

LA PEQUEÑA ALICE: ALEJANDRA PIZARNIK AND *ALICE IN WONDERLAND*

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Since its publication in 1865, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* has captivated generations of children and adults alike. The numerous translations into Spanish published in Buenos Aires testify to the fact that Alice was, and remains, highly popular there. For example, Peuser, Sigmar, Codex, Acme and Molino have all published translations or adaptations of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, some going into more than 10 reprints. A few other examples provide further evidence of *Alice's* presence in Argentine culture: there was sufficient interest in *Alice* in the seventies for Liliana Heker, a contemporary novelist, to publish a translation into Spanish of the belatedly-discovered extra chapter of *Through the Looking-Glass* (Heker, 1977). Heker also uses a picture of *Alice* as a key symbol of childhood in her novel *Zona de clivaje*: "incontaminada y radiante [...] Alicia sonríe en el mejor de los mundos, parece venir de tardes apacibles bajo las glicinas y de labores de aguja junto a la ventana" (Heker, 1997: 92-93); a recent study of Argentine women writers is entitled "Las mujeres y la escritura: el gato de Cheshire" (in Piña, 1997: 15-48); the contemporary Argentinian painter, Alicia Carletti, is fascinated by *Alice* and has produced a prize-winning series of pictures transposing certain of Tenniel's illustrations into a surreal world

of gigantic eroticized flowers and pubescent girls. Most significantly, the theatre director Sergio D'Angelo created a piece of theatre combining Lewis Carroll with Alejandra Pizarnik, which depended on *Alice* for its form and on Pizarnik's poetry for its content (with the Compañía Fantasma Argentina; source: *Clarín* archives, no further details available). *Alice* forms an important intertext to the work of the Argentinian poet Alejandra Pizarnik (1936-1972) and in this article I shall explore which aspects of Lewis Carroll's masterpiece are reworked by Pizarnik in her poetry, and to what effect.

Pizarnik's sister, Myriam Pizarnik de Nessis, comments that Alejandra loved *Alice* and often used to read it to her nephews, Mario and Fabián. Apparently Alejandra's own copy of *Alice in Wonderland* has been lost, but Myriam had the Atlántida edition, translated by Constancio L. Virgilio. We can imagine how the still-adolescent Alejandra, in the ferment of developing her poetic imagination, would read these adventures aloud whilst mentally re-reading with her own poetic preoccupations as a backdrop. She also urged her close friend Ivonne Bordelois to read the Carroll stories; Ivonne confesses that "me arrastraron a la lectura de L. Carroll la admiración y el fervor demostrados por Alejandra" (*Correspondencia*, p.263, note 66). Neither could Ivonne stop at *Alice* and *Through the Looking-Glass*; Pizarnik required further reading: "Trató de leer del mismo *La caza del Snark*. Es otra cosa; es lo otro, lo que nunca leímos antes ni después" (*Correspondencia*, p.260).

Two main articles have treated the subject of connections between Pizarnik and Carroll: Isabel Cámara analyses Pizarnik's strategy of hiding behind Carroll's text in her short episodic story "El hombre del antifaz azul" but does not cover references made to *Alice* in other poems; Cecilia Propato has analysed Pizarnik's debt to Lewis Carroll in terms of nonsense language, but she concentrates exclusively on Pizarnik's play *Los poseídos entre lilas* (Propato, 1998: 203-212). It is therefore my aim to present more of an overview of the impact of both *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass* on Pizarnik's work as a whole. A glance through Pizarnik's *Obras completas* suffices to reveal that the impact is considerable, and is felt in two particular ways: firstly, through direct quotation and secondly through the more abstract use of the garden as a symbol. Before examining these two aspects, I shall look more closely at the personal affinity between Pizarnik and *Alice*.

Alejandra Pizarnik was a precociously talented poet who published her first book of poetry at the age of nineteen. Her poetic corpus has often been read by critics as a poetics of suicide, since right from the earliest poems there is a fascination with death, which is echoed in Pizarnik's diaries and which gains a tragic aura of authenticity after the poet's death from an overdose. Whether the overdose was accidental or deliberate is not known, but as Cristina Piña points out, the destiny of the poetic persona was fulfilled nevertheless: "la Flora-persona biográfica es sustituida por el personaje Alejandra-poeta maldita, quien, en cumplimiento de su destino literario-vital,

muere ritualmente la noche del 25 de septiembre de 1972” (de Miguel, 1998: 301). I am not concerned with the question of suicide here beyond noting the fact that she died very young, which has served to reinforce the myth of her as a ‘poeta-niña’; rather, I am interested in Pizarnik’s use of elements from *Alice* to articulate her obsession with death, and to link it with childhood and the perceived failure of language to provide a ‘morada’ for the poet. However, there is an undeniably close correspondence between the poetic persona and the poet. If we look at the key poem analysed by Isabel Cámara, “El hombre del antifaz azul”, the protagonist in this re-writing of Carroll is denoted merely by the letter ‘A.’. This implies the poet’s encouragement of a simultaneous identification with both Alice and Alejandra, an identification which is supported by a comment in a letter from Pizarnik to Ivonne Bordelois: “Una vez más estoy cambiando (oh la pequeña Alice)” (*Correspondencia*, p.283). It has often been observed that Pizarnik projected a self-image of the vulnerable child, unable to cope with the adult world; her tendency towards identification with the figure of *Alice* and her dream/fantasy garden forms one important aspect of this self-image, and reinforces the position of Lewis Carroll in Pizarnik’s chosen ‘familia literaria’. Pizarnik talked to her early mentor, Juan Jacobo Bajarlía, about her ‘familia literaria’ and her ‘línea de filiación poética’ (Piña, 1991: 50-52.)

By inhabiting Carroll’s whimsically humorous style, Pizarnik apparently found a very effective mode of self-expression; she was able to (in)fuse his brand of nonsense with potentially morbid or melancholic subject matter. The aspect of *Alice* which Pizarnik immediately seizes upon is her burning desire to enter the garden, which – as we recall – she first glimpses through a little door:

Alice opened the door and found that it led into a small passage, not much larger than a rat-hole: she knelt down and looked along the passage into the loveliest garden you ever saw. How she longed to get out of that dark hall, and wander about among those beds of bright flowers and those cool fountains (*Alice*, 6-7).

Alice is motivated firstly by curiosity then increasingly by determination: the garden is appealing, and the seeming impossibility of entering it only increases its appeal and her determination to do so. Pizarnik is driven by a similar desire for the unattainable; in her poetry, the garden becomes a powerful yet ambiguous symbol of a fascinating other world beyond this one, a world which could provide a dwelling place for the poet. In an interview with Martha Moia, Pizarnik comments: “Una de las frases que más me obsesiona la dice la pequeña Alice en el país de las maravillas: “Sólo vine a ver el jardín.” Para Alice y para mí, el jardín sería el lugar de la cita o [...] el centro del mundo” (1973: 8). Interestingly, the phrase that Pizarnik quotes actually comes from *Through the Looking-Glass*, not from *Alice in Wonderland*. In both stories, Alice initiates the adventures by her stubborn persistence in trying to enter a garden, whether that be the garden glimpsed through a tiny door, or the garden belonging to the Looking-Glass house. In

the same way that the garden becomes a symbol in Pizarnik's poetry, so too does the Looking-Glass house. Like Alice, the poet experiences a pull to enter the room which is apparently out of reach through the mirror: "me llaman de la habitación más cercana y del otro lado de *todo* espejo" (*Obras*, 208 – my emphasis), but by subtly altering the wish so as to include the room on the other side of *all* mirrors, Pizarnik at once intensifies the attraction and invests it with a greater symbolic significance. It becomes like a call from beyond the confines of the poet's reflected identity. Pizarnik conflates the two narratives, extracting from both what she considers to be the essential feature: the desire to enter the garden. Alice's original phrase is "I only wanted to see what the garden was like" (*Looking-Glass*, p.24), yet the haunting refrain which recurs several times in Pizarnik's poetry is "Sólo quería ver al jardín" (*Obras*, 219). Obviously, without knowing whether Pizarnik read it in English or in one of the many available translations (Bordelois is of the opinion that she read it in translation: "dudo mucho que haya leído Alicia en inglés", private email, April 1999), it is impossible to comment on whether the slight change is in fact due to the translation or is simply a shift of emphasis on Pizarnik's part from the more prosaic 'see what the garden *was like*' to the more transcendent '*see* the garden' (my emphasis). Pizarnik was a very careful reader, attentive to the slightest detail and nuance, but also prone to 'proyecciones metafísicas' in her readings as noted by Ivonne Bordelois (*Correspondencia*, p.296, note 99). What is most important is that the phrase which in Carroll's text is very simple and matter-of-fact, in Pizarnik's oeuvre takes on a great weight of significance.

The first time this phrase is used by Pizarnik is in a poem punningly entitled "Casa de citas", meeting house, possibly with sexual overtones, but also house of quotations. (It is likely that Pizarnik's earlier-quoted statement about the garden being 'el lugar de la cita' for both her and Alice also has this double meaning of meeting and quoting; but it too may be overshadowed by the sexual connotations of the phrase). Quotations certainly abound – the bossy tone of one of the voices in this disembodied dialogue is that of Carroll's Red Queen admonishing Alice. I say disembodied, however, since no specific mention is made of Carroll or his characters' names – all is an apparently undifferentiated textual continuum passing from Carroll to Pizarnik. If we make a direct comparison of Pizarnik's text with Carroll's original, we can see the similarities:

"Abrió la boca un poco más, así se notará que estás hablando" (*Obras*, 219)
 "open your mouth a *little* wider when you speak" (*Looking-Glass*, p.24)

"Hablá en voz muy baja. Y sobre todo, recordá quien sos." (*Obras*, 219)
 "Speak in French when you can't think of the English for a thing [...] and remember who you are!" (*Looking-Glass*, p.28)

The voice –echoing its literary alter ego, Alice,– says, "Sólo quería ver al jardín"; however, rather than receiving in reply a patronizing pat on the head from the Red Queen, the reply is a question, "¿Y ahora?". The

implication is that the desire to enter the garden has not been fulfilled, or has been abandoned as impossible. Or even that the character has entered the garden, but illicitly, and now has to justify her presence. The meeting/quotation continues with a section of direct quotations from Pizarnik's own poetry, including *Los poseídos entre lilas*; in this way, Pizarnik's own texts are scrutinized and evaluated alongside those of Carroll. Pizarnik haunts or inhabits both texts on the same level, thus bringing herself closer to Carroll's Alice, and at the same time, putting a distance between herself and her own writing. Like Nadja, another female literary figure who Pizarnik was instinctively drawn to, it would seem appropriate for Pizarnik's poetic voice to say: "Qui suis-je? Si par exception je m'en rapportais à un adage: en effet pourquoi tout ne reviendrait-il pas à savoir qui je 'hante'?" (Breton, 1991: 9). Pizarnik haunts the texts of Lewis Carroll and simultaneously haunts her own. Her identity is as much that of Alice as of Alejandra. The final quotation from *Through the Looking-Glass* in this poem is inserted into further dialogue from *Los poseídos* and references to another Pizarnik character, "la Sombra". Again, I compare Pizarnik directly with Carroll:

"Soy real" dijo. Y se puso a llorar. (*Obras*, 220)

"I am real!" said Alice, and began to cry. (*Looking-Glass*, p.51)

This indignant and frightened exclamation is undermined by the voice which subsequently declares "Y entonces se vestirá tranquilamente con el hábito de la locura" (*Obras*, 221). Carroll's Alice finally finds her way firmly back into the reassuring solidity of her familiar world and secure identity, but the implication of the clash between Carroll's and Pizarnik's texts is that the identity of Pizarnik's poetic voice is far more fragile, never able to prove that it is "real" and therefore lapsing into madness. The distinction between madness and nonsense is an important one, to be discussed in more detail later on.

This intricate and revealing process of intertextual dialogue is intensified in a later untitled poem which takes up where the "Casa de citas" left off; in it, Sombra quotes from the end of the earlier poem, then reiterates her desire to find a garden:

Sombra quería un jardín. "Sólo vine a ver el jardín" dijo. (*Obras*, p.230)

By putting Alice's phrase into the mouth of Sombra, Pizarnik at once underlines the "shadow" status of her text and also the less definite sense of identity in her poem. Here, the significance of the garden is made most explicit. It is a metaphor for the unattainable; each garden that Sombra visits is never the garden she is searching for, and she draws a parallel between this search and the process of writing in so far as whatever she writes never says what she wanted to say. 'Pero cada vez que visitaba un jardín comprobaba que no era el que buscaba, el que quería. Era como hablar o escribir. Después de hablar o de escribir siempre tenía que explicar: "No, no es eso lo que yo quería decir."' (*Obras*, 230). In this way, wanting to enter the garden is associated with wanting to find a perfect, unambiguous

mode of writing or expression. This is made plainer still in another untitled poem of 1971:

Te dimos todo lo necesario para que comprendieras
y preferiste la espera,
como si todo te anunciase el poema
(aquel que nunca escribirás porque es un jardín inaccesible.

“sólo vine a ver el jardín”) (*Obras*, 247, original punctuation)

The phrase is repeated with increasing frequency in poems from the last months of the poet's life; the following quotations are taken from poems which were amongst the jottings found in Pizarnik's room after her death:

sólo vine a ver el jardín.
[...]
no es este el jardín que vine a buscar
a fin de entrar, de entrar, no de salir. (*Obras*, 248)

Sólo vine a ver el jardín donde alguien moría por culpa de algo que no pasó
o de alguien que no vino. (*Obras*, 249)

We see how towards the end of her life there was an increasing sense of desperation. Alice's phrase becomes a kind of mantra, but the garden now seems distant from that of Carroll's diminutive heroine. The presence of death was only humorously present in Carroll's garden; the Queen of Hearts' repeated execution sentences are never actually carried out. Here a much more personal and emotional tragedy is unfolding; we have the impression that the garden as “lugar de la cita” has failed the poet, since someone failed to arrive. At this point it is pertinent to refer once more to *Nadja*, and in particular to Pizarnik's article on it (“Relectura de *Nadja* de André Breton”, *Obras*, 393-401); Pizarnik's (re)reading displays the deep affinity she felt with this work and its thematic connection with her own preoccupations. Her general comment on the poet, responding to Breton's text, could equally well apply to herself: “Es probable que la condición de poeta lleve, entre otras cosas, a adoptar el rol de fantasma [...] Uno de los *trabajos forzados* de este fantasma podría consistir en girar incesantemente en torno de un bosque en el que no logra introducirse, como si el bosque fuera un lugar vedado” (*Obras*, 399-400). Isabel Cámara pointed out that in Pizarnik's “El hombre del antifaz azul”, what ‘A.’ struggles to enter is in fact a ‘bosque en miniatura’ (*Obras*, 177) rather than a garden; this has the effect of making it a wilder and more threatening place, with associations from fairytales such as ‘Little Red Riding Hood’ (used by Pizarnik in ‘La verdad del bosque’, p.214), and ‘Hansel and Gretel’ (mentioned in the review of *Nadja*, p.396). The words in which it is described there echo those of Pizarnik's *Nadja* review: “es un pequeño lugar perfecto aunque vedado” (*Obras*, p.178). So we have the image of a shadowy Nadjan figure haunting the outskirts of a wood; onto this is superimposed, by the continual repetition of Alice's phrase, the figure of Alice trying to enter the garden.

These repeated references to the garden have a mythic quality and in this respect reveal an affinity with Cortázar's use of the garden as symbol;

Pizarnik was great friends with Cortázar and there are many intertextual references between his *Rayuela* (first published in Buenos Aires in 1963) and Pizarnik's poems. The garden is one of the many symbols used by Horacio, the main protagonist of *Rayuela*, in trying to articulate his quest: "si todo eso [...] estuviera ahí para que alguien [...] se entrara por una puerta cualquiera a un jardín cualquiera, a un jardín alegórico para los demás [...] y en ese jardín se pudiera cortar una flor [...] a lo mejor todo eso no era más que una nostalgia del paraíso terrenal" (p.207). Elsewhere he gives the action of opening the door into the garden strong childhood associations by alluding to a popular Argentine folksong, 'Arroz con leche', known to most Argentine primary school children: "Arroz con leche, me quiero casar con una señorita de San Nicolás, que sepa coser, que sepa bordar, que sepa abrir la puerta para ir a jugar".

"De una manera u otra [...] todos quieren abrir la puerta para ir a jugar; "si hay una chance de quedarse en el jardín mirando las florcitas" (p.538).

Both Cortázar and Pizarnik associate the garden with childhood in some way, but the symbol is much more central to Pizarnik, as well as being more ambiguous. Cortázar's poem of homage to Pizarnik, published in October 1972 shortly after her death, imagines her on her final journey "al jardín donde Alicia la esperaba" (Haydu, 1996: 174) and many other homages single out the search for a garden as a key feature in Pizarnik, for example Rita Geadá: "buscadora del [...] jardín más bello" (Haydu, 1996: 176), and Olga Orozco: "Sólo había un jardín: en el fondo de todo hay un jardín [...] Ahí está tu jardín" (Haydu, 1996: 179-80).

The poem "Las uniones posibles" gives a clue as to why Pizarnik's version of Alice's garden might be so tantalizingly out of reach. Pizarnik was an avid reader of Sartre, and – using his distinction between 'être pour soi' and 'être en soi' (as expounded, for example in *La Nausée*) – to be in Pizarnik's garden would be like existing 'en soi', whereas the poet is always condemned to *wanting* to be in the garden, *thinking about* entering it, *talking about* it – existing 'pour soi'. For this reason, the poetic voice of "Las uniones posibles" strives to annul the vicious circle of consciousness: "No quiero saber. No quiero saberme saber. Entonces cerrar la memoria: sus jardines mentales, su canto de veladora al alba." (*Obras*, 195). This is borne out by Pizarnik's comment to Martha Moia: "Proust, al analizar los deseos, dice que los deseos no quieren analizarse sino satisfacerse, esto es: no quiero hablar del jardín, quiero verlo. Claro es que lo que digo no deja de ser pueril pues en esta vida nunca hacemos lo que queremos. Lo cual es un motivo más para querer ver el jardín, aun si es imposible; sobre todo si es imposible." (1973: 8). That she should use Proust as an example is noteworthy, since Proust is the twentieth-century literary paradigm of childhood memory unrecoverable through the conscious memory, which is nicely portrayed by Pizarnik as a "jardín petrificado" (*Obras*, 109). Her tone also reveals more than a hint of Alice-like stubbornness.

A strong motivating force behind Pizarnik's desire to enter this mythical garden is anguish about growing old. In both poetry and diaries, Pizarnik expresses abhorrence for losing her "cara de niña": "Y aún tienes cara de niña; varios años más y no les caerás en gracia ni a los perros" (*Obras*, 138); "Antes me disculpaba mi cara de niña. Ahora, súbitamente, me tratan como a una grande. Ya no me exceptúan por mi edad breve. Ya no es tan breve. Ya no me ampara mi cara de niña." (diary entry for 18/3/61, quoted in *Poemas*, Endymion, p.115).

Like Alice, who resents the rose's remark "you're beginning to fade, you know" (*Looking-Glass*, p.22), Pizarnik –both poet and persona– finds the serious adult world repugnant. Her fantasy of halting the aging process is poetically projected onto the locus of the garden: 'Alguien demora en el jardín el paso del tiempo' (*Obras*, 222). To enter the garden would thus signify entering a fantasy world, like that of Alice, not subject to the laws of time.

But the garden is far from being a pure symbol of some lost paradise of eternal childhood, a kind of ideal fusion of Alice's garden with the "paraíso terrenal" suggested by Cortázar. I mentioned earlier that the garden as symbol is an ambiguous one; the garden may carry associations of childhood, but even in childhood (which in the following poem Pizarnik characterizes with limpid imagery of grass growing in the horse's memory and wind praising the lilac blossoms) death makes its entrance. Or rather, the Alice-figure enters into death:

'Infancia'
 Hora en que la yerba crece
 en la memoria del caballo.
 El viento pronuncia discursos ingenuos
 en honor de las lilas,
 y alguien entra en la muerte
 con los ojos abiertos
 como Alicia en el país de lo ya visto. (*Obras*, 100)

Here Pizarnik draws on Alice's curiosity, represented metonymically by the open eyes, but the alteration of 'el país de las maravillas' to 'el país de lo ya visto' is crucial; the threshold has been crossed, not the threshold into adulthood, but into death. It would be interesting to know how one might translate this phrase into English. The structure of the Spanish mimics the title *Alicia en el país de las maravillas*, thus encouraging the translator to keep as close to 'Alice in——land' as possible. One option would be 'Like Alice in Once-seen land' (to preserve the same initial vowel sound as 'Wonder') but this takes rather a liberty with the sense, which should obviously be 'already seen'. Susan Pensak translates it as "like Alice in the land of *déja* [sic] *vu*" in *Woman who has sprouted wings: Poems by contemporary Latin American women poets* (1987: 47). Susan Bassnett opts for "like Alice in Memoryland" (unpublished manuscript).

The combination of innocence and experience so powerfully communicated in *Alice* here lends weight to childhood's strange fascination

with death (see Terry Otten, 1982: 51). Poetic figures are also introduced into a garden where the flowers are funereal, and have obscene associations. The prose poem “Niña entre azucenas” (*Obras*, 218) describes the sensation of “doble memoria” in which a childhood memory of hiding among the lilies is contaminated:

Instada por la visión de esa mano recogida por sí misma con dedos como cinco falos, hablé de la doble memoria. Evoqué las azucenas detrás de las cuales una vez me escondí, minúscula salvaje [...] El gesto de la mano dio una significación procax a la figurita del memorial, la escondida entre azucenas. [...] Tan ofensiva apareció la imagen de mi niñez que me hubiera retorcido el cuello como a un cisne.

In Alice’s ‘Garden of Live Flowers’ (*Looking-Glass*, pp.18-22) the Tiger-Lily is rude and offensive to Alice, but here the flowers take on a far more sinister aspect. Enter Hieronymus Bosch and his *Jardín de las delicias*: Pizarnik was fascinated with Bosch’s paintings and in two parallel poems “La palabra del deseo” and “El deseo de la palabra” she refers to the “jardín de las delicias” (p.157) and describes herself as a “heredera de todo jardín prohibido” (p.156). Bosch’s garden was intended to prick the conscience of its medieval viewers, revealing the closeness between life’s delights and hellish retribution: Pizarnik, by moving ambiguously between Bosch’s garden and that of Alice, suggests the more disturbing proximity between childhood and sexuality (though after Freud and his ‘perverse polymorphs’, this is not news), and childhood and death. So Alice’s garden acts as a powerful symbol for Pizarnik, although the surreal wood of Breton’s *Nadja*, the frightening wood of fairy stories and Bosch’s extremely adult and sexual garden threaten to overshadow it.

Having examined the impact of Lewis Carroll’s texts on Pizarnik in terms of the garden as symbol, I shall now look more closely at the ways in which Pizarnik uses extensive direct quotation from Carroll. Many key poems closely follow scenes from Carroll’s texts, quoting some passages verbatim and changing others, but peopling them with more overtly symbolic characters which pertain to Pizarnik’s personal mythology and obsessions. Alice’s initial fall down the rabbit hole is reinterpreted in “El hombre del antifaz azul” (*Obras*, 175-80); the white rabbit becomes a little man in a blue mask, and the objects Alice sees as she falls are *objets trouvés* from Pizarnik’s poetry and from diverse other literary sources. The objects include dolls’ arms, a child crying at her own portrait, and a cage disguised as a bird –referring to Pizarnik’s poem ‘El despertar’ in which “La jaula se ha vuelto pájaro”– and “un escarabajo de oro”, referring to the established literary magazine of that name (*Obras*, 52), *El Escarabajo de Oro*, which was published in Buenos Aires and ran from 1961-74. We know from a letter included in Ivonne Bordelois’ *Correspondencia Pizarnik* (Buenos Aires: Planeta/Seix Barral, 1998) p.256, that Pizarnik was working on this text in 1968.

As well as twisting the dialogues and character of Alice in “El hombre del antifaz azul” to serve her own poetic ends, Pizarnik takes the liberty of

altering the characters present in other scenes clearly based on *Alice in Wonderland*. I mentioned earlier Cecilia Propato's analysis of *Los poseídos entre lilas* with regard to Carrollian nonsense language, but this is by no means an isolated instance within Pizarnik's poetic oeuvre, nor is it the most obvious 'borrowing'. I shall take as examples of this her use of Chapter 7 of *Alice*, 'A Mad Tea-Party' in 'Devoción' (*Obras*, 198) and the tale of the Mock Turtle in 'A tiempo y no' (*Obras*, 199). I begin by quoting first Carroll then Pizarnik at some length in order to illustrate their closeness:

There was a table set out under a tree in front of the house, and the March Hare and the Hatter were having tea at it: a Dormouse was sitting between them, fast asleep, and the other two were resting their elbows on it, and talking over its head.
[...]
'Have some wine,' the March Hare said in an encouraging tone.
Alice looked all round the table, but there was nothing on it but tea.
'I don't see any wine,' she remarked.
'There isn't any,' said the March Hare.
'Then it wasn't very civil of you to offer it,' said Alice angrily.
'It wasn't very civil of you to sit down without being invited,' said the March Hare. [...]
'You shouldn't make personal remarks,' Alice said with some severity; 'it's very rude.'
The Hatter opened his eyes very wide on hearing this [...] (*Alice*, p.58)

Pizarnik takes this framework but makes significant changes to the characters and to the end of the conversation:

Debajo de un árbol, frente a la casa, veíase una mesa y sentadas a ella, la muerte y la niña tomaban el té. Una muñeca estaba sentada entre ellas, indeciblemente hermosa, y la muerte y la niña la miraban más que al crepúsculo, a la vez que hablaban por encima de ella.

'Toma un poco de vino' dijo la muerte.
La niña dirigió una mirada a su alrededor, sin ver, sobre la mesa, otra cosa que té.
'No veo que haya vino' dijo.
'Es que no hay' contestó la muerte.
'¿Y por qué me dijo usted que había?' dijo.
'Nunca dije que hubiera sino que tomes' dijo la muerte.
'Pues entonces ha cometido usted una incorrección al ofrecérmelo' respondió la niña muy enojada.
'Soy huérfana. Nadie se ocupó de darme una educación esmerada' se disculpó la muerte.
La muñeca abrió los ojos. (*Obras*, 198)

Most immediately striking is the substitution of the characters. Death, the girl and the doll are all emblematic for Pizarnik and recur throughout her poetry; by dispensing with the Hatter/Hare duo and reducing the scene to three characters, it becomes at once more symbolic and schematic, and less overtly comical. The reader of Pizarnik's 'version' is obviously aware of the Carroll palimpsest, but the substitution of characters makes allusions to other poems by Pizarnik such as "La muerte y la muchacha" (which in itself

makes reference to Schubert's *Death and the Maiden*) and Mme. Lamort of "Diálogos". In Carroll's original, it was the Mad Hatter whose eyes opened; Pizarnik transfers this action to the doll, and it becomes a kind of leitmotif in subsequent poems. The motivation for Pizarnik's substitutions in this poem becomes more clear when we consider that the poem was originally published in a group of three "Pequeñas Prosas" with "Diálogos" and "Desconfianza" (p.197). The first of these two poems comprises a nonsense dialogue about Madame Lamort (death again – Pizarnik is evidently following the Red Queen's instructions to "speak in French when you can't think of the [Spanish] for a thing!"). It owes as much to the absurd non-sequiturs of Ionesco's *La cantatrice chauve* as to Lewis Carroll's nonsense logic; the poem that follows, "Desconfianza", puts its absurd questioning about the identity of Madame Lamort into a more serious context. "Desconfianza" raises the question of orphanhood and exile from cultural roots ("remember who you are"), asking in the voice of a child, '¿qué significa un bisabuelo?' (p.197). It is interesting that the "bosque", previously associated with Nadja and Alice, recurs here – this time associated with the poet's family roots: "Mamá nos hablaba de un blanco bosque de Rusia". Taken as a group, the tone of absurdity and nonsense is modulated; the plaintive realism of "Desconfianza" provides a context in which to read "Devoción" and strikes a chord with the orphaned state of "la muerte". Thus Pizarnik uses Carroll's text and tone to illuminate the themes of orphanhood and death, themes which have preoccupied her since the early, more sparse and rigorous poetry. For example "Fiesta" (*Obras*, 106), which proclaims the poet's orphanhood or "La danza inmóvil" (*Obras*, 37) in which all life is woven from death: "De muerte se ha tejido cada instante".

"A tiempo y no", which follows "Devoción" in the *Obras completas*, operates a similar process of rewriting and substitution. It enters Carroll's text at the point after the croquet game, where the Queen of Hearts offers to take Alice to hear the Mock Turtle's story. But in Pizarnik's text, although she again uses Carroll's phrases as a direct model, the invitation is extended by "la muerte" to go and see "la reina loca". Again Pizarnik reduces the main characters to a schematic threesome of "la muerte", "la reina loca" and "la niña"; both the King of Hearts and the Gryphon are eliminated, and what in Carroll is the tale of the Mock Turtle is told by the mad queen. Pizarnik, by these alterations, replaces characters who had their origin in visual or verbal puns with emblematic figures. The muñeca as featured in 'Devoción' continues to play its mute but significant role, opening and closing its eyes. Segismunda too does this in *Los poseídos entre lilas* as a game, mimicked by the stage lighting: "Abre los ojos. Fuerte iluminación. Cierra los ojos. Débil iluminación. Esto se repite muchas veces" (*Obras*, 279).

Pizarnik had a fascination with dolls and their staring eyes; not only do they make repeated appearances in her poetry (see for example Lytwin in *Los poseídos entre lilas*, the doll replacing Carroll's dormouse in "El hombre del antifaz azul", or in "Retrato de voces", *Obras*, 364), but many

photographs of the poet in her room picture her with her wide-eyed dolls. There is a strong connection between Pizarnik and Breton's *Nadja* with respect to dolls; the opening sentence of her "Relectura" frames herself seizing upon Nadja's fixation with dolls' eyes: "una niñita lautreamontiana atraviesa una página de *Nadja* y desaparece con esta idea de sacar siempre los ojos de las muñecas para ver qué hay detrás" (*Obras*, 395).

The doll's eyes act as a visual reminder of several of her earliest poems, including "La de los ojos abiertos" (*Obras*, 20), the poem "Infancia" quoted earlier, and No. 31 of "Árbol de Diana" ("Es un cerrar los ojos y jurar no abrirlos", *Obras*, 84). Placing this staring doll into Carroll's scenario has the effect of adding a Surreal note (by association with surrealist mannikins) to what was arguably a truly surreal text before Surrealism was coined. Jeffery Stern posits this in 'Lewis Carroll the Surrealist'; interestingly, several of those considered by Pizarnik to be in her 'familia literaria', such as Baudelaire and Rimbaud, also appear on Breton's list of proto-Surrealists (1982: 132-153). The doll acts as a visual metaphor for the links Pizarnik is continually making between childish things and death, since the action of closing the eyes is symbolic of death. The tale which "la muerte", "la niña" and "la muñeca" hear, unlike the doleful punning of Carroll's Mock Turtle, substitutes the discourse of madness for the language of nonsense. Gilles Deleuze makes a careful distinction between the elements of what he calls the 'grotesque trinity of child, poet and mad [wo]man' (1990: 83), intimating that it is dangerous to confuse logical nonsense or children's speech with the discourse of madness. The tale of the "reina loca" is sardonically violent and incestuous, straying from the essentially harmless nonsense of the *Alice* framework, yet the doll's sudden exclamation '¿Qué bida!', which incidentally alludes to Cortázar ("¿Ké bida no es tragedia" leyó Talita en excelente ispamerikano' (*Rayuela*, p.454), returns us to a more light-hearted style. The expected arrival of Maldoror, the infamous eponymous hero of Lautréamont's *Les chants de Maldoror*, emphasizes the nature of this prose passage as an eclectic meeting of texts and quotations, into which the transgressive tale of the "reina loca" – who calls to mind "La condesa sangrienta" – is woven. Pizarnik thus deliberately brings together symbols of childhood and the discourse of madness within poetry, courting the dangers of which Deleuze warns.

Having looked in some detail at the ways in which Pizarnik uses *Alice*, the obvious question to ask is why? What is the motivation behind Pizarnik's extensive borrowing or inhabiting of other authors, most particularly Carroll but also Beckett and Ionesco? Cecilia Propato neglects to point out that *Los poseídos entre lilas* is based to a far greater extent on Beckett's *Fin de partie* than on Carrollian nonsense, though this has been noted by María Negroni (1997: 142). Is it simply, as Isabel Cámara suggests, "el programa de ocultarse en el lenguaje" (Cámara, 1985: 38)? I have already mentioned Pizarnik's idea of a "familia literaria" in terms of those authors she read and admired. A diary entry for 18/1/61 reveals a deeper need to get inside other

lives: “Probarse vidas ajenas como vestidos heredados. Para no ver la propia desnudez” (reproduced in *Alejandra Pizarnik: Poemas* ([s.l.]. Endymion, 1986: 114). I suggest that the lives Pizarnik sought to “try on” were literary, in the form of other texts; through these inherited literary garments she hoped to find a substitute for the unattainable poetic language for which her poetry is constantly striving. Such an ideal poetic language would *not* be “un órgano de conocimiento del fracaso de todo poema” (*Obras*, 239), but rather “un espacio ceremonial donde palabras como *amor, poesía y libertad* eran actos en cuerpo vivo” (*Obras*, p.212).

However, since this is ultimately unattainable, Pizarnik resigns herself to a poetic language which openly acknowledges – indeed parades – its status as an endless web of quotations, a textual continuum at one stage removed from ‘actos en cuerpo vivo’. Unable to find a poetic language which can answer in the affirmative the rhetorical question “si digo pan, ¿comeré?” (*Obras*, 239), she goes to the other extreme of emphasizing dependence on written texts. The notion of the text as a palimpsest of quotations is fundamental to writers in the first half of the twentieth century and in this respect Pizarnik continues the modernist tradition.

Pizarnik’s most desperate and extreme use of *Alice in Wonderland* comes in her dense, iconoclastic and obscene prose text, “Hilda la polígrafa”. In this text it is as though Pizarnik has utterly abandoned all hope of finding the garden, or of fashioning her own distinct poetic language, albeit through quotation and rewriting. References to the garden are now mocking and hollow, for example the ironic section title “El prebisterio no ha perdido nada de su encanto ni el jardín de su esplendor” (*Obras*, 297), and the only quest – still an allusion to Lewis Carroll, nevertheless – is “ché, que busco un hipopótamo” (*Obras*, 306). Compare this with “He said he *would* come in,” the White Queen went on, “because he was looking for a hippopotamus”. (*Looking-Glass*, p.114). Alice is invoked (“¡Y que viva Alicia de las maravillas!”; *Obras*, 304) at the literal climax of a passage which is composed of overtly sexual neologisms, in the style of Joyce or of Cortázar’s *gliglico*. There is a world of difference between Carroll’s whimsical punning nonsense and Pizarnik’s violently distorted prose. In such an outpouring of language gone mad, Alice’s dream world becomes a nightmare; her garden of “bright flowers and cool fountains” has been taken over by Bosch’s *Garden of Earthly Delights* and by the menacing wood of fairy tales. Pizarnik is at her most iconoclastic, reducing all the many texts and authors quoted to objects of derision and sexual innuendo; but at the same time Pizarnik as character, as poetic persona, is at her most vulnerable. No longer is she ‘A.’, the curious “pequeña Alicia”; instead, she addresses herself directly and violently in the intimate name of her last years: “Sacha, no jodás”. Welcome to the grim reality of adulthood.

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