thomas takes after Carroll in an attempt to create "blends," in which two words may be pronounced or written simultaneously. Thus, the boat "Jezobel" in Songs (p. 134) is named after Isobel and Jane.<sup>28</sup> In Mrs. Blood, the verb "shatters" (p. 66), though an existing English verb, may be seen as a compound of "scatters" and "tatters" (p. 59). The neologism "Syrious" in Latakia (p. 171) is also a blend of "Syrian" and "serious" and seems to be used to imply a lack of seriousness on the part of the speaker. In addition, it justifies Rachel's anger at the uselessness of attempting communication. As she says: . . . . .

Oh, the whole question of language, of communication,  
it's impossible ... We invent alphabets and language

systems in order to make things clear. But it doesn't really help. Once you get beyond letters, into words, into emotions and ideas, it doesn't help at all . . . . Nothing ever changes . . . people who speak the same language don't even speak the same language. You. Me. All just make the same sounds (p. 171).

In this respect the declaration made by the Duchess to Alice in Alice's adventures, "Take care of the sense, and the sounds will take care of themselves" (p. 121) proves to be insufficient to establish proper communication and understanding. Sutherland points to the necessity for the speaker to

select the proper sound-sequences and express them in a form that will not mislead his listeners. In other words, it is not sufficient for a speaker to 'take care of his own sense' (i.e., to determine what he wishes to convey) and frame his utterance so as to be clear to himself, paying no special heed to the signs which are to represent his thought to others.<sup>29</sup>

What Thomas eventually denounces through the use of "blends" is the degradation of language, its progressive entropy. The result of the deterioration of human communication can be found in the story of the life of Thomas' characters. They suffer from a sense of fragmentation and fail in their attempts to communicate with the outside world. The normal trajectory from "I" to "You"<sup>30</sup> which language communication usually describes becomes distorted and the characters wander from "I" to "I." In this sense, madness is a consequence of the failure to establish proper understanding between human beings. Madness is not only a differential behavior but a differential language, a language that chooses its own sense — sound rules and appears inaccessible to the non-initiate. Thomas views madness as a metaphor for

actuality since our world is a linguistically fragmented universe where each individual talks his or her own language without paying attention to the meaning conveyed. Each of Thomas' female characters is strongly individual, isolated from others, trying to break the circle of her isolation. My contention is that Thomas writes as much about language as about, say, Isobel. In fact, I believe her characters and stories are the means by which she makes her point about language. Lewis Carroll points to the ambiguous nature of utterances or sound-sequences or to the inherent danger of using improper diction by putting his heroine in ambiguously amusing situations; Thomas denounces the same thing by putting her heroine in sometimes dramatic situations, on the verge of personality dissolution.

"Homophonic gradation" is another way of showing the sound-process by which the meaning of an utterance finds itself thwarted, sometimes to the point that an initial x sentence becomes a final z sentence, without any connection between the two. Sutherland quotes an interesting little poem from Carroll to a younger brother and sister which exemplifies this type of communication failure through distortion of sounds. The first five lines are here relevant:

Tutor: What is twice three?  
Scout: What's a rice tree?  
Sub-Scout: When is ice free?  
Sub-sub-Scout: What's a nice fee?  
Pupil (timidly): Half a guinea!<sup>31</sup>

By the time the receiver (pupil) gets the question from the sender (tutor) it has been so distorted that the answer given ("half a

guinea") makes no sense. Thomas herself explores the extent to which sound sequences become distorted and for this purpose she sometimes resorts to the use of another language, namely French. Here are a few examples borrowed from Blown Figures: "Nous allons/Noose alone/Nurse along" (p. 173) or "Heure H" (p. 69), which stands for "her age"; even the African invocation "Mmere dane" (p. 282) sounds (fortuitously?) like the French "Mère damnée."

Among other devices, Lewis Carroll uses etymology in order to justify and explain his invention of portmanteau words in the Jabberwocky poem. When Thomas uses etymology, it appears almost as a last recourse in an effort to circumscribe the "real" meaning of a word which common usage has spoilt. In Mrs. Blood she uses this device twice, once to establish a link between grāve, an "excavation to receive a corpse," and grāvid, "pregnant" (p. 150) and the other time to establish a connection between vulture, "a vulture" and vulnerable. In the light of this explanation, Mrs. Blood can assert: "I am vulnerable; I am allied to vulture" (p. 207). It is no surprise to the reader then to see the vulnerable patient falling prey to "circling vultures." At other times, she simply uses definitions to the same effect.<sup>32</sup>

Nonsense or communication failure is effected through the sound/sense distortions of lexical units or phrases. However, larger linguistic units such as whole sentences can be affected by syntactical deficiencies and made incomprehensible as well. I have shown how it is grammatically incorrect to juxtapose two

words of a different grammatical nature by means of a conjunction of coordination. In Blown Figures, further examples of syntactical mistakes are discovered. I should like to pay attention to two particular instances of obscured import due to the lack of referential and/or structural meaning. The first one reads as follows: "The lizard does not eat pepper and sweat break out on the frog"(p. 340). The idiom may work as a parable in Thomas' prose, signifying that whoever does the act suffer the consequence. However, this passage presents some problems for the reader unacquainted with the idiom. The sentence then appears out of context and its meaning remains enigmatical. Normally, the function of the anaphorous determiner "the" for both<sup>33</sup> lizard and frog is to convey the implication that both creatures are known to the speaker and the reader. Yet, if the latter is not familiar with the writer's referential world, he will fail to understand and establish the proper relation between the passage and the remainder of the text. Hence, this example can also serve to pose the **larger question of the relation between the artist and his audience.**

The other instance of obscured statement in Blown Figures is the following: "the serpent hangs between the two apples: Knowledge and Life and Death" (p. 284). The difficulty here is due to the lack of logic pertaining to numbers; indeed the two apples are expected to be "Knowledge and Life" or "Knowledge and Death" or "Life and Death," but not "Knowledge and Life and Death," because that is one too many! It may be assumed that the speaker views "Knowledge and Life" as only "one apple" or "life and Death" as another 'apple," yet since nothing in the text makes it clear

for the reader, we are forced to conclude to the speaker's failure at expressing a clear idea. In Mrs. Blood also, there is an example of obscured import caused by lack of structural or referential consistency. When Mrs. Blood recalls "Jack . . . standing outside the New" (p. 85), one expects something else than an adjective in nominal function after the definite article. If "the rich," "the poor," "the blind," "the English," are recorded forms of English usage, such is not the case of "the<sup>\*</sup>New".

Perhaps Thomas means to warn the reader against sloppy statements but she may also be pointing to the lack of inherent logic of language, despite the use of "grammatical rules." Besides, someone who suffers a sense of dissociation from reality, who feels alienated from the outside world cannot be required to be always consistent with her language. Thus an incomplete sentence may be the mirror reflection of an incomplete thought. Mrs. Blood is aware of it as she asserts: "A sentence is a group of words expressing a complete thought. But there are sentences and sentences" (p. 196). In a world Thomas depicts as chaotic, where individuals are on the verge of dissolution, sentences are not always what grammarians want them to be.

Audrey Thomas tries to stress the importance of proper statements and diction for human communication to be possible. As she explores all the aspects of the problem, she realizes that the entropy of language is in part due to our lack of effort at making things clear. But there are also deeper psychological motifs to the ineffectuality of language communication, which is demonstrated through the story of her main character. Suffering

from a neurosis, she fails to act according to the strict rules imposed by the outside world when precisely she has rejected that outside world. Thomas is also concerned with the extent to which a chaotic civilization can only produce a language devoid of solid structures. It is indeed difficult to assess which comes first and leads to the other's deterioration: the decline of a civilization or that of a language.

Thomas denounces our habits of constantly lying about the nature of reality by hiding beneath nice words what is considered as dirty. Such is the case of words relating to sex, women's pregnancy, the body's natural functions, etc. . . . And in particular, the author signals our failure to educate equally men and women about these topics. Her fiction points to many instances in which euphemisms<sup>34</sup> are employed to avert a direct contact with the "thing" described. The Isobel Cleary of Songs is taught to feel dirty about her own body so that special derogatory terms are used to describe menstruation: "the curse," "falling off the roof," "getting your grandmother." And she adds:

Parts of the body and bodily functions had nicknames as well. A vagina was a 'tookie,' a penis (although rarely mentioned) a 'teakettle,' a bowel movement a 'grunter' or a 'daily duty.' It was all very coy and somehow dirty (p. 64).

Thomas' frustration reaches a pitch of anger as she questions the reasons for the silence that surrounds "pain and birth and blood."<sup>35</sup> Mrs. Blood is her spokesman when she asks: "What do you call your periods, among yourselves? What do you feel about virginity, sex, contraception?" (p. 83). Women, like black

people are treated as inferior, dirty and Thomas cries out against their state of négritude in our world. Thomas often describes a strong enmity between her female and male protagonists. The Rachel of Latakia cannot but proclaim her freedom against her lover Michael and all that he represents: a misogynist, male-oriented world. She opts for her own freedom, her right to be a writer rather than submit to the stereotype Michael wants to impose on her. Instead, Hester (his wife) can assume that role of "mother" to him. Rachel's monologue reveals both her dilemma and her decision:

Perhaps one of the reasons I get so angry at Hester . . . is because she has made a choice which I am no longer free to make. She has chosen you over the pursuit of her art. For me, that is no longer a possibility. I want both (love and art), but I can't give up the second for the first . . . . That's [Love, . . . 'Tis woman's whole existence] what men want to think, that's what they need to think, especially men like you--egotists--ambitious and so very insecure. Hester really is the perfect wife for you . . . . She is the wife as mother (your mother) " (p. 73).

Thomas contends that in our world, women live in a ghetto, fearing to name their own bodies. Made to feel dirty about their own nature (which is due to an extent to the influence of Christianity on our way of thinking--something Thomas fights against by ridiculing the religious ceremonial), women try to masquerade it by constructing a "clean, well-lighted mythology" made of "ladies' magazines,"<sup>36</sup> which is only an escape from reality.

Thomas makes Mrs. Blood explain:

Life as it should lived. Flowers on the dinner table . . . . Escape literature, or is it really? Is it not

sadism of a particularly nasty kind? Can you live up to this woman or that dress or this complicated recipe? And of course, you can't." (p. 67).

While euphemisms prevent access to understanding women's nature, Isobel Cleary in Songs yearns "over the bright and shiny mothers in the Journal and Woman's Home Companion, slim-waisted, beautifully groomed . . . or out walking with their golden daughters . . ." (p. 65). It is interesting at this point to turn to Sutherland's explanation of the use of euphemisms:

When the emotional associations surrounding a given thing are extended to the word which symbolises it, men often will avoid using the word because of the emotional shock it has come to provide for them as individuals and for other men. Words symbolizing "taboo" referents may themselves thus come to be "taboo." When this has occurred and the thing symbolised by the word must for some reason be made an object of discourse, men often resort to euphemism--the substitution of a less emotionally-charged word for the one of strong and undesirable affective connotations.<sup>37</sup>

Lewis Carroll shows in a humorous manner how words can put on a euphemistic value; for instance, in Alice's Adventures the words "dog," "cat," or "chatte," are so negatively loaded for the mouse that he reacts with violence and anger at the mere mention of these nouns by Alice (p. 42). Thomas shows how euphemisms operate in more serious contexts and thereby denounces woman's situation, attacking pretense and the literature that embodies pretense, "Escape Literature" as Mrs. Blood calls it, that of "ladies' magazines." In contrast to the false language and reality they display, Thomas sets up the story of her heroines who make attempts at talking openly about their femininity. Songs, Mrs. Blood, Blown Figures and Latakia are thus to be viewed as

a form of literature that takes arms against a bourgeois literature and a bourgeois ideal. In Songs, Isobel Cleary in particular discovers the ridicule of her "aesthetics of the beautiful" when she tries to offer roses--an image of the beautiful--to one of the patients of the mental ward, ironically named Beatrice.<sup>38</sup> The patient's head

fell forward into the petals. Then she sat up again and trembling, wrenched off some of the petals and put them in her mouth. Chewed them. Swallowed them. Picked off some more . . . [so that] by the end of the week she had eaten every one of them (p. 165).

The moral of the story, as it were, is that the "aesthetics of the beautiful" is superseded by the aesthetics of ugliness, dirt, pain, what Rachel in Latakia will later call "the aesthetics of the flesh" (p. 171). The Surgical Ward of the mental asylum in Songs provides Thomas with a metaphor for the way in which art should be performed:

Watching operations became like watching a ballet. There was such timing, such precision, such control. I, who had lived most of my life in chaos and disorder . . . found in the OR a beauty and self-control that was created out of pain, ugliness and decay . . . Inside [the operation room] the doctors were translated into gods (p. 199).

And indeed, Thomas' art meets the above criteria.

If the reader gets arrested in his reading by the apparent chaotic structure of Blown Figures or the display of nonsensical utterances, neologisms, errors in pronunciation or spelling and dismisses Thomas' fiction, he will miss much of what is essential to her work: her legitimate interest in the nature and function

of language, her concern for the degradation of language, points that she interweaves with great craftsmanship into the texture of the plot. If Isobel rejects the ideal of life that fairy-tales<sup>39</sup> may have imparted to her as a child, it is because that ideal proved deceitful. There has been no Charming Prince waiting for her, only a deceitful Richard and an estranged husband. And I believe the excerpts from fairy-tales or nursery rhymes which Thomas incorporates into her fiction should be read with much prudence as they embody the wrong kind of literature or life-vision to which some of her heroines have once attached themselves. Thomas warns the reader against this kind of escape literature by often distorting it.<sup>40</sup>

The language that depicts the world which surrounds the female narrators in Thomas' writing lies to them. For instance, attributes<sup>41</sup> designating colours have been so narrowly interpreted through religious bias that they have become worn symbols of moral qualities rather than mere colours. Such is the case of "white" which, as Mrs. Blood remarks, evokes purity in anyone's mind while "black" connotes evil. And yet to her own surprise, she admits that "black White Fathers" exist (p. 106) and that Melville perceived white as a possibly "sinister" color (p. 162). Furthermore, some attributes such as the adjective "pretty," "new," "true" are relative terms whose specific meanings "vary with the user's conception" of them and with the receiver's conception too.<sup>42</sup> In Thomas' writing, as in Carroll's, problems of proper evaluation stem from the comparative nature of adjectives. Mrs. Blood comments: "but as he says she is quite young

and very pretty I couldn't place her. She must have been, if I even saw her at all, just another young and pretty face" (p. 74).

The problem may appear more serious when the inherent ambiguity of a comparative term leads one to make paradoxical statements, such as the one uttered by Isobel in Blown Figures: "I've slept with other men. I've never been unfaithful, no" (p. 412).

Seemingly, Isobel's frame of reference must be different from that of Delilah who admits: "I don't know what you mean . . . I don't get it. Frankly, I don't get you" (p. 412). In addition, the narrator of Mrs. Blood points to the difficulty of deciding even for herself what is right or wrong: "I knew the way you know something for sure, know it so hard it . . . makes your heart thump, even when what you know for sure is wrong" (p. 86). The power of an attribute to deceive may be so strong as to be akin to partaking consciously of a criminal act. Mrs. Thing in Mrs. Blood bitterly acknowledges her feeling of utter helplessness as she hears that a "ritual murder is not murder, it is ritual" (p. 105). On two other occasions, Thomas' character reveals the sometimes redundant effect adjectives may produce when associated with nouns that partly contain the same element of information as they do. Mrs. Thing's statement "But to begin at the new beginning" (p. 131) or the title of the book Isobel Cleary, in Songs, reads - "True Confessions" (p. 137)-are such examples.

In a world of chaos where anything can mean anything, Thomas' characters grope for understanding and one can see the whole journey motif as a search for meaning and a better comprehension

of the reality of language. This quest involves a coming across numerous and varied situations in which the heroines must dis-mantle language, undo its mechanism, as it were and try the language of their alienation against that of the outside world.

Thomas' heroines keep clashing against words, fumbling with their meaning(s), groping for more information somewhere else. As the narrative unwinds, it can safely be assumed that they do acquire a finer perception of the nature of spoken or written words, of language's intricacies, of people's carelessness and lack of concern for true human understanding and it can further be assumed that the result of their inquiry is presented to us in a re-constructed form, as Thomas' fiction. I shall presently examine some other ways in which these female characters try to relate to the outside world, everyday language or find themselves increasingly isolated by a lack of enriching communication.

Lexical ambiguity can be the source of misunderstanding, irony, laughter. Lewis Carroll exploits it in a comical, humorous fashion in many instances.<sup>43</sup> As for Thomas' character, Mrs. Blood, she recalls a past incident which took place in the insane asylum in which one of the patients called out: "Give it to me give it to me" (p. 67). Taken out of context, the phrase is subject to free interpretation on the part of the listener. It may sound like a sexual invitation or it can be interpreted literally as "give it to me" (though, in this case "it" remains indeterminate) or it can be interpreted the way the nurse does as: "I'll give it to you alright if you don't stop that racket" (p. 67). The nurse is probably aware that the patient intends some-

thing else, yet as she has neither the time, nor the desire to inquire about the possible meaning of the utterance in the speaker's mind, she deliberately emphasizes one of the other possible significations of the phrase. This is a way to get herself out of a situation in which an effort is required to make understanding and communication possible. The patient remains unattended, locked with her request within the walls of her alienation.

Mrs. Blood is also aware of the natural ambiguity that arises from speaking of "a lady in the street" (p. 68). This phrase is used euphemistically to refer to a prostitute so that the narrator must add precision to what she says if she means to be understood accurately. The eventual consequence of such a necessity to constantly specify may lead to a sentence of the type: "We saw a lady in the street who is not a lady in the street but a woman in the street . . . ." The listener or the reader has to be on his guard as he may not be certain of when an utterance is meant literally or not. One would not expect any one to take the expression "dead as a doornail" literally<sup>44</sup> though the young Isobel Cleary of Songs almost takes a similar expression literally when her grandfather tells her sister to get "the Pope's telephone number," a funny phrase he has coined to refer to "Vat 69" (p. 113). It comes as no surprise to the reader that amidst this jungle of names, sense or nonsense, Isobel Cleary, or Mrs. Blood or the more mature Isobel of Blown Figures or Rachel fail to read properly signs like "DO NOT PICK THE FLOWERS," "TRESPASSERS WILL BE PROSECUTED," "JOURNEY'S END." The question then is: when is one

supposed to know that words mean what they mean, to use Humpty Dumpty's easy definition. When do words start being signs, omens rather than mere words? Thomas lets her characters wander and drift through the labyrinths of linguistic intricacies.

Mrs. Blood imagines herself making up "a crazy world where all the fathers and mothers were called 'Father' and 'Mother' and the dogs were called 'Dog' and the babies 'Baby'" (p. 88). In other words she considers the possibility not of calling individuals by their personal names (or in terms of her relation to them) but of simply viewing them as the members of a word-class /father/, /mother/, etc., in which all members are anonymous. According to the French linguist Jean Lavédrine, determiners (the, my, a, that, this, etc.) more or less convey this effective action of organizing the outside world relatively to the speaker.<sup>45</sup> If the definite article--as in "the father," for instance--implies a personal vision or apprehension of the world, the absence of article (which relegates the noun "father" to the state of a lexical item /father/) clearly signals the lack of relation between the speaker and the outside world then seen as a mass of anonymous items.

Mrs. Blood is right to imagine such a world as crazy-- and this is the important term in regards to Thomas' ideas--because communication would be utterly impossible between individuals with no identity, i.e., no particular name to characterize each one of them.

On a smaller scale, the consequence of generalization, of defining a human being in terms of his racial or national char-

acteristics may impair the comprehension of his oneness and further lead to racial prejudice. Audrey Thomas perceptively remarks in Mrs. Blood the habitual association made in North America between a kind of "frog face" and "the face of the older Negro" (p. 110). Ms. Thomas examines other cliches that are quickly and carelessly employed about Jews, or handicapped people<sup>46</sup> and which lead to some form of prejudice. And while the existing stock of words is immense and can be played with ad infinitum, the artist Rachel, in Latakia discovers that "the sea is so many different colours" and yet "there is no word for blue" (p. 67). There is no available class name to describe artistically the colour of the sea just as there is no available class name to speak of Lewis Carroll's Gryphon or many of his other unique characters.

As a matter of fact, Carroll uses such proper names as "Humpty Dumpty," "Tweedledum" and "Tweedledee," "Haigha and Hatta," because there exists no available class name to designate the individuals he wants to describe. Being each a unique representative of his kind, only a personal name can help to convey the shape he is, as it were. Of course, it is reasonable to argue that proper names are usually totally arbitrary signs which in no way can convey any idea of what a person is like. For one thing, a personal name--at least in the Occidental world--is not chosen by the individual himself but is more or less arbitrarily bestowed on him at birth. Thus, proper names can be seen as inappropriate to convey informative<sup>47</sup> connotations and simply may be said to serve to identify objects. The self-

important Humpty Dumpty is aware of the uniqueness of his name. The class/Humpty Dumpty/ is composed of the one member "Humpty Dumpty" and is therefore a closed set. The visual representation Alice can form of Humpty Dumpty is indissociable from his name. Alice, inasmuch as she appears to him in the Looking Glass world as a unique representative of her own class, should be treated by Humpty Dumpty with equal respect. Instead, he disdainfully remarks: "with a name like this, you might be any shape, almost" (p. 263). I suspect that Humpty Dumpty is Lewis Carroll's spokesman, to make the reader aware that there are a few individuals in our world called "Alice," be they French, English, fat or thin, so that the name "Alice" taken out of its frame of reference can apply to any of them and fails to describe the individual characteristics of the one referred to.

Thomas also shows that personal names only point to nonentity for a listener unacquainted with the individuals thus designated. Mrs. Thing, in Mrs. Blood (whose name incidentally points to anonymity as well) repeats fragments of a conversation she listens to:

Dear Sabina was there and Frances who had brought dear Trevor and was complaining . . . . Anyway, somebody had brought along one of the Polish wives . . . and Eva, the Spanish girl, was going to be there too . . . . Mrs Maka . . . sat on one corner with her little boy . . . . It was all rather awkward as Eva hadn't shown up at all and Ann, who had invited the Polish girl had assured that . . . (pp. 74-75).

Mrs. Thing herself admits that she feels her "strangeness, foreignness" as these women utter sounds "which are mostly meaningless" to her (p. 75). The name "Waldo" also appears once<sup>48</sup>

with no other reference to that "individual" elsewhere in the novel so that the receiver feels totally alienated from the outside world where sounds exist without sense.

Nonetheless, the debate is not easily closed. Although Sutherland argues that Carroll "subscribed to Mill's doctrine, that proper names serve to merely identify objects, and, as labels, to connote nothing whatever about the attributes of their referents,"<sup>49</sup> one must consider the extent to which personal names are part of the historical, genealogical, philosophical or religious traditions. Biblical names are still widely used and according to Lareina Rule, "the old legendary gods and goddesses of long-forgotten races still exist in names we sometimes give our children today."<sup>50</sup> In this sense, one can trace the meaning of "Alice" back to its Greek origin "Alethia" as "'the Truthful one,' a Crecian who knew neither lie nor deception."<sup>51</sup> One may wonder whether Lewis Carroll knew the original meaning of the name "Alice" and played with it, creating a character who belies her name by constantly appearing to the creatures of Wonderland and the Looking Glass as a liar, a deceitful individual.<sup>52</sup>

Literature often records this type of demystification enterprise in naming.<sup>53</sup> "Rachel" is a Hebrew name which means "A ewe. The personification of gentleness and patience while suffering." Michael, another Hebrew name "Mikhael" signifies "Who is like God, a spiritual and orderly one who practised absolute truth."<sup>54</sup> The story of Latakia shows that Rachel learns in fact to be an independent woman who casts out Michael--described

at first as a god but who turns out to be an egotistical, deceitful man.

Furthermore, one must record the desire some individuals feel sometimes to change their names. Mrs. Blood notices "George Tetly Odonkor . . . wish [*sic*] to be known and called Rynors Mensah Odonkor" (p. 189), a sign that he has come to reject the name that betrays his colonization. Also, proper or general names do possess their own magic, i.e., they are invested with an autonomous existence and a power of their own and the words themselves are regarded as some sort of "magical token" having supernatural power over natural phenomena. Sometimes the affective force of these words lies in the meanings they embody, but not always. Such is the case of "Africa," Isobel's Africa, "The Shadow," "bat," "cave"<sup>55</sup> "valedictorian," or "saludatorian."<sup>56</sup> In the last two cases, the magic of words may be said to be associated with the mere sounds these words produce.

There is yet one last aspect of both Carroll's and Thomas' concern for language that must be dealt with. The Victorian writer illustrates on one occasion his awareness that language can be used to talk about language and, as Sutherland explains, that "verbal symbols may be used to refer to other verbal symbols."<sup>57</sup> Hence Carroll establishes a distinction among things, the names of things and the names of names of things. The White Knight wants to sing a song for Alice:

"The name of the song is called 'Haddocks' Eyes.'"  
 "Oh, that's the name of the song, is it?" Alice  
 said . . .  
 "No, you don't understand," the Knight said . . .

"That's what the name is called. The name really is 'The aged aged man.'"

"Then I ought to have said 'That's what the Song is called?'" Alice corrected herself.

"No, you oughtn't: that's quite another thing! The song is called 'Ways and Means': but that's only what it's called, you know!"

"Well, what is the song, then?" said Alice . . .

"I was coming to that," the Knight said. "The song really is 'A-sitting On a Gate': and the tune's my own invention" (p. 306).

Thomas includes a similar instance in one of her novels, Mrs. Blood, which I shall quote here: "The name of this street is Rue de la rue . . . And I forget the name of that street, but the name of this street is Rue de la rue and it only goes one way" (pp. 49-50). The thing's name is "rue," the French for "street." But the name of the street/rue--the label identifying the object to which it is affixed--is: "Rue de la rue." Thus the name of the name "rue" is "Rue de la rue," a phenomenon pertaining to what linguists call a metalanguage. If the written word "Rue" is spelt with an upper case "R" and can be differentiated from the word "rue" spelt with a lower case "r," a listener cannot make such distinction as there exists only one pronunciation of the word. The import of the above statement is therefore very confusing. In addition, Mrs. Blood's statement sounds all the more puzzling as she employs the determiner this/that to make a difference between the names of two streets which in fact are both named "Rue de la rue." Also, Thomas delights in playing with the equivocal meaning of "it only goes one way," since the phrase can signify that the street is a "one way street" or that once the statement has been made, it cannot be erased and must be interpreted "one way." The utterance "Rue

de la rue" can only be written one-way since the difference between upper and lower cases enables the reader to distinguish between "Rue"-as-X and "rue"-as-x. Replacing these nouns respectively by X and x, the utterance reads as "X of x." In this sense, it truly goes one way since X of x  $\neq$  x of X. However this difference is erased at the phonetic level, that of spoken language. Since there is no way one can differentiate "Rue" from "rue" in spoken French, the statement "Rue de la rue" also sounds like "rue de la rue," in which case X = x. Then, to say that "it only goes one way" becomes a lie since the two terms X and x are interchangeable and x of x = x of x. Needless to say, Thomas cleverly interweaves these games with language into the body of her fiction, as an evidence of the necessity to distinguish between written and uttered language.

As I have demonstrated, Thomas' concern for language in the manner of Lewis Carroll proves to be quite varied. She deals with both spoken and written languages, cliches, stereotyped-or set-phrases, homophonic or semantic ambiguity, sentence-structure, etc., and the language of her fiction then is meta-language. Thomas challenges the reader in his expectation of her writing by constantly undermining the validity of what is said or written. Words have become worn tools and fail to bring concision to one's utterances. The result of the deterioration of language which Thomas denounces can be seen in the way in which her characters fail to grasp the real meaning of what is said or to communicate positively with the outside world. Because language does not make sense or convey proper information, the

world that surrounds Thomas' characters has ceased to cohere, pushing them into alienation and madness. The writer's fiction aims at being anticonventional, chaotic, and even shocking. It represents Thomas' battlefield on which she fights equally against prejudice, taboos or sloppy statements. Her literature stands in direct opposition to the type of fiction displayed in 'escape literature' or, for that matter, fairy-tales. It is in fact apparent that she deconstructs the traditional fairy-tale by setting the story of her characters antinomically to that of Carroll's Alice in particular, a point which will be examined in the next section of this study.

### Chapter Three:

#### Thomas and Carroll: Two Sides of the Looking Glass

As I have suggested in the second chapter of this study, Thomas relies on Carroll's clever play on language and to a great extent uses similar devices to convey her ideas. However, she departs from him in one fundamental way: her play with language tends towards seriousness, irony, an abrupt and plain denouncement of our responsibility for the degradation of language, while Carroll deals with it lightly. The sense of humour derived from the Alice books suffices to release the reader's tension and to provide him with a good piece of entertainment while Thomas' epigraph to "all the Alices" in Blown Figures suggests that her fiction is prescriptive and corrective. In fact, Thomas' novels constitute "Alice books" for grown-up Alices who are Isobel Cleary, Mrs. Blood, Isobel and Rachel. I now propose to show in which various ways Thomas' works differ from their source, the Alice books, and how they are designed prescriptively by Thomas for Alice. Though the two authors choose to tackle similar themes, their treatment varies a great deal. And so does the structure of their fiction. In the first part of this chapter I wish to deal with the authors' treatment of themes and show how they serve to differentiate Thomas' from Carroll's fiction. In the second part, however, I propose to approach the problem in terms of genre. In other words, I shall discuss the Alice books

from a genre perspective and see if they belong to the realm of fairy-tales or the world of Fantasy. I shall subsequently turn to Thomas to verify that our conclusions on Carroll's work do not apply satisfactorily to Thomas'.

The reader knows for a fact that Alice dreams her whole adventure through the Looking Glass world or Wonderland. Although Thomas does not formulate such a clear statement as to the nature of "Isobel's" adventures, it may be deduced from the analogy to Carroll's tales that she intends to present her characters' stories also as the development of a dream. In fact, with Blown Figures, Thomas makes it clear to the reader that Isobel's story is not real and that she launches into a dream-adventure: "None of this was real so why not adopt temporarily a sister or a friend?" (p. 34). The word 'boat' becomes a symbol, "a dream representing change, exodus, adventure, anything to anyone..." (emphasis added, p. 4). Thus, the point of divergence between Carroll and Thomas does not lie in the fact of dreaming but in the nature of the dream.

Boredom and curiosity are factors that initiate Alice's journey into the imaginary world of Wonderland. The first lines of the tale open on this acknowledgement: "Alice was beginning to get very tired of sitting by her sister on the bank, and of having nothing to do" (p. 25). Boredom sets her body, but not her mind, to sleep. By envisioning the whole adventure of Wonderland (p. 162) Alice's imagination escapes the boundaries of dull reality. Even Alice's older sister later admits the attraction Wonderland exerts on the imagination because of its

sense of motion, openness and excitement. She knows she has "but to open her eyes again and all will change to dull reality" (p. 163). Alice's story unwinds as the fulfillment of a happy vision.

On the contrary, the journey of Thomas' characters reveals its nightmarish nature. What initiates Isobel Cleary's trip away from Harry's cottage is the unwanted loss of her grandpa's place. As she phrases it:

Two things happened to me the summer I was seventeen: my grandfather sold his summer place and I went to work on the Hill. The second came about ultimately from the first, for it was because there was no more Journey's End that I had to spend my summer in the city for the first time in my (remembered) life. I couldn't believe it (p. 133).

The amputation metaphor pinpoints the character's frustration and helplessness at having to put up with an undesired happening: "it was like a cruel and unnecessary amputation, done in the night so that I woke up minus a vital limb . . ." (p. 133). Thus, the loss of the cottage due to external, uncontrollable events leads Isobel to face ugliness, pain, chaos, madness.

The wonderland with which Alice mingles is a world of play whereas the wonderland that appeared to Isobel Cleary as the real one (Harry's place) proves to be deceitful in comparison to the displayed reality of the insane asylum. In other words, Songs describes two types of journey: the illusory one to Harry's mountains, full of joy and games and the real one to the mental institute where madness is not effected through games but through actual human beings' tricky and sometimes wicked

intentions. Similarly Mrs. Blood's journey originates in her bleeding. She confesses: "I am here because I bleed" (p. 14). The tragic and frightening experience of losing a child stands at the back of the journey motif in this novel as well as the next, Blown Figures. Now, if Michael's involvement with Rachel in Latakia is caused partly by boredom, Rachel's comes out of a more basic need which she views as physical but which the reader knows to be intellectual (in the sense that it stimulates her writing).

Also, all of Thomas' characters undergo the direct experience of losing something or someone whereas by her uniqueness and privileged position Alice is kept safe from suffering, say, from a relative's death.

Though she meets evil-intentioned creatures like the Red Queen, she never has a personal experience of death. In the Alice books, death remains under the form of a verbal threat. It belongs to the realm of the (open) future. Dying as a fact (for the foetus) and as a mental process (where the character goes through a psychological defeat) belongs to the realm of the (closed) past and constitutes the core of Thomas' fiction and of Mrs. Blood in particular.

Concomitant to the boredom that describes Alice's monotonous life is the concept of present time as static. The present appears as a series of dull moments to the point that Alice falls asleep. And sleep is an image of stasis. In contrast to this uneventful concrete present, stands another kind of present embodied in the present of the journey narration which is a becoming,

an aperture to the future and its absorption into a rich deployment of exciting actions. As soon as the journey begins and spreads its presence, the former present time of Alice's dull life dissolves into a formless, blurred past. Hence, the Alice books emphasize the opposition between a past vaguely sketched in the opening and closing pages of the tales, essentially made of rules of obedience and good behaviour and a present full of (future) promises lived by Alice as she progresses through the land of Wonder. Though Alice makes some references to her real life and family on her way, these instances remain scarce and casual and do not serve to give more importance to the reality of the now past; rather they function as an inducement to the journey.

In this respect, Thomas' writing differs from its literary source. In her fiction, past and present counterpoint each other; the past (i.e., all that has happened to the character up to the moment of narration/utterance) feeds the present, as it were, making it more meaningful or more dramatically void. It keeps surging back and forth, causing the character to suffer from a sense of failure and incompleteness. The present in this case is static and binding and consists in the narrative unrolling of the "posthumous" past. It serves prescriptively to teach Thomas' female protagonists about the deluding nature of the past and its resemblance to an Alice-like feast.

Isobel Cleary, in Songs, becomes aware, through the mental, narrative reconstruction of her yearly trips to Harry's cottage of their deluding nature in contrast to what she later encounters

in the asylum. Spatial and temporal distance grant her sight and lucidity. Involved as she is in a confused relationship with Jason, Richard and possibly Jack, Mrs. Blood appears to face the necessity of an abortion. The narrative of her journey which is the novel in totum rectifies the past and corrects the erroneous view the heroine had of her act.

Similarly, the Isobel of Blown Figures recapitulates through her symbolical African journey the sum total of her errors, the problems of her relationship with Jason. In particular the narrator points out: "she did not rescue Jason/Kay, she merely joined him and that was the worst thing she could have done . . . . Why had she not seen it . . ." (p. 393).<sup>1</sup> The sometimes omniscient narrator of Blown Figures addresses Isobel in the following terms

Because you were afraid, Isobel. Because you thought he didn't really like it—passion, abandonment, the great conflagration of a man and a woman . . . cooing like pigeons, shrieking like sea-birds mating suddenly and incredibly in the frozen air . . . Because you accepted, poor fool, her order [Jason's mother] as more valuable than your chaos (pp. 393-94).

The character has substituted for the hierogamous union its civilized, unnatural counterpart<sup>2</sup> and the departure from natural cosmic rules has led to a breaking point in Isobel's marriage, where everything appears as a lie. Rachel, in Latakia, puts down onto paper the story of her now terminated love affair and reflects on its meanderings.

What seems to correspond to the Alice-like trip of Thomas' characters is not one that reads as a promising present full of

unrolling exciting actions. That "trip" in each of Thomas' four novels proves deceitful. Hence, it comes as no surprise to the reader that Isobel in Blown Figures teaches all the Alices about the misleading nature of fairy-tales and nursery rhymes by dismantling them, in particular, Hans Christian Andersen's famous fairy-tales "The Little Mermaid" and "The Snow Queen." As for Rachel (Latakia), she finally sees the whole relationship as the puzzle (game) or as part of a gigantic looking glass chess game (p. 15). Then, for each of Thomas's heroines, a corrective journey is introduced in order to clear the character's doubts as to the nature of reality.

Accordingly, the time-sequence pattern present in the Alice books is reversed by Thomas in her novels, as through a mirror reflection. On the one hand, the past, dull and formless in Alice's case takes shape and assumes considerable proportions in Thomas' hands, haunting the present of her female narrators. On the other hand, what fills up the present of Alice's journey through extraordinary events inversely equates in Thomas' writing with the deceitful past of her heroines, their undertaking the wrong journey. If we assume the madness metaphor to be most informative of Alice's journey, Isobel Cleary's mad voyage begins as Alice's ends. Isobel's abrupt loss of a tenacious dream (Harry's wonderland) initiates her entering into the wonderland of madness of the asylum, while Alice's loss of her dream (Wonderland) corresponds to her exiting out of it, her going back to dullness. If Thomas' novels display two different journeys, an illusory one and a real one, Lewis Carroll's tales speak only

of one unique journey, into the land of enchantment. The journey through time in the Alice books reads as the development of a happy dream which unfolds with and in the present and the narrative. In Thomas' novels, the journey through time reads as the development of a nightmare.

Hence, it becomes apparent that for Alice, Wonderland remains Wonderland, even more so as the nostalgic memory of her past childhood will ebb and flow in her adult mind (p. 164). She has fallen victim herself to the vice of turning everything into a game, so that she is protected from a real and painful encounter with cruelty (the Queen), absurdity (trial) and chaos (the croquet game). In opposition to this easy fairy-tale vision of life, the mental institute, Africa, the hospital, Crete represent places where Thomas' female protagonists have encountered chaos, fear, defeat, loss and death and have attempted to come to terms with their past or the concepts of guilt and evil. Thomas refuses Carroll's escape to Wonderland. Her characters' experiences are grounded in the real and their learning consists in accepting both their own shortcomings and life's inconsistencies and cruelty. As the narrator of Blown Figures states: "A roaring of tense colours and interlacing of opposites and of all contradictions, grotesques, inconsistencies, life" (p. 387). The artistic metaphor of painting provides the reader with an adequate depiction not only of the disturbing lives of Thomas' characters, but also of the narrative of their lives, Thomas' novelistic creations.

In the following pages, I wish to examine another major point of divergence between Thomas' and Carroll's writings. In the first chapter of this thesis, I have stressed the symbolic function of sexual inversion in regards to the Canadian and Victorian writers, showing how they both use female disorderliness to free their characters from overpowering bonds, and themselves to an extent too. However, this perspective based on a socio-historical, psychoanalytical approach does not take into account another informing approach based on a mythical view of the topic and writings in question. It is my purpose therefore to evoke a few particulars concerning the female protagonists' roles in both Carroll and Thomas in order to set the latter writer apart from the former and pinpoint her most skillful handling of the mythical.

I have previously indicated the possibility that by turning into a queen, and according to the mirror-reflecting logic of the chess game, Alice also puts on the attributes of the Red Queen, whose colour characterizes some of Thomas' heroines and which connotes of crime and guilt, if only through the reference to the Scarlet Letter.<sup>3</sup> There is no doubt then that Alice becomes a prototype of the passion-controlled female, wild in her rage. However, this new way of considering Alice, no longer as a little girl, but as a demented female is only dimly sketched in Carroll's concluding passages of Alice's Adventures and The Looking Glass (p. 336). My intention is now to approach Thomas' novel, Blown Figures, from the same angle and see to what extent the portrayal of Isobel renders a similar or even more defined

impression. I intend to suggest that in this most experimental novel Isobel's wild female powers are restored. For this purpose, I shall use mythocritical material concerning the Great Mother and make side-references to some of her substitutes, Hecate, Artemis, Diana.

In the first place, it seems that a historical perspective that accounts for female unruliness is restrictive because it ignores the deeper reality of the problem, the myth. As Evelyn J. Hinz suggests in her mythocritical analysis of Margaret Atwood's Surfacing:

One of the characteristic depictions of the Great Mother in primitive art is as the "Lady of the Beasts," wherein she is pictured either in the company of animals or as an animal herself. Stimulating such iconographic representation, as Erich Neumann and others have explained, were the worship of the Great Mother as the progenitrix of all living things, and the specific identification of the feminine principle with the animal world. Consequently, in the earliest phases of primitive thought animals were pictured inconjunction with the feminine not to suggest specifically that they were autonomous creatures under her protection but rather to indicate that they were her offspring.<sup>4</sup>

As I have already pointed out, in Thomas' novel, there are obvious references to Isobel as an animal and the mother of an animal. The heroine's child is described in theriomorphic images, specially the kid, the pig, the fish and starfish, the bird. Among these, the kid/little goat punic image designates the offspring both as a human being and an animal. A further reference to the unnaturalness of the "child"--which duplicates Alice's remark about the duchess' child (p.87)-- is given under the form of an avowal: " 'If it had grown up,' she said to herself, 'it would have made a dreadfully ugly child ...' " (p. 292). Other sections

of the novel speak of a baby's abnormality and deformity (p. 58, for instance). As the product of a human and animal mating, the child fails his mother's hope since it bears some human characteristics, and not just the animal ones which are hers. Also, the child's description contains a composite of the three elements, Earth (pig, kid), water (starfish, fish) and air (bird) which particularize the Great Mother as the Ruler of Heaven (air), earth and sea.<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, Isobel is depicted through the literary allusion to Hans Christian Andersen's tale, "The Little Mermaid"<sup>6</sup> as a siren who, mythologically, does not act like her fairy-tale counterpart but who, on the contrary, is a "winged daemon of death who haunted graves and the underworld."<sup>7</sup> By nature, the siren is endowed with the power to kill and even Andersen's little mermaid has the potential to use a sharp knife to free herself from a "human" appearance. Isobel who fluctuates between the two zodiacal signs of the Libra (i.e., the perfect balance between Virgo and serpens) and of Scorpio (the murdering tailed-animal) possesses the bipolar tendencies usually associated with the Great Mother, as an unruly woman and a mother of all.

In addition, Isobel's kinship to dragons and owls (p. 357) enables the reader to view her as an animal with dangerous powers, as the "affreuse Echidna . . . mi-partie serpent, mi-partie oiseau palmipède et femme . . . dans laquelle Jung veut incarner . . . le prototype de la Grand Prostituée apocalyptique."<sup>8</sup> From a psychological viewpoint, the dragon combines

animal, nocturnal and water characteristics which are primarily feminine. Besides, as E.J. Hinz remarks,<sup>9</sup> the owl is "the bird of the goddess in her Hecate avatar" who, incidentally, according to W. Sherwood Fox's The Mythology of All Races<sup>10</sup> has heavy connections with childbirth, and resembles Artemis, another hybrid of the Great Mother, who uses "goat" as part of her materia medica. The traditional associations of these interrelated goddesses with the feminine symbolism of the moon, darkness and water are also present in Blown Figures.<sup>11</sup> And perhaps the following passage witnesses the historical degradation of the myth of the Great Mother's supremacy by its passage through a male-governed civilization.

In her dream the Dutch Boy came to Isobel as a long-legged bird. His feathers glowed in the moonlight. "Look," he said gently, "the stars have got caught in your hair." With his beak he began to disentangle them, one by one. The blood from the sharp points of the stars ran down the back of her neck. Wherever the blood flowed crimson feathers grew . . . . Suddenly Isobel realized the moon was only an enormous white plug in the sky. That if anyone or anything pulled it out all manner of terrible things would come rushing through the hole. When she looked into the eyes of the Dutch Boy she saw that he was blind, that his two blind eyes glowed in the moonlight like opals. Suddenly her breasts began to bleed and she woke up screaming (emphasis added, p. 338).<sup>12</sup>

This complex dream which evokes the perversion of a hierogamous union may read as the sign of the loss of the moon's powers in front of the sky. As for the Dutch Boy, it could perhaps be suggested that his blindness either comes from the realization of his crime (the deterioration of the feminine) or from his real "blindness," i.e., his inability to see female supremacy.

Eventually, Isobel's incarnation into a witch<sup>13</sup> with necromantic practices and her disappearance in the forest, Diana's universe, at the end of the novel, does not suggest the failure of myth in the face of history but rather the failure of history (as a patriarchal-oriented western heritage) to acknowledge myth and namely the prevalence of the Great Mother archetype. The unfulfilled wish to see her "tail" grow again (p. 331) that Isobel, in her identification with Andersen's "little mermaid," formulates<sup>14</sup> is another clear sign of our masculine-oriented failure to admit that primitive powers were originally feminine. As a Great Mother prototype, Isobel remains paralyzed by the confining and suffocating narrowness of history that has perverted her original "wholeness" and purity.<sup>15</sup> This is also why the child remains fragmented in Thomas' writing in contrast to its mythic counterpart whose successful birth and wholeness signify the rebirth of the cosmos.

Thus, the reading of Thomas' fiction reveals that history has swallowed myth and that time appears as the monstrous divider between a masculine and feminine orientation, at the expense of the latter.

Thomas also makes an attempt at reappropriating the myth, in the guise of a male-female symbolic sexual inversion and by an invocation of chaos, a wanting to return to the starting point of creation. The chaotic structure of Blown Figures signifies the success of her enterprise.

This assumption about the historical perversion of myth also verifies itself in the more positive Latakia in which the female

creative and destructive powers of Rachel overthrow Michael's pseudo-godliness. In fact, from this vantage point, one may even wonder if Mrs. Blood could read as a positive assertion of female corruption--as the title suggests--and freedom. One is actually tempted to interpret Mrs. Blood's apologetical tone towards Jason (p. 220) (whom she ceaselessly disavows throughout the narrative) as a well-calculated instance of disguised cruelty aiming at hurting him by making him tragically aware that he is not the father of the dead child, that Richard has been her lover and likely the child's parent too and that the miscarriage is in fact an abortion. In this sense, it would also be in keeping with Rachel's cunning and unpleasant comments to Michael (p. 22).

Both Carroll and Thomas use symbolic inversion as a means to let their characters' frustrations out. There is no doubt that the type of inversion of roles between Alice and the Queen, Carroll and women, Isobel and Jason, Rachel and Michael, Thomas and men, rests on serious historical, psychological or sociological foundations. However, in Audrey Thomas' case, there is a more satisfying (mythic) development of the unruly woman and the chaos motifs. Chaos, for Thomas, is not the mere result of madness and non-conformity to well-established rules, it is also structurally a basic component of what the powers of the Great Mother are. Accordingly, Thomas appears as a mythic writer who reinstalls the myth to power by adapting symbolic sexual inversion to her purpose. Differences between Carroll's and Thomas' treatment of themes thus abound. They also exist at the level of genre classification.

I now intend to consider respectively the place of Carroll and Thomas with regards to the fairy-tale world and/or the fantastic. Both authors resort to the words "tale," "fairy-tale," "story" to describe their fiction. Carroll persistently uses, even twenty-five years later,<sup>16</sup> the terms "fairy-lore" and "fairy-land" to designate Alice's Adventures. In addition, his prefatory poem to The Looking Glass also names the subsequent narrative a "fairy-tale" (pp. 173-74). Whatever reasons lie behind this naming, it is interesting that Carroll chooses to call thus the Alice books.

As for Thomas, in the epigraph to Songs, she makes use of the word "tale" and she emphasizes its passage from an oral form (Harry talking to his granddaughters) to a written one (Songs is a written tale). The epigraph to Blown Figures refers to Isobel's fondness for "fairy-tales" and to the decision of the "I"-narrator to make for her a (written) story (not read before). This "not read before" may serve to designate the story as a not-read-before-type-of-fairy-tale. It is in fact my contention that Thomas' Blown Figures constitutes a very special "form" of fairy-tale while Carroll's Alice books are more traditional.

In the following pages, I wish to approach the two writers comparatively, i.e., to determine the extent to which the terms "fairy-tale" and "fantastic" may apply to their fiction and accordingly the extent to which they enable the reader to measure the difference that separates their oeuvre and ultimately Thomas' great originality in writing.

My first step will be to consider the Alice books in terms

of their relation to the fairy-tale and/or the fantastic.

K.M. Briggs, in his The Fairies in Tradition and Literature<sup>17</sup> denies that the Alice books have anything to do with fairy-land. Other critics of the genre simply ignore Carroll's writings. At the onset, it looks as if the Alice books therefore have no point in common with the fairy-tale. Rabkin, in The Fantastic, considers them to be the perfect example of Fantasy, a genre whose primary concern is with the fantastic.<sup>18</sup> The critic defines the fantastic as a quality of astonishment which occurs when there is a diametric reversal of narrative ground rules within a text and when there is a direct contradiction of prevailing perspectives.<sup>19</sup> However, Todorov's description of the Fantastic (as a genre) totally excludes any reference to the Alice books. Yet, it may be inferred from his study that the fantastic in the Alice books would appear as an expression of the marvelous rather than Fantasy. Considering the discrepancy between Todorov's and Rabkin's interpretations, and since no point of agreement can be reached as to the nature of the Alice books, it is preferable presently to turn to the fairy-tale so as to see whether the morphological properties that define the genre also apply to Carroll, and if so, to what exact measure.

According to Propp's morphology of the fairy-tale, a tale "often attributes identical actions to various personages," hence the possibility of studying a tale "according to the functions of its dramatis personae."<sup>20</sup> After considering the recurring functions of dramatis personae through an impressive list of tales, Propp sets up a list of possible but limited functions

that pertain to the fairy-tale. Not all the functions are evidenced in the same tale, yet they appear in a certain chronological order.

First, some sort of initial situation is set to introduce the hero, his situation or status. Then, a member of a family absents himself from home. And an interdiction is addressed to the hero who violates it. At this point, the villain makes his apparition (under multifarious forms: the dragon, the devil, the bandit, the witch, the stepmother). It naturally follows that the villain makes an attempt at hurting or possibly killing the hero; eventually, as often is the case, the hero acquires through a donor's help a magical agent that will enable him to triumph over the villain when he confronts him in a (deadly) combat. Then, the hero returns home triumphant, while the villain is exposed and punished. The tale draws to a close with the hero's marriage or reward (accession to the throne, etc.). At this point (a) new element(s) of disruption may be introduced (for instance, the bride dies suddenly) in order to start again the tale. Such a process is inherent to The Arabian Nights. Though this generative process is possible, it does not have to appear in fairy-tales.<sup>21</sup>

Propp further establishes a primordial distinction between two types of heroes, the "seeker-type" who deliberately goes on a search and the "victimized one" who leaves his home because he has been banished or abandoned. The treatment of each differs in so far as the seeker hero knows what his goal is whereas the victimized one falls prey to all sorts of adventures on his way.

The narrative of the former describes a quest, that of the latter a domination by fate and wandering.<sup>22</sup> This distinction between two types of fairy-tale heroes proves central to our application of Propp's model to Carroll's and Thomas' writings.

After trying Propp's above fairy-tale properties on the Alice books the following remarks can be made: The heroine's situation is given out either in relation to her sister (in Alice's Adventures) or her playing with her pet animals (in The Looking Glass). Then she chooses to go on a journey into Wonderland or the Looking Glass world. She is of the seeker-type as the incentive to depart from her sister's watch comes from within her. Rabkin states that boredom is what initiates Alice's journey. However correct, this statement needs to be amplified by saying that concomitant to boredom, there is also an interdiction. In other words, if Alice gets bored with sitting by her sister, it is precisely because she has been summoned--presumably by overshadowing parental authorities--to obey her sister and remain nicely seated like a well-behaved child. If the book her sister reads is equally boring, it is also because it lacks the necessary excitement and amusement that stimulate children's imagination. Hers indeed is an unexciting life of submission to parental authority (whose representative is embodied in the older sister). So that the image of boredom is only one side of the whole education motif which Alice not only questions (by refusing to look at her sister's book) but rejects. Her rejection is thus a violation of the whole Victorian code of good behaviour. The "interdiction" does not appear in an overt way; instead it reads

between the lines that describe Alice's ennui. Alice must stay with her sister; she must obey her and be a good child. Well, Alice violates the code by simply abandoning her sister and launching into a quest which supposedly will bring her motion, excitement and freedom, all three facts depressingly absent from her Victorian environment. Similarly, in The Looking Glass, Alice escapes her confinement by crossing a melting mirror. Her violation of the interdiction is expressed in the following statement: "Oh, what fun it'll be, when they see me through the glass in here, and can't get at me" (p. 185). Again, the desire to escape adult surveillance is as central to the remainder of the narrative as is her curiosity and longing for the world of enchantment. Boredom and interdiction are isomorphic elements in the Alice books.

In Alice's Adventures, Alice further trespasses her rights by absorbing food that is not always meant for her (p. 57). In fact, the curiosity which makes her inquire about what lies behind closed doors or in far away gardens leads her from adventure to adventure, in which she encounters a few unpleasant figures. The study of these successive encounters with the mouse (pp. 42 - 43), the caterpillar (p. 72), the pigeon (pp. 75 - 76), the Duchess (p. 84), the March Hare and the Mad Hatter (p. 94), etc. leaves the reader with the impression that, to some extent, they all manage to make a fool of Alice, by constantly contradicting her or interrupting her. The result is that in each case Alice apologizes humbly as a very submissive, polite child in the face of such cunning adversity that uses language as a magical device

to lure her into difficulty. This form of reversal (Alice's rejection of obedience and her paradoxal submission) is, according to Propp, essential to the spirit of the fairy-tale.<sup>23</sup> To a lessened degree, the creatures of Wonderland appear therefore as a plural form of the villain figure who constantly confuses or deceives his enemy. Among them, the Duchess is a more threatening one since she suggests chopping off Alice's head (p. 84) and thus foreshadows the Red Queen's cruelty. In the latter is epitomized the notion of villainy.

However, the Queen-as-villain only gets into verbal fights with Alice. The conflict between the heroine and the villain (p. 161) eventually reaches a climax, embodied in Alice's decision to verbally counter-attack the authority of the Queen (p. 161). Yet Alice is not granted total triumph and is more or less pulled out of the tale, as it were, before things worsen for her. Her victory is only a partial one and is perfectly in keeping with the properties of the fairy-tale defined by Propp. In The Looking Glass, Alice is finally granted accession to the throne and final victory over the villain Red Queen in a physical combat that opposes them (p. 336). The heroine then returns to her Victorian world as the dream ends.

Todorov points to the similarity between the fable or the allegory and the fairy-tale in the sense that they all testify to a certain form of learning process developed by the hero in his journey.<sup>24</sup> Alice has learned to master her fears of authoritative powers and to speak up for herself. By becoming temporarily a queen herself, she is more able to evaluate the Red

Queen's exaggerated use of power (p. 342).

This perspective on Carroll's tales does not contradict Rabkin's analysis of the the fantastic elements in the Alice books. In fact, Rabkin himself admits that "one of the most fantastic genres is the fairy-tale" which contains a reversal of narrative ground rules. He further recognizes, along with Luthi, that "by seeing danger handled safely and symbolically . . . [children's] own fears can be mastered."<sup>25</sup>

Nonetheless, Rabkin refuses to make of Alice's Adventures and Through the Looking Glass a fairy-tale on the grounds that "while fairy-tales use the World of Enchantment as their location, and are therefore highly fantastic, a true Fantasy such as Alice continues to reverse its ground rules time and again."<sup>26</sup> He opposes the world of fairy-tales as a controlled world--to Fantasy in which chaos prevails over order. I would like to clarify my position toward these comments. First, while Rabkin states that boredom is at the source of Fantasy which offers a "vision of escape,"<sup>27</sup> he ignores the fact that boredom is only one side of the problem. Secondly, he declares the Alice books chaotic because he only pays attention to that part of the narrative that describes the journey. In other words, by simply extracting from Carroll's tales in their entirety that part of the narrative which speaks of chaos, he manages to demonstrate that a true Fantasy, unlike fairy-tales, does not submit to order. This is to say that he ignores the introductory and concluding pages of both tales which, however few, exist and constitute the beginning and end of Alice's story, namely, Alice's initial status (vs. her sister), her breaking away from conventions and Alice's

return to her sister which attests to the final reordering of the narrative universe. After fulfilling, in a dream, her healthy longing for authority and role reversal--a phenomenon known to all child psychologists<sup>28</sup>--she becomes more capable of accepting and facing anew the restrictions imposed on her life (and imagination) by Victorian education. Her initiation, even if ephemeral, has turned out to be quite useful.<sup>29</sup> The story has its allegory and as such qualifies for the title of "fairy-tale."

It is, however, true that the very contents of the journey itself in Carroll's work offer a chaotic variety which may puzzle the reader of fairy-tales habituated to a clearer arrangement of limited adventures. And it is on this chaotic diversity within Alice's journeys that Rabkin rests his argument. However, the tales in totum should not be declared chaotic on the grounds that the journeys in them are peopled with chaotic, ever-changing rules. On the contrary, it may be argued that Carroll has arranged carefully Alice's final triumph over the Red Queen at the end of the second tale.

How then can we account for the existence of constant flip-flops of rules (i.e., chaos) in the narrative if the whole is to be seen as a fairy-tale, that is, a world controlled by an orderly arrangement of limited functions? Though he fails to pinpoint the nature of the problem, Rabkin answers the contradiction by turning Alice into a Fantasy.

I wish to propose another answer by examining Alice's function as a hero. As I have stated earlier, Alice is a seeker hero since she makes the choice of escaping her sister's watch

and getting into another world. Yet, as she is transplanted into the new world of Wonderland, whose values and rules are different (or opposite), she appears to be temporarily pushed from one adventure into another without any real control of her destiny. Her sudden changes of size cause her to get involved in situations which she cannot dominate. As such then, Alice is a victim, that is, a victimized hero, who at times gives in to fear and tears. Such a type of hero, according to Propp's studies is a toy in the hands of fate, and bounces from misfortune to misfortune. The narrative of her wandering is as Propp calls it, "without searches,"<sup>30</sup> that is chaotic. Thus, the following conclusions can be formulated: the Alice books present a heroine who starts as a seeker, wanders partially as a victim and regains her former status as a seeker-hero.

When Propp analyzes fairy-tales he emphasizes the distinction between the two types of heroes by saying that "there is no instance in our material in which a tale follows both seeker and victimized heroes."<sup>31</sup> And yet, the Alice books which abide by the properties of the fairy-tale exemplify a slight deviation from the norm. Alice as a seeker heroine succumbs under the chaos of Wonderland and becomes a victimized heroine. She later learns how to regain confidence. During the lapse of narrative (and of time) in which she is the victim, chaos prevails. The whole "allegory" of the text does not suffer from this deviation and remains unchanged. Alice's Adventures and The Looking Glass remain fairy-tales, and at the worst (or best) they are original fairy-tales, i.e., touched by a zest of "fantasy" on the part

of Carroll.

Todorov's approach in The Fantastic serves to corroborate my interpretation. For the fantastic to exist, Todorov posits as a necessity that the character's world "is indeed our world, the one we know, a world without devils, sylphides, or vampires ...."<sup>32</sup> In such a universe narrated by an I-narrator so as to facilitate the reader's identification with the character, "there occurs an event which cannot be explained by the laws of this same familiar world."<sup>33</sup> The hero then must opt for one of the two following possibilities: the event is uncanny or marvelous. During the lapse of time before the hero makes his choice, the fantastic arises. Thus, the fantastic is primarily a hesitation, something Rabkin also admits and calls "a quality of astonishment."

From these remarks, it follows that a world peopled by Carrollian figures does not offer the minimum credibility necessary to the reader to even permit his identification with the character. Furthermore, the Alice books are not in the I-narration. In this sense such a work can only connote of the marvelous, a variety of which, Todorov asserts, is the fairy-tale.<sup>34</sup>

This lengthy examination of the Alice books proves necessary in order to situate our analysis of Thomas' Blown Figures. I now propose to consider this novel in terms of its relation to the fairy-tale and see if the novel is faithful to the arrangement of functions required by the genre.

Earlier in this thesis, I have dealt with the similarities in

characters and scenes between the Alice books and Blown Figures. The journey motif, the chessgame imagery serve to establish a definite analogy between the two works in question. Isobel is a more mature, adult Alice who undertakes a search, despite the fact that her previous journeys (depicted in Mrs. Blood) have made her aware of the dangers that threaten her.

The omniscient narrator comments, as she boards the boat: "She was going. She had broken away from him" (p. 16). Isobel thus appears as a seeker-hero, even though the motifs that push her into departing are partially concealed to her, since they lie in the deeper recesses of her unconscious. What leads her into the journey is a "lack" which, as Propp remarks, can be "sometimes depicted quite vividly" or which "sometimes . . . is not even mentioned verbally."<sup>35</sup> The death of the child, one finally gathers from her mental vagaries, constitutes that 'lack' which stimulates a desire in her, that of finding "something." Jason, as her closest relative, bestows his blessing on the heroine, allowing her to "set off for the struggle," an element that characterizes the hero's departure from home in the fairy-tale world.<sup>36</sup> The letter Jason asks her to read on the plane confirms it: "I know that . . . the journey you have just begun is right and good--that the purpose goes far beyond what you may think . . . " (pp. 17-18).

Furthermore, as in the Alice books, the interdiction appears in an indirect manner, as linked to a code of behaviour. As Jason's wife and a mother Isobel has twice violated her rights: in the first case by taking a lover, Richard, and in the second

case (a consequence of her affair) by letting her child die. What Isobel has ignored and soiled is a certain form of morality and conformity. The narrator informs us that

she knew what was wrong, and why, and what to do about it . . . . She had killed the child and then ignored its corpse--blasphemed the ghost-mother by her actions, her sacrilege, and thought she could get away with it (p. 194).

Concomitant to the violation of the interdiction is the appearance of a new personage, the villain whose role is to disturb the peace of a family or "to cause some form of misfortune, damage or harm."<sup>37</sup> Isobel ceases to live in peace after the loss of her child. The villain pursues her under the form of demons. As she avows: "I am looking for my dead child--am not content with the living until I have exorcised the dead" (p. 213). Tormented as she is by "demons" (p. 213), she seeks an escape from guilt and fear and later a confrontation with them: "The demons, who had driven Isobel this far, now stood on the masts and the funnel, on lifeboats and at the entrances to passageways cackling, cracking" (p. 33). Hence Isobel begins her quest accompanied by her "hateful witches, OBAYIFO, BAYI" (p. 25), pursued by their tyranny, eventually having to oppose them.

However, Thomas' constant critical intrusions into the text, her playing with Isobel as a chess player does with her pawn,<sup>38</sup> indicate Isobel's lack of choice. Accordingly, she is doomed to wander from place to place, for an indefinite lapse of time.

Aimlessness, directionlessness govern her: "Where was she going? What was she doing here?" (p. 169). Her staying in Dakar or her stumbling through the fury darkness of the Bamako train station" (p. 145) have no other raison d'être than that of keeping the tale going. And as the "old man" recalls, what matters perhaps is just the wandering itself, the generative creation of endless adventures: "A tale- a tale. Let it go and let it return ....A story, a story. Let it go. Let it come" (p. 169).

Hence, to return to Isobel, her journey appears to an extent as mere drifting. Again, as in Alice's case, the heroine, initially a seeker, finds herself in the position of victim. Yet, despite the obstacles set on Isobel's trip by Thomas in order to distract her away from her purpose (we must remember Isobel wants to exorcise the dead and confront herself with the child) Isobel eventually reaches the sacred village where the exorcism is performed on her. Two different versions of the event are given to the reader who is free to interpret à sa guise. At the end of the first one, nothing is left but "blackness before Isobel's eyes" (p. 516). After the second one, Isobel takes to the forest (Diana's universe) and becomes a witch (p. 525). Whatever way the reader looks at it, the result is a form of absence or void. Isobel does not return to Jason. In this sense, his prediction ("the results of your

journey in the end will be positive for both of us . . . you will come back safe and sound . . ." [p. 187]) falls short of its actualization.

The conclusion that can possibly be drawn then is that Thomas is simply not writing a fairy-tale since the traditional chronology of the genre is here completely disrupted. Up to the point when Isobel enters the village the arrangement of events is respected but not later. Thomas then may be writing "something else." However, and this is not to mean that Thomas is indeed writing a fairy-tale, there is one central element to the fairy-tale which Thomas exploits skilfully, i.e., the villain and which I want to explore for I believe in it lies a possible answer for a description of Blown Figures.

What prevents Isobel, after her exorcism, from regaining her wholeness and returning to the world of normalcy (symbolized by family life) in an Alice-like manner is the villain figure who, as we have seen, appears in the form of witches, dragons, all sorts of monsters. The guilt motif enables us to view the villain as an external expression of internal contradictory and violent subconscious pressures. As in other fairy-tales, the villain is an unacknowledged part of the hero, that sometime destructive tendency in the self which Jung calls 'the shadow.'<sup>39</sup> Isobel tries to struggle against the demons that attempt "to take possession of her" <sup>39</sup>and the unrolling narrative of Blown Figures describes not her progressive emergence (triumph) over those dark forces but her progressive absorption by them: Isobel is absorbed (swallowed by them) to the point that she herself becomes the

villain. There are open references at the end of the novel to this process of negative assimilation which, according to Propp, describes the villain: "the villain spoils the crops," "causes bodily injury" (a child is born with two heads [p. 525]) and uses bewitching means." The villain also "casts a spell" on the village (p. 525), "makes a threat of cannibalism," and declares war" (p. 535).<sup>40</sup>

In traditional fairy-land, the witch (villain) turns out to have a positive function so far as, in the role of guide, helper, she enables the hero to go the right (opposite) way. In Blown Figures, the witch remains antagonistic and the heroine puts on the attributes of the villain.<sup>41</sup> Ironically enough, she does so by becoming a witch.

What seems striking is that Thomas plays with the traditional notion of fairy-tale. She adopts the fairy-tale structure only to dismantle it. Isobel's initiation fails, her return is made impossible; chronology and the comforting longing for unity and order are broken. At the literal level, Blown Figures leaves a gap wide open, questions unanswered. What happens to Isobel? Does she die? Where is the child? Has he ever existed? Was he a mere pretext? What is true, real? Thomas' novel is a deconstructed fairy-tale. Not only does Thomas attack nursery rhymes or fairy-tales by distorting them in the body of her prose, she also undoes them most skilfully by creating a structural contradiction to the principles inherently at work in fairy-tales. The villain in Blown Figures is both Isobel and her witches.

Thomas demonstrates the existence and actuality of

chaos in our world by setting her character in a chaotic, alienating world and also, structurally - from the perspectives offered by the function of 'dramatis personae' in the fairy-tale genre - she promotes chaos. Thomas is, after all, the witch herself, who lures her characters into deceptive acts and plays with them as with pawns. In a highly technocratic world, a fantastic universe that ceaselessly betrays (or reverses) our expectations, in short a post-modernist world, Blown Figures aims at teaching all the Alices about the impossibility of obtaining easy answers.

Thus, if Thomas refers to the Alice books in the body of her fiction under the form of themes and allusions, or if she exploits the structure of Carroll's tales, it is not so much with the purpose to imitate as to differentiate. Isobel or Rachel do not submit to order, but rebel against male power.

However, paradox, the essence of life according to Thomas, is also contained in her work. My above mythical approach to role reversals in Blown Figures or, for that matter, Latakia, seemingly offers a contradiction to the statement that Thomas' fiction points to chaos. Obviously a mythic narrative adopts chaos only as an intermediary stage and ultimately manifests order. The great "female powers" (Latakia, p. 49) that the Great Mother prototype encompasses are re-installed in Thomas' last two novels. Accordingly, one is forced to conclude that the path to order (myth) passes by the recognition of chaos (deconstructed fairy-tale) and constitutes the author's deliberate 'paradox.'

In her interview with David Arnason, Thomas admits the

necessity to select and assimilate experience so as to order it. Her longing to reorder our chaotic world is successful. She rejects the order imposed by the fairy-tale genre, but accepts the one imposed by myth. How much in the details of her fiction is done -- through the sure touch of an "unconscious artistic logic" -- to contribute to the creation of such an epiphany as Blown Figures must be left to our imagination.

## Conclusion

In this thesis, I have evoked the differences between two writers, Carroll and Thomas, who, though using many of the same literary devices, adopt two visions of writing: male and female. In the pages that follow and in lieu of a conclusion, I wish not only to bring together the focal points of Carroll's and Thomas' works but also, and mostly, to indicate the new, challenging perspectives this study has enabled me to form.

Even though both Thomas and Carroll concern themselves with female characters, the particular imprint of the writer on his/her fiction can be determined. To use Nancy K. Miller's words, where "the encoding of ... experience in literature [remains an] organisation...of the dominant culture," the fiction is masculine. It is not a universal construct, nor is it feminine.<sup>1</sup>

In her article on women's writing (resting on Freud's analysis of daydreams and fantasies in adults) Miller defines what she calls "women's fiction" and states the basic separation between a masculine and feminine mode of writing (pp. 40sq). According to the psychoanalyst, "unsatisfied wishes are the driving power behind phantasies; every separate phantasy contains the fulfillment of a wish, and improves upon unsatisfactory reality." Furthermore,

The impelling wishes vary according to the sex,

character and circumstances of the creator; they may... be divided...into ~~two~~ principal groups. Either they are ambitious wishes, serving to exalt the person creating them, or ~~they~~ are erotic. In young women erotic wishes dominate the phantasies almost exclusively, for their ambition is generally comprised in their erotic longings; in young men egoistic and ambitious wishes assert themselves plainly enough alongside their erotic desires (emphasis added, p. 40).

Hence, Miller affirms that in masculine fantasies, "coexistence [*is*] possible" between the 'ambitious' and the 'erotic' and that there can be "a woman in some corner, for whom the dreamer [*male*] performs all his heroic deeds" (emphasis added) (p. 40). She further notes that the hero of male literature "is continually exposed to danger, but we follow his perilous adventures with a sense of security, because we know that at each turn, he will triumph" (emphasis added, p. 40). Needless to add, this comment pinpoints the motif of the quest I have referred to in my thesis. The hero of male fiction is thus invulnerable.

In the remainder of her argument, Miller demonstrates that female fiction also charts the daydreams of an invincible (female) ego but which differs from the male one in the sense that female power resides in its self-sufficiency; female ambitious wishes that become transcribed into women's fiction "are contained entirely in their erotic longings" (p. 41). The important words in regard to my thesis are "contained entirely in" for, precisely, they refer the reader back to the notions of search, circularity, internalization, self-centeredness or self-sufficiency. In fact, while Miller approaches the problem from a different angle, it is noteworthy to point to the vocabulary she uses to define this male/female dichotomy. If the hero of male writing undergoes

perilous adventures but eventually triumphs over externally imposed difficulties, as is the case in the fairy-tale whose quest structure has been discussed apropos of Carroll, the heroine of female writing triumphs by simply creating within her mind a fantasy of power which, according to Miller, aims at revising "the social grammar in which women are never defined as subjects: a fantasy of power that disdains a sexual exchange in which women can participate only as objects of circulation " (p. 41).

In other words, the heroines choose to refuse a reality that does not conform to their (erotic) longings and to focus on the re-creation or re-scripting of that reality in their fantasies. La princesse de Clèves for instance renounces the Duc of Nemours (ne/amours) and his world of maxims to concentrate, at her country residence, on the re-creation --on her own terms and through fantasy-- of a reality she does not wish to accept. In her nocturnal reverie, which as Miller **notes**, Michel Butor called "a daydream of fetishistic sublimation " (p. 42), Mme de Cleves demands and attains 'a something' that is incompatible with what reality can offer. Likewise, Thomas' heroines all reject the traditional "happily ever after" of fairy-tales, the domination of men over their lives, the masculine code of behaviour for women, in favour of their own fantasies. Mrs. Blood has an indeterminate number of lovers, Isobel rejects her marriage, Rachel denounces Michael's pseudo-godliness and she literally re-writes him, turning him into a ludicrous broken/ fallen god.

These elements concerning the divergence between male/female impulses vs a reality which is a male-oriented heritage have deeper ramifications at the level of the structure of male/female fiction. Miller notes that "the implausible twists of plot so common" in women's novels are "a form of insistence about the relation of women to writing: a comment on the stakes of difference within the theoretical indifference of literature itself " (emphasis added, p. 44) These implausible twists, may I add, correspond to what I have called the chaos, search, circularity, wanderings and flip-flops of ground rules of Thomas' (and partly Carroll's) fiction. If the quest leads somewhere, generally to a 'return home' (whatever the symbolic meaning of 'home' can be) the search leads "elsewhere," with the 'elsewhere' functioning as an indefinite determiner.

To apply these remarks to Thomas and Carroll more concisely and to return to the limited field of investigation I have adopted in my thesis, there is no doubt that Lewis Carroll has attempted to emphasize the impulse to power that operates subliminally in Alice, namely her fantasy to reverse the hierarchy of Wonderland and the Looking Glass in order to "revise the social grammar" in which women and a fortiori little girls "are never defined as subjects." What Carroll tells about is not only Alice's childish dream of power for the weak, but also her rebellious female day-dream of overthrowing the maxims and language that bind the narrative by a logical, well defined masculine structure and her longing for another script in which refusal and chaos abound (what I call the search).

However, as I have tried to show in my study of the Alice books, Carroll is bound in his development of Alice's fantasy and outburst of freedom and power by a conformity and respect for the norms, maxims, narrative structure, order and logic of his time and kind (male). The bipolar, ambivalent quest/search tendencies in Carroll's work underline the confusion that reigns in Alice's varied Adventures and that puzzles the reader. Precisely, the word confusion (from the Latin cum: with and fūsiō, from fundere: to pour) is relevant for it indicates the merging together and the confusion (in its accepted sense), in Carroll's writing, of both tendencies, the male (fairy-tale quest) and the female (search) ones. To say that the Alice books are structurally an example of 'androgyny' and thus constitute a deviation from the norm and from proper tradition and writing can only be seen in the way critics struggle to enter the Alice books into a well defined category. For some, like Rabkin, they are a true Fantasy (so alike women's wild unexpected fantasies!) for others they are a fairy-tale, faithful to its inner organising principles. For an even wider majority, they belong 'nowhere'! Accordingly, what may in fact single out the Alice books as unique is perhaps not Carroll's games with language--for others have made similar experiments--but his very peculiar penchant for a female mode of writing and converse imprisonment in a male traditional literary code.

Thomas has sensed Carroll's struggle with the informing 'text' (what Miller calls "the doxa of socialities," p.36) that forcefully moulds his writing. She, as a female writer, has made it possible to improve on Carroll's incomplete enterprise by first

miming it, then re-scripting it. If Alice returns home, obeying the narrative rules of the fairy-tale genre, let us not forget that Isobel "remains elsewhere" (p.525), an interesting phrase also used by Luce Igaray in her description of women's writing:

To play with mimesis is...for a woman to try to recover the place of her exploitation by language, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it. It is to resubmit herself... to ideas -- notably about her-- elaborated in and through a masculine logic, but to "bring out" by an effect of playful repetition what was to remain hidden: the recovery of a possible operation of the feminine in language. It is also to unveil the fact that if women mime so well they are not simply reabsorbed in this function. They also remain elsewhere....(emphasis added) <sup>2</sup>

Thomas does not mime Carroll. She completes him and her re-writing of Alice's experience into that of "Isobel" brings the reader more understanding of the revolution accomplished since Carroll's times.

With this search for the White Queen through Thomas and Carroll's prose, the reader comes to wider, more challenging perspectives: namely, the possibility of relocating, redefining fiction according to its linear structure (quest) or its circularity (search) and further investigating the extent to which traditional (male) narrative is losing (or has lost) **ground in the** face of a more chaotic, tidal form that refuses the possibility of safe return and glory. The "remaining elsewhere" of Isobel may be what represents the sure mark of a deviational narrative that surreptitiously imposes its mode on modern writing; in this regard it would be worth tracing its origin back in literary tradition.

Finally, with Thomas, the reader has discovered the "bypassing of the dialectics of desire,"<sup>3</sup> a peculiarly feminine act of victory, a refusal to give in to Jason, Richard, Michael or for that matter, Carroll. Audrey Thomas and Lewis Carroll are the two completing sides of the mirror without which fullness remains unachieved.

## Appendix

In this appendix will appear the quotations, allusions, diverse references, scenes borrowed by Thomas from the Alice books. The novels will appear in the following order: Songs, Blood, Lat. and B.F. Blown Figures is listed last because it constitutes the most important 'catalogue' of borrowings. As I have shown in the third chapter of my thesis, Thomas draws most heavily on Carroll for Blown Figures in order to deconstruct the Alice books. The reader can judge of the necessity to list these borrowings from their quantity.

The appendix will be done under the form of a chart. The left hand column (1) will indicate the pages from Thomas' novels on which there are borrowings from Carroll. The second left hand column (2) will indicate whether or not we are dealing with a quotation or an allusion, a reference or an image. A quotation reproduces accurately the passage from Carroll; an allusion approximates a quotation, but some words are changed or omitted. a reference simply refers to a situation or scene in the Alice books; as for the image, it relates to a similar image used by Carroll in the Alice books. The two columns on the right indicate if we are dealing with a passage from Alice in Wonderland (3) or The Looking Glass (4).

| 1                        | 2                                                            | 3                             | 106<br>4                       |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <u>Novels</u><br>(pages) | <u>Type of borrow-</u><br><u>ing</u>                         | <u>Wonder-</u><br><u>land</u> | <u>Looking</u><br><u>Glass</u> |
| <u>Songs</u>             |                                                              |                               |                                |
| 28                       | allusion to the<br>well.....                                 | --                            |                                |
| 35                       | imitation of Mock<br>Turtle's song.....                      | 141                           |                                |
| 145                      | reference to Alice in<br>rabbit hole.....                    | --                            |                                |
| 207                      | quotation.....                                               | 89                            |                                |
| <u>Blood</u>             |                                                              |                               |                                |
| epigraph                 | quotation.....                                               | 89                            |                                |
| 19                       | reference to the<br>rabbit hole.....                         | --                            |                                |
| 48                       | reference to Alice,<br>March Hare, and<br>playing cards..... | --                            |                                |
| 115                      | reference to Cheshire Cat<br>Cat.....                        | 90-91                         |                                |
| 121                      | reference to Alice's<br>debate.....                          | 35-36                         |                                |
| 173-74                   | reference to Carroll<br>and rhinoceros beetle.....           | --                            |                                |
| 180                      | reference to Alice<br>and White Rabbit.....                  | --                            |                                |
| <u>Lat.</u>              |                                                              |                               |                                |
| 15                       | chess game image.....                                        | --                            |                                |
| 19                       | reference to Cheshire<br>Cat.....                            | --                            |                                |
| 20                       | reference to Cheshire<br>Cat.....                            | --                            |                                |
| 28                       | game image (ever-changing<br>rules).....                     | --                            |                                |

|             |                                                |        |     |
|-------------|------------------------------------------------|--------|-----|
|             |                                                |        | 107 |
| 1           | 2                                              | 3      | 4   |
| 105         | chess game image.....                          | --     |     |
| 170         | reference to Looking<br>Glass world.....       | --     |     |
| <u>B.F.</u> |                                                |        |     |
| epigraph    | reference to Alice.....                        | --     |     |
| 72          | reference to the<br>Pigeon.....                | 76-77  |     |
| 86          | quotation.....                                 | 33     |     |
| 88          | quotation.....                                 | 39     |     |
| 89          | quotation.....                                 | 33     |     |
| 91          | quotation.....                                 | 75     |     |
| 92          | quotation.....                                 | 36     |     |
| 124         | quotation.....                                 | 261    |     |
| 125         | quotation.....                                 | 250    |     |
| 126         | allusion to White<br>Queen and chess game..... | 208    |     |
| 128         | quotation .....                                | 185    |     |
| 129         | quotation.....                                 | 175    |     |
| 130         | allusion to Alice's<br>hunger.....             | 180    |     |
| 141         | quotation.....                                 | 130    |     |
| 142 ff.     | train journey<br>image.....                    | 217ff. |     |
| 161         | allusion to Alice's<br>tears.....              | 40-41  |     |
| 163         | mirror image.....                              | 180-81 |     |
| 195         | reference to the<br>little voice.....          | 220    |     |
| 292         | quotation.....                                 | 87     |     |
| 293         | allusion to cards.....                         | 108    |     |
| 295         | quotation.....                                 | 116-17 |     |
| 299         | quotation.....                                 | 242    |     |

| 1   | 2                                               | 3 | 4              |
|-----|-------------------------------------------------|---|----------------|
| 300 | quotation.....                                  |   | 259            |
| 301 | reference to the dream.....                     |   | 344            |
| 303 | quotation.....                                  |   | 337, 339<br>34 |
| 305 | quotation.....                                  |   | 84             |
| 307 | allusion to<br>luggage.....                     |   | 219            |
| 313 | possible reference.....                         |   | 100            |
| 314 | allusion to<br>Flamingo.....                    |   | 111            |
| 315 | allusion to Alice<br>through Looking Glass..... |   | 185            |
| 343 | reference to kitchen<br>shelf.....              |   | 253            |
| 352 | allusion to White<br>kitten.....                |   | 175            |
| 363 | quotation .....                                 |   | 99             |
| 442 | quotation.....                                  |   | 181            |
| 481 | quotation.....                                  |   | 33             |
| 501 | quotation.....                                  |   | 75             |
| 502 | allusion to Alice's<br>loneliness.....          |   | 39             |
| 503 | quotation.....                                  |   | 33             |
| 504 | quotation.....                                  |   | 29             |

## Notes

### Introduction

<sup>1</sup> Lewis and Short, "circus", A Latin Dictionary (Oxford: at the Clarendon Press, 1975). Also, see the OED, 1933 ed. All further references are to these editions.

<sup>2</sup> Gaston Bachelard, La poétique de l'espace ( Paris: P.U.F., 1960), p. 210.

<sup>3</sup> Gilbert Durand, Les structures anthropologiques de l'Imaginaire : Introduction à l'archétypologie générale (Paris:Bordas, 1969),p.284.

<sup>4</sup> Latin Dictionary.

<sup>5</sup> OED.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Lewis Carroll, The Annotated Alice: Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass ( Cleveland and New York: The World Publishing Company, 1960). All further references to this work appear in the text. Quotations from the Alice books come from this volume. Later cited as Alice.

<sup>9</sup> Audrey Thomas, Songs My Mother Taught Me ( Vancouver: Talon Books, 1973). Later cited as Songs.

<sup>10</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, Mrs. Blood ( Vancouver: Talon Books, 1970). Later cited as Blood.

<sup>11</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, Blown Figures ( Vancouver: Talon Books, 1974).

Later cited as B.F.

<sup>12</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, Latakia (Vancouver: Talon Books, 1979). Later cites as Lat. Quotations from Thomas' four novels are followed by page numbers in parentheses in the text.

<sup>13</sup> Durand, pp. 364-65. The ouroboros, the great symbol of the temporal cycle, disappears and reappears with the same rhythm as the moon.

It is a symbol of fertility as well as the terrifying keeper of the ultimate mystery of time: death. --In Durand, pp. 364-69.

### Chapter One

<sup>1</sup> See the appendix at the end of the thesis.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> The same can be said of Rabelais' Abbaye de Thélème.

<sup>4</sup> Saussure also uses the chess-game image in his Cours de linguistique générale.

<sup>5</sup> These points are developed by many Carrollian critics, such as K. Blake, D. Hudson, J. Pudney and R. Sutherland.

<sup>6</sup> This is not to say that Thomas focuses only on women. Her concern is for the human predicament as well as the condition of our language, the art of novel writing or the position of the artist in our world.

<sup>7</sup> When I refer to Isobel in quotations marks, I mean to refer to all of Thomas' characters at the same time for they can be seen as one single character depicted in her progression through life.

<sup>8</sup> Other writers such as Joyce Carol Oats ( Wonderland) or Margaret Atwood ( The Edible Woman) make use of Carroll's Wonderland.

<sup>9</sup> Mircea Eliade, The Myth of the Eternal Return or Cosmos and History, trans. from the French by Willard R. Trask (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1965), pp. 17-18. Bachelard, Poulet, Rousset also express similar views.

<sup>10</sup> Even then, Isobel cannot avoid the temporal progression (expressed by the death of her friend's father, her boyfriend, her

grandmother).

<sup>11</sup> Although this study is not a Jungian interpretation, it is of course possible to connect Isobel's sense of dislocation or split identity to Jung's analysis and definition of neurosis as "a state of being at odds with oneself, caused by the conflict between instinctive drives and the demands of one's society, between infantile obstinacy and the desire to conform, between collective and individual obligations."

--In C.G. Jung, Word and Image, ed. by Aniela Jaffe, Bollingen Series XCVII:2 (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1979), p. 228. Later cited as Word. Also, the contrast between Joseph, the male servant, and Mrs. Blood serves to emphasize the latter character's sense of broken identity. Joseph appeals to Mrs. Blood's imagination because she can feel his "primitiveness." She consciously notes that "He is very superstitious ...and often goes to the market for fantastic remedies... and he knows what the dark side of life is all about, and violence appeals to him" ( p. 176).

<sup>12</sup> The dive/search motif appears frequently in Canadian fiction, particularly in Margaret Atwood's Surfacing. It can be developed from a Jungian viewpoint with regard to the "process of individuation," something I have done with Blown Figures.

<sup>13</sup> One recalls that the Wanderer's miserable fate comes as a consequence of his ignorance that the bounties of his Lord shall not last and that his Lord shall die. The theme of transience which is at the heart of Anglo-Saxon Poetry seems to haunt Ms. Thomas as well.

<sup>14</sup> This point is further developed in the third chapter. Thomas undoes our expectation of narrative circularity by introducing a new element on the last page of the novel: "get rid of it, he

said" ( p.220). This sentence winds up the tale, bringing the reader back to the starting point, but with the knowledge of a new important element ; instead of viewing the narrator as a victim ( of men and, in particular, of Jason) who has lost her child through miscarriage, he can comprehend her guilt in the light of a moral fault, a possible abortion. The concept of guilt and sin so obviously introduced on the last page serves to undermine the reader's belief in the narrator's story and leads him to a new reading of the novel. Furthermore, a mythocritical approach to the guilt motif in Blood would confirm my point. The French theoretician of the Imaginary, Gilbert Durand, points to the narrow isomorphism between blood as a dark water ("l'eau sombre") and femininity or "menstrual time," all three elements interrelated in the novel and connected to the "archétype de la Chute."

--In Durand, pp. 93-96.

<sup>15</sup> For instance, Blood, 19, relates to Songs, 114.

<sup>16</sup> References to characters of previous novels in B.F. are on pp. 18-19, 21, 31, 214 and 455.

<sup>17</sup> Africa occupies a privileged place in the journey motif. Because the African land appears to the Western consciousness as swollen with possibilities, mystery and primitiveness, it becomes another metaphor for the water seen as the unconscious. Going through Africa or diving into water are one and the same thing: a psychological search undertaken to come to terms with one's self.

<sup>18</sup> Thomas herself is the "white Queen" (or the White Goddess) who plays with Alice.

<sup>19</sup> Lewis Carroll, Alice, p. 216, note 1.

<sup>20</sup> This cliché of contemporary fiction is also used by Nabokov.

21 Alice, p. 336, note 1.

22 Ibid., p. 172, note 1.

23 In an interview with David Arnason and Wayne Tefs (taped at St. John's College, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Canada, Fall 1977), Thomas declared Jung and Carroll to be the two sides of the same thing, an interesting comment in the light of her reference to both in her fiction.

24 Other references to the characters' dislocation are on pp. 29-21, 22, 23, 25, 29, 32, 33, etc....

25 Jung, Psyche and Symbol: A Selection from the Writings of C.G. Jung, ed. by Violet S. de Laszlo ( New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1958), p. 295. Later cited as Psyche.

26 Jung, Word, p. 78.

27 The child motif, an important aspect of Thomas' writing can be analysed from a Jungian point of view. The child always appear dismantled or mutilated. The theriomorphic images that designate it such as the pig (B.F.,287), the kid (B.F.,58,93), the fish (Blood, 191), the bird ( Blood, 108-09) all point to some dislocation resulting from eating (Blood, 108-09, 191), cutting (B.F., 171) or breaking (Blood, 59, 66, 217; B.F., 455).

Jung sees the clearest " manifestation of the child-motif in the therapy of neuroses" as "the maturation process of personality ...termed the process of individuation." When the latter is successful , the child-motif can be expressed by " roundness, the circle or sphere, or else by the quaternity or another form of wholeness... the 'self.'" In contrast to the archetypologist's above ideas, Thomas' fiction witnesses the failure of the child-motif to express wholeness. Also, the sense of futurity or of the triumph of life

over darkness which the child-motif usually features is absent from Thomas' writing. And because the self seems for ever fragmented, chaos dominates over order.

--See Jung, Psyche, pp. 122, 128, 127-31.

<sup>28</sup> See Mrs. Blood's discussion with her doctor: "But quite often the magic or exorcism fails."...."A good failure. The juju has lost to malevolent spirits, not to paranoid schizophrenia or whatever..." (emphasis added, p. 93).

<sup>29</sup> Jung, Word, p. 78.

<sup>30</sup> The distinction is between the acting function and the actor.

<sup>31</sup> The reader is Thomas' chess partner (p. 144).

<sup>32</sup> Tzvetan Todorov, The Poetics of Prose (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1977), p. 70.

<sup>33</sup> Also Rachel's comment on p. 30. The writer is a painter in the process of transposing on to the canvas the landscape she observes. Such a work excludes the possibility of chronology.

<sup>34</sup> This point will be examined in the third chapter, when I analyse "the fantastic" in the writer's fiction.

<sup>35</sup> Ed. by Barbara A. Babcock, in The Reversible World: Symbolic Inversion in Art and Society (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1978), pp. 147-90.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 151.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., pp. 154-55.

<sup>38</sup> Bruce Jackson, "Deviance as Success: The Double Inversion of Stigmatised Roles," in Reversible World, p. 274.

<sup>39</sup> Further development to symbolic inversion is given in the third chapter in regard to myth. Also, Blown Figures' chaotic structure can be seen in the disturbance of the linear time sequ-

ence and of the narrative circularity, the use of blank spaces, the collage technique, etc....

## Chapter Two

<sup>1</sup> The first quotation comes from Blood, 66. The second one from Lat., 171; the third one is from Blood, 85.

<sup>2</sup> In particular, The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, Finnegan's Wake and Ulysses.

<sup>3</sup> In Blood, 59. The word "living" can be used both with the determiners 'the' and 'a'. "To seek a living" is synonymous with "to earn one's bread," whereas "to seek the living" means "to look for the one (or those) alive." This deliberate confusion allows Ms. Thomas to introduce the word "bread," and possibly one more pun on "risen" since the dough of bread is said to "rise."

<sup>4</sup> Robert D. Sutherland, Language and Lewis Carroll (The Hague, Paris: Mouton, 1970), p. 13. Later cited as Language.

<sup>5</sup> I shall use throughout this chapter the English phonetic transcription recorded by Daniel Jones in his Everyman's English Pronouncing Dictionary, ed. by A.C. Gimson (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1967).

<sup>6</sup> Sutherland, Language, p. 166.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 169.

<sup>9</sup> The distinction may also be between can and may; it can be a cultural reference on the ~~part~~ of the narrator.

<sup>10</sup> In fact, the confusion between the child and the goat seem to have deeper connotations that will be studied in the third chapter.

<sup>11</sup> Sutherland, Language, p. 175.

<sup>12</sup> Unless of course one distorts the spelling of a word in

order to reproduce approximately its pronunciation; in this case, the wrong spelling takes the place of the phonetic transcription.

<sup>13</sup> Linguists do not always use the same terminology to describe the principal English sounds. I have used Daniel Jones' technical terms, from his Everyman's English Pronouncing Dictionary.

<sup>14</sup> Interview with David Arnason and Wayne Tefs.

<sup>15</sup> Sutherland, Language, p. 204. Thomas plays on the same "shave/save" ambiguity in B.F., 532.

<sup>16</sup> The reader can look at Barbara M.H. Strang's analysis in Modern English Structure (London: Edward Arnold Publishers Ltd., 1970 ), pp. 54-55. It is important to remember also that some phonemes are already morphemes, like "a."

<sup>17</sup> The r/l confusion is indicative of language contact. The expression is also a biblical reference (emphasis on mortality).

<sup>18</sup> Lat., 20.

<sup>19</sup> Sutherland deals with this aspect of Carroll's technique in the chapter entitled "Obstacles to Communication Presented by the Utterance Itself," pp. 204-07 in Language.

<sup>20</sup> B.F., 197.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 82.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>23</sup> The asterisk placed at the beginning of a phrase, word, or sentence means that these linguistic units are not recorded forms of English common usage. They may be hypothetical forms but are said not to occur in English. (see B. Strang's definition in Modern Structure, p. 55). It is to be understood in this sense in this chapter.

<sup>24</sup> "Riven" is repeated in Blood, 59; the narrator also alludes

to "Rosie the riveter" ( p. 59).

<sup>25</sup> In the particular context of the quotation on p. 21, one expects "given" instead of "riven" since the following sentence is "Take this in remembrance of me."

<sup>26</sup> Sutherland, Language, p. 150.

<sup>27</sup> However Sutherland contends that the reader cannot seriously be expected "to believe that frumious contains the significations of both 'fuming' and 'furious.'...It is more likely that most words occurred to Carroll spontaneously in their final form." In Language, p. 150.

<sup>28</sup> An interesting compound if one recalls its Biblical namesake.

<sup>29</sup> Sutherland, Language, p. 188.

<sup>30</sup> The reader can find further information on this particular point in the chapter entitled "Les coordonnées morphémiques nominales. La description syntaxique et le descripteur sémantique," from Jean Lavédrine's work on Coordonnées morphémiques élémentaires en anglais contemporain ( Paris: H. Champion, 1975).

<sup>31</sup> Quoted by Sutherland in Language, p. 27.

<sup>32</sup> B.F., 132; Blood, 57.

<sup>33</sup> See Walter Ong's analysis of the function of the definite article, Interfaces of the Word: Studies in the Evolution of Consciousness and Culture (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1977), pp. 63-64. Harold Pinter also uses this device. In fact Pinter's technique of language is similar to that of Carroll and Thomas.

<sup>34</sup> The phrase employed by Mary ("I want to spend a penny") is understood euphemistically by her mother as "I want to go to the toilet"; however the child only wants "to put the penny in" and does not need to go to the bathroom; she plays with her mother's understanding of the expression as a euphemism for going to the toilet.

The misunderstanding between mother and child puts an end to their moment "of shared childhood." (Blood, 52). Another instance of euphemism in the same novel is on p. 83: "you've cursed my pajamas."

35 Blood, 83.

36 Ibid., p. 66.

37 Sutherland, Language, p. 216.

38 Thomas may have wanted to establish a connection between her patient-character and Dante's Beatrice.

39 The passage that most strikingly expresses the character's disappointment with fairy-tales is in B.F., 328.

40 B.F., 250, 258-61, 328. Blood, 66-67, 71, 104, 123.

41 My definition of the word "attributes" is that of Sutherland in Language, p. 102 but it also includes adjectives.

42 Sutherland, Language, p. 176.

43 Ibid., pp. 166-67.

44 Blood, 112. Sutherland gives similar instances from Lewis Carroll's tales in Language, p. 193.

45 Jean Lavédrine, Cours de linguistique anglaise, given at the University of Grenoble III, France, 1975-76.

46 Songs, p. 39.

47 Sutherland, Language, p. 141.

48 Blood, 73.

49 Sutherland, Language, p. 141.

50 Lareina Rule, Name your Baby (New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1966), p. 24.

51 Ibid., p. 29.

52 Alice is clearly accused by some of the Wonderland creatures

in several instances, in particular on pp. 33, 76, 109, 114, of Alice's Adventures.

<sup>53</sup> Nonetheless, some writers may choose at times to make their characters abide by the analogue of their prototype. Such is the case of Hagar in The Stone Angel by Margaret Laurence.

<sup>54</sup> Lareina Rule, Name your Baby, p. 166.

<sup>55</sup> Blood, 43-44.

<sup>56</sup> Sutherland, Language, p. 213.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 119.

### Chapter Three

<sup>1</sup> This allusion to Kay and Gerda can be traced to H.C. Andersen's tale "The Snow Queen" in Hans Christian Andersen's Fairy Tales (n.p.:The Hairloom Library, n.d.) pp. 170-226.

<sup>2</sup> See Evelyn J. Hinz, "Hierogamy versus Wedlock: Types of Marriage Plots and their Relationship to Genres of Prose Fiction," PMLA, 91, No. 5 (Oct. 76), 908.

<sup>3</sup> B.F., 210.

<sup>4</sup> Evelyn J. Hinz and John J. Teunissen, "Surfacing: Margaret Atwood's 'Nymph Complaining,'" Contemporary Literature XX, 2 (1979), 229.

<sup>5</sup> William Sherwood Fox, The Mythology of all Races, Vol. 1 (1964), p. 186.

<sup>6</sup> Andersen, Fairy Tales, pp. 105-42.

<sup>7</sup> Fox, Mythology, p. 262.

<sup>8</sup> Durand, p. 106.

<sup>9</sup> Evelyn J. Hinz, "The Masculine Feminine Psychology of

American Canadian Primitivism: Deliverance and Surfacing," Other Voices Other Views, ed. by Robin W. Winks ( Westport and London: Greenwood Press, 1978), p. 92.

<sup>10</sup> Fox, Mythology, p. 187. Details concerning Artemis are on pp. 184-85.

<sup>11</sup> See pp. 17, 203, 354, 376.

<sup>12</sup> Allusion to the story of the Dutch Boy who plugs the dike.

<sup>13</sup> Mythocriticism provides the reader with an understanding of the function of the witch in the human imagination. She is a form of the femme fatale which the imagination views either as the black moon, death, the witch or the "Vamp." Gilbert Durand recounts the deadly powers of Kali, the goddess of death and time, "représentée vêtue de rouge, portant à ses lèvres un crâne plein de sang" or those of Mousso-koroni who symbolises all that stands in opposition to light: darkness, witchcraft. The latter goddess is an image of rébellion,... désordre,...impureté." Because of her foulness and unfaithfulness she introduces evil and therefore suffering and death into the universe. The last pages of Blown Figures reveal such a mythic figure. Isobel uses human skin to make witches' dresses (p. 534), curses Miss Miller to be crushed ( p. 535), eats her victim's foot (p. 540), or goes by the name "SHE EATS GRAND PEOPLE" (p.543 ). Her color is red, with a strong association with blood. Durand concludes that blood,"en sa féminité...est la première horloge humaine, le premier signe humain corrélatif du drame lunaire (emphasis added). In Durand, p. 122.

<sup>14</sup> The exact passage in Andersen's tale is on p. 139 of Fairy Tales. Other references are made in Blown Figures to Isobel's bleeding feet (pp. 328-31) which echo Andersen's story, pp. 131-32.

<sup>15</sup> Purity here does not mean virginity. See Evelyn J. Hinz

and John J. Teunissen's explanation in "What is the Nymph Complaining for?," ELH, 45 (1978), 422.

16 Footnote to Alice by M. Gardner, pp. 21-22, note 1.

17 (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967), pp. 194-95.

18 Eric S. Rabkin, The Fantastic in Literature (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), p. 28.

19 Ibid., p. 41.

20 V. Propp, Morphology of the Folk-Tale (Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1968), p. 20.

21 Ibid., p. 58.

22 Ibid., p. 36.

23 Ibid., p. 30.

24 Tzvetan Todorov, The Fantastic (Cleveland/ London: The Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1973), p. 54.

25 Rabkin, Fantastic, p. 57.

26 Ibid., p. 37.

27 Ibid., p. 42.

28 Games also fulfill this function.

29 When her older sister tells Alice to go in for her tea, Alice obeys immediately. (p. 162).

30 Propp, Morphology, p. 39.

31 Ibid., p. 36.

32 Todorov, The Fantastic, p. 25.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid., p. 54.

35 Propp, Morphology, p. 35.

36 Ibid., p. 37.

37 Ibid., p. 27.

38 Allusions to this can be found in B.F., 140, 141, 142, 144.

- 39 Propp, Morphology, p. 29.
- 40 Ibid., pp. 31-34.
- 41 An element emphasized by Propp in Morphology, p. 83. As a helper, see p. 81.

### Conclusion

<sup>1</sup> Nancy K. Miller, "Emphasis Added: Plots and Plausibilities in Women's Fiction , " PMLA, Vol. 96, No. 1 (January 1981), 46. Her ideas seem to be 'political' versions of Jung, Bachelard, etc. (animus/anima concept). Further page references from the article appear in parentheses in the body of the text.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted by Miller, p. 38.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

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