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Impressionism and the Writing of Audrey Thomas

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Abstract

This thesis explores Audrey Thomas's adaptation of Impressionist methodologies to analyse verbal discourse. It confirms that Impressionism is the major visual influence on Thomas's work, and clarifies the complex relationship between the tenets of the movement and Thomas's literary concerns. Since the author's intentions in using visual methodologies are most clearly and thoroughly formulated in Latakia and Intertidal Life, the principal analytic focus of this study is these two texts. First Thomas's critical understanding of Impressionism is verified, and the tenets of the movement which are central to Thomas's writing are defined. Once the sociopolitical issues backgrounding Thomas's adaptation of Impressionism are clarified, the author's actual application of the visual methodologies to challenge both social alienation and the alienating characteristics of verbal communication are analysed. This thesis proves that an understanding of Thomas's adaptation of Impressionism is necessary for a thorough comprehension of her struggle against the sociopolitical infringements of her own artistic medium.

Résumé

Cette thèse examine l'adaptation de Audrey Thomas des méthodologies de l'Impressionisme pour analyser le discours verbal. L'étude confirme que l'Impressionisme est l'influence majeure visuelle sur l'oeuvre de Thomas, et aussi clarifie la relation complexe entre les principes du mouvement et des intérêts littéraires de Thomas. Puisque les intentions de l'auteur en utilisant les méthodologies visuelles sont de formuler de façon la plus claire dans Latakia et Intertidal Life, le foyer analytique principal de cette étude est ces deux textes. Premièrement, la compréhension critique de Thomas de l'Impressionisme est vérifiée, et les principes de mouvement qui sont au centre de l'oeuvre de Thomas sont spécifiés. Dès que les issues sociopolitiques derrière l'adaptation de l'Impressionisme auront été clarifiées, l'application actuelle des méthodologies visuelles pour contester à la fois l'aliénation sociale et les caractéristiques de la communication verbale, seront analysées. Cette thèse prouve qu'une appréciation de l'adaptation de l'Impressionisme de Thomas est nécessaire pour une compréhension complète de sa lutte contre les infractions sociopolitiques de son propre milieu artistique.

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Introduction

In her writing, Audrey Thomas appropriates methodologies originating in the visual arts to analyse the disjuncture between perceived reality and its literary representation. This thesis focusses specifically on Thomas's use of Impressionist methodologies in Latakia and Intertidal Life to explore the implications of this slippage. Both of these texts involve a conscious appropriation of concepts and strategies associated with Impressionism in order to analyse sociopolitical structures which Thomas suggests bind and alienate individuals who questions these same structures. Though visual art plays a crucial role in most of Thomas's writings, Latakia and Intertidal Life are the only texts¹ by Thomas which adopt stylistics rooted in the visual arts, and overtly discuss the advantages of visual communication. Examples from other works by Thomas are used to support the reading of the two texts central to this thesis.

Thomas's experimentation with visuals is more radical in the earlier works Mrs. Blood and Blown Figures, but the fact that Thomas continues to apply visually oriented techniques in Latakia and Intertidal Life suggests that the two earlier texts had not satisfied her concerns with the

limitations of verbal discourse. In Latakia and Intertidal Life, the analysis of the discrepancies Thomas associates with verbal discourse centers on the sociohistoric context of making meaning. The two texts function both as critical analyses of verbal discourse and experiments in communication through language which adopts visual methodologies.

A number of critical studies of Thomas's writing acknowledge her use of strategies derived from the visual arts, though no in-depth analyses of this use have been carried out. Joan Coldwell, in her essay "Memory Organized: The Novels of Audrey Thomas," defines the description in Latakia as the "scene" where "everything is happening in terms of artistic being and creativity" (48), though she does not affiliate the suggested image of boundlessness with a non-verbal form of "artistic being." More to the point, in a group interview for Writing, the interviewers comment that they "see the strong influence of . . . visual arts" (Alexander 4) in Thomas's writing. But rather than having Thomas extrapolate on the relationship of visual and verbal art as it functions within her texts, the interviewers allow the author to affirm only superficially the influence of visual art on her work. In a review of Mrs. Blood, Munchmeyer, and Prospero on the Island, Anthony Boxill also notes the author's visual methodologies, stating that Thomas asks the reader, "How is art different from other kinds of

imitation?" (114). His analysis not only fails to differentiate between various artistic forms, such as writing and painting, but also never returns to the question as he has presented it.

Robert Kroetsch acknowledges the importance of visual art in understanding Thomas's work, when he defines Blown Figures as a "radical experiment in form" (111) in which "art calls attention to art" (113). Kroetsch's definition suggests that he sees the text itself as a piece of visual art, with form functioning as a controlled mode of discourse. Though, in his comment regarding art calling attention to itself, Kroetsch is overtly referring to the relationship between Thomas's text and the painting printed on the cover, he does not take the analogy between the visual arts and writing beyond a referential level.

Jean Mallinson notes the Impressionist influence in Thomas's work directly when, in a review of Songs My Mother Taught Me, she refers to the text as "an impressionistic period piece" (32). This connection is reinforced by Barbara Godard, who relates Thomas's blurring of boundaries and concern with perception to the Impressionist painters (29). Godard also acknowledges Thomas's exploration of the relationship between writing and painting, and each medium's "power for representing life" (35). Though Godard's references are perceptive and accurate, they present only a cursory analysis of the topic, consisting of no more than a

few hundred words in total. In spite of the numerous critical references to Thomas's use of visual strategies and methodologies, no extensive analysis has been made of the authorial intentions behind the appropriation. Yet Thomas's own acknowledgements of the influence of visual art on her literary career, analysed in Chapter One of this thesis, verify that her adaptation of the visual arts is a crucial element in her work.

The first and second chapters of this thesis establish a groundwork from which Thomas's appropriation of Impressionist strategies can be analysed. Chapter One verifies Thomas's awareness of not only the concerns and methodologies of Impressionism in the nineteenth century, but also the relationship of these concerns and methodologies to literature. It then provides an overview of how Thomas has incorporated Impressionism into various pieces of her work. Chapter Two presents the basic tenets of literary Impressionism which echo in Thomas's writing, and their relation to the visual school.

The last two chapters move from a general analysis of Impressionism in relation to Thomas's writing to an in-depth study of Impressionism in two specific texts, Latakia and Intertidal Life. Chapter Three is a study of Thomas's analysis of what she suggests are the major limitations of verbal discourse, such as its tendency to depict reality as a fixed structure and the individual as possessing a static

and omnipotent perception of that reality. The sociopolitical structures which Thomas suggests are the sources of these limitations are then defined. The chapter concludes by clarifying how the tenets of Impressionism, as presented in Chapter Two, are appropriate to Thomas's intention of circumventing the alienating factors of both verbal representation and contemporary western society.

The fourth chapter of this thesis shifts the study from Thomas's comparison of writing and visual art, to her adaptation of Impressionist techniques in Latakia and Intertidal Life. The chapter explores Thomas's use of visual methodologies as a means of challenging both social alienation and the alienating characteristics of verbal communication. The conclusion of this thesis summarizes the analyses within the four chapters and establishes whether Thomas has succeeded in countering the social biases she locates specifically within her own artistic medium.

Social alienation is a central issue in both Latakia and Intertidal Life. In Latakia, the isolating tendency which Thomas suggests is ingrained within verbal discourse is reinforced through the alienation felt by the heroine of the text, also a writer, who finds herself trying to comprehend a relationship littered with subterfuge and covert motives. The central character's meticulous analysis of her relationship is juxtaposed against the prospect of a direct, open mode of communication, presented through her

own impressionistic depictions of the seemingly open and honest Cretan society which surrounds her. Regardless of the apparent potential for a direct, unbiased perception of reality, the heroine's analytic efforts begin to envelop progressively larger spatial and temporal contexts of social interaction, while the impressionistic representations become less frequent. By the end of the book, the heroine/author accepts the fact that her appropriation of visual methodologies, though it has exposed some of the falsity behind the images of reality established by her society, has not succeeded in creating a representation of reality which can replace those images.

In Intertidal Life, Thomas uses Impressionist methodologies to analyse a less apparent structure of oppression and alienation. Unlike the central character of Latakia, the heroine of Intertidal Life is not an anomaly within the society which encompasses her. The familiarity of her immediate community, which consists of her children and friends, obscures the heroine's sense of alienation. Regardless, the isolating tendency of written discourse is made apparent through the heroine's inability to balance her literary career with communal interaction. The limitations of writing are communicated through the actions of the characters, the lone writer being juxtaposed against the interactive and mutually supportive visual artists of the island.

Unlike the impressionistic representations in Latakia, which suggest the potential for a direct, open mode of communication, those in Intertidal Life signify the actual solitude and alienation felt by the protagonist. The comparison of writing to visual art in Intertidal Life implies that the obvious and seemingly unique social alienation felt by the heroine in Latakia is not unique at all, but simply more obscure when located within familiar surroundings.

Chapter One: Thomas's Knowledge of Impressionism

"I want a palette, not a pen," laments the narrator of Latakia; "I have to take the long way around when what I really want to do is dip my brush directly into the ocean, the sky, the sun" (61). In comparing writing to the visual arts, Thomas joins a tradition of artistic analysis which dates back to Simonides of Cheos (ca. 556-467 B.C.) who, according to Plutarch, first defined painting as mute poetry and poetry as speaking pictures (Moralia 346f). Since then, a voluminous amount of information and opinion has been recorded on the analogy.² It is not surprising that many of Thomas's literary techniques, as well as many of the literary concerns voiced by her protagonists, can be found in previous comparative analyses of writing and the visual arts. Of particular influence on Thomas's work are the attitudes and viewpoints of Impressionist painters and writers, including Gustave Flaubert, Joseph Conrad, Virginia Woolf, and Henry James.³

The relationship between the sister arts⁴ is a familiar one to Thomas, who acknowledges a visual influence on her work from the early stages of her literary career:

I've been surrounded by visual artists all my life. I was married to one, lived with one, my

mother went to art school, and one grandfather was an inventor and mechanical engineer . . . I don't work in visual art myself but with writing, doing the seeing for the reader (Writing 4).

This last observation is repeated in Latakia, when the heroine acknowledges that "a writer writes with his eyes" (21). Thomas's desire to do the "seeing," but not necessarily the "reading," echoes the central Impressionist desire to present an objective impression for the reader to experience, without dictating how the piece should be interpreted.

Thomas first acknowledged her interest in Impressionism before any of her books were published, during her studies at the University of British Columbia. Her Masters thesis in English is entitled Henry James in the Palace of Art: A Survey and Evaluation of James' Aesthetic Criteria as Shown in His Criticism of Nineteenth Century Painting. James is himself regarded as an Impressionist (Kirschke vii), and much of his criticism deals with the work of Impressionist painters.⁵ Thomas's own thesis refers to the art movement frequently and Chapter III of her study specifically focusses on James's attitude toward French painting in the nineteenth century. Her bibliography lists a number of books which deal with Impressionism, including Sam Hunter's Modern French Painting: 1855-1956 and John Rewald's The History of Impressionism. In 1963, the year Thomas's thesis

was completed, the author already was well acquainted with the tenets of the Impressionist school of art.

In addition to her thesis, Thomas wrote another critical work dealing with the visual arts, her essay "Through a Glass Darkly: Canadian Art Criticism." It opens with a quotation from James, and focusses on the issue of the verbal analysis of the visual arts. It was published in 1970, the same year as Mrs. Blood, Thomas's first book (and one of her visually most experimental). Her reference to John La Farge's discussion of James's "painter's eye" in a book review she wrote in 1990 (Graham K4), verifies that Thomas's interest in the role of visual art in literature, at least with regards to James's views, has continued to the present day.

Thomas's short stories also reveal a more than superficial understanding, on the author's part, of the movement in question. "Dejeuner sur l'herbe" is the title of a story found in the collection of Thomas's short stories entitled Real Mothers. It is also the name of the painting by Manet which instigated critical recognition of the Impressionist school, due to its impact at the group's first organized show (Hunter 15). Manet's painting was noted primarily for its disrespectful attitude toward classical aesthetic order in visual art, and its brash representation of "nude" as "naked."

Thomas's story deals with a man and a woman

vacationing, appropriately, in Paris. They view their relationship and their environment from a cautious and superficial distance but, as the story progresses, the heroine gradually realizes the facade of the existence they have been maintaining. The story ends with a picnic in a cemetery covered in bright sunlight and the shade of trees, reminiscent of such works as Manet's "Dejeuner sur l'herbe" and Monet's "Les Femmes dans un Jardin." The heroine defines the visit as "a chance to picnic with Degas" (152), and it is during this meal with an Impressionist that she finally acknowledges the artifice which has controlled their lives. She taunts her companion with the slogan they have been toting throughout the story, "Don't Touch! . . . Don't Get Involved!" (154) and, ultimately, does get involved, by helping rescue an abandoned kitten. Though not a major gesture of liberation, the act suggests that the heroine has at least begun to break through the aesthetic order of social dictates, just as Manet had with his painting.

Thomas's short story "Still Life With Flowers," from the collection entitled Ten Green Bottles, though making less obvious connections with the tenets of Impressionism, presents a parallel structure. Like "Dejeuner sur l'herbe," "Still Life With Flowers" is set in a cemetery and it contrasts a character's "aesthetic satisfaction" (17) with her inability to relate to the funereal rigidity of her society. The "still life" of aesthetic arrangement is

ultimately disrupted, as the heroine realizes that static social structures are both confining and disempowering.

Manet's painting "Dejeuner sur l'herbe" was shown at the exhibition entitled "Salon des Refuses." Another short story by Thomas, in the collection Two in the Bush and Other Stories, also has this title. The story opens with a description which accents some of the major stylistic concerns of the Impressionist movement:

The pale sunlight of a winter dawn, cold as a false smile, sidled through the bars and deposited small parcels of light on the floor (91).

In this opening line, Thomas uses two central elements of Impressionism -- the blurred image, and the play of light and shadow. The phrase "cold as a false smile" also echoes the Impressionist artist's interest in blurring the boundaries between external and internal reality. The mental fusion of context and consciousness is central to the story's plot, which deals with the unconventional views of patients in an insane asylum. The reference, in the story, to a Van Gogh print on the wall, reinforces the association of the theme of dissolution and chaos with the Impressionists. As with her story "Dejeuner sur l'herbe," the only conclusion Thomas offers in "Salon de Refuses" is that no definition of social order can possibly account for the multiple perspectives of a chaotic reality.

Thomas makes a number of other references to painters

and authors from the movement in her works. Mrs. Blood, for example, includes various references and allusions to Impressionist authors, but the book also mentions authors not associated with the movement, including Descartes, Dickens, Donne, Greene, Joyce, C.S. Lewis, Melville, Shakespeare, Swift, Webster, and Wilde. This "overloading of literary references" (Coldwell "From" 99) weakens the argument that the references to Impressionist authors and painters in this particular work suggest an Impressionist core to the text. But the argument applies to Mrs. Blood only, for, as Bowering notes, Thomas's "earlier habit of literary stuff from the English anthology" ("Site" 87) is dropped in the author's next novel, Blown Figures. Though the literary references decrease, allusions to Impressionist works continue to be integrated into the text.

Blown Figures offers a particularly novel synthesis of the movement's concerns with those of the text. The cover of the book is a copy of a painting entitled "Lovers in a Landscape No. 7," by Claude Breeze, himself not seen as directly influenced by Impressionist painting.⁶ David P. Silcox describes Breeze's "Lovers in a Landscape" series as dealing with "the human figure in both its social and its private roles" and "man in contemplation with himself" (279). Silcox's description, though alluding to the Impressionist concern with the melding of conscience and context, is too general to suggest an influence from that

specific movement in Breeze's work. It is Thomas herself who clarifies the connection between Breeze's intentions, those of the Impressionists, and her own. The explanation is made in another of Thomas's texts, Latakia:

Sometimes I feel like one of those Impressionist painters who cheerfully sacrificed the subject, as subject, to a study of the changing effects of light. Lovers in a landscape, perhaps, but the lovers are just part of the landscape - they are shape, tone, movement (or lack of it), not STORY (30).

Breeze's "Lovers in a Landscape No. 7" does present a strong unity between the lovers and their environment. Both the ragged texture and the shifting colouring of the terrain are repeated in the nude figures. The violent, mad expressions of the characters are reinforced by the violent brush strokes and seemingly haphazard overlay of the various objects in the painting. As in the short stories noted above, Thomas suggests that the desire for a fusion of mental space and landscape is both a tenet of Impressionism and a specific concern in her own work.

Latakia includes a number of other allusions to painting and writing related to the art movement. The protagonist, Rachel, often voices her desire to be a visual artist rather than a writer (30, 60, 61). She also addresses various concerns specifically related to the

tenets of the Impressionist painters, including the "sensuous intoxication" of "impressions" (26), the desire to capture the direct image (61, 120), the fusion of subject and landscape (80, 111, 122), and the effect of light and shade on an object (38, 61, 99). At one point, Rachel notes the difficulty of capturing the effects of light with language: "It is very hard, with tools as worn as words, to capture the way the street looks in early morning, mid-afternoon, beneath the moon" (60). The protagonist's concern echoes the Impressionists' desire to "not only record a particular view, but . . . record it at only one particular moment of the day in the particular light present then" (Kirschke 5). In Latakia, Thomas also makes specific reference to various authors associated with Impressionism, including James (23), Woolf (47), and Conrad (122, 147). Latakia, more than any other of Thomas's works, overtly acknowledges the author's awareness of Impressionism and her desire to incorporate the movement's methodologies into her own writing.

Though the references to Impressionism are less frequent in Intertidal Life than in Latakia, they are no less central to the composition of the text. The title itself acknowledges the fusion of the individual, as subject, to the landscape. References to the visual arts proliferate in Intertidal Life, since so many of the characters are themselves visual artists. There are also

allusions and references to Impressionist artists (6, 11, 14, 22, 125), the most intricate being the references to Flaubert and Woolf. The one novel the protagonist hopes her daughter will read is Flaubert's Madame Bovary, which the heroine contrasts with pulp romance fiction (analysed in Chapter Three of this thesis). Thomas acknowledges Woolf's To The Lighthouse through direct reference, as well as through the use of imagery reminiscent of Woolf's text as a background for Intertidal Life. Impressionism is used to establish a basic format in which Thomas can analyse the interaction between the lovers and the landscape of her text.

Thomas's writing acknowledges an understanding of the intentions and methodologies of the Impressionist painters and writers. Even so, it is the author's own words, external to the creative texts, which make the most convincing affirmation of her conscious adaptation of visual methodologies. In her thesis, Thomas states that a painting "has a closer relationship to society, to individuals in contact with one another" (4) than a text, and adds that the art of painting has a force and directness which James "could not help but envy" (4). Thomas positions visual art nearer to reality than verbal art again, when defining her own writing strategy. In an interview for Writing, Thomas notes that she herself often "begin[s] with an image" (4) and that the text develops from this visual source. "I'm

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interested," Thomas states, "in reproducing the visual in words" (4). It is Impressionism, more than any other art movement, that Thomas turns to in order to satisfy this interest.

Chapter Two: Impressionism

E.H. Gombrich discusses Impressionist painting in terms of "reading" a "language" (274). Beverly Jean Gibbs argues that literary Impressionism is the systematic transference of strategies aligned with the art of painting, to the art of writing (176). These two views affirm the close relationship between the two media in the movement, but the difference between the views points to another important concern in an analysis of this particular school of art. Through his metaphor, Gombrich suggests a primacy for writing, while Gibbs, in her description, argues for the primacy of painting. Neither visual nor literary Impressionism wholly preceded the other; the art forms developed virtually simultaneously. It is crucial to realize, though, that literature was dependent on painting for the formulation and definition of its Impressionist tenets, if not for their actual use.⁷

Literary Impressionism did not develop as a cohesive movement even in itself. In various early Impressionist texts, such as Flaubert's The Sentimental Education, the characters, usually painters, voice views central to the movement, even though the literary style remains undefined. Certain authors, such as Flaubert and the Goncourt brothers,

used what are now defined as Impressionist techniques before being acquainted with the major works of Impressionist painters.⁸ Maria Elisabeth Kronegger notes the lack of consistency in the development of the movement in literature, commenting that, "the only point of agreement among critics is that no Western writer was impressionistic all his life" (120). Though France is seen as the locus of Impressionism, non-French precursors and participants in the literary aspect of the movement are also recognized, such as Conrad, James, Joyce, Dazai Osamu, Ivan Turgenev, Whitman, and Woolf (Kronegger 32). Unlike the visual school, early literary Impressionism was never presented as a single coherent methodology defined by a clique of mutually influential artists. By the time Thomas's first writing appeared, over a century after Flaubert's first Impressionist work, the movement's tenets and stylistics had been analysed and represented in a coherent format.⁹

The central concern for the early Impressionists was the creation of a spatial and temporal immediacy which allowed for the interplay of context and consciousness. Kirschke defines the strategy in literature as the rendering of "the direct and fleeting impression" (4), and Hunter acknowledges a parallel intent in painting, noting that Monet searched for a "remarkably unsentimental and direct observation of life" (33). According to the Impressionists, reality could not be analysed but only intuited; a fusion of

sensations passed into consciousness where it changed into impressions. These impressions were then to be recorded, without selection or expression.

There is clearly a conflict within this methodology since there is no way to guarantee that selection has been avoided. In Kirschke's connection of the words "direct" and "impressions," and Hunter's connection of the words "direct" and "observation," the two writers point to a questionable opinion which has persisted in western art and philosophy since Plato -- the primacy of sight in relation to the other senses, with regards to the objective representation of reality. Jean Hagstrum notes that, "of all the senses, the eye had, for Plato, the closest kinship to spirit. He called it 'sun-like,' and his metaphor, 'the eye of the mind,' exalted both sense and intellect" (5). Plato's explanation of poetry and painting's imitativeness in The Republic is based on the visual metaphor of the mirror-image, poetry being as much a "manufacturer of images" (X. 605a) as painting. In the Phaedrus, Socrates states that "sight is the keenest of our physical senses" (57). Plato's prioritization of visual over verbal representation established a supremacy of the visual that maintains support into the twentieth century.

This Platonic hierarchy of the senses, as well as the metaphor of the mirror, can be found as well in the Impressionist concern with the centrality of the role of

perception in the creation of an image.¹⁰ As Kirschke notes, "among the Impressionist techniques in painting, perhaps foremost is the dictum that the artist must render the impression that objects make on the eye" (4). The Impressionist painters felt that reality was not perceived as objects but as colour and light, since perception itself was dependent on light; therefore, the acknowledgement of reality was dependent on human sight. Kronægger, relating this central tenet to writing, accents the mirror metaphor, commenting that, according to the Impressionists, "man's consciousness faces this world as pure passivity, a mirror in which the world inscribes or reflects itself" (14). For Impressionist writers, the textual representation of reality also depends on the reflection attained by the mind. Regardless of the acknowledged psychological factor, the assumed primacy of visual perception retains its influence in Impressionist writers, who turned to description as the central format in which the "objective" interpretation of reality was to be presented.¹¹

But the artists of this movement were not necessarily less subjective than those of any other. As James himself argues, "a painting is not an 'Impression' but an expression" (Parisian 165), and the Impressionist tenet of objectivity can only be represented through a simulation of objectivity. Cezanne, defining Monet as "only an eye -- but what an eye!" (Gombrich Story 405), also points to an

individualism within the artist which necessitates some degree of subjectivity. The light cast by this false objectivity reveals a questionable foundation for Impressionism. Thomas's appropriation of Impressionist stylistics, on the other hand, cannot be accused of a similar dubious basis since her intentions are not aligned with those of the movement. Thomas herself notes the false assumptions at play in Impressionist painting in her Masters thesis, stating that, "in theory at least the artist was not to arrange or select, . . . [but] in actual fact, the best of the Impressionists did not adhere to this part of the theory" (69). As will be shown in Chapter Three, Thomas's appropriation of this particular school of art is based on a conscious intention of exposing the impossibility of perceiving, let alone representing, any true and objective image of reality.

Authorial presence in the Impressionist text is subdued in order to strengthen the image of objectivity and immediacy in the relationship between the perceiver (i.e. the reader) and that which is perceived (i.e. the impression stimulated by the text). Kronegger defines Flaubert as the founder of Impressionism in writing because he was the first author to "present the impressions of his protagonists without 'intruding' into their world" (15). In Pages from the Goncourt Journal, the Goncourt brothers record Flaubert's comment to them that, "'the story, the plot of a

novel is of no interest to me. When I write a novel, I aim at rendering a color, a shade. . . . The rest, the characters and the plot, is mere detail'" (58). Woolf voices similar sentiments in her introduction to Mrs. Dalloway, commenting that:

The more successful the method, the less it attracts attention. The reader it is to be hoped will not give a thought to the book's method or to the book's lack of method. He is concerned only with the effect of the book as a whole on his mind (viii).

The authors of Impressionist literature subordinate the extratextual reality, the book's "method," to the world of the text itself.

The suggested obfuscation of the text's creator has a number of structural implications, the most obvious being the general lack of developmental distinctions in the plot. Phenomena must be presented in the order in which they are perceived, so as to emphasize the sensory quality of the experience rather than that which is being experienced. Woolf notes this apparent lack of structure in her introduction to Mrs. Dalloway: "the book grew day by day, week by week, without any plan at all, except that which was dictated each morning in the act of writing" (viii). Various critics have acknowledged a similar lack of clear direction in Thomas's texts. Alix Kates Shulman, for

example, defines Songs My Mother Taught Me as "a collection of vignettes" that is "almost lacking in plot" (33). Kroetsch refers to the "discontinuity of form" in Blown Figures, where "the reader, like the writer, becomes archaeologist, seeking the grammar of the fragments" (112). The fragmentation of an Impressionist text, which often begins within, or after, notable events and ends inconclusively, allows the author to avoid both excessive finish and any acknowledgements to authorial control (Kirschke 214).

The Impressionist piece is presented as a self-sufficient entity, all necessary aspects of the work encompassed within it. Kronegger notes that "the impressionist writer's objective is to create a self-contained work of art that is its own form and substance" (73). For this reason, the plot is introspective, tending not to address concurrent issues of great social concern. The seemingly inconsequential events of every day life which arise within the text thereby gain greater significance and undergo more detailed inspection, as does the process of representation itself. Due to the analysis of the writing process, the Impressionist text is often self-reflexive, "telling how it came to be written" (Beebe 303).¹² The written work is denied a fictional world of its own. Thomas's similar interest in analysing the quotidian and the writing process, and her "loving attention to detail"

(Peter Stevens 259) will be discussed in Chapter Four.

One of the most common plot structures used by Impressionist writers is that of the diary, in which it is feasible that the writer may analyse the writing process while writing. Not only does this structure suggest that the text is a part of the reader's reality, but it also suggests an absence of foreknowledge on the writer's part. This form also has the advantage of mutable writing styles and points of view, as well as the potential to reveal the protagonist's psychological developments through the tone of the text itself. Kronegger notes that:

Writers of diaries, notebooks, and memoirs have the advantage of making everything proceed from a certain instant: according to the moment, they can change writing styles, that is the manner of suggesting reality (51).

The diaristic format allows the writer to address the same scene or object at different psychological points, thereby recording the changes in the psychological perspective. The format also carries the illusion that the author is writing honestly, with regard to the particular moment, since there is no intended general audience.

For the suggested integration of the author into the text to be convincing, the author must adapt the views and attitudes of the protagonist. "The author 'identifies' with the illusions of the protagonists, and ironically, the

distinction between author and protagonists, between illusion and reality disappears" (Kronegger 15). Authorial omniscience is subordinated to the unity of the impression through authorial self-levelling. This act of submission leads to a greater dependence on the reader to complete the image. Though Impressionist prose may be "an exercise in discontinuity" where "the traditional stable world is dissolved into the unfinished, the fragmentary" (Kronegger 52), this fragmentation is created with the awareness that the reader will attempt to impose order. The short brush strokes of such Impressionists as Monet and the dotting techniques of such Pointillists as Seurat are both methods which force the viewer to form a unity out of apparent dissolution. This strategy can also be seen in the Impressionist juxtaposition of colours, first defined by Delacroix, as a means of leading the viewer's mind to do the blending. Viola Hopkins Winner notes that Conrad also elicits reader participation in the process of creation, using strategies "where the narrator does not want to report a scene at length, or cannot, and where it is desirable for the reader to do a good deal of active imagining" (108-09). Godard points to the same strategy at play in Thomas's writing, where the text "invites us" to "add our own interpretations" (47).

The counterparts, in writing, to the painterly methods of fragmentation to enforce viewer participation are

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numerous. The use of minimal description to "sketch in" a character creates an unfinished impression which the reader must complete. The use of synecdoche is also popular amongst Impressionist writers since it minimizes description, "using the merest suggestion to elicit the emotional response of the viewer" (Kirschke 119). Often various pieces of information are dropped throughout the text which can only be understood when considered simultaneously. The reader is also encouraged to participate through allusions to either previous episodes in the text, or to information not explicitly addressed in the text but probably familiar to the reader. The repetition of key phrases, images, or memories functions to mesmerize the reader, much as rhythm and rhyme do. The recurrence of various images or memories also allows the protagonist to "circle around the same motif" (Kirschke 199), considering multiple viewpoints on a singular issue. Similar uses of allusion and repetition appear in Thomas's work, inviting "the participation of an attentive reader, who must remember, sift, compare, and contrast the occurrences of a given phrase" (Godard 46).

These various strategies are supported further, in an Impressionist text, through the author's choice of words. In Impressionist literature, the meaning of a word is recognized as not originating solely from the image or idea it represents on its own, but from the word's relationship

to the other words within the text, as well as the collective tone these words convey (Kronegger 77). Language is used to reinforce the vagueness, dissolution, and unity of the Impressionist perception in general. Verbs are stressed, since they allude to the movement and fluidity of the sense impression. Substantivized colour adjectives, quality nouns and action nouns are also favoured for their vivid images and, in the case of action nouns, their sense of movement and blur.

Kronegger suggests that a "great number of commas has its equivalent in the Impressionist's broken brush strokes" (83). It is not simply the repetition of commas, though, which creates the fragmentation but, as Kronegger herself notes (82), the rapid succession of images. There is no clear justification for seeing punctuation as a tool of Impressionist writing. Thomas differs from the central writers of the original movement because of her manipulation of punctuation, capitalization, and spacing as a means of enhancing the sense of fragmentation within her texts.

Since the plot of an Impressionist text is supposedly indeterminate and ambiguous, the psychological make-up of the protagonist also is presented as inconsistent and vague. Kronegger suggests that, "since the definition of character is inseparable from a novel's plot, character cannot exist in a formless novel" (46). But an Impressionist work is not completely formless, even if false objectivity is ignored,

as the text still depends on the "order" in which impressions are realized. The protagonist does have characteristics which are synthesized with their environment. The Impressionist protagonist is often defined as an artist whose concerns correlate with those of the Impressionists. The character, never the less, usually has a vague psychological make-up, thereby allowing consciousness to meld with the fragmentation of the environment. As Kronegger notes:

The protagonist in Impressionist literature lacks a composed personality. It seems that human life is broken up into fragments at will, and that the person is reduced to a discontinuous series of states (60).

The fragmented and introspective nature draws the individual away from logic and toward a comparatively emotional and irrational state of being. The protagonist is highly sensitive to all impressions, often losing the ability to judge which type of impressions to reject and which to adhere to. The Impressionist protagonist generally is depicted as a passive absorber of sensory impressions, as in Conrad's Heart of Darkness and Woolf's The Years and Mrs. Dalloway. The character feels estranged not only from the social environment which demands the wearing of masks, but also from the self.

The passive though perceptive protagonist is seen as

having two potential emotional outcomes. On the one hand, the individual might become overwhelmed by the multitude of impressions being perceived, and fall into a state of dissolution or self-destruction. On the other hand, the protagonist may withdraw from the impressions of reality into a private psychological world. The image of the divided self is particularly common in literary Impressionism since it represents the struggle of the individual to distance one's self from the fragmentation which one has become a part of. The withdrawn protagonist may not realize the control that he/she has over that which is perceived but, regardless, begins manipulating the representation of impressions to communicate consciousness. Kronegger notes that, "as an emotional reaction to the outside world, such art became a symbol of the protagonist's emotions and of his expressionist attitude toward the world" (28). In either outcome, the various impressions acquired by the protagonist attain a homologous status as perceptions.

A fragmented yet unifying point of view is a central characteristic of the Impressionist protagonist. Since the author sacrifices the authority of organizing the impressions which the protagonist receives, a fragmented, multi-faceted depiction of these impressions is presented. No differentiation is made between impressions based in reality, such as sensory impressions, and those based in

consciousness, such as memories or dreams. "What all Impressionist works have in common," Kronegger notes, "is to give time the character of space, to impose spatial relations on time, to do away with a chronological narrative and replace it with sketches" (58). Memories and perceptions become contemporaneous elements in a synthesis of sense-impressions. The act of perceiving and the act of remembering become homologous experiences, with the focus placed on the interplay between the protagonist's consciousness and the environment.

The descriptive passages of Impressionist texts allude to a unity through dissolution, accenting the play of light and shade, the fragmentation of images, and the blurring of vision. The Impressionists defined colour and light as the source of visual impressions, functioning free of temporal or linear influence. Description of images obscured by water, rain, fog, and intense sunlight are popular, therefore, in Impressionist texts because of the fragmenting and blurring effects of the elements on perception. The all-encompassing aspects of both light and water function to submerge the protagonist in the external environment. Rather than dramatizing action, light and water lend a sense of inertness which complements both the apparent lack of authorial drive and the openness of the protagonist's consciousness to external impressions. The optical diffusion offers a sense of distance and isolation which

supports the psychological state of the protagonist (Rewald 578). Kronegger notes that the images of isolation:

reflect states of emotion within the main character whose vision is impaired: their quality is a psychological as well as a narrative ambience and erodes any clear distinction between reality and hallucination, between truth and illusion (16).

The sense of isolation felt by the protagonist, rather than allowing a clear perception of the reality from which they feel distanced, creates an image of dissolution which disallows any separation of reality and representation.

The Impressionist author strives for an image of cohesion between reality and fiction. Through a blurring of the boundaries between, on one side, the text's plot, protagonist, and landscape, and, on the other, the reality external to the text, Impressionist writing suggests a direct representation of reality. Thomas's motivation for employing Impressionist strategies is not wholly aligned with those of her Impressionist predecessors. Though she adapts the general tenets of the movement in both Latakia and Intertidal Life, as well as in other works, she does so for sociopolitical reasons. Thomas's adaptation of Impressionist stylistics to depict the passive individual is not based on a concern for representational immediacy. Rather, Thomas uses the stylistics to expose the means by

which contemporary western social structures manage to force individuals into positions of either role-acceptance or social alienation.

CHAPTER 3: The Limits of Verbal Discourse

Criticism which deals with Thomas's representation of sociopolitical structures generally presents two arguments - either that the author's re-evaluation of conventional social structures results in the definition of a previously unacknowledged framework, or that her re-evaluation results in the acceptance of a limited human perception which cannot see beyond a non-structural or dissolute image of reality. Coldwell's essay "Natural Herstory and Intertidal Life" is an example of the former argument. In this essay, Coldwell concludes that, "the metaphor of the intertidal zone, washed by the moon-controlled tides and warmed by the masculine sun, is an image of unity to which, after much torment, Alice [the protagonist] finally gives assent" (148). This interpretation of the titular metaphor, though it recognizes Thomas's desire to supersede the alienating binarism of gender differentiation, fails to acknowledge Thomas's suggestions that mutability and competitiveness are an inherent aspect of the intertidal zone, where "everything just goes around eating each other" (Intertidal 260). Rather, Coldwell advances the notion that Thomas's references to natural violence and competition are intended to echo a sociopolitical structure based on male dominance.

Thomas's goal, according to Coldwell, is to affirm "existence through its evocation of the beauties of the natural world, and affirm woman's power through both her real and symbolic connection with natural forces" (149). Such a unified and harmonious structure suggests that Thomas's displacement of the dominant order is intended to advance a new system of binary differences with beauty, woman, and nature on one side, and their opposites on the other. This alternative though is simply a re-affirmation of the previous dichotomy with the androcentric perspective replaced by a gynocentric one. But in Intertidal Life, not only is the tide variable, but the environment it washes over is as well; one cannot experience the same intertidal life twice. The environment is not presented as maintaining a clear order, for crabs might lose claws and starfish might grow back arms, and there is always the potential of something "sticking a divine finger into these small universes [and] playfully rearranging things" (Intertidal 269). Coldwell denies the text's image of a protean reality and, therefore, misinterprets Thomas's representation of alienation through gender differentiation.

Coldwell's desire for an image of order is echoed in Brigitte G. Bossanne's assertion that certain texts by Thomas follow the order of myth. Bossanne initially attempts to place her feet in both pools of criticism, that of a new order and that of chaos, by stating that, in

Thomas's writing, "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'" (232). According to Bossanne, Thomas's protagonists ultimately establish a clear definition of reality, going through a "corrective journey . . . in order to clear the character's doubts as to the nature of reality" (218). But later in her analysis, the critic argues that the passage through chaos is not even necessary, since Thomas can "reject the order imposed by the fairy-tale genre but accept the one imposed by myth" (232). Both Bossanne and Coldwell suggest that Thomas's ultimate intent is to present an image of harmony and order without alienation or competition, but neither critic addresses the issue that the definition of a new hermeneutic reinforces the structural rigidity which, according to Thomas, perpetrates the alienation her protagonists struggle against. Nor do either of the critics acknowledge that, in order for Thomas to perceive any such structure for reality, she would have to be external to the structure herself.

A number of other critics argue that, through a depiction of reality as chaotic and discontinuous, Thomas denies the potential for defining any underlying order. Pauline Butling, in her essay "The Cretan Paradox, or Where the Truth Lies in Latakia," argues that Thomas defines contradiction as the only assured aspect of reality:

What is new in Latakia is the absence of an underlying or overriding unity which makes 'sense' of the flux of experience. . . . There are symbols, myths, narrative motifs and so forth with the potential for becoming unifying paradigms, but instead, they too become part of the labyrinth (107).

Ellen Quigley, in "Redefining Unity and Dissolution in Latakia," supports Butling's conclusions. Echoing Thomas's own questioning of the authority of language itself, Quigley states that Thomas presents "a dissolution of any absolute definition of unity and dissolution" (219). Butling and Quigley's acceptance of Thomas's ambiguity allows these critics to analyse the texts without imposing, or suggesting the author imposes, a structure upon them. This accepted lack of clear perception also echoes the Impressionists' avoidance of conclusiveness and excessive finish.

The view that Thomas's texts present a previously unacknowledged order and the view that they deny any possible definition of order are not in complete conflict. Though the views clash with regard to Thomas's conclusions, they coincide on the issue of her instigation for analysis. Both critical camps acknowledge that the catalyst of Thomas's work is her political concern with the marginalization of individuals or social groups by sociopolitical structures. They also agree that Thomas exposes a discontinuity between these structures and the reality which the structures suggest they represent,

and both acknowledge the alienating effect caused by this misrepresentation.

For Thomas, the central structure supporting the false representation of reality is language itself. As Donna Bennett notes, Thomas attempts to "locate a real language, a means of communicating that precedes our present exclusionary language" (235). Butling also suggests that, in Latakia, "the subject of the novel is not the story of their emotions so much as the story of Rachel's struggle to write that story" ("Cretan" 108). Linda Hutcheon defines Intertidal Life as "perhaps the most powerful novelistic critique in recent years" of "totalizing systems and so-called universal Truths" ("Shape" 220). Hutcheon refers to Alice, the protagonist, as "a writer obsessed with language and with its contexts" (222). Two of Thomas's major concerns, Hutcheon notes, are "the nature of language" and how to "write about writing" (222), acknowledging the central role of language within the critique of totalizing systems mentioned earlier. Verbal discourse, in Thomas's work, is presented as a fiction, and Latakia and Intertidal Life as metafictional texts, for each "draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality" (Waugh 2). It is specifically this relationship between fiction and reality which attracts Thomas to Impressionism.

For Thomas, the reason verbal discourse fails to represent the real world is the fact that language defines reality as a

stationary object fixed for scrutiny. The primary impetus driving the linguistic desire to make meaning, according to Thomas, is based on possession, containment, and disempowerment. By disallowing an image of monolithic unity to support her text, Thomas suggests that it is impossible to background accurately the fluctuant, temporary impressions perceived by the individual by a single omnipresent order, whether such an order exists or not. The concept of a fleeting reality is supported by one of Latakia's central themes, the Heraclitean maxim of the impossibility of stepping into the same river twice or, on the social level, of remaining within the same relationship. At one point in the text, Michael, the ex-lover of the protagonist, states that, "Whatever happens between you and me, I can never go back to Hester." Rachel, the protagonist, immediately reminds him that, "It wouldn't be the same Hester you'd be going back to" (25). When Hester, Michael's wife, tells Rachel she feels she has a similar relationship with Michael to that which Rachel has with her daughters, Rachel chastises her for trying to keep him a child. The heroine acknowledges the same desire for stasis within herself, even as she perpetuates it:

the idea of the menage a trois was your refusal to
 . . . take responsibility . . . as well as our
 refusal, Hester's and mine, to insist that you
 grow up. You know how children can manipulate a
 situation between competing adults - and you were

just like a child; you are a child (43).

Even while citing the flaw in seeing Michael as a child, Rachel continues to define him as one. Such ambiguities are common in Latakia. Truth is not represented as a uniplanar structure unaffected by temporal and emotional influences, but as a pluralistic concept dependent on the flux of individual perception. As Butling points out, "in Latakia, the underlying premise of the book is that 'reality' is contradictory, 'truth' variable: unity or singularity is neither imagined nor desired" (108). Therefore Rachel is able to write, "'Michael, I love you.' It was a lie when I said it and yet as soon as I said it, it was true" (45) and the "reality" of the text is not ruptured.

Recognizing that her desire for an over-arching perception of reality originates from a fictive basis, the protagonist associates the desire with literature. She lays blame for her social turmoil on her attempts to make order of her life, stating that she must "stop looking for the 'eternal aspect' of the story" (30). The issue for Rachel, and for Thomas, is not whether marginalized individuals have, in the past, and can, now, adopt socially established order as their own. Rather, the point of contention is the fact that the imposition of any structure is unrealistic, since no fixed order can represent adequately the protean world in which individuals exist. Thomas acknowledges the same dilemma, with regard to what she sees as the

established, western canon, during an interview with Eleanor Wachtel:

You can write your book any damn way you want to as long as it works and don't let men tell you that it has to have the larger scene. I'm so fed up with hearing that. You know, you've got to write War and Peace, you've got to write this great diorama of history, The Naked and the Dead. You've got to set it in the context of the great social upheavals of your time (45).

Thomas's animosity toward the pressure to define an all-encompassing sociopolitical context echoes the Impressionist preference for quotidian events as the subjects of their work. More importantly, it verifies the fact that Thomas sees conventional literary forms, such as the novel, as reinforcing sociopolitical formulas which falsely depict reality as a fixed and definable construct.

Intertidal Life also addresses the falsity of formulaic literary representations of reality. Thomas creates an especially concise juxtaposition of ambiguous reality against the rigidity of literary formula by critiquing various motifs of the romantic novel through her own plot. In the twentieth century, romanticism has come to be associated with women, as in the Harlequin Romances which Alice, the protagonist of Intertidal Life, and her daughter read over the summer.¹³ The glorification of the

subordinate female role which these texts propagate offers an escape for the women who read them, but simultaneously immobilizes and distracts the readers from reacting against the structures imposed upon them in their own realities. In her essay "A Fine Romance, My Dear, This Is," Thomas presents various standard romance novel motifs:

- the heroine often spends time in hospital after suffering an accident, though not disfigurement;
- the hero is by the bedside to cry out "Darling!";
- the heroine gives up her career;
- the setting is exotic (Greece, Italy, or Spain);
- the lovers marry and live happily ever after (6).

All these standard motifs arise in Intertidal Life, but either they are directly contradicted or their conclusiveness is presented as dubious.

Though not having suffered an accident, Alice is psychologically preparing herself for an unnamed operation to be performed at summer's end; the novel begins after the operation has been planned, the operation is never clearly defined, and the text ends before the operation is realized. The gravity of the operation is communicated through the heroine's narration and the reader is led to speculate that it is somehow associated with her efforts to define herself as an independent woman, rather than an immobile woman dependent on a handsome doctor with "hawk-like" features.

Unlike the handsome doctors who hover over the

heroines' bedsides in the Harlequins, the male lead of Intertidal Life, Peter, is not present at the hospital. Alice notes that, "he did not like hospitals. She had had her children alone; he would not even stay in the building" (13). Alice's doctor does not actually appear in the text. The closest thing Thomas gives us is the unclear image of the anaesthetist: "She could not tell, from the bulge where his nose was, whether he had hawklike features. Anyway, he was too old" (280).

Turning to the third point in Thomas's list of Harlequin conventions, Intertidal Life does not present its heroine as either terminating her career or developing a career which supports that of her lover. The text opens with Alice's unromantic job as a writer already underway. Alice's respect for her own career proves to be a source of tension, rather than harmony, between the couple, as it was for Rachel and Michael in Latakia. Unlike the exotic locales of the romance novels, the setting of Intertidal Life is generally defined as domestic and familiar (one of Alice's fondest memories is of the family cleaning out the septic tank together). The plot, rather than beginning with early love leading to marriage, begins after the separation and does not establish any definite conclusion. The relationship in Latakia is similarly achronological, with "the honeymoon coming at the end." While having Alice and her daughter discuss the same standard romance plot

conventions offered in "A Fine Romance, My Dear, This Is," Thomas makes sure that each of the conventions is deflated in her text. The reader of Intertidal Life is presented with ambiguous, unfinished images which contradict any attempt, on the reader's part, to infer a textual format of completion and unity. By not defining a consistent background or sense of unity to support her text, Thomas intimates that no single omnipotent truth can be prescribed as backgrounding reality either.

In Latakia and Intertidal Life, Thomas's analysis of verbal discourse goes beyond a critique of literary formulas, ultimately presenting language itself, regardless of how atypical its use, as also supporting false representations. In Latakia, Thomas's efforts to locate a source of direct communication carry her back to the origins of language and the most ancient alphabet in history. The final stop on Rachel and Michael's cruise is the Syrian port city of Latakia, where the Ugaritic alphabet supposedly first developed. Having arrived at this source of communication, the narrator is frightened and amazed by her inability to comprehend the cacophonous discourse around her. Rachel is only fluent in English. The couple are on a Norwegian ship, surrounded by ships from various other countries. The steward communicates to these ships via a flag book. On shore, the signs are in Arabic and the couple is given a map in Arabic and German to help them navigate

the city. Rachel comments on the disorientation caused by such a polyphony of languages:

How much we depended on language, on verbal interchange, for our security. We were uneasy and disoriented in this place, where what we heard and what we saw printed was utterly incomprehensible (169).

Language, whether it be maps, speech, or written text, necessarily distorts that which it attempts to signify. The alien context of the Syrian port functions to accentuate the degree to which Rachel and Michael had been able to inter-relate ("I have never felt so far from home" (166)), but also works as a magnification of their own inability to communicate fully through human sign systems.

It is not until Rachel and Michael take a taxi to Ras Shamra, the site where the most ancient alphabet in the world was discovered, that the heroine admits to her communicative impotence:

"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."

"That's nonsense"

"Is it? Nothing ever changes. People don't get any better as their language gets more sophisticated. And people who speak the same

language don't even speak the same language. You. Me. All of us. All just make the same sounds. That's even more terrifying than the first three hours in Latakia. At least here you know the language is different" (171).

In Latakia, the narrator acknowledges the difficulty of depicting reality through verbal discourse since such discourse is dependent on an unrealistic social structure for its source of meaning. In Intertidal Life, verbal discourse is defined once again as unrealistic, with the author pointing at an androcentric social order as the creator and beneficiary of this false representation.¹⁴ Bennett argues that Thomas, in her writing, is "breaking through the restrictive language that binds [her]" in search of a "benign but powerful . . . presexual source out of which real change arises" (235). Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's argument in No Man's Land coincides with that presented by Thomas. They argue that women are not necessarily alienated from the words with which they communicate, but that the language must be revised, in some way, in order to remove its sociopolitical biases:

Where male writers often seem to define "woman talk" as a contaminated subset of the general category "language," women writers tend to assume that "men's language" is "language." Hence the female linguistic project is in many ways more

urgent, more radical, and . . . more contradictory than the male one, for the women's revisionary imperative frequently involves a desperate effort to renovate the entire process of verbal symbolization, a process that, they feel, has historically subordinated women (236).

Alice, like Rachel, uses writing in an attempt to articulate her social identity, and to come to terms with the protean character of her environment and her relationship to it. She too locates the contradiction between verbal stasis and realistic fluctuancy within the act of classification, but for Alice the social intentions behind classification are more apparent.

Alice's efforts to appropriate language begin with a reclassification of her own name, noting that "the whole business of names was awkward. And who was she really?" (14). In an analysis of the political function of pseudonyms, Gilbert and Gubar argue that "the pseudonym began to function more prominently as a name of power, the mark of a private christening into a second self, a rebirth into linguistic primacy" (241). Thomas, in reference to the arbitrary names with which the heroine of Mrs. Blood christens herself, defines this action as a changing back to one's real name, suggesting a process of rediscovery and self-definition (Bowering "Songs" 23). Throughout Intertidal Life, Alice is obsessed with the fixedness, the

forced definition, of "naming," particularly the naming of herself. The plot takes place in the early 70s when the island hippies are all busy changing their names to "Sunshine or Rainbow or Chanterelle," "Rosamund Apple or Johanna New Moon or whatever." The process is seen only as a fashionable trend by the hippie crowd, but for Alice the sociopolitical connotations are much more pertinent.

During a conversation with two female friends, Alice notes that "somehow one's first name doesn't seem as politically oppressive as one's married name. And yet I loved being 'Mrs. Hoyle'. Then everybody knew I was married, you see. I had status" (172). But along with status came stasis. After the separation, Alice suggests that she would change her name to Alice Apple or Alice Blackberry, to make it easier for she and her ex-husband to be introduced in public. The heroine is joking, but only at the suggested impetus; it is not to help camouflage the flawed seams of social etiquette that she wishes to change her name but for the opposite reason, to expose them and redefine herself.

The heroine deliberates over her re-naming as an act of independence, noting that the children are frightened by the idea, realizing that the change in signifier has the power to change that which it signifies. She herself recognizes the alienation a new name would cause, feeling uncomfortable when her daughters begin to call her "Alice" instead of

"mummy." Yet her married name is no longer adequate for denoting the multi-faceted "Alice Hoyle: 1,000 Interlocking Pieces" (158).

The heroine refers to herself by various pseudonyms, including Alice Agonistes and the Scorpio Housewife, and calls her husband, at different points in the text, Peter the Rock, Peter Pan, and Peter Peter pumpkin eater. "If I were going to change my name," Alice muses, "I'd change it to Midnight, to Hecate, to Aminita, yes to Aminita, beautiful and deadly" (40). Her friends offer various possibilities: Christine, Pristeen, Del-feen, Vaseline. "I'm serious" responds Alice, "I need help" (173). Alice's friends fail to recognize the significance "naming" has for the writer, who suggests that the naming of women by their father's and husband's patronymics parallels the explorers' attempts to de-naturalize their untamed surrounding by charting and naming:

Women have let men define them, taken their names even, with marriage, just like a conquered or newly settled region, British Columbia, British Guiana, New Orleans, New Jersey, New France, New England, etcetera. I really understand all those African nations taking new names with their independence, names that relate to their racial history (171).

In Thomas's various works, mapping and naming are both seen

as forms of labelling imposed by a patriarchal structure. In Songs My Mother Taught Me, the heroine is baffled by the map of New York she studies prior to the family's summer trip; for her, the map is a false representation of the real geography (15). In Latakia, Rachel, while looking at a map, states: "I'm not sure I really understand . . . I have always had that problem with maps myself. In spite of being told the scale, I cannot conceptualize the size" (76).

References to maps and cartography proliferate in Intertidal Life as well. In the epigraph to the text, Thomas takes an ironic jab at the traditional methods of defining order in nature and society in general. The epigraph reads:

"Part of the following day was employed in arranging and setting in order our records of observations, charts and calculations, and the notes made on all matters which having been jotted down on board ship in the midst of toil and labour required to be systematically expanded in order that they might be in good order and not convey a confused idea of the information gained. [We also replenished our supply of water, twenty barrels of which could be filled in a day in that district]."

- A Spanish Voyage to Vancouver

The passage brings attention to the explorers' manic demand for "order" (the word itself appears three times in the

quotation), and the efforts they made to superimpose their social structure upon the changing terrain which they encountered. The short final line reaffirms the actual dependence these men had on the nature they suggested they controlled through the processes of recording and classification. In Thomas's metaphoric discourse, maps function like language, representing a desire to impose order where no order can be comprehended.

The most intricate analyses of the alienating aspect of verbal communication appear within the heroines' own relationships. In Latakia, personal emotional complexities are interwoven into Thomas's analysis of verbal discourse as a political force. Both Rachel and her ex-lover, Michael, are writers. The catalyst for the protagonist's realization of the limitations of verbal communication is her failed relationship, Michael having returned to his wife, Hester (who, ironically, is a painter). While Rachel struggles to accept her alienated position within the failed menage-a-trois, she becomes increasingly aware of her similarly isolated position, as author, within the larger community in which she has chosen to exist, the Cretan village.

Rachel begins to affiliate herself more often with the island's intruders (tourists and the tourist industry) than with the locals of the community. She "wonder[s] what they [the locals] say about me here" (127), and defines herself as "an enigma . . . to most of them" (18). She summarizes

her position in the community as that of an alien: "I am an outsider here, passing through the lives of the people on this street. I will be, in the end, to them (if they think of me at all), a faded snap-shot" (68). Consistent with her view of verbal discourse as impersonal, Rachel suggests that the locals' recollections of her will consist of a visual sign, a photograph, rather than a verbal one, such as her name. Rachel's sense of social alienation ultimately is transferred onto the self-alienation inherent within the task of writing.

In her essay "Basmati Rice," Thomas states: "I often see myself like a diver in one of those old-fashioned diving bells, both in and apart from everything in the universe around me" (313). The concept of simultaneous authorial control and authorial participation is also voiced by Rachel:

The artist almost always lives in a Double Now. Therefore, it is not difficult for me to be up here on the roof, thinking of you, and still very much aware of the sound of Heleni's loom two doors down, and the noise of a motorbike coming down that last spiral before the village proper, and the moon slowly surfacing behind the hill (58).

Rachel, like Thomas, purports to be able to support an intimacy with her social surroundings while maintaining the distance required to record them. But Thomas's image of the

diving bell suggests a discrepancy since, while suggesting a simultaneous fusion and separation from the environment, it acknowledges the lack of interaction with the environment that such a preferred position entails. Similarly, Rachel's examples consistently undercut themselves by affirming the spatiotemporal slippage between participation and representation. Writing about her friend Heleni's weaving, for example, Rachel muses:

It is a sound I had heard behind shutters everywhere in this village, but I had never seen one of the big looms up close until this week. Now I fancy that sound as the sound of the Cosmic Treadle, the sound of the history of Crete, the sound of Woman as Guardian of Culture (55).

The weavers, referred to indirectly, are presented as one organic unit communicating through mutual labour. Yet the heroine alienates herself by noting that she rarely sees the weavers and never participates in their labour. Furthermore, her use of terms such as "history," "guardian," and "culture" reveals the defining and classifying results of her verbal efforts to represent a timeless, changing "collective consciousness" (55). Rachel's response to a community dance is similar:

We are so uprooted now, so terribly alone. Think, even of the way we dance - as metaphor, I mean. All last winter, I went to the Alikí Theatre on

Thursday nights to see the traditional dancing.
 So much of it involves a group, involves touching,
 arms around shoulders, lines weaving in and out .
 . . The dances are ritualistic, traditional . . .
 and beautiful (56).

The description, which is created a number of months after the actual event, refers both to the heroine's sense of social alienation and the alienated position of the text "as metaphor." Focussing on ritual, tradition, and history, it once again exposes language's inevitable impulse to define and categorize. The use of the subjective adjective "beautiful" further alienates the narrator from the event, which is presented as something one admires rather than something in which one participates. Regardless of Rachel's suggestion that she can maintain simultaneous immediacy with her reality and her writing, the verbal representations of social intimacy are consistently backgrounded by a sense of alienation.

In Latakia, the act of writing, communication through language, is depicted as the misconstruction in which all the other conflicts of the text are rooted, with the central subject of Latakia being "not the story of their emotions so much as the story of Rachel's struggle to write the story" (Butling 108). The relationship falls victim to the limitations established by the modes of communication which Rachel and Michael use. Ultimately, the conflict leads the

heroine to question verbal discourse itself and where, within discourse, any unity might originate.

Thomas shows that her heroine's metafictional attempts at deconstructing the languages she has been taught ultimately crumble in upon themselves because of their own dependence on those structures which are being torn down. Standing amongst the ruins of a past civilization, Rachel acknowledges the absence of any perceivable unifying form of verbal discourse, and the mutability of history, time, and language itself. Kroetsch comments that:

Uncovering, for . . . Thomas, involves as well the discontinuity of form. The continuity asserted by history is beyond, lies beyond, the truth of fiction. The reader, like the writer, becomes archaeologist, seeking the grammar of the fragments (112).

Rachel begins the last brief segment of her "love letter" by informing Michael that, "now you are part of my 'archaeology' and I am part of yours" (171). Realizing that it is a fragmented archaeology, Rachel stops attempting to reconstruct it through language, preferring to "enjoy this rare spaciousness and keep on observing" (171).

In Intertidal Life, the authorial task is again presented as a major catalyst for the heroine's sense of alienation. While only the central character of Intertidal Life is a writer, there is no greater proliferation of visual

artists in any other of Thomas's works than there is in this text. Though a major sub-character in Latakia is a visual artist, and the heroine of Latakia constantly expresses her desire to paint, in Intertidal Life, all the characters seem to work within the medium at one point or another.

Alice finds that her domestic and social lives constantly intrude upon the writing process. The desire for privacy leads the protagonist to limiting the amount other individuals can communicate with her. She places a restriction on the use of her phone and, to deter visitors, places a "Do Not Disturb" sign at the end of her driveway. The message is clear: social interaction and the act of writing are mutually exclusive.

In direct contrast to writing, and the "lone writer" personae of Alice, Thomas presents painting as a highly social medium. The image of visual art as a means of communication which circumvents the alienating condition of writing culminates when two of Alice's female friends and her ex-husband, who is in search of something "higher," begin painting a communal mandala. Their affectionate co-operation directly confronts the cynicism and suspicion of Alice, with her unused phone and her "Do Not Disturb" sign. The art project begins to encroach on what little social activity Alice has permitted herself. Because of the project, the two friends begin to keep secrets from Alice -- that is, cease communicating with her: "We can't tell, . . . It's a secret"

(196). Both friends suggest a causal relationship between Alice's own request for privacy and their silence. Trudl admits that she sees the reduced interaction as awkward but adds that, though she often had wanted to visit Alice, she chose not to out of respect for the writer's privacy (192). Stella's response roots Alice's alienation solidly in the differences between their chosen mediums: "You have your writing. . . . We happen to be painters" (221). In Intertidal Life, the act of writing is not only depicted as less adequate than the act of painting for maintaining social intercourse, but also as instigating social alienation in the first place.

The protagonist of Intertidal Life defines the structuring of language in western society as an attempt to impose stasis upon a fluctuant reality. Similarly, the narrator of Latakia concludes that any effort to depict reality through verbal discourse is undercut by the fact that contemporary western discourse is dependent on an unrealistic social structure for its source of meaning. Both characters recognize that verbal discourse, notably writing, is inadequate in counter-acting the limitations of that same medium. When Rachel recognizes the futility of trying to make anything clear through verbal discourse, she does not admit to utter defeat, defining observation and movement as the potential source of her personal development: "I will enjoy this rare spaciousness and keep on observing. I don't

know what to do about my life except to keep on going and to try to make 'progress'" (171). Thomas shadows her protagonist's decision, challenging what she sees as the limitations of verbal discourse with an attention to perception and movement, and using Impressionism as the central source of her methodology.

Thomas is concerned with countering the classifying and stagnating tendencies she associates with conventional uses of verbal discourse, such as the novel genre. The author comments that:

The novel has a tradition of received morality behind it. And if you no longer believe in that - or if you believe there isn't any such collective morality in the society in which you live -- then the novel is about breaking down all that (Twigg 249).

For Thomas, the assumed collective morality is basically an androcentric one, though any authority is dubious. Thomas's texts accent concerns with specific sociopolitical biases in language and communication, but the desire for verbal objectivity leads her to question authorial control as well. The Impressionist writers addressed themselves to a similar task, aiming to "present the impressions of [their] protagonists without 'intruding' into their world" (Kronegger 15). In Latakia, Thomas acknowledges the necessary image of her own sacrificed authority, where

reality and representation are depicted as potentially unified, "the lovemaking just an extension of the talk, so that sometimes it was hard to tell which was which, whole paragraphs of touch punctuated by kisses" (41). Rachel speaks of wanting to:

Dip my brush directly into the ocean, the sky, the sun, the eye of Heleni's donkey, the dark beard of the priest, and transfer it all to canvas. . . . to grind up the white house and put them there too and grind up the baskets of shining eels (61).

The author is depicted as wanting to minimize the processing which reality goes through in its transference to the artistic form, in order that the object perceived and its representation are fused into one impression.

Alice, in Intertidal Life, voices the identical desire for immediacy, for circumventing the transmogrification of impressions into tainted words rather than images. Frustrated with her inability to communicate her emotions clearly, Alice states, "I need to sprawl, to scrawl, to pull out from myself the great glistening sentences full of hate and fury and fling them, still wet and steaming onto these white pages" (30). Alice's words echo in Guy de Maupassant's description of Monet's efforts, where the painter was so intent on capturing a passing image that he "took the rain beating on the sea in his hands and dashed it on the canvas" (Courthion 24). The Impressionist aim of

capturing the direct and fleeting instant is also part of Thomas's methodology for circumventing the sociopolitical filter of verbal discourse. The Impressionist belief that reality cannot be analysed but simply intuited supports the desire of Thomas's heroines to represent reality apolitically.

By circumventing displays of authorial dominance in an Impressionist text, the author directs attention away from both the omnipotence of the author and the author's particular view of reality. The locus of representation is seen as dynamic, chaotic, and therefore undefinable. This randomness and disorder match what Butling refers to, in Thomas's work, as "the absence of an underlying or overriding unity which makes 'sense' of the flux of experience" (107) and what Quigley defines as "a dissolution of any absolute definition of unity and dissolution" (219). The apparent lack of authorial presence endows the text with a sense of aimlessness, without a clear plot line or a sense of finish.

The apparent lack of direction in an Impressionist work is often justified through the use of the diaristic format. The approach is also fitting for an Impressionist work because it carries with it the allusion of sincerity, as perceived by the writer at each particular moment, and fidelity, since there is no intended general audience. Furthermore, it justifies changes in writing style and point

of view as an echo of the writer's psychological fluctuations. In Thomas's work, the factual and intimate representation of an individual's perception of social context is also a central goal. The diaristic format allows Thomas to present sociopolitical views through her narrators, thereby avoiding overt pedantry, while reinforcing her argument through an image of candour. The format also reinforces the unfinished and ambiguous characteristics which Thomas wishes to represent as existing within reality.

The Impressionist text focusses on everyday events which occur within the narrator's life. The work is often self-reflexive because the writing of the text is also an aspect of that life. The fact that the narrator is aware of information which has not been disclosed to the reader means that the reader is forced to participate in the construction of the text by assuming and inferring information. These aspects of Impressionism also suit Thomas's sociopolitical interests. She focusses on the quotidian events of her characters' lives in order to expose the biases inherent in various day-to-day events, from domestic chores to conversations. The reflexivity of Impressionist works allows Thomas to nip the bias in the bud, having the heroines of both Latakia and Intertidal Life focus on the process of making meaning through language. The active role of the reader in the creation of the text minimizes the

alienating factor of hierarchical order by decreasing authorial control while increasing reader responsibility.

The image of structural fragmentation which the Impressionist concerns reinforce is mirrored in the image of the Impressionist protagonist, who "lacks a composed personality" (Kronegger 60) and who feels estranged from both the social environment and his/her own personae. Thomas also depicts her protagonists as lacking unified personalities, vacillating in their views and attitudes, and never confidently voicing resolution. The ambiguity, while allowing the reader to make decisions about the textual reality, casts a dubious light on the social structures which have failed to resolve the protagonists' conflicts.

Unlike the Impressionists, who did not attempt to acknowledge a political explanation for their protagonist's sense of alienation, Thomas suggests that the alienation is brought about by sociopolitical factors. In Latakia, the central factor is defined as being inherent in the initial process of establishing verbal discourse: "the first letter of the 'most ancient alphabet' seemed to me always to be greed, acquisitiveness, the desire to plunder and possess" (170). Thomas fuses what she sees as the oppressive and alienating intentions of language with sociopolitical oppression in contemporary society, writing that, "All boundaries made by men tend to be artificial, born of greed or pride or expediency. All labels are just that - labels"

("Thoughts" 149).

In Intertidal Life, the desire for power and control is defined as ingrained into the social structures of western society as well. Alice, associating the desire to claim and dominate with the explorers, asks herself, "What if women had been the explorers? Would things have been different then?" and answers "Probably not. It probably wouldn't have made any difference whatsoever. And yet" (15). Thomas offers no precise answers, but ensures that both possibilities, that gender would and that it would not make a difference, are presented for the reader's consideration. The impressionistic ambiguity and fragmentation of the protagonist's views reaffirm Thomas's desire not to define any specific social image of unity and order, whether she believes one exists or not. It is not Thomas's intention to re-establish a new version of an old dichotomy but to lead the reader to question the need for a dichotomous interpretation of reality at all.

Chapter 4: Impressionism in Latakia and Intertidal Life

Thomas, though she employs Impressionist stylistics, does so for reasons which are not wholly aligned with those of the movement's founders. The Impressionists of the nineteenth and early twentieth century were not completely unified in their own intentions, but they shared the primary concern for an objective, direct recording of the "interplay of the individual's consciousness and the surrounding world" (Kronegger 13). The Impressionists did not question consciously the sociopolitical implications of the constraints of verbal communication, being "little inclined to deal with issues of great social concern" (Kirschke 14). They focussed instead on developing "the insignificant events of every day life" (Kirschke 72). The image of the individual as inert and impressionable was based on a desire, on the Impressionists' part, to absorb external impulses and represent them objectively in the work, as a means of creating the most accurate depiction of reality possible.

Unlike the Impressionists, Thomas suggests that even everyday events are based on political constructs, and that communication is itself one such event. In Latakia and Intertidal Life, Thomas shows that her desire to depict the alienating and disempowering effects of western

I sociopolitical structures is stylistically compatible with the Impressionist intention of representing the individual as a passive and inert receiver of external impressions. Thomas's regard for "the importance of the moment she is examining, to the function of language within her expression" (Peter Stephens 96), though based in a sociopolitical impetus, coincides methodologically with the Impressionist desire for objectivity and immediacy.

Whereas Impressionist tenets present the relationship between the individual and the environment as a potentially harmonious and direct synthesis, Thomas defines the equation as being in constant friction. The inertness of the individual, for Thomas, is a characteristic imposed by oppressive sociopolitical frameworks, rather than one chosen by the individual. In Thomas's texts, the biases of these frameworks are exposed through an awareness, acknowledged by the narrators, of alienating forces, such as the structures of verbal discourse, within contemporary society. Susan Rudy Dorscht defines Thomas's concern with the alienating tendency of language as "the poststructuralist anxiety of a self recognizing its alienation from itself in language" (64). Dorscht proceeds to analyse the disenchantment with language felt by the central character of Mrs. Blood, but fails to address the search for other modes of representation, specifically those rooted in visual art, which this alienation instigates in the author. Thomas's

use of visual stylistics is, among other things, an attempt to circumvent the tautological limitations inherent in using written language to analyse verbal communication and the political biases it enforces.

Thomas's adaptation of Impressionist techniques in Latakia and Intertidal Life challenges the alienating forces within various social structures, particularly verbal communication, and subverts the notion of an all-encompassing, "correct" view of reality. The author's deflation of authorial omnipotence is shadowed by her depiction of the protagonists, as authors, attempting but failing to establish a concise definition of reality. The methods Thomas employs to subvert authorial power, simultaneously dissuade the reader from imposing any social template upon the text, while leading the reader to participate in the creation of the text.

In Impressionist writing, the author is seen as an undesirable yet unavoidable filter of sensory impressions, imposing personal biases and predefined structures onto the objective impressions of reality. For this reason, the authorial role is either ignored or denied authority in the text. The major stylistic result of this attitude is the absence of an omniscient perspective. Phenomena are often represented in the order in which they assumedly are perceived by the character, with gaps and inconsistencies being included as simulations of the inconsistent perception

of an individual in real life. In Latakia and Intertidal Life, the external author is dealt with in a similar manner.

Both Latakia and Intertidal Life consciously acknowledge the limited perspective of the narrator. Latakia is written in the first person non-omniscient voice, the text being presented as the protagonist's efforts to clarify her social situation. Rachel, presented as both the protagonist and the author of the text, overtly acknowledges her limited perception. "I wonder what they say about me here?" (127) she asks, admitting her lack of insight into the local Cretan community; "Perhaps I will turn up in someone else's memories" (127). She even mentions her ability to limit her own perspective, though only partially: "I had contracted my focus -- a husband was no longer part of it. Then I fell in love with you, and somehow, I could not expand again" (131). Rachel also often notes how much previous information she has lost or has never fully comprehended (17, 93, 134). By having Rachel, as the author of the text, acknowledge her own limited viewpoint, Thomas ensures that the reader is kept aware of the faulty basis of authorial omniscience.

Alice, the protagonist of Intertidal Life, also lacks any over-arching view of her reality. Though the text is written in both the first person and the third person, neither voice is omniscient; Alice's thoughts are the only ones ever exposed to analysis within the narrative. Alice

defines the text as a commonplace book which she is using to analyse her broken marriage (39), to "stay sane" (30). Thomas thereby suggests that the text is written by the character for herself; extratextual individuals are not acknowledged as participants in the creation of the text, and the role of the external author is denied. Thomas explains the third person passages in the book by having Alice note that she refers to herself in the third person in an attempt to clarify her perspective of reality:

It was hard for Alice to see. Things kept getting in the way. The car was going either too fast or too slow. She tried talking about it in the third person. "Alice and Peter Hoyle were a happily married couple . . ." (26).

The passage continues in the third person, confusing the externality of Thomas with the externality which the protagonist/author is imposing upon herself. The heroine's desire to manage her life re-introduces Thomas's concern with the fallacious logic behind any attempt to freeze and structure a reality within which one participates. Ironically, Thomas has Alice begin rewriting her own history as if it were a third-person novel, aware that the omniscient voice will endow her with the ability to impose a sense of order upon reality. Alice's literary attempts at separating herself from her life ultimately prove inadequate at achieving any sense of control. The effort dissipates

into bitter satire, as soon as Alice acknowledges an unpleasant aspect of her reality, her ex-husband's new lover, "one of the nymphs on the Grecian urn, oh my yes. When she cried her eyes didn't even get red. She may even have wept pearls" (26). As in Latakia, the protagonist's voice is used to present Thomas's own view of the omniscient perspective as disingenuous.

Like Rachel, Alice also acknowledges her flawed and discontinuous memory, "full of bits of esoterica. But often not complete" (5). She defines her memories as "scraps that stick in my head. Nothing whole" (69). When Peter tells her they can no longer have sex, Alice acknowledges her unreliable memory by spending their last night together "trying to memorize his body with her fingertips" (152). When her daughter presents her with a pressed rose which has fallen out of a book, Alice comments, "I don't always put them in significant places although it's not a bad idea--than perhaps I'd remember why I'd pressed them in the first place" (272). By suggesting that both Latakia and Intertidal Life are works written by the protagonists, Thomas, in the logistics of the fiction, denies the real author a role in the process of creation. Furthermore, the flawed and inconsistent minds of Thomas's heroines/authors counter the image of authorial omnipresence and reinforce Thomas's own representation of perceived reality as fluctuant and discontinuous.

In the two texts, Thomas employs Impressionist styles of description which reinforce the heroines' claimed constricted perspectives. Many of the descriptive passages in Latakia, rather than suggesting unobstructed views within pockets of atemporality, present only sketchy glimpses of various images, implying the protagonist's cognition of impressions as she passes them. Charles Walcutt clarifies the intent of objectivity, when he notes that the Impressionist writer "presents the mind of a character receiving impressions rather than judging, classifying . . . [them]" (232). In Latakia, an example of such a seemingly nonjudgmental record of the environment reads as follows:

Down more, further yet: Hotel Agropolis, Hotel Astoria (Lux), Hotel Acteon, "Rent Rooms," Zimmer Frei, ENIKDOM; the last bend now, past (if we had known it) the vine-covered balcony outside your study; forward towards the sea, which was out of sight now; past the post office on the left, the bakery on the right; then, suddenly, right out onto the square, the fishboats dancing in front of us, the cliffs -- "Aghia Sophia Buses Stop" (153).

A comparison to Woolf, one of Thomas's major Impressionist influences, would shed some light on the author's intended affect. The style Thomas uses in the above passage strongly parallels that which Woolf uses in various sections of her work, such as the following excerpt from To the Lighthouse:

I

So off they strolled down the garden in the usual direction, past the tennis lawn, past the pampas grass, to that break in the hedge, guarded by red hot pokers like brasiers of clear burning coal, between which the blue waters of the bay looked bluer than ever (33).

In both passages, the viewpoint is the limited one of the protagonist. The description itself seems temporally accurate, the heroine noting an impression only as long as it takes for the next impression to dominate her vision. The author avoids a biased representation by offering no opinion on the various images, presenting them as a catalogue. Appropriate to Impressionist works, both Thomas and Woolf's images are sketchy and fleeting, with a proliferation of words evoking movement, such as "forward," "past," and "down." There seems to be no time to recognize the separate movements of any particular object until, in Thomas's description, the protagonist reaches the open square and watches the boats bobbing on the water.

Neither Thomas's nor Woolf's heroine is presented as controlling the impressions which attract her vision. The sense of change and ambiguity is attributed more to the environment, than to the protagonist, with the viewer being depicted as a passive slate on which the impressions are inscribed. In To the Lighthouse, the heroine is presented as having spent her life being led down the garden path by a

structure which she does not realize, until late in the novel, has predetermined her role in society. In Latakia, on the other hand, the heroine is depicted, from the beginning of the text, as struggling to redefine her social structure. Yet her efforts, presented as they are through a biased mode of communication, lead to a dead end: "'Aghia Sophia,' you said, 'all out. The end of the line'" (154).

Another Impressionist style of description plays a central role in Latakia -- that of the image out of focus. Like the rushing style analysed above, the blurred description presents the perception of the protagonist as ambiguous and nondelineating. One of the intentions behind the dissolution of impressions is the deflation of structural boundaries between the environment and the protagonist's consciousness, with "the unity of space and colour sensation [functioning as] . . . an interplay of the individual's consciousness and the surrounding world" (Kronegger 13). The depiction of vision blurred by natural filters, such as intense sunlight or fog, accents the protagonist's inert role, as well as the individual's sense of distance and isolation (Rewald 578).

The blazing sun and "light-washed" (Latakia 60) walls of the Cretan village present a prime background on which to appreciate the visual effects of intense sunlight. Natural light in general was "the vital principle for the Impressionist painters" (Kirschke 5) and painting in the

open air was common amongst the Impressionists for this reason. Appropriately, Rachel writes her entire analysis in the open air, during a day on the rooftop of her Cretan flat. As soon as the sun sets, Rachel stops writing: "Sun down. Moon up. Time for me to brush my hair, put on a dress and go down into the square" (171). For Rachel, the sunlight both accentuates the various impressions she receives, and blurs them into an unstructured melange of images:

I want to capture the sound of Heleni's loom or the sunlight on the white wall over there or the moment when the Magic Boat goes through that gap in the horizon. And so, I put my pen down and lay a big rock on the pages I have written so far (not many) and join the ladies, or go swimming, or climb the hill. I blink when I step out into the sunlight. "Kalli-mare-a, kalli-mare-a." The blonde woman comes out of her house and puts my hand on her enormous belly so that I can feel the baby kick. Someone is drying octopus on a clothesline in front of the house (30).

Sunlight functions as the force which makes Rachel recognize the shortcoming of her writing. "In this light," Rachel comments, "the whole world dances" (90), for the light empowers the various Cretan images with an immediacy and vitality the protagonist feels she is unable to represent in

her work. Incapable of reproducing the direct, fleeting image, Rachel puts down her pen and leaves the few pages she has written. The authorial externalization from community (Rachel can either write or "join the ladies" but not both) parallels the heroine's sense of social alienation, from both her ex-lover and from the Cretan community with which she never fully assimilates. Ultimately, the protagonist merges her own fear of alienation with a general fear of the alienating tendencies of western society: "It frightens me that we lock away or shunt to 'special schools' anyone who is physically or mentally different. We are producing a society as perfect and smooth on the surface as any other good plastic" (145). It is the desire to create a seamless society out of a fluctuant and inconsistent reality which Rachel acknowledges as her ultimate source of fear.

Ironically, Rachel's verbalization of her apparent failure at presenting the direct impression is countered by her own impressionistic description of quotidian events. Butling claims that Thomas's success at visual representation in Latakia is paralleled by a social success in communication:

While writing about writing a book and the problems in recreating a landscape, [Thomas] creates the landscape. . . . While writing about failures in communication, she succeeds in communicating (Cretan 110).

Though Thomas may succeed in communicating in Latakia, Rachel does not succeed in circumventing the sociopolitical biases of language which Thomas has suggested manipulate communication. The objectivity suggested by Impressionism is, of course, only a simulation, a subjective representation of reality. The success of literary Impressionism arises from the fact that the reader is led to forget or ignore, momentarily, the authorial subjectivity. It is during the passages of impressionistic description that Thomas is able to communicate an image of a structural reality (even though she is controlling that image). But when Thomas incorporates an analysis of the sociopolitical issues central to her argument into her text, the Impressionist imagery fades and Thomas's subjectivity takes the forefront. Latakia fluctuates between impressionistic descriptions which do reinforce the image of reality as ambiguous and undefinable by those within it, and analytic passages which temporarily subsume that image.

Just as Crete presents an ideal location for analysing the effect of intense light upon visual impressions, the coast of British Columbia is perfect for analysing the effect of fog and rain. This is the setting for Intertidal Life and, within the first paragraph of the novel, Thomas makes it clear that a psychological fog has set in:

Where had the fog come from? Last night had been so clear . . . But then in the middle of the

night the foghorn began, . . . with its regular, monotonous lament, the lowing of drowning cattle, always, to her, a sound of unrelieved loneliness, irretrievable loss (3).

The fog is so dense, Alice informs the reader, that "only the slight sound of water lapping against the pilings indicated that the channel in front of her was still there," and that "if she took one more step she might walk right off the end of the earth" (4). The reader is introduced to a protagonist who, typical of Impressionist characters, is transfixed and bleary-eyed. Also typical of Impressionist works, the protagonist's obscured vision and immobility are associated with a sense of alienation. While the "fog" reflects Alice's confused social perspective, the clear night echoes the domestic bliss which has now been replaced with "unrelieved loneliness." For Impressionists, the sense of distance created by blurred images added to the objective perspective; for Thomas, the alienation is an undesirable situation caused by the constructs of contemporary western society.

As Alice's day progresses, the fog is replaced by haze, "a layer of very fine gauze" (7), which is then replaced by glaring sunlight. The consistently blurred vision supports the metaphor of social fluctuation and vacillation which backgrounds the text. In the same episode, Thomas writes that when a friend of Alice's approached, "Alice squinted,

took off her sunglasses, then put them on again. It couldn't be. Although there was no reason why not. It was. It wasn't. It had to be" (17). Throughout the text, the heroine is unsure who her friends are, not only on a physical level but also on an emotional one.

In Intertidal Life, the protagonist's sense of alienation is repeatedly magnified through blurred vision caused by various external influences such as sun, fog, and rain. At one point, Alice states:

I was thinking the other day . . . how different the world looks through rain than it does through tears. A landscape seen through rain keeps its shape -- it's like a picture painted by the Pointillists only done with lines instead of spots. Quite beautiful. Through tears it's all smeared and blurred, it's -- (22).

Pointillism, also referred to as Neo-Impressionism, moves away from the disordered immediacy and emotional passivity of Impressionism, accenting order and scientific control in the representation of impressions (Kirschke 17). When Thomas defines vision through tears as blurry and less aesthetic than the organized image created through the scientific methodology of Pointillism, she is aligning her character's emotional state with Impressionism. The fusion of the internal strife experienced by the heroine after her marital break-up with the external world as she perceives

it, is reinforced by the Impressionist desire to blur internal and external reality. In Intertidal Life, as in Latakia, the limited, fluctuant, and blurred perception of the protagonist is presented time and time again as the perception which initiates the representation of reality.

Thomas adheres to the Impressionist tenets of authorial disempowerment once again when shifting the context of Intertidal Life from that of Alice's external environment to that of her subconscious. Kronegger notes that, in an Impressionist work, "the individual's consciousness fuses with the impressions from the outside world: outer and inner space becomes a single space of Stimmung" (88), roughly defining Stimmung as "atmosphere, ambience, mood" (88). The conflation of external reality and the subconscious cannot be addressed in an Impressionist work, since no individual external to the mental shift is acknowledged.

The last half a page of Intertidal Life describes Alice's ex-husband and her daughter having a conversation on a row-boat. Alice is undergoing an unspecified operation at the very same time. The passage is notable because, for the first time in the text, Alice is writing in the omniscient voice, as if watching the two individuals while they float in the middle of the water. But the shift in voice remains consistent with the format of Impressionism that functions throughout the text. The change signifies the transition from an external reality to the subconscious mindscape of an

anaesthetized individual, a transition which the narrator cannot overly acknowledge.

Just prior to her operation, Alice imagines herself floating on water: "Floating. Floating. But not facedown, not the dead man's float. Or not yet, ha ha" (280). She then voices a desire to see her family again: "She wanted to see Flora one more time, Anne, Hannah. She wanted to see Peter" (281). Though the accent is on Flora, the last person Alice thinks of, before losing consciousness, is Peter. The protagonist's sense of floating and her desire to see Flora and Peter resurface in the context of her subconscious, where the two characters appear in a rowboat.

Appropriate to the subversion of authorial omniscience, Thomas continues to employ Impressionist stylistics even though the context has changed. Flora is described as crying, a blurring of vision Alice herself has associated with Impressionism. Peter, on the other hand, is squinting from the intense sunlight. The image of the two characters floating in the ocean also fuses the inertness of individuals in an impressionistic description with the sense of uselessness Peter and Flora feel about Alice's operation, a metaphor for the "removal of parts" which has taken place in the family.

Appropriate to an Impressionist text, but a peculiar detail for an omniscient take-over, neither of the individuals on the boat, Thomas informs us, is able to tell

what time it is. Kronegger notes that Impressionist works "give time the character of space, . . . impose spatial relations on time" (58). By addressing the issue of indefinite time specifically, Thomas associates the temporal blurring of the protagonist's change in consciousness with the blurred time of reality, as presented in Impressionist art. For Thomas to have addressed the heroine's shift in consciousness directly would have required the author's acknowledgement of her extratextual priority. By not addressing the change in voice, Thomas reaffirms the conflation of external and internal reality, re-enforcing the Impressionist methodologies used throughout the text.

Through the written monologues of her protagonists and various Impressionist stylistics, Thomas is able to suggest a relinquishing of her authority. This does not guarantee, though, that the reader of the text will not attempt to impose a structure upon it. Since the structure the reader imposes probably originates in the same social order Thomas is attempting to disparage, the reader is as dubious a participant in the creative process as the author. In order for the extratextual reality to be more thoroughly ignored, a suggested disregard for the reader is also required. For Impressionists, the viewer or reader was expected not to re-interpret the artwork so that it conformed to a social formula, but to accept the impressions as a way of perceiving. The desire for the reader to work only with the

impressions offered by the text agrees with Thomas's desire that the reader not impose social structures upon a piece of writing (or a reality) which itself supports dissolution.

Both Latakia and Intertidal Life, in the process of using Impressionist techniques to disqualify authorial control, also attempt to foil the reader's desire to impose structural stasis. Rachel defines Latakia as "the longest love letter in the world" (21), with the audience also being pre-defined as Rachel's ex-lover, a character within the text. The assumption that Thomas is attempting to communicate a particular structure to the reader is thereby obfuscated, since the external reader is not only not acknowledged, but denied a presence outside of the text.

This disregard for the reader is reinforced by the impressionistic passages, such as the description of the walk down the narrow street to the square, quoted at length above. The person presenting the passage does not wait for the reader, starting the description after the walk has begun, not noting the purpose of the walk, and acting as if the various buildings are familiar objects to all concerned. Nor does the narrator bother to translate the German and Greek, since apparently everybody involved is also familiar with their significance, if there is any. The reader gets a sense of being snubbed, as the narrator yanks him/her through the images of narrow streets to the square.

In Intertidal Life, a similar disregard for the reader

is presented. The entire text is laid out in sections labelled by months, affirming that it is all part of Alice's commonplace book. As Alice's personal and intimate journal, the text is not expected to be read by anybody, let alone a stranger. The simulation of privacy also suggests a factual and objective representation of the protagonist's world; the writer is not attempting to convince anybody of anything.

Within the text, Thomas suggests a further disregard for the reader in the rapid juxtaposition of various mental impressions, as in the following passage:

Her back was BRAZIL

Her breast was BUNKER HILL

And just a little bit

Below

Was BORNEO

Would we take our children with us, on these
voyages of discovery?

FIRST MOM ON THE MOON

Would our lovers wait faithfully for us until
we returned? (Would we really want to go?)

It was almost Hallowe'en and Alice bought a
nice round pumpkin while she was in town (70).

As in an Impressionist text, "transitions are associational and . . . the line between the actual and the imagined has disintegrated" (Kronegger 78); the reader is invited to establish the associations between the various references.

The passage is a mental correlative to the physical description cited previously, in which the reader is hurried down the street. There is opportunity only to accept Alice's mental leaps before the text finally stabilizes on a description of her carving a pumpkin. Alice is presented as unaware that anybody else may be trying to comprehend her thoughts.

In both Latakia and Intertidal Life, comprehension comes to the reader with the protagonist's repetition of various key images, memories, or ideas. This technique is a more complex version of the Impressionist repetition of key nouns or images within a particular passage. Kronegger suggests that literary repetition echoes the Impressionist painter's device of blurred colours and sights, functioning "to intensify and to transfigure the passage into a strange and drowsy [one]" (79). But besides the blurring effect on the reader, the structure also counters the narrative format.

The convoluted recounting of information, which loops back to certain experiences in a particularly claustrophobic fashion, becomes a metaphor for the protagonist's relationship to language, and therefore also to the society which generates that language. The reader cannot extrapolate on the direction Thomas's text will take because the narrator keeps leading the reader back to the same issues from different directions. There was a similar

desire amongst the Impressionist painters to experience multiple perspectives in order to recreate the complete image. Monet, for example, painted the same lake 48 times, attempting to capture the effects of changes in light and shade on the object (Kirschke 5). The protagonist of Latakia writes that she is also concerned with multiple visual perspectives, "taking a lot of notes on how the village looks at certain times of day" (19). This visual preoccupation finds its social parallel in Rachel's attempts to fully comprehend the various angles of her relationship and the sociopolitical influences which define them.

The text of Latakia consists of a series of prose pieces separated from each other by lines which cut across the page, the pieces varying in length from one line to several pages. On page 29, Thomas presents the following equation:

I HATE YOU
I LOVE YOU

EVERYTHING ABOVE THIS
LINE IS TRUE

The paradox presented by the equation reappears throughout the book. The line of separation in the quotation parallels the lines which separate the sections of text, indicating that the issue of contradictory statements which runs through the book is encapsulated in this one equation.

Though Thomas defines the book as one letter, she reveals that one piece of text need not carry a singular

perspective to remain consistent with a changing emotional landscape. Each "truth" is only of the moment, dependent on all the previous truths for its complete definition, as the sentence "EVERYTHING ABOVE THIS LINE IS TRUE" reminds the reader. Butling notes that "it is this emotional or experiential truth, which invariably involves logical contradictions, that Thomas presents in Latakia" (106). The truth is cumulative; with each added section, the reader must consider everything above the line, in order to grasp the entire, though transitory, truth.

The looping plot of the Impressionist text is also present in Intertidal Life where, as in Latakia, the heroine is struggling to establish an acceptable view of her reality, "sitting all day in a dark cave with a single candle. Trying to see, trying to see" (62). It is Alice's obscured vision that leads her to switching from the first person to the third person, when writing about herself. This is also the reason why she defines herself by various names. Alice does not relish the confusion associated with her multi-directional perception, complaining that her "mind keeps spinning off. I wish I could slow it down or shut it off or something" (63). Rachel and Alice ultimately come to accept the divergent viewpoints of the individual, thereby rejecting their own earlier quests for an ordered explanation of their reality.

The Impressionist desire to see an object from various

viewpoints, Thomas suggests, is an inherent aspect of reality, something which cannot be "shut off." Yet, as Intertidal Life shows, a character which is represented as possessing a fluctuating and seemingly self-contradicting perspective is deemed emotionally inadequate and lacking sufficient self-control. Alice, more than Rachel, is presented as a neurotic individual struggling to come to grips with her inconsistent social structure. She acknowledges that she cannot keep her mind from "spinning off." Peter worries about her sanity, telling her to "change channels" when her fears dominate her perception (86). Alice even notes that Flora shows concern about her mother's emotional stability (12). Alice does not replace her multiple views with an image of an ordered reality but with an acceptance that, though an order may exist, she, as an integral part of that order, cannot perceive or define it.

Conclusion

Donna Bennett refers to Thomas as an "intuitive believer[]" in a primitive order that controls the specifics of existence," arguing that Thomas searches for "the presexual source out of which real change arises" (235). Yet, if Bennett must argue that Thomas is an "intuitive believer," then Thomas's search cannot have produced any definitive information on the "primitive order." This deduction is appropriate since, in order for Thomas to define the order, she would have to undercut her depiction of it as primary. The question is not whether Thomas's search is successful, but what it is she has found. Thomas offers no clear answer; however, in what Coldwell refers to as "the calm of acceptance" ("Natural" 149) with which Intertidal Life closes, she does offer a confidence in humankind.

Intertidal Life ends with an image which fuses both the all-encompassing, boundless character of nature and the interdependence of genders. During Alice's operation, the heroine's strongest support, Flora, spends the day with the heroine's greatest source of domestic disjuncture, Peter. The man and woman are, as mentioned above, in a small boat surrounded by water. Though Peter is not presented as being as anxious about his ex-wife's operation as Flora is, he is

depicted as Flora's support:

"It's going to be all right, you know," he said.
And then, because he wasn't quite sure how to
comfort her, he said,

"Flora, would you care to row?"

She nodded silently and, bracing their
fishpoles beneath the seats, they carefully
changed places (282).

These are the closing lines of the novel. Typical of Thomas's works, the ending is open since, as the author comments, "there is no 'proper boundary' for words" (Basmati 317). The reader is not told whether the operation is a success. Nor is it clear what Alice, Flora, or Peter will do afterwards. But the final image of the two individuals "changing places" suggests an ability on both their parts to change perspective. Most importantly, the image does not focus on a separation by gender. The man and woman share a mutual concern, and function as mutual supports, just as the changing of seats in the boat is a mutually dependent act of symmetry and balance.

Latakia, presented as the protagonist's written efforts to comprehend her life, also ends on a note of acceptance. On the second to last page of the text, Rachel appears to be just as confused as ever, except that now, in a moment of frustration, she has concluded that "the whole question of language" is impossible. However, the fact that Thomas

offers the reader no resolution to the problems of verbal discourse, does not mean that the text ends in conflict and chaos. As in Intertidal Life, the work swings around to an acknowledgement of mental incapacity and an acceptance of this human trait. As Rachel concludes, "It seems to take a whole lifetime to learn how to live, and then we need another one to put it all into practice" (172). Though reality is itself undefinable in a lifetime, one's appreciation of it improves with experience.

The various applications of Impressionist techniques in Latakia and Intertidal Life function to discredit the subjective forces within society. Yet Thomas does not present an image of life as being rooted in chaos, preferring to offer what she has defined as "that sense that things are operating according to some kind of plan" (Bowering "Songs" 9). It is the presumption that individuals can interpret that plan objectively which Thomas hopes to weed out of human perception.

Notes

1. In Alan Twigg's interview with Thomas, the author rejects the term "novel" in reference to her work: "the minute your novel is about breaking down, it's not a novel anymore. It's a book. I write books" (249). Therefore, the term is not applied to Thomas's works in this thesis.

2 For a history of the comparisons of verbal and visual art in European art and philosophy from Plato to the eighteenth century, see Gotthold Lessing's Laocoon: An Essay upon the Limits of Painting and Poetry. Jean Hagstrum's The Sister Arts also analyses the history from Plato to the eighteenth century, focussing on its effects on English Neo-Classicism.

3 A description of the various stylistic devices used by the Impressionist writers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries can be found in Chapter IV of Maria Kronegger's Literary Impressionism.

4 The term "sister arts" has been used to unite various mediums of creative representation but, as Jean Hagstrum notes in The Sister Arts, "poetry and painting [are] the two arts that have most commonly been called 'sisters'" (xiii).

5 For a survey of James's art criticism see The Painter's Eye: Notes and Essays on the Pictorial Arts by

Henry James, edited by John L. Sweeney. For a study of James's familiarity with impressionist painting, see James J. Kirschke's Henry James and Impressionism.

⁶ Discussions of Breeze's work can be found in David P. Silcox's "First-hand familiarity with Canadian Art," Barry Lord's "Let There Be Darkness," Alvin Balkind and Peter Selz's "Vancouver Scene and Unscene," and Richard Simmins's article "Claude Breeze: Recent Paintings and Drawings."

⁷ The term Impressionistes itself was first coined by Leroy, in his Le Charevari review. Its source was Monet's painting "Impression: Sunrise" first shown at the 1874 exhibit.

⁸ See Maria Kronegger's Literary Impressionism, pp. 30-31, and Stephen Ulmann's "New Patterns of Sentence Structure in the Goncourts," Style in the French Novel, pp. 121-145.

⁹ William Frierson's The English Novel in Transition, Sam Hunter's Modern French Painting, and Steve Ulmann's Style in the French Novel, as well as other texts which propose definitions and tenets of Impressionist literature, were published prior to the publication of Thomas's works.

¹⁰ See Chapter 2 of Sam Hunter's Modern French Painting for a thorough analysis of visual primacy in Impressionist art.

¹¹ The Impressionist methodology for transferring

reality into words differs from those of the Realists and the Naturalists of the nineteenth century. For a comparison of Impressionism to both Realism and Naturalism, regarding the relationship between reality, perception, and the artist, see Beverly Jean Gibbs's "Impressionism as a Literary Movement."

12 For analyses of reflexivity in Impressionist texts, see James J. Kirschke's Henry James and Impressionism, and Albert Cook's The Meaning of Fiction.

13 For an analysis of contemporary pulp romance literature and its social implications, see Margaret Ann Jensen's Love's Sweet Return: The Harlequin Story.

14 The androcentric bias in western European verbal discourse is discussed in Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's No Man's Land, Rita Felski's Beyond Feminist Aesthetics, and Toril Moi's Sexual/Textual Politics.

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