

**ALICE'S JUMP IN INTERSEMIOTIC AND INTERTEXTUAL TRANSPOSITION:  
FROM JOHN TENNIEL'S ILLUSTRATIONS TO MARGARET ATWOOD'S RE-  
READING**

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**ABSTRACT:** Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass* (1871) continues to be open to cross-media transfer: musicals, drama, film, besides opera and television. Based on Clüver's, Hoeck's and Genette's theories, this work presents an intersemiotic reading of Alice's jump, as she passes from the world of reality into the world of the mirror, as described by Carroll and illustrated by John Tenniel; it then discusses Margaret Atwood's rereading of the same episode, in *Negotiating with the Dead* (2002). The counterposing of these two distinct arts and world views confirms the endless politextuality of the original text, and how the act of interpretation and critical reaction is shaped by current reception conventions.

**KEYWORDS:** Lewis Carroll. John Tenniel. Margaret Atwood. Intersemiotic and intertextual transposition.

**RESUMO:** A obra *Through the Looking-glass* de Lewis Carroll (1871) foi e continua sendo passível de recepção em várias mídias: versões musicais, teatrais, fílmicas, além de ópera e televisão. Dentro deste amplo leque de opções de leituras intersemióticas, este trabalho tem como objetivo – a partir das abordagens teóricas de Claus Clüver, Leo Hoeck e Gérard Genette – fazer uma leitura intersemiótica do salto de Alice, ao ela passar do mundo da realidade para dentro do mundo do espelho, como descrito por Carroll no texto-fonte e ilustrado por John Tenniel; em seguida, analisar a releitura que Margaret Atwood faz do mesmo episódio, em *Negotiating with the Dead: a writer on writing* (2002), no qual ela interpreta a travessia de Alice como o momento em que ocorre “o ato de escrever”. A

contraposição dessas duas artes e visões de mundo distintas constituirá o desafio deste trabalho a fim de comprovar, uma vez mais, a infinda politextualidade do texto-fonte.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Lewis Carroll. John Tenniell. Margaret Atwood. Transposição intersemiótica e intertextual.

## **Introduction**

As Margaret Atwood ponders on the act of writing, she discusses, in *Negotiating with the dead: a writer on writing*, Chapter II, the duplicity of the writer as writer, and asks herself: “What is the relationship between the two entities we lump under one name, that of ‘the writer’?; “And who is the writing ‘I’?”; “What is the nature of the crucial moment – the moment in which the writing takes place?” (ATWOOD, 2002, p. 35, 45, 55). Atwood concludes by turning back to *Alice through the Looking glass*, “always so useful in matters of the construction of alternate worlds”, in order to give her account of “who does what as far as the actual writing goes”:

At the beginning of the story, Alice is on one side of the mirror – the “life” side, if you like – and the anti-Alice, her reflection and reverse double, is on the other, or “art” side. (...) Alice is a mirror-gazer: the “life” side is looking in, the “art” side is looking out. But instead of breaking her mirror and thus discarding the “art” side for the hard and bright “life” side, where the “art” side is doomed to die, Alice goes the other way. She goes *through* the mirror, and then there is only one Alice, or only one that we can follow. Instead of destroying her double, the “real” Alice merges with the other Alice – the imagined Alice, the dream Alice, the Alice who exists nowhere. But when the

“life “side of Alice returns to the waking world, she brings the story of the mirror world back with her, and starts telling it to the cat. ( p.56-57)

As Atwood continues – and this is the point we wish to emphasize –

It is a false analogy, of course, because Alice is not the writer of the story about her. Nevertheless, here is my best guess, about writers and their elusive doubles, and the question of who does what as far as the actual writing goes. The act of writing takes place at the moment when Alice passes through the mirror. At this one instant, the glass barrier between the doubles dissolves, and Alice is neither here nor there, neither art nor life, neither the one thing nor the other, though at the same time she is all of these at once. At that moment time itself stops, and also stretches out, and both writer and reader have all the time not in the world.(2002, p. 57)

This research thus begins from this argumentation, for it is this magic instant – Alice’s image passing through the mirror and jumping into an alternative world, which Atwood managed to capture and to interpret as the moment in which the act of writing occurs – which we intend to explore:

a) by returning to Lewis Carroll’s source-text *–Through the looking-glass and what Alice found there* – for we are dealing here with the “*primauté du texte*” which lies at the origin of the image (HOECK, 1995, p.71);

b) by counterposing the text to John Tenniel’s illustrations, which had been ordered by Carroll himself, in order to verify which details were transposed and reconstructed and – considering that the relation of an illustration to its source- text can be as varied as the relation of an ekphrastic poem to the visual work which it evokes (CLÜVER, 2006. p. 140) – what

relations can be established between the verbal and the non-verbal text? Considering that book illustrations are made to be published alongside their source texts (CLÜVER, 2006, p. 142), would these illustrations, made inside a single work be “*une simple traduction intersemiotique*” or would they become “*une transposition intersémiotique autonome*”? (HOECK, 1995, p. 73);

c) by comparing the source text with Atwood’s intertextual reading, in order to investigate the function of the transtextual relations established;

d) by contrasting Tenniel’s intersemiotic reading with Atwood’s intertextual one, in order to verify how a Victorian illustrator working together with the author and a writer inserted in our post-modernity, with distinct languages and world views and thus with different conceptions of art and literature, have visualized and transposed the crossing from a “real” into an alternative world.

For it is exactly the fact that, in both cases, we do not have comparable expressive intentions and comparable poetics, along with correlative technical means (PRAZ, 1982, p. 19) which incites us to investigate the matter, and, thus, perhaps, be able to show how Tenniel and Atwood have transcended the limits of Lessing’s warning that space is the field of painting and time that of poetry (PRAZ, 1982, p.23). This contraposition would give us, in its turn, a new dimension to the meaning and fascination which Alice’s crossing still maintains in our present-day world, for, as an aesthetic object, the work has also been and continues to be open to reception in different media by way of translations into many languages and multiple adaptations and transpositions into musical, dramatized and movie versions, besides opera and TV, as a stand-alone or in combination with *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*.

## From Lewis Carroll's source-text to John Tenniel's illustrations

As is well known, the multi-talented Lewis Carroll, as lecturer in Mathematics at Christ Church (Oxford), became a close friend of Dean Henry Liddell's daughters, particularly Alice. From a story told to the Liddell girls when Alice was four years old, Carroll wrote *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and, afterwards, *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There* (1871). In love with children, Carroll wrote both narratives as a contrast to the edifying, moralistic stories read to children in Victorian England. However, both stories proved to be much more than children's stories, for they have become masterpieces of universal literature, for readers of all ages.

Although Carroll had been the original illustrator of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, his own artistic inabilities, among other problems, delayed the publication of the work. As Carroll already knew John Tenniel's work as an illustrator for *Punch* magazine, he called on him, and Tenniel, after extensive talks with Carroll, illustrated the first edition of the work. Soon after, he illustrated *Through the Looking-Glass*. In all, Tenniel made ninety-two drawings in black and white for both books –engraved on blocks of wood, to be printed in the woodcut process. It was only in 1911, more than forty years after the original drawings, that Tenniel hand-colored the first illustrations of Alice: fair-haired, with a blue dress and white pinafore outlined in red. This look has become the classic one and was adopted in later works. As Gil Stoker comments, “new illustrations to Alice have never stopped appearing, but it is significant that these have failed to supersede Tenniel's own designs, which have never been out of print”. They still stand amongst the most famous literary illustrations ever made, “not only through their magical combination of fantasy and design, but also through the constant source of inspiration the story and its iconography have afforded, and are still affording, to later artists”. (<http://www.alice-in-wonderland.net>)

Concentrating, from now on, on our analysis of the first chapter of *Through the Looking-glass*, in which the crossing from the real into a fantastic world occurs, we raise the following questions:

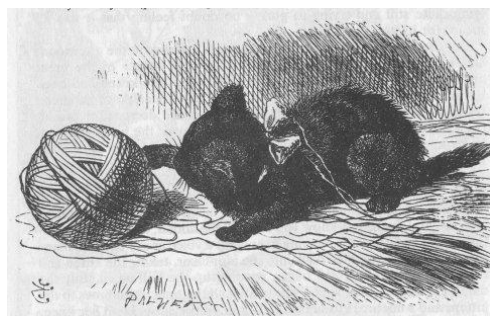
1) Which elements of Carroll's text precede and therefore prepare the reader for Alice's crossing?

2) In which way do these elements also foreshadow some of the objects which will be seen in the world of the mirror?

3) How did Carroll manipulate images, actions and speeches in order to create a propitious mood for entrance into a fantastic world?

4) Reminding ourselves that "significant indefiniteness is the mark of symbols" (VRIES, 1976. intr.)<sup>15</sup> which symbolic associations, pertinent in the context of the elements mentioned by Carroll, contribute to this transition?

*Through the Looking-Glass* begins with a poem by Carroll dedicated to Alice, in which he mentions several times that it is a "fairy-tale" (CARROLL, 1975, p. 175)<sup>16</sup>, thereby already situating the reader in a world of fantasy. The narrative starts in the first chapter, "Looking-Glass House": we are in the drawing-room of Alice's house – "withdrawing-room" already denoting the room to which ladies retire after dinner. It is in a room, therefore, with connotations of individuality and isolation – complementing the meaning of "withdraw" – in which we find Alice, as if preparing herself, in her "privacy of body and thought", for the imaginary adventures in the Looking-Glass House. The associations of the house with shelter and security



<sup>15</sup> All further references to symbolic associations will be taken from this work, unless otherwise stated.

<sup>16</sup> All further references to this work will be presented as *TLG* followed by page numbers.

further confirm and extend the meaning of this room.

The fantasy world starts with Dinah, Alice's cat, taking care of one of her kittens – Snowdrop, the white kitten – while Alice was sitting curled up in a great armchair, “half talking to herself and half asleep” (*TLG*, p. 176). The other kitten– the black one, Kitty – uses the occasion to romp and entangle a ball of worsted that Alice had been trying to wind up and spreads it over the hearth-rug. This scene, apparently only playful, is actually already significant for the passing into an alternative world, through the symbolic associations of the cat with liberty and playfulness, concretized in the actions of Kitty, who takes advantage of her liberty to disentangle the ball of worsted. The ball of worsted, reminding us of the expression “to spin a yarn”, corroborates the associations of the wool yarn with a long adventurous story or a trip, reinforcing the relation established between these two elements of the story – the cat and the ball of worsted – as anticipating and propitiating Alice's crossing, for they suggest that the story which will be

disentangled will also be “free” and full of playfulness.

Tenniel's first illustration for the text portrays exactly this anticipatory moment: Kitty playing with the ball of worsted. The fact that she touches the ball of yarn with her paw as if she could manage it, disentangling it and entangling herself in it, confirms the relation between the symbolic associations of the cat and the ball of worsted – liberty and romps in a long devised story. In the left-hand corner one can further detect the illustrator's initials, John Tenniel, and, in the middle, the signature of the Dalziel brothers.

The fact that Alice was curled up in a great



armchair – symbolizing pause, rest – serves to emphasize the sleepy state which Alice finds herself in, and also, through the associations of the armchair with the throne and authority, to emphasize the authoritarian, even if playful, tone in which Alice talks to the kitten. Furthermore, it is by climbing on an armchair that the girl will reach the chimney-piece, even if she “hardly knew how she had got there” (*TLG*, p.184), as the intrusive omniscient narrator declares.

Tenniel’s illustration of this scene – Alice in the arm-chair, with the kitten on her lap trying to help the girl wind the ball of wool up again – confirms the intimacy between the two and the playful atmosphere in which Alice and the kitten find themselves, features which also propitiate the dialogue which Alice keeps up with the kitten and with the make-believe world she creates. The size of the arm-chair – which belongs to the adult world – besides stressing the delicateness of Alice’s figure as well as the smallness of the kitten, foregrounds, by its frontal position in relation to the spectator, the subtle use Tenniel makes of framing techniques. This position enhances the fact that Alice looks as if she is framed by the “real” world of adults, and also her oblique position in the arm-chair, ready to fall asleep, as if in disagreement with the rules of etiquette for children and, therefore, also ready to leave the adults’ norms of reality.

Alice’s state of drowsiness, in its turn, prepares us for the girl’s crossing, as it remits us to the symbolic associations of sleep as giver of prophetic dreams, for, after her adventures in the looking-glass world and in the final chapter of the story “Which Dreamed It?”, Alice wakes up and says to the kitten: “You woke me out of oh! such a nice dream!” (*TLG*, p. 341). This statement also relates sleep with the symbolism of dreams, for in dreams the soul is absent, working or seeing things away from where the body is at that moment. The very etymology of “to dream” (*trügen*= to deceive) confirms that Alice’s adventures did not actually take place, for in chapter XI “Waking”, which is limited to the narrator’s comment



“ – and it really *was* a kitten, after all”, Alice wakes up holding the black kitten. Sleeping is also symbolic of creativity, of the sacred state in which Alice finds herself, about to start an imaginary adventure; and, still more, of a dangerous state, for, if during sleep the soul leaves the body to wander outside, as in a dream, Alice would be exposed to the dangers which her adventures in the looking-glass house could cause her.

Alice continues her long conversation with Kitty, repeating several times her “favorite phrase”: “Let’s pretend”. (*TLG*, p.179-80). This phrase, which already suggests that there is no separation between the real and the fantasy world for the girl, will be the great propitiator to enter the make-believe world of the looking-glass. For it is at the moment when Alice, holding the kitten in front of the looking-glass to show her how sulky it was and in order to punish her because she would not fold her arms properly, threatens to put her inside the looking-glass world – “‘and if you're not good directly,' she added, 'I'll put you through into Looking-glass House. How would you like that?’” (*TLG*, p. 180) – that we finally come to the mentioning of the looking-glass, the great metaphor which will lead to Alice’s transposition from the world of reality to the world of fantasy. Therefore, starting from the very title of the book, the looking-glass is the key element in Carroll’s story, as it will also be of the two Tenniel illustrations portraying this transposition.

The looking-glass is a traditional decorative object in a Victorian drawing-room, as can be seen in Henry Treffey Dunn’s gouache showing Dante Gabriel Rossetti reading proofs of *Sonnets and Ballads* to Theodore Watts Dunton (London, 1882):



In this picture, the mirror can be observed with the other elements which make up a drawing-room, as the blazing hearth, the arm-chairs, the clock, the paintings, all of them described by Carroll, in this way helping us to visualize the room in which Alice finds herself.

Symbolic of imagination in its capacity to reflect the formal reality of the visible world, the mirror has the same characteristics of the mirror as reflection of the real world; the temporal and existential variety of its function provides the explanation of its meaning and of the diversity of its associations. From the earliest times, the mirror has been thought of as ambivalent: it is a surface that reproduces and also contains and absorbs images. At times, it takes the mythic form of a door through which the soul may free itself 'passing' to the other side, an idea reproduced by Carroll in *Alice through the Looking-glass* (CIRLOT,1971, p.211). The mentioning of the symbolism of the mirror, therefore, corresponds to the symbolism of sleep and of dreams, for it is through this sacred state as creativity and provider of prophetic dreams that Alice manages to transpose the barriers of reality.

The expression coined by Alice – Looking-glass House – reveals how much the girl must already have thought about the matter, to present it with so much naturalness to the kitten. The ideas exposed by the girl also corroborate her creativity as she mentions that the room which can be seen through the glass is the same drawing-room in which she is, “only

the things go the other way” (*TLG*, p. 181)<sup>17</sup>. The same reversion will happen with the associations of the house to shelter and security, for she will be exposed to inconceivable adventures as she penetrates the world of fantasy. In this way, as a foretaste of the narrative which will be “disentangled” inside the looking-glass world, Alice tells the kitten everything she imagines concerning this Looking-glass House.

In turn, Alice’s concern in wanting to know if there would be a fire in the hearth in the Looking-glass room, for it was winter, retrieves the symbolism of the hearth as the most sacred place in the house, with its associations of home, life, hospitality further increased by the symbolism of fire: essence of life and spiritual energy, related to the hearth and to winter. Moreover, the associations of fire with the “flaming tongues” of inspiration and as mediator between vanishing and appearing forms, link the lighted hearth not only to Alice’s passing through the mirror but recall Atwood’s interpretation of the crossing being the moment in which the act of writing occurs. Alice’s concern, reinforced by her commentary “I want so much to know whether they’ve a fire in the winter: you never can tell, you know, unless our fire smokes and then smoke comes up in that room too – (*TLG*, p. 181) further adds to fire the associations of smoke as evanescence, the soul leaving the body, confirming the transitoriness of her adventure and of the passage from one state to another.

The last thing mentioned by Alice are the books. Related to wisdom, secret knowledge, remembrance, magic, these books will have their meaning altered when Alice confides to the kitten that “the words go the wrong way” (*TLG*, p. 181). She has experienced it herself, as she has held up one of her books to the glass “and then they hold up one in the other room”. If one remembers that the “word”, as *Logos*, symbolizes an immanent reason in

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<sup>17</sup> According to Martin Gardner, “the looking-glass theme seems to have been a late addition to the story” following what was said by Alice Liddell herself. In a mirror all asymmetrical objects “go the other way”. “There are many references in the book to such left-right reversals. (...) If we extend the mirror-reflexion theme to include the reversal of any asymmetric relation, we hit upon a note that dominates the entire story”(…):the ordinary world is turned upside down and backward; it becomes a world in which things go every way except the way they are supposed to go”. (*TLG*, p. 180-181).

the world, this reason will therefore be inverted in the looking-glass world, which again foreshadows the strange happenings, characters and speeches which will make up Alice's adventures in the looking-glass world.

As she then asks the kitten if she would like to live in Looking-glass House, Alice perceives a passage in the mirror which allows her to "see a little *peep* of the passage in the Looking-glass House" if she leaves the door of her drawing-room "wide open". It is this door – associated with the idea of house, homeland, the world, and symbolizing, like the threshold, the transition between stages, or states of being, in accordance with the symbolism of the mirror as a door — which permits Alice to visualize this other "state" of being, for if the closed door is a barrier to mystery, the fact that the door of Alice's drawing-room was wide open makes it become a threshold, revealing the passage into this other world, very similar to the passage into the drawing-room in the real world, but which may become "quite different" (TLG, p.181) as we enter it.

The idea of passing through the mirror and entering the house thus comes to Alice's mind, attracted as she is by the apparent beauty of the imaginary world which awaits her. And Alice's "favourite phrase", "Let's pretend", (TLG, p.179-80) – which sends us simultaneously to the act of writing fiction, also a make-believe world, and thus foreshadowing Atwood's interpretation – operates like a magic formula for access to this magical world. For, as she repeats "let's pretend there's a way of getting through into it, somehow", "let's pretend the glass has got all soft like gauze, so that we can get through –" the glass turns into a sort of mist (*gauze* = thin light cloth through which one can see; mist). Therefore, when Alice comments "Why, it's turning into a sort of mist, I declare!" (TLG, p. 184), the gauze/mist has already transformed itself into mist. Symbolic of things indeterminate, and of the inevitable obscuring of the outlines of each aspect and each particular phase of the evolutive process,

mist thus initiates the transition to another world, for Alice realizes that “It’ll be easy enough to get through” (a phrase which she repeats three times, besides sending us back to the title).

The narrator further compares the melting of the mirror to a “a bright silvery mist” (TLG, 184) – which can be explained by the condensation of water vapor in the air on the cold surface of glass, propitiated by the heat of the fire, thereby adding the shiny color of silver to this quality of indetermination of mist, a fact that explains Alice’s wonder and astonishment at this transformation. Hence, as Alice climbs on the chimney-piece, she is already impregnated by the symbolism of fire, of the hearth and of the shiny and silvery mist into which the mirror has transformed itself, suggesting that the fantastic world has become penetrable. As a consequence, “In another moment Alice was through the glass, and had jumped lightly down into the Looking-glass room” (TLG, p. 181-184), thus completing her ascending movement as she climbs onto the arm-chair with a descending movement as she jumps into the. Looking-glass room.



This crossing will be transposed by Tenniel in two illustrations: the first showing Alice on the verge of passing through the mirror; the second, depicting Alice as she appears on the other side of the mirror. As we compare both illustrations, we perceive that each is the reverse of the other. As Gill Stoker confirms, both illustrations of Alice’s passage through the mirror appear on opposite sides of the same page, so that the illusion of her transference from one world to another is created as one turns the page ([http:// www.alice-in-wonderland.net](http://www.alice-in-wonderland.net)) As a realistic touch, and also as visual play, Tenniel has reversed his monogram in the second picture,

suggesting that he is also inside the looking-glass world, but he did not reverse the signature of the Dalziel brothers.

In the first illustration, we perceive that Tenniel has re-created, through spatial elements, all the characteristics provided by Carroll of the Victorian drawing-room in which Alice finds herself: the mirror, the hearth with the mantel, the paintings, the clock and the vase. In the foreground we can see Alice, facing away from us, kneeling with one leg on the mantel, with her right arm against the surface of the mirror. This arm, illuminated and very visible, will be only suggested in the following illustration, in which the hidden arm will appear illuminated, while the leg which she is kneeling on will become hidden. Significantly, Alice's face, hidden in the first illustration as she is facing the other way, will become visible only in the second, suggesting that she is now a figure inside the looking-glass world, or the world of "art".

The same reversion will happen with the objects which surround her: on the mantel, a clock and a flower vase, both inside glass bell jars and, on the left-hand wall, a picture, while on the right-hand wall is another picture, already mirrored in the looking-glass. In this way, Alice finds herself framed by objects which belong to the "real" world as well as by an object already inside the world of "art", as Atwood calls it, thus pointing forwards to the crossing. Alice's shadow, reflected in the mirror, also suggests and confirms its permeability. Tenniel's monogram, in turn, is clearly visible on the right side of the illustration, as also is the monogram of the Dalziel brothers, on the left side. The only detail added by Tenniel which is not mentioned by Carroll is the vase with artificial flowers on the mantel. As Martin Gardner comments, "it was a Victorian custom to put artificial flowers as well as clocks under glass bell jars" (*TLG*, p. 186) on the mantel, and the flower vase is therefore in keeping with the drawing-room environment, besides visually complementing the clock, as both frame Alice.

The act of passing through the looking-glass, in turn, takes us back first of all to the symbolism of the crossing. Like the step and the pilgrimage, they are different ways of expressing the same thing – the advancement from a natural state to a state of consciousness by way of a stage in which the crossing symbolizes precisely the effort of consciously overcoming something – thereby confirming the creative effort of Alice’s imagination in repeating “Let’s pretend” in order to be able to enter the imaginary world of the looking-glass. At the same time, it corroborates Atwood’s “guess” that “the act of writing takes place at the moment when Alice passes through the mirror”, when the two entities – the man and the writer – merge, in this effort of conscious surpassing. This crossing is also related to the symbolism of the journey, for, from a spiritual point of view, the journey is never merely a passage through space, but an expression of the urgent desire for discovery and change that underlies the actual movement and experience of traveling. Therefore, to study, to inquire, to seek or to live with intensity by means of new and profound experiences are all modes of traveling, or spiritual and symbolic equivalents of the journey. Heroes are always travelers, in that they are restless. Flying, swimming, and running are other activities which may be equated with travelling, as well as dreaming, day-dreaming and imagining (CIRLOT, 1971, p. 164-5).

Thus we realize that Alice as heroine, from the start of the story, will embody the characteristics of this hero: as she repeats “Let’s pretend” she already reveals her desire for discovery and change, which leads her to imagine the alternative world which awaits her on the other side of the looking-glass. The fact that she has dreamed all the experiences she has passed through during her journey in the looking-glass house only confirms – as already pointed out in relation to the symbolic associations of sleep and dreaming – that the journey is not only a passage through the space of the looking-glass world, but simultaneously the fulfillment of her desire for discovery and change.

This is also the moment which Atwood recontextualized in her work, as she compared Alice's crossing with the act of writing, which "takes place at the moment when Alice passes through the mirror" This recontextualization, in its turn, throws a new light on Carroll's text, for it confirms, from our XXI<sup>st</sup> century perspective, the permanent reality of this experience and the writers' incessant search to capture this moment of transition between reality and fantasy, thus making their limits more and more flexible and/or permeable. The fact that Alice has "jumped lightly down into the Looking-glass room" (*TLG*, p.184), besides confirming the symbolic connotations of the crossing, adds to them the associations of the jump, for "le saut est un exploit guerrier, chez les Celtes, et il fait partie des jeux dont est capable le héros, soit pour échapper à son adversaire, soit pour l'accabler" (CHEVALIER & GHEERBRANT, 1974, p.155). Consequently, even in a make-believe world, Alice's jump still retains this quality of a feat, for she has escaped from the world of reality and entered an imaginary world in search of new adventures. Her jump also foreshadows the obstacles which she will have to overcome.

In the second illustration, already inside Looking-glass House, a reflected version of her own house, she realizes, from the fact that she has passed through the glass, that the others can see, but not reach her. This discovery, again, reveals how, in a child's imagination, the "make-believe" element cannot be touched, but only glimpsed by the adult world. She also realizes that "the pictures on the wall next the fire seemed to be all alive" and that "the very clock on the chimney-piece (...) had got the face of a little old man, and grinned at her". In other words, the objects which in real life don't have life acquire life in the world of art, granted by the imagination of the writer/artist: the world of art, in which Alice finds herself, is therefore "as different as possible" (*TLG*, p.186) from the world of reality.

These pictures, as they become alive, prefigure the anthropomorfization and animation of the clock, the vase and the other objects which Alice will interact with. In its turn, the old



man who grins at Alice on the other side of the clock – as the narrator emphasizes, in the Looking-glass “you can only see the back of it” (*TLG*, p.186) – reminds us of the figure of Father Time, but parodying it, for Father Time is generally represented as a bearded old man, wearing a cloak and carrying a scythe or hourglass or another device that shows the passage of time, while the figure represented on the clock resembles a clown. The fact that the clock symbolizes the cyclic existence of man, man’s slavery to relative time and destiny, makes us realize how in the looking-glass world these connotations are also inverted: the little old man’s grinning face suggests an inversion of the normal order of time, that is, Alice is outside chronological time. In this way, we could suggest that Tenniel has also managed, through the expedient of the inverted clock, to overcome the limits of Lessing’s warning, of space being the field of painting and time that of poetry, as he illustrated Carroll’s source-text. As Atwood also intuited and emphasized, in relation to us readers: “At that moment time itself stops, and also stretches out, and both writer and reader have all the time not in the world”.

After having observed that the looking-glass room was not “so tidy as the other” one in “real” life – indicating, perhaps, that the world of art has its own organization which does not necessarily correspond to that of real life – and that the chessmen among the cinders in the hearth “were walking about, two and two!” (*TLG*, p.186), like reflections in a mirror, Alice herself, in contrast with the objects which acquire life in the looking-glass world, realizes that she is becoming not only invisible but also that the others cannot hear her. And, corroborating what she had imagined concerning the books in the looking-glass room, the book that Alice finds on the table and whose pages she decides to turn to see if she could read it, has its printing reversed and therefore she can only manage to read it if she holds it up to the glass. As Martin Gardner remarks, “the fact that the printing appeared reverse to Alice is evidence that she herself was not reversed by her passage through the mirror” (*TLG*, p. 190). Similarly, in Atwood’s analogy, the writer continues to be what he is – he does not become a character.

Then, after reading the poem *Jabberwocky* and pondering on how difficult it was to understand it, Alice decides to “have a look at the garden” (*TLG*, p. 197). It is therefore from chapter II onwards that her adventures in the looking-glass world begin, as she enters a sunlit summer garden.

Returning now to the issues proposed at the beginning, we realize that, in relation to the elements in Carroll’s text which precede the crossing and prepare the reader for it, the symbolic associations of the very drawing-room in which Alice finds herself, of the arm-chair in which she is curled up, of the kitten romping with the ball of worsted, the fact that Alice was sleepy, talking to herself and to the kitten, create a propitious mood for the entrance into a fantasy world; simultaneously, this playful atmosphere, complemented by Alice’s favorite phrase “Let’s pretend”, almost like a magic formula, corroborate this propitious mood and confirm the ease with which she will pass through the glass, besides anticipating what she will find in the Looking-glass House: the same drawing-room, but with everything exactly the opposite way round: that is, the pictures are alive, chronological time is abolished, the chess pieces walk, the books are written in reverse and Alice, a “real” character, becomes invisible and inaudible to the characters she will meet.

Keeping in mind that Tenniel’s illustrations were made in close collaboration with Carroll, for “no detail was too small for his exact criticism” (Collingwood *apud* [http://www.squidoo.com/John Tenniel](http://www.squidoo.com/John_Tenniel)), the heteroplasmic relations between the source-text and the four illustrations analyzed seem, at first sight, to be simple intersemiotic translations, inasmuch as Tenniel has faithfully reproduced the verbal text. For, as Hoeck argues,

La lecture du texte illustré est, en effet, aussi indispensable pour saisir la signification de l’image qui l’illustre, que l’est la contemplation de l’oeuvre d’art (...). Dans la transposition intersémiotique, le discours primaire – image ou texte – [Carroll’s text] fonctionne automatiquement et souvent injustement

comme norme d'évaluation absolue par rapport au discours secondaire". (...)le lecteur a naturellement tendance à juger l'illustration sur sa fidélité au texte"(...). Plus le discours secondaire reste proche du discours primaire, plus il risque d'être considéré comme une simple traduction intersémiotique, plutôt que comme une transposition intersémiotique autonome" (1995, p.72- 73).

However, these illustrations, with the images placed outside the text and thus on a divided surface, however clean, clear and faithful in their dialogue with the original – thereby keeping, for the child reader, the playful component of the images and confirming, for the adult reader, the typical atmosphere of a Victorian drawing-room – carry with them the whole symbolic charge which the objects and scenes described in the source-text contain: from the kitten romping with the ball of worsted, Alice in the arm-chair with the kitten and the ball of worsted and, finally, Alice in the act of passing through the mirror, in two illustrations, in which the first already anticipates the second – the first, by Alice's shadow projected on the mirror, and the second, by being the exact reverse of the first, as we have seen – thus visually creating the illusion of the act of passing through the mirror. We therefore believe that the illustrator, even if he remains a mere intersemiotic translator, has transmitted all the symbolic richness of the primary discourse in his illustrations, in their "magic combination of fantasy and drawing".

### **From Carroll's source-text to Atwood's re-reading**

As we return to the Atwoodian text mentioned above, and especially to Atwood's "guess" that "The act of writing takes place at the moment when Alice passes through the mirror", which is the origin of this research, we pass from an intersemiotic to an intertextual

transposition. Starting from Gérard Genette's definition that "the subject of poetics" is not *architextuality*, but "*transtextuality*, or the textual transcendence of the text, (...) all that sets the text in relationship, whether obvious or concealed, with other texts" (GENETTE, 1997, p. 1), it becomes evident that, in Atwood's case, the textual transcendence of *Through the looking-glass* is manifest, as much through intertextuality, with the "actual presence" of Carroll's text in Atwood, as through metatextuality, the relationship of "commentary" which "unites a given text to another, of which it speaks" (GENETTE, 1997, p. 4). This critical relationship presents itself in two consecutive moments:

– In the first, Atwood re-reads Carroll's text in itself, that is, Alice as a character: "at the beginning of the story" she is on "the 'life' side", looking inside the mirror, in which she sees her "reflection and reverse double", which is on the "'art' side" (ATWOOD, 2002, p. 56). This interpretation thus becomes already emblematic of the inner eye of the artist as he dreams of an alternative world – as the symbolic connotations of dream confirm: in dreams, the soul is absent, works or sees things away from where the body is at the moment. On the other hand, art's gaze, "looking out", becomes representative of mimesis or of the necessary link with life, as it reflects the conventions of reality of the world in which Alice was raised, whether that of the XIXth or of the XXIst centuries, in order that the work of art be recognized by the reader/appraiser. Atwood's "jump" starts exactly here, as she asserts that Alice – as well as the writer, in the "false analogy" which she will propose – instead of "discarding the 'art' side" as we non-artists do, for we prefer the "hard and bright 'life' side", she will go "*through*" the glass barrier which separates reality from fantasy and will merge "with the other Alice – the imagined Alice – "; that is, the writer merges with his artistic "elusive double(s)" and they become only one being. This crossing, as seen, is propitiated by the triple repetition of Alice's magic formula "let's pretend" which, even if not mentioned by

Atwood, underlies her interpretation, for “let’s pretend” is simultaneously what the writer does with the reader, as Atwood text implies.

– In the second moment, prepared by the first, Atwood, with her “false analogy”, interprets Alice’s crossing as metaphoric of the very act of writing. In other words, the moment of “going *through*” – the word *through*, explicit in the title, already so symbolic of the conscious effort of overcoming a difficulty – is when the act of writing takes place: the moment in which life and art merge, in the same way that “time itself stops, and also stretches out” – as the figure of the grinning old man in the clock confirms – in order to give “both writer and reader (...) all the time not in the world” (ATWOOD, 2002, p.56-7). And it is in the instant that Alice returns to the world of “life” bringing with her the story of the looking-glass world that we realize the writer/artist’s mission, to return to the “life” side the world of “art” which his work has created.

It thus becomes evident that Atwood, from her contemporary perspective, found new meanings in “the construction of alternate worlds”, proposed by Carroll’s text:

– in relation to the first moment, as she interprets Alice’s “real” world as the world of life and the world inside the looking-glass as the world of art, instead of simply a fantasy world, thus opposing but also juxtaposing and merging both worlds, as Alice merges with the “anti-Alice”;

– in relation to the second, as she interprets the act of writing as occurring at the moment when Alice goes through the mirror, that is, the moment of transition between reality/life and fantasy/art, the writer taking the “life”side with him, as he crosses the threshold, in order to merge with his elusive double, on the side of art. His return, nevertheless, like Alice’s, will be indispensable, so that the reader may equally benefit from this stretched-out time the writer has created, while he was on the side of “art”.

## Conclusion

Taking up again the main points of our argumentation, as we pass from Carroll's "primauté du texte" to Tenniel's illustrations, we have first foregrounded some contextual data about the relation writer/illustrator, in order to better evaluate this dialogue established between two different arts and verify which details of the verbal text were transposed and reconstructed in the illustrations and which intermediatic relations were established between the source-text and the illustrations. Starting from the Atwoodian text and considering that our main "object of perception" (CLÜVER, 2006, p. 148) would be Alice in the act of passing through the mirror – the moment which Tenniel presents by way of two illustrations – we could not have failed to also examine the two illustrations which precede those of the crossing, for they prepare the reader for the transition, prefigure some of the objects which will be seen, and create, by their symbolic associations, a propitious atmosphere for entrance into a fantasy world.

The pictorial connections which can be established among the first four illustrations of the work show how there is a fictional continuity among them: the kitten romping with the ball of worsted, and Alice in the armchair holding both in her lap, foreshadow the two main ones: Alice in front of the mirror and in the act of passing through it (the latter already visualized by the reader as if he were also inside the looking-glass house). Thus, despite keeping the simplicity of the illustrations, making them accessible to children, Tenniel's art manages to transcend this crystal-like playfulness, as he captured, following Carroll, the "let's pretend-like" atmosphere which permits and favors the transposition of the real fictional world to the imaginary fictional world dreamed by Alice. Simultaneously, the details of these illustrations reflect the characteristics of the Victorian world in which author and illustrator lived and worked, as well as Alice as a fictional character, with her typical Victorian dress.

In the same manner, in relation to Atwood's interpretation of Alice's jump, her "false analogy" does not fail to be extremely creative, as she makes us visualize the moment in which the act of writing occurs, that is, the moment of artistic creation, in which the writer, instead of discarding his reality, brings it with him inside the imaginary, atemporal and utopic world of art. As Atwood further comments, as she considers "the nature of the audience"(ATWOOD, 2002, p.49) in relation to the writer and the tale-teller,

a book may outlive its author, and it moves, too, and it too can be said to change – but not in the manner of the telling. It changes in the manner of the reading. As many commentators have remarked, works of literature are recreated by each generation of readers, who make them new by finding fresh meanings in them. (...) The act of reading a text is like playing music and listening to it at the same time and the reader becomes his own interpreter." (p. 50)

In this way, Praz's remarks concerning the relation between literature and the visual arts – "all aesthetic evaluation represents the meeting of two sensibilities, the sensibility of the author of the work of art and that of the interpreter. What we call interpretation is, in other words, the result of the filtering of somebody else's expression through our own personality" (PRAZ, 1982, p. 33) (my translation) – apply not only to the intermedial dialogue established between Carroll and Tenniel, who filtered Carroll's expression through his own personality, both inside the same cultural context; they apply equally to the metatextual dialogue established between Carroll and Atwood, as she re-creates Carroll's text within her own generation, consequently renewing it for us, as she makes us visualize, in Alice's crossing, a new and creative interpretation already latent in Carroll's text, but which needed to come to the surface through the sensibility of the Atwoodian interpretation.

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