"SO MANY PEOPLE GOING THE OTHER WAY": AN EXAMINATION OF THE MORAL STRATEGY OF LANGUAGE USAGE IN FIVE NOVELS BY JANET FRAME

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PREFACE

The title quotation is from Janet Frame's novel, Living in the Maniototo (72). Abbreviations and editions of the five primary sources referred to in the text are as follows:

EA The Edge of the Alphabet. London: W.H. Allen & Co., 1962.

SG Scented Gardens for the Blind. London: The Women's Press Ltd., 1982.

SS A State of Siege. London: Sirius, 1989.

LM Living in the Maniototo. London: The Women's Press Ltd., 1981.

CP The Carpathians. London: Century Hutchinson Ltd., 1988.

Some of the ideas developed in the chapter on Living in the Maniototo were first sketched out in a paper on that novel (39.498) written in 1990.

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INTRODUCTION

Janet Frame develops a clear moral strategy in her novels which appears to reflect a theological paradigm. In each novel she saves some of her characters to be her "chosen remnant", and damns others. The morality of Frame's realm is idiosyncratic and subverts that of society. The characters in her novels who are depicted as the pillars of society or as materialistic "successes" are not found among her "elect" for, to Frame, materialism is the arch-enemy of the imagination. It is the outcasts of society, the mad, the maimed, the poor and the eccentric who populate Frame's sacred domain. These are the ones to whom she entrusts her priceless treasure: the poetic language of the imagination. The lack of authentic vision displayed by the other characters disqualifies them from "election".

The sovereignty of Frame as the arbiter of morality is clearly evident in her novels for she judges her characters according to a strict moral code of language usage. Her sole criterion for moral judgement is the extent to which her characters allow an imaginative vision of life to shape their language, a vision that transcends and transforms concrete reality. This thesis traces the development of Frame's moral strategy through a chronological selection of five of her novels: The Edge of the Alphabet (1962), Scented Gardens for the Blind (1964), A State of Siege (1966), Living in the

Maniototo (1979), and The Carpathians (1988).

Frame develops her own "doctrine of predestination" in her novels. She either predestines her characters to a lifelong grappling with reality through the imaginative use of language, or to a life of materialistic stultification expressed through the language of conformity. There is no evidence in the novels of "conversion" from the cursed realm of language usage into the blessed realm and the characters travel a fixed path. The reader knows from the outset that characters like Pat Keenan, Lance Halleton, and the Shannons will be doomed because of their insensitivity towards the imaginative use of language. Others, however, like Daphne Withers, Thora Pattern, and Erlene Glace will be saved because of their use of poetic, ideosyncratic language. This foreshadowing of destiny does not mean, however, that Frame's work is devoid of surprise, subtle ambiguity, or paradox.

Frame delights is subverting the reader's expectations. In Scented Gardens for the Blind, Vera Glace appears damned through her constant cloying attempts to force Erlene to speak. Yet she is ultimately saved, and with the twist in the novel's denouement we discover her to be the secret imaginative creator of all the language in the novel. In A State of Siege, Malfred Signal appears to be "lost" in her rigid conformity to a set vision. Yet her courage and determination to pursue a faint desire for change and then to hold fast to it through the terror and fear that threatens

her sanity, ensures her salvation. Mavis Halleton, the struggling writer who is constantly distracted from writing her own novel does not seem to fit Frame's criterion for salvation. Yet she does not give up and finally presents us with Living in the Maniototo, proof of her intense struggle to remain faithful to the imaginative use of language. Mattina Brecon, the bored, wealthy philanthropist who seeks to "possess" people in foreign lands by "knowing" their lives and buying their land seems to have placed herself beyond Frame's pale. Yet Mattina's valuing of memory above all else earns her a place among the "elect", even though her function in The Carpathians is ultimately revealed to be that of a "character" within her "son's" novel.

The nature of Frame's salvation is highly paradoxical: Thora Pattern and Zoe Bryce commit suicide, Malfred Signal dies mysteriously, Vera Glace is incarcerated in a psychiatric hospital where her long-awaited speech amounts to primeval sounds, Mavis Halleton is constantly thwarted from writing her novel and Mattina Brecon dies of terminal cancer. Frame "rewards" her heroines with incarceration and death. Her salvation promises no joyous afterlife because her form of enlightenment is synonymous with oblivion. Frame saves her "elect" from their tortuous existence on the "edge of the alphabet" by moving them off the edge and forward into death. For them to move closer towards the centre of society would be a backward move and tantamount to "death in life", an infinitely worse predicament, in Frame's eyes, than death

itself.

The outcome of Frame's moral strategy is deeply pessimistic for, although she values the supremacy of the imaginative use of language she allows so few of her characters to use it. Even in novels like Scented Gardens for the Blind and The Carpathians where the death of the old language signals a new start, the "new" language amounts to unintelligible primeval utterings. There is, however, a recognisable development in the depiction of Frame's pessimistic world view. The dichotomies of the early novels seem to be less harsh in Living in the Maniototo and The Carpathians, though they are no less absolute. The humour and the closer association of the protagonists with the suburbia Frame disparages, merely serve to intensify the reader's recognition of the underlying deeply pessimistic vision. Frame's moral strategy ensures the salvation of a minuscule minority whilst leaving the vast majority without hope.

The first novel to be examined, The Edge of the Alphabet, depicts the rigid dichotomies resulting from Frame's moral strategy for language usage. Thora Pattern articulates her language of the imagination from a position of incarceration, like Daphne in Owls Do Cry. She is marginalised by society because of her authentic vision and dwells precariously on "the edge of the alphabet." Of the three other protagonists, Zoe Bryce is the only one whose outward journey mirrors an inward journey and faithful search

for reality. She joins Thora on the "edge" in her use of a language of insight and death. Pat Keenan's language, in contrast, reflects society's norms in its preoccupation with caution, convention and materialistic pursuits, and Frame consigns him to the stagnation of the status quo. The imaginative language of Toby's dream-world belies his inarticulateness but his preoccupation with fame disqualifies him from a firm position on the "edge" and he exists in a vacuum of illusion. Frame rewards the singleminded search for the truth of the imagination and all forms of compromise are disqualified.

In Scented Gardens for the Blind, Frame's "elect" are still separated from society. Erlene has little contact with the outside world and "speaks" her language of the imagination as a dumb recluse. Frame endows her with insight and sensitivity that act as a foil to the inadequacy of the other characters. Edward evades reality and lives in the past, presiding over his regiment of toy soldiers and the history of the Strang family. His delusions of grandeur are reflected in his deceptive language that denies truth. Vera Glace is eventually revealed to reside in the world of the imagination, a "mad" domain which is devalued and made invisible by society but honoured by Frame.

Frame uses the journey motif again in A State of Siege but, unlike Toby or Edward, Malfred chooses to exchange one state of consciousness for a vastly different one. She

renounces a former conventional vision in order to embark on a search for a truthful imaginative vision. The reality she confronts plunges her into a lurid world of terror where her past taunts her. To break with a lifetime's habit of viewing costs Malfred her life but her sacrificial adherence to truth, depicted through poetic interior monologue, wins her Frame's salvation. Malfred dies because the degree of enlightenment she attains is incompatible with life in a world of false materialistic values.

In Living in the Maniototo, Mavis Halleton experiences the writer's frustrating propensity to succumb to distraction. Yet her imaginative use of language is the standard by which Frame judges the language of the other characters in the novel. Through the depiction of the real, the surreal and the metaphorical, Frame makes great demands upon the reader by constantly subverting the reader's expectations. The shifting identity of the narrator, the confusing disappearance and reappearance of characters, and the black humour distances the reader from the author and results in an unsettling reading process. Throughout the novel the reader gains insight into the creative process of writing fiction, a process which is of supreme value to Frame.

Frame's next and most recent novel, The Carpathians, also makes strenuous demands upon the reader as the concepts of the Gravity Star and the Memory Flower subvert the

conventions of proximity and point of view. Frame builds further on the paradox of the memory as both truthful and arbitrary, explored in Living in the Maniototo. Although Frame saves Mattina through her faithful quest for the memory of the land and damns the residents of Puamahara for their materialism and neglect of memory, the reader's expectations are ultimately subverted in the final revelation of John Henry Brecon's "authorship". These final two novels reveal that Frame manipulates not only the fate of her characters but also the expectations of her readers.

The theological paradigm apparent in each of the five novels examined in this thesis reflects Frame's sovereignty as author. The chosen few that accumulate through the novels meet Frame's criterion for language usage leaving those cast aside to remain forever beyond the pale. Salvation is reserved for the élite, those who find it are rewarded with early death, and Frame's judgement is final.

THE EDGE OF THE ALPHABET

The Edge of the Alphabet is the third novel in Frame's canon. In the novel, Frame continues to develop the theme of the morality of language usage[1] after the manner established in the two previous novels. Her strategy is based on the moral absolutes, as there is a clear demarcation between the characters whom Frame saves and those whom she condemns through their use of language. In Owls Do Cry, Daphne sings from the "dead room", a world cut off from the rest of society because her message advocating the supremacy of authentic imaginative language is incompatible with the materialistic message of the status quo. In The Edge of the Alphabet, the writer-narrator of the novel, Thora Pattern, also speaks from a position of separateness from the rest of society. She lives precariously on "the edge of the alphabet" where to choose imaginative language will alienate her from society, and where not to do so will portend death. In living "on the edge", she is marginalised from the centre of conventional communication; however, rather than escape via her only other option, oblivion, she adopts a prophetic role where she exemplifies a different use of language. Her language promotes Frame's vision of authenticity for she speaks a language of creativity, insight and death. Thora shuns the words used at the centre or core of the alphabet because they effect miscommunication; "The used words have their peril. The rust on them (they say) brings tetanus to

the wounded life" (83).

As her name suggests, Thora Pattern is a paradigm against which we judge the language of the other characters in the novel and she performs a function similar to Daphne in Owls Do Cry. She is aware of the risks of her position but is courageously prepared to face the consequences of using words which "like people exposed to a deathly weather, shed their fleshy confusion and show luminous, knitted with force and permanence" (13). Thora's pattern for language usage is taken from Daphne's and extends far beyond the bounds of The Edge of the Alphabet to shape the language of future writer-narrators in Frame's canon, such as Vera Glace and Mavis Halleton. (This concept is enlarged upon in Jeanne Delbaere-Garant's article, "Daphne's Metamorphosis in Janet Frame's early novels.")[2]

In The Edge of the Alphabet, the reader is placed at two removes from the text by the intervening figures of Thora Pattern, the narrator, and Peter Heron, the hire-purchase salesman who submits her work for publication posthumously. The distancing technique affects the reader in two ways: it enables the reader to identify more easily with the isolation from society that each of the characters experiences, but it is also a means by which Frame indicts the reader for collaborating with society in keeping people who are considered eccentric at a distance. The reader is also distanced from the novel by the way the characters

intermittently merge with the narrator. Although Thora Pattern retains a life of her own we are never certain who Thora Pattern is. In this way, the novel is the precursor to Scented Gardens for the Blind where the personality of the narrator is completely lost in the lives of the protagonists.

On the first page of the novel, Thora Pattern discloses that her purpose in writing the novel is to undergo "a journey of discovery through the lives of three people - Toby, Zoe, Pat". The ubiquitous Thora moves in and out of the minds of the three characters as she either speaks for them or elaborates upon their thoughts. She speaks repeatedly of the precariousness of her position on the "edge" and of the encroachment of death, "Now I sleep in the snow and death is a white silent bird beating at the snow" (79). The idea of the narrator journeying through the lives of others is taken up in a more subtle way in the next novel, Scented Gardens for the Blind, where Vera Glace explores the lives of Edward and Erlene. However, in the latter novel, we, the readers, are not informed of the purpose of the narrator and are kept guessing until the revelation in the final chapter when we discover Vera to be a psychiatric patient and the other characters to be figments of her imagination.

Thora Pattern begins her voyage of discovery with Toby Withers whom she introduces to us in her characteristically allusive poetic language, "His feet had finished bleeding. . . He thought they were sea-anemones or dried oak-leaves or

burst pine-cones from outside, where magpies garbled A-Wimbledon-a-Wombledon-a-fourteen-miles . . ." (13). Toby exists in a no-man's-land as his search for fame and the marriage ideal, which echo the values of the status quo, disqualify him from a permanent position on "the edge of the alphabet" and yet he frequently inhabits a dream world in which he uses a contrasting imaginative language. He is firmly rejected by society, "There was just no place for him to fit in. People should fit in and harden and stay, like drops of cement in a brick wall" (24).

His main dream is to write a book on the Lost Tribe. This consuming passion is based on a school essay on the legend of the lost tribe of Lake Manapouri that was given encouragement by his teacher. He naively anticipates writing the book while on an overseas trip to England so that he can live off the royalties when he returns home. His life amounts to a constant striving towards the unattainable goal of finding the right words to use for his book. Inarticulateness plagues Toby's everyday speech and he compensates for this frustration with brawn and scare tactics, as in the incident where he frightens his father with his loaded gun (21). His language stands in direct contrast to Thora's insightful first-person narrative sections.

Thora speaks of her life near the "mud flats" which are inhabited by "creatures who are beyond the range of words . . the relics of extinct monsters" (22). The "edge of the

alphabet" is often represented by a physical domain in Frame's work. These "mudflats" equate with the "mangroves" in A State of Siege which form the edge between land and sea (SS 3), the boundary between life and death. This desolate area, bordering the sea is a primeval-like territory out of which emerges an authentic language. In Scented Gardens for the Blind, it is spoken of as an area of "ice and marshland, ancient rock and stone" (SG 252) out of which arises a "first degree language" (SG 118). It is in this domain that Toby's Lost Tribe belongs but as he does not belong to this realm of communication he is unable to express his vision. The Lost Tribe symbolises humankind's primitive roots without the clutter of modern civilisation.

The effect Toby has on others is one of repulsion and even members of his own family, like Aunt Norma, consider him to be a "great lazy lump" (24). He has the "embarrassing disease" of epilepsy and to Aunt Norma is "uncouth and dull." He struggles to utter a simple sentence whereupon he proceeds to bore others by doggedly sticking to a subject that fails to interest them. In short, his aunt deems him to be a blight on society. Toby typifies the misfits of society that populate Frame's work: the mad, the eccentric and the lone artists. They are in strong contrast to society's "norm"; characters like Aunt Norma and Pat who venerate conformity.

Yet, despite his antisocial ways, Toby displays an ingenuity of his own. He may be set in a mould but at least

it is a custom-built mould of his own making and not one designed for him by others. He may cling to the dream that his overseas trip will bring fame and fortune, that he will write his book and that Evelina Festing loves him but at least he has dreams. He is not afraid to show himself to the world and in doing so he performs the important function of causing others to face the reality of the "untidiness in . . . the world" (24).

As the Matua draws away from the quay, we meet Pat Keenan, the Irishman who has been visiting his sister in New Zealand. His streamer trailing away with no-one to hold the other end symbolises the "untidiness" that Toby represents. Thora states that this is a characteristic of her world, "At the edge of the alphabet all streamers are torn or trail into strangeness" (42). Thora identifies with Toby and tries to speak through him with her imaginative language. He takes farewell of his country with her words (46) and there is a close identification between the two throughout the novel. However, this is not so between Thora and Pat. Their use of language contrasts strongly as Pat's language represents all that Thora rejects. The character of Pat seems to be modelled on the Irishman, Patrick Reilly, in The Envoy From Mirror City[3] who seeks to protect and possess Frame during her time in London.

Pat is an overly cautious man whose clichéd platitudinous speech mirrors the societal conventions he

models his life on. He attempts to recruit others and seeks to squeeze everyone he comes in contact with into his mould. His safe predictable lifestyle dictates that one should make enough money to insure oneself against all possible hazards in life, "He fusses constantly over his pension expectations, his insurance policies, crouching over them in an attitude of incubation, turning them, settling them, keeping out the cold air of poverty and pensionless old age" (132). He lives life according to the rules and regulations of the status quo. Pat readily acquires his self-esteem from such pursuits as an annual round of golf as it makes him feel "superior to his fellow workers on the buses" (106). His language reflects such superficiality and he prides himself on saying exactly what is expected of him, "Whenever there was something to say which other people often said, which was the accepted word or phrase, Pat always felt the compulsion to say it" (111). Pat seeks to control Toby and Zoe, as he seeks to control all those with whom he comes in contact. He gains kudos from having a stake in other people's lives.

Zoe Bryce is the protagonist whom we identify the most closely with Thora in her use of language. In her first encounter with Toby we are aware of her imaginative use of language, "It doesn't make you feel afraid, does it, that you are fiction . . . that you exist only in someone's mind, some poor writer who cannot do better than bring forth the conversation of musicians, poets, mice?" (70) She is an ex-school teacher who is constantly called upon to defend her

position before the incredulous Toby and Pat who revere the teaching profession. Thora, alone, supports Zoe in her decision to give up teaching, and derides the profession, "You who are a school teacher must know the activities of our infant room. How quickly we learn now to destroy under supervision, to scissor people's eyes out, to make fringes and bracelets of their hearts" (80).

Something remarkable has happened to Zoe on board the Matua and she harbours a secret that has changed her whole outlook on life (71). She is sick for most of the early voyage and whilst in the ship's hospital she undergoes her revolutionary experience. One night an unknown sailor steals into the ward and gives her a lingering kiss on the lips (85). She makes no effort to resist her first kiss and this episode becomes a touchstone for the rest of her life. For Zoe, it is the "kiss of life" so familiar in fairytales like "Sleeping Beauty". The after-effects are life changing, "My path is certain now. I even think differently. I am changed, like those people who after the visits of the gods begin to sprout wings (or horns) or give birth to monsters" (89). In the aftermath, she determines to leave her sick-bed and hereafter lead a healthy life on board ship. The kiss also represents the non-verbal language of the "edge of the alphabet" in its unpredictable riskiness and, as such, stands as a beacon for the new direction Zoe is moving towards in her life.

Zoe's memory of her first kiss is of far more value to her than the actual event. She cannot change the past but she can manipulate her memory of it. Her memory changes according to whim and is embroidered by her lively imagination. In one moment she remembers her first kiss with feelings of cherished intimacy but in the next moment she remembers it with feelings of deep revulsion. She feels that she now has a new lease of life but also despairs that she has probably contracted a dreaded venereal disease (87). The memory, as a fertile breeding-ground for the imagination and as favourite tool for those situated on "the edge of the alphabet" is a theme that is developed in The Carpathians.

The Edge of the Alphabet introduces the recurring theme in Frame's work of the obsessional urge of many of her characters to write a book. Toby's desperate ambition to write his book on the "Lost Tribe" gives him a purpose for living. Zoe wonders whether she, too, should write a book, "Everybody is going to write a book. Memoirs on writing-paper, toilet-paper, cafe wall, pavement, or stone column in a city cemetery . . . " (81). This theme is dealt with in subsequent novels and especially in Living in the Maniototo where nearly all the main characters aspire to becoming authors. However, the right words are elusive for many of Frame's characters and they seem to grope hopelessly in the dark. Toby, as the precursor, is an extreme example because he is so obviously doomed in both the world of the imagination and the world of concrete reality.

The reference to the "Ancient Mariner", and how if he were sighted by the Matua he would be taken on board and "cured", highlights the false values of a society that cannot cope with people who break out of the general mould. Society puts such people away, "He will appear before a Southhampton Magistrate. They will deport him" (99). The narrator pleads for the mariner, "Let him tell his own story! Give him paper and pen and ink or a quill a goose or turkey-quill . . . " (99). The Ancient Mariner is juxtaposed in the text with the long-awaited Kala family who board the ship in Panama. The passengers' longing for them reaches apocalyptic proportions, "And are they the Second Coming? do they signify a new heaven and a new earth . . . ?" (100) This family appears perfect with "a marvellous air of completeness, as if they had been hatched overnight fully developed and clothed" (98). They are revered by everyone, yet the respect paid to them is ascribed arbitrarily; they have done nothing to deserve it. Once they settle into ship society reality sets in and they soon topple off their pedestal when the passengers realise that they have the same human foibles as everybody else (133).

Yet, among the passengers, Toby stands out as having more foibles than most with his loud voice and lumbering ways. Zoe finds talking to him frustrating and depressing as he is clumsy and inarticulate. His words only emerge after great effort, "His tongue seemed to hamper him, to try to prevent him from speaking at all. He seemed to have to

contend with so much - tongue, teeth, lips . . . " (101). However, despite his lack of education, he claims to have his own secret store of ideas that no-one can steal from him. Along with his ideas, he also stumbles across words which he fiercely claims as his own, "Inserted is my word" (103). It disconcerts Zoe that Toby has an influence over her that causes her to open up and say things that belie her characteristic introspection. She finds herself alluding to the most intimate incident of her life, "My life has been manipulated, Toby. I am a plaster statuette facing a different way now. A force, an incident, has swerved me to face what people call 'the light'" (102). Despite their many differences, their thoughts have only "paper walls" between them and at one point Toby angrily accuses her of "listening" to his thoughts (103). They are both misfits of society. The only difference is that Zoe, with her sensitive intelligence and articulateness, suffers the greater pain of awareness. Toby has a flash of insight into her embarrassment at being associated with him and sees it as the inability to cope with "someone whose ways are often so strange that they frighten you" (104).

Thora Pattern questions her narratorial power over her characters. Are they like goldfish which she may over-feed or starve? She sees the drudgery of people's lives and observes that "everywhere is the stampede of death" (112). Some dream of a materialistic solution by winning a jack-pot while others dream of breaking out of lives of boring

predictability, "Now what I like is to be free, to go for a whirl on the dance floor in that club in Dolphin Square" (113-4). Thora is confused. She has set out on her exploration through the lives of others but, as she is the author of their fate, she can also limit her own experience.

Toby's homesickness increases and his thoughts on board ship are never far from home. His predictable past in Waimaru is about to be exchanged for an unpredictable future in England and, therefore, his sense of security is threatened. His dreams are important to him because they are predictable and their orderly patterns help him feel safe (114). Yet his dreams are also saturated in death imagery, "It is the clutter of death which is inescapable" (125). Death is all around: the death of nature and human nature. Toby's dead mother mingles with the sodden leaves and wintry signs of death (125). In the context of death Toby's parents ask him about the completion of his book on the Lost Tribe. Toby is afraid to acknowledge the truth that his dream of writing the book is doomed. He will never have the right words with which to capture his vision creatively because he himself is doomed for having a foot in both worlds.

The death imagery of Toby's dreams begins to infiltrate the minds of the passengers on board the Matua but they attempt to cover up their fear of death with layers of words, "No, no, the ship will not sink . . . We are safe. How safe we are!" (128) However, despite the verbiage, troublesome

thoughts of death continue to plague their minds. The narrator emphasises the constant presence of death. Even when people she has known have "cremated their thoughts, paying high fees . . . the same ashes have returned to them, . . . like pellets of shot flung in their face and their eyes, blinding them for the rest of their life" (129).

When the passengers disembark in London, bleak images continue to abound with the rain and "cobweb land" (134). Toby sets off independently of Pat and Zoe. He angrily refuses to become one of Pat's beneficiaries by accepting his offer of board. Toby's future prospects match the dreary London landscape, "I have journeyed, it seems, from Winter to Winter" (134). The narrative continues to be charged with death and rottenness. The rot seems to take on physical dimensions as it seeps into Toby's skin and later culminates in a serious arm infection. As readers, we hold out little hope for his future in the great metropolis. He is blind to his personal short-comings and readily courts disaster.

In the final section of the novel, "The Silver Forest", we follow the fortunes of the three protagonists in London. Language shapes their lives and we observe the impact on their language usage as they leave the ready-made, closeted ship society and enter the sprawling metropolis to experience the harsh realities of big city life. Zoe takes up Pat's offer of board but Toby strives to be independent and to go it alone.

Toby faces London with the suspicion of an outsider but also with the aggression of one who feels that the world owes him much. London intimidates him and he reacts to this by seeking out opportunities to intimidate others. As he walks along Oxford Street he feels "tired and old" until he stumbles across a trick shop. Practical jokes are his reliable standby for language incompetence (139). With his newly purchased toy gun-cum-cigarette-lighter he frightens a bank teller, much to his delight, and gains the power and self-esteem denied him through speech. However, the pleasure of this experience soon evaporates and Toby resumes feeling "lost, inside and out" (141).

In London, Toby is disconcerted and disoriented by a language that constantly tricks him. He expects words to mean what they say but soon discovers the deception of place names like Piccadilly Circus. Toby confronts disappointment at every turn. His boring job as commissionaire at the Wonderland Cinema and his squalid basement room, shared with two flatmates who are rarely present, are demoralising. He tries to commence writing his book but, contrary to expectations, his environment offers him little inspiration and he gets no further than the title. He longs for the solace of words and wants to write to his dead mother and receive a consoling return letter, but such hopes are futile. The worsening swelling on his arm and his prompt firing from the cinema aggravate his feelings of bitterness and

homesickness. Toby's depressing early days in London set the scene for the remainder of his stay.

Zoe's fortune in London parallels Toby's in its misery. She finds work as a cleaner to support herself through her "private research" but the latter is as elusive as Toby's book. Zoe's life, like Toby's, has always had its reference point in the unretrievable past, either in her unrequited love for Len Hewell or in her kiss on board the Matua and her future in London seems to hold out no hope for her. Her cleaning job attracts the derelict of society, "the unmarried mothers, the retired prostitutes, the obsessed, the 'mentally backward'" (155) and Zoe soon quits the job. However, Zoe merely moves from one group of misfits to another in her job as usherette in a cinema. Her vision of London is packed with images of death, "the dead sliding by in tall cars . . . the wet clay heaped like a new grave around the filled entrance to the old bomb shelters" (155). The concise, metaphorical language of Zoe's thought-life runs parallel to Thora's and earns her a permanent position on the "edge of the alphabet".

Zoe and Toby meet up unexpectedly in Hyde Park. Their loneliness unites them, as Zoe later comments, "We are brother and sister, in narrow alleyways" (181). They scarcely speak to one another but when they do Toby's egocentric conversation indicates the depths of his depression, ". . . he asked Zoe about her own life, but did not wait for an answer" (158). The bitterly foggy weather is mirrored in the

stifled conversation of the people in the park, "The dampness wound itself like a corkscrew into the people; their voices, trapped, looped the loop and fell to the earth" (158). There is no genuine communication taking place anywhere in Hyde Park, a park so famed for its words. The words are all directed one-way, from the soap-box speakers to the man with the doomsday sandwich board (158). Zoe and Toby part without the comfort or joy of conversation both crave for.

Toby continues to be fascinated with words but he is unable to use them for his own purposes. At the laundrette he latches onto the word "centre", the headquarters of the business (162). The awe Toby attaches to this word highlights his contrasting peripheral existence. The words are there but they race around wildly in his head and he is unable to harness them, "Words were running on and on in his head - laundries, lost property, circuses, buses and their destinations" (162).

Thora's narratorial intrusion builds upon Toby's inarticulateness. She speaks of all the Sunday morning noises and of the way in which human speech merely adds to the noise, "They say, they say. Everywhere people are saying, explaining, attributing causes" (163). Even the silences that punctuate conversation must be filled with noise, "In the cracks of the silence the people's voices grow like bright feverish weeds whose stalks are hollow and whose shallow roots are separated from the earth (or water) with one tug of

a hand or breeze" (163). In reaction to their loss of words and the vulnerability of language, people opt for the predictability and ease of numbers, "proclaiming that at last two and two make four" (164).

Toby clings to a material ethic to compensate for his loss of language. However, through his memories of gold panning in Central Otago when one greedy panner drowns in his effort to strike it rich, Frame underscores the false treasure of materialism (166). His haunting memories of his dead mother leave him feeling destitute, like "a house with one wall torn away" (169). He desperately needs to be with people but the comfort of human fellowship is constantly denied him in London. His attempts to contact friends of friends are futile and even his visit to Zoe and Pat is fruitless (169). Toby's powerlessness with words is reflected in his inability to find happiness.

Zoe, too, derives no power from words and has only her thoughts through which to express her store of imaginative language. Her soul-destroying job as usherette at the cinema and her depressing living conditions thwart the flow of her language, linking her further with Toby and his similar circumstances. However, her dream-world provides the needed outlet. In her dreams she recalls her stay in New Zealand and her reason for journeying there. She had felt tricked into a fantasy love affair with a teacher colleague and therefore had "adopted the conventional line of action" and had escaped

abroad (180). Now she feels that her "wall of dream is punctured like a sieve and the strange other world pours in upon [her] in a way that never happened before" (180). Zoe lives on the "edge of the alphabet" where she feels threateningly close to the "other world" of death. Yet, she is not ready to die and is overwhelmed with the creative urge to beget, to make something:

> I am concerned with an intensity of making - yet I make nothing. The kiss is the core of my life. It is my meaning, my tiny precious berry from the one branch of a huge tree in a forest where the trees are numberless. I need to walk in that forest, Mr. Sands. I need to build a house, a tower, under and through the silver leaves into the sky. (180)

Zoe faces the dilemma of all those living on the "edge"; she can either live according to convention or be true to her creative urge and "risk the darkness falling away beneath [her]" (181).

Pat uses language to cover up the truth, as when he denies missing his beloved swans whilst in New Zealand (184). The swans symbolise the reality of death for Pat, something he has constantly sought to deny. Soon, one by one, all the cygnets are killed and although he knows to expect this he has been in the habit of using his memory to evade the truth; "I remembered the little ones growing up and them all flying away together. Funny isn't it, remembering" (185). Pat's musings on death bring his language the closest we see in the

novel to Thora's and their thoughts merge. Pat's language; "If I could get my hands on the little devils who stoned the swans!" flows smoothly into Thora's language; "What does the swan mean? It is aloof, sour, a snow convention, an annual pageant of suspicious probing with a little bag of crusts on the Common. It is Elise, Leda, any changeful God" (186).

Zoe and Toby seem to grow closer together in their confusion and dream worlds. They see more of each other and visit places together. Toby eventually jealously confides in her his idea of the Lost Tribe. Language is so important to him that he is filled with terror in the museum where the creatures cannot speak to him, " . . . why don't they speak and warn us before it's too late?" (193)

Zoe also meets up again with Peter Heron, the artist she had met briefly in a coffee bar in Soho, and their encounter sets off the strange final chain of events in the novel. Peter, the struggling artist, is lonely enough to contact Zoe again. She hesitates to go out with him but recognises an affinity between them as artists in their own right:

> - . . . But I don't know you.
>
> - But I'm an artist. I know where you live, he added accusingly.
>
> - You mean where I really live?
>
> - Yes. (197)

At the club they meet the stranger Lawrence, a homosexual who wants to take them to the Serpentine to meet his friends.

Once more Zoe questions whether they have met before but this time only in her thoughts because she and Peter know instinctively that they all belong together in their loneliness and confusion, "We all understand each other" (199). At the Serpentine they meet up with Zara, a Russian prostitute who lives with Lawrence and has been procuring a young sailor for him. They form a society of outcasts and, although Zoe is very different from them, she fits in with them more than she does with conventional people like Pat and Ma Crane.

In the company of these misfits of society Zoe makes something that is far more powerful than her words. She has longed to give expression to her creativity since her arrival in London. She sculpts a miniature forest, out of the silver paper of a discarded cigarette packet, that symbolises her life, ". . . but it is the loneliest shape I have ever seen, that little dent, this twist at the top of the dead silver branch, the eyes in the silver faces of the dead people . . ." (202). She is unaccustomed to the admiration showered upon her from the group and it gives her the strong sense of personal identity she has craved for throughout her life. The intense emotion the silver sculpture induces in the others amazes Zoe, "How strange that it had so affected the others, had evoked in them feelings that they could only consider and explore by sitting there, as all three were doing now, silent, staring at the silver sculpture" (203).

The presence of the mysterious sailor in their midst and his sudden disappearance reminds us of the sailor who kissed her on board the Matua. Zoe has gone full circle in her journey and is now back at the point where her kiss renewed her life. However, the new life she receives now is different for the silver sculpture signals Zoe's death. She feels that her life on "the edge of the alphabet" has bred futility, "The communication of my life - a kiss in mid-ocean between myself and a half-drunken seaman. The creation of my life - oh my God! - a silver paper shape fashioned from the remains of an empty cigarette packet! Surely now it is time for my death?" (203) There is no need for a note as there are no more words to say. Her life has moved beyond the alphabet and she has depicted her suicidal note in sculpture before proceeding with the act. The silver forest further connects Zoe with Toby as earlier he had dreamt of himself as a forest, "He felt so strange, as if he were an entire forest, with the Lost Tribe inhabiting him" (14). The silver forest is where Toby's Lost Tribe belongs. It is the primeval land wherein lies the potential for genuine communication between humankind but it lies dead in the past and therefore cannot be retrieved. However, a forest also signifies life: growth and perpetuity. This ambiguous symbol represents life on the "edge of the alphabet", a domain where life and death are inextricably intertwined.

Zoe may not need any more words but society certainly needs the conventional patter in order to make sense of

death, " . . . 'kept herself to herself, but cheerful always' no next of kin, problem of the lonely, says vicar, house of death, anyone's house . . . I knew her I spoke to her - " (205). Zoe's death has a profound impact on her associates. Ma Crane leaves to visit her daughter up north but she cannot escape death. The nuclear holocaust imagery starts to build up in the text. She feels banished from society and notes the "shadow of the atom station" out of the window (206). (This imagery is reworked in much of Frame's subsequent fiction, particularly in Scented Gardens for the Blind, Intensive Care, and The Carpathians.) Pat is unable to fathom Zoe's suicide as it forces him to take another uncomfortable sideways glance at death. He falls back on his conventional patter and insures himself still further against calamity by exchanging his job of bus driving for the safe job of stationery supervision, "One thing you learn in stationery . . . is to keep things in their place; things and people" (217). Peter Heron also changes jobs. He destroys all of his paintings and leaves his art to become a hire-purchase salesperson. He is disillusioned with the cost of living on the "edge of the alphabet" and chooses to move towards the core rather than tip over the edge. He gives up the struggle to be true to himself as a lone artist in order to peddle the gospel of instant material gain. Yet he is unable to bury his recognition and appreciation of art. He perpetuates his love of art vicariously when he finds and submits Thora's work for publication.

Zoe's death causes the voices in Toby's head to speak of death. The "mirrors" that reflect his true self "arrive" and attempt to seduce him to "get rid of himself" (215). They cite Zoe and Pat as examples; Zoe as one who "made the fatal mistake of trying to communicate from so far on the edge of the alphabet", and Pat as one who has "got rid of himself by hiding in stationery, in envelopes with no address on them, on blank forms where no one dares to write the cost" (215). However, Toby is not to be deceived as he still has his dream of the Lost Tribe to cling to. He feels himself disintegrating as in one minute he has visions of himself as an old man spearing rubbish and then, in the next, as one who, before trick mirrors, changes shape continuously, "The mirrors had stolen his very shape, and rearranged it into something which did not belong to him anymore" (217). His life lacks shape because he is unable to impose coherence on the world through language. The consolation he had habitually derived from his dream of writing is now denied him. But even if he were successful in writing his book, he would only receive the same sentence as Zoe for choosing to live too close to the perilous "edge". He responds positively to the home-call from the ghost of his over-protective, admonishing mother but the accompanying holocaust imagery implies no awaiting sanctuary but rather a "death in life." Even Aunt Cora, whom he lives with in New Zealand, has bones that are "turning to chalk" (217), a further holocaust image that echos the "white ash" (209).

It has been difficult to distinguish between Thora Pattern and Zoe Bryce throughout the novel but towards the end they seem to merge into one character, anticipating the ending of Scented Gardens for the Blind. Thora, too, plans her death, "Tonight I devise my time. I make a little kite to follow the tides of death in the sky" (208). She admits that the other characters are extensions of herself, ". . . as if I bequeathed to them the parts of myself which I cannot invite as guests to this lonely house . . . " (208). Her language is no comfort to her in her loneliness; "Why should I wear words, like beads around my neck if no one will visit me?" (209) The nuclear holocaust imagery intensifies, "Outside, all the buildings have toppled. Men in white suits . . . prance about the debris in search of the last victims. The woman next door, blinded, has found a pot of white-ash which trickles down the window pane . . . " (209). From the "edge of the alphabet" the colour white is not the colour of purity but the colour of evil that white-washes over what is genuine (209). The concentration of death imagery running parallel with Zoe's and Thora's deaths signals the death of authentic language. There is no survivor in the novel who has the courage to live on the "edge" and perpetuate the dangerous tradition.

The novel seems to be resoundingly pessimistic. After all, the average person relies upon everyday conversational language in order to communicate on a day to day basis. Furthermore, there is no incentive to change if the reward

for remodelling language along imaginative, idiosyncratic lines is synonymous with ostracism from society leading to death. Frame offers no pity to the "average" person who has been squeezed into the mould of the status quo. Her sympathy lies with the vulnerable eccentric outsiders of society who take the risk of allowing genuine language to shape their lives. For her, paradoxically, oblivion and death seem to be the ultimate achievement and a reward for authentic language rather than a punishment for non-conformity. Thora and Zoe receive the highest accolade of death for living in a domain where "words crumble and all form of communication between the living are useless" (224). There is no middle ground or room for compromise in the world of Frame's novels. The moral dichotomy is absolute and people like Toby who do not fit firmly into either world are depicted as the most inadequate and pathetic.

NOTES

[1] This idea is explored in Cherry Hankin's seminal essay: "Language as Theme in Owls Do Cry," Landfall issue 110, 28.2 (June 1974): 91-110.

[2] Jeanne Delbaere-Garant, "Daphne's Metamorphosis in Janet Frame's Early Novels," Ariel 6.2 (1975): 23-37.

[3] Janet Frame, An Autobiography (Auckland: Random Century N.Z. Ltd., 1989) 301.

SCENTED GARDENS FOR THE BLIND

In Scented Gardens for the Blind, Frame develops the idea of the "language of silence", an idea which she continues to explore in A State of Siege. We come to accept Malfred Signal's interior monologues as a natural outcome of her incarceration, but Erlene's interior monologues are the result of wilful silence in a world filled with the clatter of words. In these novels, a creative silence is the vehicle for the imaginative use of language in a similar way to which the memory will be used in The Carpathians. Erlene's language, and that of her soulmate Uncle Blackbeetle[1], is the moral touchstone in the novel against which we judge the language of the other characters. Their language is unsullied by the conventions and clichés that riddle the language of the other characters in the novel. They converse in an imaginative poetic language of honesty and death that strengthens Erlene's resolve not to betray her authenticity by speech merely for the purpose of alleviating the guilt of her parents. Erlene's contract with silence and the authenticity it represents earns her Frame's blessing. The sovereign will of Frame consigns the other characters to a life of caricature or stultification where their tawdry language merely serves as a foil for the real "treasure". The value Frame places on creative silence is accentuated by the alarming twist at the end of the novel when we discover Vera's true identity and discover also that the entire novel

is enveloped in her silence.

As readers, it is not always easy to "walk in step" with Frame through her novels as the children, Poppy and Vera, had pledged to do in Scented Gardens for the Blind (9). We frequently get out of step and feel the "curse of silence", or the lack of discernment, put upon us until we manage to catch up. The lagging behind results from falling into the various traps Frame carefully sets for the unsuspecting reader.

Through such traps she playfully victimises us on two counts. Firstly, in our temporary lack of judgement we unconsciously acquiesce to the value-system Frame vehemently denounces in her work. For she sets us up to adopt the false values of society, only to gently mock our indiscretion at a later date, as in Scented Gardens for the Blind where we endorse the artificial barriers between the three "characters." Secondly, Frame denies us the security of a smooth reading process. She plays distancing games with us in order to prolong our recognition of her intent to lure us into an innocent reading of the novel and give us a firm footing only to cut the ground from beneath our feet. She sets up a credible scenario and we have no reason to doubt it until much later in the novel when the parallels between the "characters" become more than coincidental. However, even despite our gathering suspicions we are not given the full picture until the final chapter of the novel, whereupon with

hindsight some of the clues become more obvious. Hence, we both acquiesce to the irony and are victimised by it.

In terms of acquiring an instant understanding of the novel we experience an innocuous version of the marginalisation enforced upon Frame's protagonists by society; we find ourselves on the "outside" of the novel. From the distance, Frame invites a friendly fighting relationship between herself and the reader; a battle of wits. Ultimately, we only "walk in step" with her, or receive promotion to the "inside," when we accede to her value-system. It is a value-system that firmly denounces materialisn and advocates the worth of an idiosyncratic, imaginative vision that has the power to transform commonplace reality. Frame lays the foundation for this central theme of her canon in her first novel, Owls Do Cry[2], and then varies the theme in her subsequent novels.

Frame's moral absolutes are revealed in the "true" or "false" language usage of the characters in her novels; a poetic, imaginative language as opposed to a language that merely reflects the materialistic values of society. The tone of her work is largely ironic where the moral worth of the characters is determined by their use or abuse of language. In Owls Do Cry, the dichotomy of language usage is clear-cut to the extent where the typographical layout of italics versus bold type underpins this. The "false" language of Chicks's diary clearly condemns her because it is judged in

the light of Daphne's "true" language. However, this does not suggest that Daphne and the author are synonymous and that the novel is a panegyric on madness. Frame's message is that "true" language must be rooted in the individual imagination rather than in mere social convention and throughout the novel she emphasises the pain and isolation that result from a courageous adherence to this "truth".

Frame's irony is a powerful force behind Scented Gardens for the Blind which is a novel that, paradoxically, communicates in a language beyond words. It takes us beyond words and speech to a disturbing authenticity of silence, a primeval silence that signals the potential for a new beginning. The surname "Glace" ("something to do with ice isn't it, the Ice Age" [139]) hints at such a possibility. We are unaware of the all-pervading silence until the final chapter but rather are captivated by the words on the page which describe the desperate, estranged worlds of mother, father and daughter. The novel's milieu is eventually revealed to be the psychotic mind of the three-in-one protagonist, Vera Glace, who has remained mute for thirty years in a psychiatric hospital.

The novel is a trap, a huge deception. The many clues pointing to this fact are implicit in the text but, understandably, they are cleverly disguised and are not easily discovered on an initial reading of the novel. Frame revels in her position of power over the reader and many of

the clues reveal her wry sense of humour. Perhaps the biggest clue given to us is found in Uncle Blackbeetle's words to Erlene when he tells her of his dictionary cousin who lives between "trichotomy" and "trick" (80). However, Frame's carefully measured sense of humour ensures that the trick is not fully revealed until the last chapter whereupon we discover that, far from being real, the three characters have been figments of Vera's imagination.

The significance of the title is an enigma as the novel appears to deal more with the theme of dumbness than blindness. However, just as scented gardens are a feeble compensation for physical blindness, the novel deals with the inadequate façades of deceptive communication which humans erect in order to disguise their spiritual blindness. As scented gardens for the blind are a recognised civic convention, the title ironically reinforces the central theme of the book. The novel is neither a denigration of language per se nor a celebration of silence, but rather the proposal that a brooding creative silence must be the foundation for a new authentic communication. This silence has biblical echoes as it is synomymous with a "primary darkness, . . . the first condition of life . . . it is a darkness that does not suffer the stain of human vision" (25). It is a silence that is at the heart of language, " . . . silence is our true companion and partner and lover" (49). This silence is the same as the pregnant pause spoken of in the final page of The Edge of the Alphabet, "One day we who live at the edge of the alphabet

will find our speech." The novel depicts examples of the way in which language has deteriorated to the point where a new start is essential and any patch-up attempts would prove futile. We see this downward slide most clearly in the clichéd language of the Strang clan.

We are alerted to the theme of blindness in the first line of the novel where Erlene is said to be "like a blind person." The theme of guilt and death associated with the blindness is also introduced as Vera implicates herself with the cause of her daughter's "blindness." The death of Erlene's language is seen as a curse parallel to the "curse of silence" placed upon Poppy and Vera for walking out of step (9). Hence, although the silence produces a flowering of the imagination, in contrast to much of the novel's arid spoken word, we do not deduce that this silence is the ultimate, an end in itself.

The relationship between language and the body is a common theme in Frame's work and here the closed bowel signifying "the incarceration of man within himself" is equated with Erlene's closed channels of speech (11-12). However, paradoxically, the open bowel also signifies incarceration, as Albert Dungbeetle is trapped and killed by his treasure of dung (187). Although the production of language is totally dependent on the body, Vera realises that it takes more than a perfectly functioning anatomy to produce meaningful communication, since the language still risks

being rejected as unintelligible by the world. With hindsight, we detect the many strategically planted clues that prefigure the denouement and we realise that Vera, vicariously through Erlene, is sworn to silence because of a fear of the implications of the truth: rejection by society for exposing its sham. Vera is clearly aware of an ideal language, "The speech will be clear, beautiful, the words pleasurably patterned like daisy chains, with biting links, with the smell of the earth and the sun and the juice of man" (12). However, she is equally aware of its powerful rival, a "false" language that goes "on and on, saying nothing, the tattered bargain-price words, the great red-flagged sale of trivialities, the shutdown sellout of the mind" (12), which Vera lacks the courage to confront.

The image of Vera's childhood doll, that was designed to utter the cry of "Mama Mama" but instead emitted a sound like a beggar's cry, introduces the prominent beggar motif which symbolises the guilt and fear associated with outsiders. This fear is accentuated in Vera's life because her "outsiders," Erlene and Edward, are merely projections of herself. Frame illustrates the artificial boundaries between the two domains through the device of Vera's interior monologue. However, although Vera realises that the walls between herself and the outside world are paper-thin (26) she still attempts to cut herself off. The novel repeatedly illustrates the arbitrariness of such distinctions, especially in regard to madness. The "so-to-speak so-to-speak" (14) relief of the

neighbours that Erlene is blind rather than "abnormal" is satirised as Erlene resides purely in the mind of a psychiatric patient.

There are indications that Scented Gardens for the Blind points forward to A State of Siege. Vera seeks to deprive herself of her senses, especially sight, in order to place herself beyond mortality and the reach of Light or the truth. She, like Malfred (SS 183), describes Light as a "furious gate-crasher" that does not stop with sight but "will persist at the doors of other senses, queuing at the house of touch and hearing and smell and the unnamed senses of the world" (16). Vera and Malfred, paradoxically, seek to evade the truth and pursue it. They do not realise that they already possess the truth which lies within them.

In chapter one we are introduced to the motif of the colour "red", the colour of blood which signifies guilt, fear, and death. However, as blood also signifies life it is a contradictory image that implies life in death. The colour red is associated with the equally equivocal image of the "chair" (18), a motif which suggests power and authority but also submission and capitulation as, for example, the electric chair. Hence, just as the main characters impinge upon each other in puzzling ways the novel contains many ambiguous images and, as readers, we are denied the comfort of clear vision. We search in vain for "scented gardens" to compensate for our frustration in not being able to "see" our

way through the novel with ease.

Edward, Vera's husband, is the most developed character in the novel and also displays a form of "blindness"; he is blind to present reality. He attempts to live entirely in the past, "Edward lived, as he wished to fight with his plastic armies, by remote control" (61). He delights in documenting the history of the Strang family because he finds security in the past. He can neatly compartmentalise it from a distance and thus evade involvement in the the messy unpredictability of the present. His bespectacled vision links him firmly with Vera and the theme of blindness in the novel.

Erlene remains silent because she feels that there is "nothing to say and no words to say it" (31). She divorces herself from the verbiage that dominates people's lives. She sees the desperation of humankind's craving for the "life force" of words, "The living held out their pannikins for blood; or words" (31). However, the ambiguous metaphor of words as blood also signifies the "death force" of words. Frame firmly connects her characteristically derisive view of the teaching profession to language as a death-giving force (31). As in A State of Siege where Malfred Signal teaches her girls to restrict their view to the conventional, teaching is portrayed as repressive to the creative development of children, and teachers are depicted as hypocrites (32). They are satirised mercilessly in the novel and Miss Walters, with a face like a Jersey cow, epitimises the breed (53).

We constantly draw parallels between Erlene's life and Vera's which point to them being the one person. Erlene is also mute and carries on an interior monologue with Uncle Blackbeetle who has a workshop on her windowsill. In her withdrawal from society she, too, conjures up her own relatives, a family drawn from the animal world of beetles and snails. All three main "characters" are linked through their frequent tears and their inadequacy in coping with the pressures of living in society.

Through his obsession with war games, Edward sets himself up as the omnipotent God who is far removed from the concerns of suffering humanity, whose fate he manipulates by remote control. The triple vision of Edward's spectacles (38) invites a connection between his form of deity and the trinity of the Christian godhead. Edward attempts to escape the clutches of the enemy, Time, which relentlessly pursues him. The arbitrary nature of memory is seen in the way Vera freezes her memory of Edward, the "balding man wearing rimless mirror-like spectacles", as the "dark haired man wearing dark-rimmed spectacles" (39). This links up with the way in which Vera, too, tries to defy time.

In Scented Gardens for the Blind, silence and light, or the sun, symbolise the Truth. In a novel that deals with the theme of language and the spoken word, it appears paradoxical to equate the Truth with silence. The darkness, and shadows

formed by artificial light symbolise the fear of the unknown or the "outside" encapsulated in the beggar motif (42). The motifs of the lighthouse and keeper (45) connect the three main "characters" of the novel. Erlene is the keeper of the Truth of silence. Edward considers himself the "keeper" of the Strang family (130); the one who rescues them. When technology takes over and the lighthouse-keeper is forced to give up his job it costs him his sanity. Likewise Vera, as keeper of "true" language forfeits her sanity. The novel enacts a relentless search for the "one message which never reaches its destination" contained in each person's life (49).

Erlene's grandfather's hypocrisy, in forbidding her the use of slang only to use it himself, highlights her desire to use authentic language (32). In the incident of Edward's Arabian pants, that the grandfather secretly adores, we observe how Erlene's grandfather crushes her imaginative longing to go with him to Arabia. He tries to deceive Erlene with the denial of his desire to go to Arabia (58). Erlene's retreat into imaginary play under the bed illustrates the creative poverty of her world and her desire, from a young age, for the genuine. However, she is not allowed the solace of her dream world and early on in the novel we detect the dissolution of the bounds between illusion and reality as the words that Uncle Blackbeetle uses are the same as Dr Clapper's words to her, "Tell me all about it, Erlene" (59). It indicates the fragile nature of Erlene's world of illusion

and Frame's refusal to build it up into a utopian alternative to the rigours of the real world.

Edward also lives in a world of illusion that dissipates when he must reluctantly confront the living members of the Strang family. In his playing God he has sought to rescue the human race by "remote control." His singling out of the Strang family is a parody of the Christian God singling out the Jews; Edward refers to the Strangs as "the chosen people" (112). His motivation is "only to fulfil a small ambition" rather than out of a deep concern for humanity (62) and his blinding tears (63) betray his frustration and lack of insight. His seemingly conflicting obsession with genealogy and war ironically reveals his fascination with time; the human life-cycle of birth and death, and yet also with the way in which he views time as the ultimate enemy that pursues him.

Uncle Blackbeetle's use of language is "true" and highly imaginative, "It's the soldiers passing in twos and threes, with iron bands round their foreheads and little sachets of diseases and lavender flowers tied to their waists, and their teeth cleaned with white ash" (83). Yet, he merges with the character of Dr Clapper who does not display an imaginative use of language, "We're going to be friends, aren't we old thing?" (98) This merging of characters underlines the theme of the vulnerability of "true" language.

The alternatives to Erlene's silence in the novel are depicted as poor substitutes. Erlene is aware of how threatening silence can be to people, "people dread silence because it is transparent; like clear water . . . silence reveals the cast-off words and thoughts dropped in to obscure its clear stream" (87). It places her in a position of power over people because she is in absolute control. The contrast between the strength of her silence and the meaningless words of Erlene's former speech lessons points up the glaring superficialities of the spoken word. Erlene is sensitive to the vibrant language of nature all around her (92) and the words of her mother pleading with her to speak seem superfluous. Erlene finds Dr Clapper's language crass. It represents institutional book learning and Erlene's frequent references to the "Scholar Gypsy" reinforce the value she places on idiosyncratic experience.

Vera's letter informing Edward of Erlene's loss of speech has a devastating effect on him. He equates her silence with death, the ultimate enemy (106), and feels that it is the enemy's way of warning him of his own mortality. He undergoes a change of consciousness and senses the waning of his former "omnipotence." The words at the beginning of chapter nine anticipate the imminent psychological trauma, "He was found to be insane" (104). Edward then starts to hear voices and, in now associating him more readily with Vera, we become more sympathetic towards him. The "characters" telescope into each other, "I think that there

is a mistake. That is the reason I am here" (104). Edward insists on the necessity of speech for human survival, "We must be allowed to make our cries of pain and joy, our singing, murmuring . . . our deceits, flatteries, curses" (106). However, he believes only what he wants to believe about the truth of Vera's letter and we see the ways in which the meaning of language can be readily misconstrued. In an attempt to prop up his tottering ego he imagines that Vera wants him home because his presence alone would ensure Erlene's commencement of speech, "If I were there . . . why, she would surely talk to me - to me!" (107) Edward now has a new target at which to aim his need for power and control over others; Erlene's speech. The intensification of this need corresponds to his declining control over his own life and becomes an his latest obsession.

Edward's psychological trauma also coincides with the letters he receives from the living Strangs and, as he struggles with having to live in the present, he wonders whether "his concern for the human race [is] really so deep that he could now face the living" (113). Edward had been cut off from the real world in his absorption with the remote Strangs and war games. Frame heavily satirises him through his language, as in the incident when Edward awards a medal to the vomiting toy soldier, "One must praise . . . a soldier who vomits" (40). The toy battlefield has now become his battlefield, "with death encroaching on all sides piercing defences, destroying communications . . ." (114).

The platitudinous language in the letters of the Strang family, who Edward says "have never found their power of speech" (118), illustrates the 'false' language through which they condemn themselves. Their concern is with outward appearances and "in their use of words they appeared only as dull parched souls caked with the footprints of an extinct education in grammar and written expression" (117). Their disclaiming of any relation to the criminal Wallace Strang symbolises their use of language to cover up the truth. Edward's exposure to the language of the living Strangs triggers off a counter-reaction that results in a more authentic personal verbal expression. This is another factor that increases our sympathy for him and causes us to associate him more closely with Vera and Erlene. His psychological upheaval gives rise to an imaginative language, "Perhaps sometime in the future the written and spoken words of this ordinary family will touch like lances upon the skin of those nearest to them, will draw blood from the selected wound, will penetrate and unfold the flower closed upon its own heart" (118).

Although the three "characters" who are "mad" (according to society's "norms") use language imaginatively, this does not suggest Frame's glorification of madnesss, as has been noted above. She is careful to emphasise in this novel, as in Owls Do Cry, the pain and torment associated with a consciousness deemed mad by the world. Edward, Vera and

Erlene's copious tears and worry-filled lives substantiate Frame's grasp of this reality.

Edward's lengthy imaginary interview with Georgina Strang on her doorstep, as he contemplates their first meeting, reveals his store of imaginative language. He projects himself into her mind and predicts many of the attitudes that later eventuate, e.g. her denial of any criminal connections. He is still, however, typically egocentric. In his fantasy, Georgina's sight of her triple reflection in Edward's spectacles, brings about a change that causes her language to become progressively more authentic. It is as if she has been faced with the truth, "And if you really want to know, the chap at the Old Bailey, the murderer, is our first cousin" (141). Georgina's language becomes figurative, "It's time we all died, coughing and sneezing up our noses those green tubes like tiny rockets to deaden everything in our heads" (141). Edward's imaginary influence over her life underlines his continuing delusions of grandeur. He falsely believes himself to possess hypnotic powers over the lives of others. The Georgina he eventually meets, however, fulfils our expectations with her hypocrisy and shallow grief, "We have to take death in our stride" (143). Her language lacks spontaneity and her actions imply an artificial premeditation on when or how she should reveal her grief.

Edward previously believed that his interest in the past

Strangs was confined to an isolated part of history but now, confronted with the living Strangs, he recognises that his interest has been of wider consequence, for the history of the Strangs represents the history of the world (146). Now, it is the "fluidity", rather than the compartmentalisation, of the human race that fascinates Edward as the person of Georgina Strang seems to merge with his wife, Vera (147). Edward is shocked at people's attempts to escape from the unique essence of their individuality, "We can't stand alone. We have to be imitating, bargaining, transacting every part of ourselves. Why should Vera aspire to be Georgina Strang?" (147) Frame's irony resurfaces since Edward, himself, exists purely in Vera's mind and, furthermore, he aspires to be God. In his consideration of the movement of the human race, or "river", towards the "sea" or oblivion, Edward unconsciously reinforces his own insubstantiality (147).

The theme of "inside" versus "outside" is apparent in the message of the "voice" that plagues Edward. Edward's life has borne little reference to the world outside the Strang family and now the "voice" challenges him with his presuppositions of artificial boundaries. Edward's letter to Vera at this time provides evidence of his altered consciousness, " . . . he seems to have been elevated by a sudden leverage of his entire mind, as if he had been thrust into an upstairs view with direct access to the upper level of people's minds where the nests of ideas are built . . ." (149). The allusion to Icarus (150) suggests the risk

involved in such a rebellion against convention. Once again, Frame emphasises the vulnerability associated with being different from the rest of society. Vera acknowledges that life would have been much simpler if they had lived lives of conformity, "Oh why have we never been like all the others in accepting each day in black and white without question or scrutiny?" (150)

As stated above, we are more aware of the way the novel is saturated in irony on a second reading. We note Frame's ironic humour in Vera's obsessive curiosity about the thoughts in Erlene's head which, ultimately, are revealed to be her own. Through the momentum generated in the novel by the hopes Vera and Edward place on Erlene's spoken word (153), Frame validates verbal language. Words are important to Frame, "those solid little bombs that in one explosion can free a prisonful of pities, and set them working - as angels making mailbags to carry the messages" (161). The expansive, imaginative thought-lives of the protagonists are not sufficient; they must be translated into spoken words. Frame handles the theme of the importance of the spoken word ironically as she provides so few examples of authentic verbal speech in the novel. However, we continually see the build-up of "false" speech in the novel in the light of the hopes for Erlene to deliver authentic speech. Vera and Edward view Erlene's silence as an enemy that will doom them if she does not speak, "the whole world is doomed because it will seem to have accepted the silence which lurks beyond and

within us, only waiting for us to surrender" (153). A further layer of irony is that, within the bounds of her silence, Erlene, too, is reliant on speech. She lives for her conversations with Uncle Blackbeetle and her urging him to speak, "Talk to me, Uncle Blackbeetle", mirrors Vera's and Dr Clapper's urging of Erlene to speak (171).

Vera, like Edward, derives a sense of power from Erlene's silence and believes that she is indispensable to Erlene's life. Vera's own muteness is hinted at, "I cannot convince myself that silence is an affliction; perhaps after all, I am in league with the enemy" (155). Her reference to being "in league" with silence foreshadows the concluding revelation of Vera as the mute psychiatric patient. Silence is Vera's "enemy" because she has no power over it ; she is unable to force her daughter to speak. Her domain, her power over her own speech, corresponds to Erlene's controlled silence and to Edward's believed power over Erlene's speech. Silence, in the world of the novel, is the domain of the "mad." All the "sane" characters in the novel speak copiously and yet their speech is devoid of creativity. The constant inference in this comparison is that the only hope of salvation is for the "mad" to break with their silence and speak a whole new language.

Frame's ironic treatment of the theme of madness is evident in the novel. She creates all the main characters with the signs and symptoms of what society deems "madness";

the denial of speech, withdrawal from society, and the hearing of voices. However, Frame's centralisation of such characters and the ultimately disclosed lack of distinction between them highlights the artificial barriers society erects between the "sane" and "insane." Even the hospital where Erlene visits with Dr Clapper ostracises the mad, thus reinforcing the dichotomy (162). Frame demystifies and redefines madness as, "only Open Day in the factory of the mind" (160).

In Scented Gardens for the Blind, the spoken word is superficial and doomed compared to the non-verbal. Even Vera's speech to Erlene belies the rich language of her thought life, "All the speech training, Erlene, remember, 'myriads of rivulets hurrying through the lawn . . .'" (88). The novel makes us aware of the dangers of speech and the way people seek to control one another through speech. To commit oneself to speech gives others a handle on one's life, a means of manipulation. Vera's curiosity about Erlene's thoughts dominates her life. Erlene's silence, and therefore her apparent self-containment, gives Vera a sense of powerlessness. She is unable to exercise any real control over Erlene and therefore gives herself imaginary powers, ". . . she cannot walk either. Don't you see how she relies upon me, her mother, to help her walk to the hospital? (154) The human need to force others to "tell" (164) is a motif in the work of Frame. We find it in the first volume of Frame's autobiography, To the Is-land, where the young Janet is

forced to the front of the class to "tell" the teacher of her misdemeanour.[3]

The sense of guilt that plagues Vera's life partly stems from her withdrawal from society; "Sometimes I feel that when I move through my life I am lashed to the deck, wax is set in my ears, in order that I too may not be lured to destruction by the noise of humanity" (160). Edward, too, initially withdraws into the past to bolster the history of others in an attempt to ecsape his own mortality. However, Vera also feels a guilty responsibility towards Erlene's silence. We sense Vera's guilt in her constant nervous chatter to Erlene during their hospital visits to Dr Clapper. She wants to project her own superficial speech upon Erlene in order to confirm her own normality, "See how well I am speaking for her, Dr Clapper! . . . let me speak, to show how neatly I arrange the words!" (166)

The psychiatric profession, represented by Dr Clapper, is satirised as much as the teaching profession in the novel. The slaughtered fly symbolises, for Erlene, Dr Clapper's deceit, particularly in the light of his words, "Insects are marvellous" (169). She feels that his repetitive "so many things to say" merely reinforces the contrary: there is "nothing to say" (168). She associates him with death (170) in his obsequious attempts to lure her into speaking by a close identification with her.

Uncle Blackbeetle, like Dr Clapper, is closely associated with death, "the common denominator" (172). His lengthy tale about cousin Albert who dies beneath his long-awaited treasure of dung illustrates the way in which materialistic values can lead to self destruction. Uncle Blackbeetle's words, "What manner of man is he, again, your father?", merge with Dr Clapper's (190) and cause the astonished Erlene to speak. The ironic way in which Erlene is suddenly betrayed into speech by someone she believed to be her dear friend but who turned out to be her enemy, illustrates another trap the reader may fall into, that of presumption. As with the main "characters", we discover that the other characters, also, are not as substantial as we had supposed.

Edward momentarily exchanges his obsession with the Strang family for the security and tangibility of making a chair (199). He recalls the rock throne, built on the New Zealand beach by someone who sought control over the waves, that he and Vera had sat in (204). His choice to build a body contoured chair for himself instead of a throne symbolises the way his zeal has dwindled from the lofty aspiration to save the human race to merely making himself comfortable. The beach throne had been spacious enough for two people but this chair is molded to his shape alone and Vera likens it to a "coffin" (206).

As Vera awaits Edward's return to New Zealand she knows

that she is being "betrayed by Change" (213). Her memory of Edward is static and yet "Change" is indifferent to her plight. She imagines a world conspiracy of silence with mounds of discarded, rotting words everywhere. Yet it does not signal the death of language but rather "the growth of articulate speech from the silence . . . " (216). This imagery is central to The Carpathians which Frame wrote twenty-five years later. Vera imagines people fleeing the plague of silence and resorting to any form of vocalisation just to escape the threat. Speech becomes the desperate reaction to the fear of silence. Much of the spoken language in the book illustrates this lack of imagination. Vera tries in vain to coax Erlene into a dialogue formula, "I'll say something to you, and you reply, and I'll reply to your reply" (222). Erlene's thoughts centre on a contrasting language, "The true sound rising at last from ice and marshland, ancient rock and stone" (227). She imagines that when she finally speaks it will be with an "ancestral voice, the voice of the beast" (227). Meanwhile, there is no need to speak because there is no power to speak (237). Therefore, when Edward returns, their encounter does not cause Erlene to speak and her silence continues. Through the speech/silence dichotomy, Frame establishes the value system that places unimaginative conventional speech at the bottom of the scale, far below silence. Silence is not the ultimate answer for Frame but rather a midway point; a creative pause that signals the potential for a new language.

Clara Strang's verbosity provides the contrast to Erlene's silence in the empty way Erlene had described, " . . . words falling all day and night blocking the doors of speech" (236). Her language usage is confined to a fixed track and when faced with language that deviates from the conventional, as when Edward speaks of the chair he has just made in response to her enquiry into the role of genealogists, Clara feels threatened (241). Edward's response about the chair is egocentric. He is thoroughly disillusioned with the lives of the Strangs and would rather speak of himself. Clara's language underscores the ironic way in which her life is based on illusion as much as Edward's, even though she claims to be rooted in the everyday world of Quarter Street, St. Kilda. She prides herself in being part of a "gifted" family but the presence of the brand new violin "still in the front room" that she had "put" her son to indicates otherwise (243). The insubstantiality of her language is symbolised in the collapsible white cake she serves Edward (244). Edward's visit with Clara intensifies his feelings that life is catching up with him and that there is little difference between Peckham and Dunedin. The sound of the sea reminds him of the encroachment of time, the commodity he had sought to escape by his obsession with the past Strangs.

The "raking shuffling sound" of the sea combined with the foster children's high-pitched cries that haunt Edward as he leaves the premises foreshadow the primeval language of

the denouement (245). He is fearful of the unintelligible sounds, which resemble the "wild cries and screams" (151) of the "mad", and they impress upon him further the need for Erlene to speak "the new language of mankind" (246).

The final chapter throws a whole new light on the novel. It forces us back to the beginning to search for the clues to the startling conclusion. We discover for the first time the extreme isolation of Vera, closeted away in her "mad", silent world for thirty years. Yet, her silence has produced the novel and her language has filled every page. Vera's hospital world has been unaware of her rich resource of language. The irony is that although, as readers, we feel tricked when the milieu of the novel is revealed, we also feel party to privileged information as in reading the novel we know far more about the workings of Vera's mind than the psychiatrists. Frame allows us, the amateurs, to have more insight into the mind of a "mad" person than the professionals and hence she draws us into colluding with her satire of them.

In situating Clara Strang, the practical, eminently "sane" person in the eyes of society, in the psychiatric hospital as well, further emphasises the way Frame's writing rejects the arbitrary dichotomies in society between the "sane" and "insane" (249). Frame emphasises the point powerfully as she creates Vera and Clara as utterly dependent upon each other, "Two torn people grafted together in secret

life and growth" (250). In the end, there is also little to separate Dr Clapper from Erlene as he, too, is obsessed with a beetle on his windowsill (248). In this way, Frame not only continues to satirise the psychiatric profession but also to break down societal barriers. Dr Clapper's fear of incrimination by Vera's speech matches Vera's fear of Erlene's speech (251). In his language, too, which is now more imaginative, his character merges with the main characters, "You mean out of the jungle and into the clearing where the wild beasts are sitting in the sun?" (250). Erlene also speaks of her long-awaited speech as the "voice of the beast" (227,8).

The "ancestral voice . . . the true sound rising at last from ice and marshland, ancient rock and stone . . ." (227) with which Erlene believes she will eventually speak, foreshadows the last words of the novel. The "language" Vera finally speaks is unintelligible to us, "Ug-g-Ug. Ohhh Ohh g. Ugg" (252). It equates with Erlene's predictions of the "true sound" but not with the reader's or with Edward's. Edward had desperately wanted "words, the new language of mankind" instead of Vera's "frightening sounds which have no meaning" (246). The whole book is Vera's tactic for evading responsibility, a smokescreen that delays the moment of truth when she must courageously release the new language she withholds from the world. The dramatic irony of her debut into the world of speech produces a powerfully bathetic effect that heightens our awareness of Frame's bleak

world-view.

The faint optimism implied by the newness of Vera's primeval sounds is overshadowed by a cynical pessimism, a sardonic reality that subverts all our expectations of the birth of a new language. The suspense of the novel has been building up to this climactic moment of hope for a pristine language but what eventuates is a mockery of articulateness. All that remains is the disillusionment and deep pessimism of a world where the imaginative, creative use of language is barely accessible.

NOTES

[1] The spelling of Uncle Blackbeetle is consistent with the 1982 Women's Press edition of Scented Gardens for the Blind used in this thesis.

[2] Janet Frame, Owls Do Cry (Christchurch: Pegasus, 1957)

[3] Janet Frame, An Autobiography (Auckland: Random Century N.Z. Ltd., 1989) 25.

A STATE OF SIEGE

In A State of Siege, published four years after The Edge of the Alphabet, Frame approaches the theme of language usage from a new angle. She portrays the supreme value of imaginative language through the metaphor of an artist's quest for visual authenticity. Malfred Signal had habitually viewed the world in black and white terms and her goal had been to paint precise, easily recognisable scenes. Frame traces Malfred's psychological struggle from her rejection of the old Matuatangi "view" to her confrontation with a new and terrifying reality. In the denouement, Malfred achieves a state of enlightenment through her sustained grappling with reality, but finds that it is incompatible with life. With characters like Thora Pattern, she now lives on the "edge of the alphabet" where the only way forward is death. As in the former novel, Frame's moral guidelines for the use of language are clear; she "redeems" Malfred for courageously embarking upon her quest but, through caricature, clichēd language, and the depiction of stultified lifestyles, Frame condemns Malfred's associates in Matuatangi for choosing to remain trapped on the treadmill of tradition. Malfred's outer journey from Matuatangi to Karemoana is mirrored by her inward journey through the worlds of thought, memory, dream and vision. She seeks to reject her former "view" where shadows have dominated and outlines remained intact for the "new view" which is dominated by the "Light" or truth which

breaks down conventional barriers.

In the novel, Malfred Signal is persistently attacked by overwhelming forces that demand entry into her life. However, she is not merely a passive victim for she, too, is on the attack. She, like Vera Glace in Scented Gardens for the Blind, is a divided personality; she is on the offensive and defensive. One half of herself seeks to destroy the enemy of a lifetime of "viewing" according to social convention; the other half desperately seeks to defend herself from unknown foreign invasion. In the first section we are alerted to the ways in which visual stimuli dominate Malfred's life. However, as darkness severs her from the visual, language increasingly assumes primacy in Malfred's life and becomes her only link with the real world.

War imagery saturates the novel and underscores the tensions in Malfred's life. The sea surrounding Karemoana is an inimical force, a familiar image in Frame's work, that reinforces the ongoing conflict, "and here the sea - will close in for the kill" (55). Malfred refers to nature itself as an invasion (57), an idea reinforced by the violent verbs used to describe the onset of the storm, "sprang", "thudded", "hurling", "attacking", "prowling" and "screaming" (62). The ragged children near the mangrove swamp engage in "gun-battle" (61), and Malfred recalls at length the school air-raid practices during the Second World War (65-8).

The novel deals with forces that seek either to enter or exit from Malfred's life. Malfred wants to release her "New View" of the world which is a contrasting imaginative point of view that originates from the seat of enlightenment, the "room two inches behind the eyes." This room is "filled almost to overflowing; yet for forty years she had kept it locked" (8). The forces seeking entry are, understandably, cleverly disguised and Malfred struggles to identify them throughout her ordeal.

As an artist, Malfred has operated primarily on the visual level. Her point of view has been determined by the artistic conventions of light and shade, proportion and perspective. However, her art has been governed by other people's views of reality, "How satisfied she had felt at the Art Society's Exhibition when a visitor, seeing her work, exclaimed, 'But it's exactly like the - (river or mountain or picnic scene). I'd recognise the spot anywhere!'" (59) Although she is now stripped of all the props of the past that supported that view: family, work, friends, hometown and status, her "New View" does not unfold unhindered, "She feared now, that . . . she would not be able to confront the ordinary 'day to day' living that takes no account of self-styled visionaries, of women in middle age who decide to 'see' when their seeing has changed to include a world they never dreamed of before" (70).

In the first section entitled The Knocking, we are

introduced to the "South Pacific Paradise" of Karemoana, the island up north to which Malfred will move to begin a different lifestyle. The irony of the opening paragraphs, where despite the golden vale of orange trees humans are still mutual enemies, is developed in the novel as Karemoana turns out to be a prison rather than a paradise for Malfred. The irony alerts us to the multiple levels of meaning that create the dense texture of Frame's work. In A State of Siege the words on the page operate on many levels, from real to surreal. Through these levels Frame constantly traps the reader into a certain viewpoint which she later subverts; for example, she draws up convincing cases for Malfred's insanity or heart disease, factors to be discussed later in this essay.

The title suggests the importance of the theme of inside/outside. Malfred refers several times to the knocking as signifying a transfer both in and out across a barrier, "the whole world lay without, trying to get in" (62); "she began to feel some confusion about whether the visitor demanded entry or exit" (79). She fears that the barriers between inside and outside are breaking down and feels that her skin has become the outside of the house with the fists knocking on her body (79). The demarcation between the animate and inanimate worlds has already been blurred with Malfred's personification of the storm, but now it seems to collapse. Both of the rooms that dominate Malfred's life are in a state of siege: the room in the bach and the "room two

inches behind the eyes." The two climactic violent incidents of the novel, where the stone is thrust through the bach window and Malfred crashes through into the dream-room, involve the breaking down of distinctions between outside and inside.

In Matuatangi, Malfred's life is dull and predictable and her art reflects this lack of inspiration with its "sentimental and colourless" images (10). It is in her hometown, however, that she realises her capacity for dreaming, an ability inherited from her father that enables her to make "mountains or trees as separate dreams inside [her] mind" (8). Yet, this imaginative potential has not been "captured" and given a "name." Rather, she has been shaped by the language of others ("you are your father's daughter" [6]) and has been expected to conform to their language patterns ("Yes, Miss Henderson; no, Miss Wallace; do you take sugar and milk, Miss Ford?" [28]). Malfred feels that for all of her life she has been "bound in someone else's dream" (15).

Despite the vigorous protesting of friends and family, Malfred determines to leave, and they recognise in her "a flame that there was no accounting for, burning steadily at its own pace because it had been lit from within" (12-13). The fire/light motif appears frequently in the novel, not only suggesting a process of purification and initiation she must undergo in order to move from an "old" life to begin a "new" one but also a process of destruction. Likewise, the

death motif, integral to Frame's work, highlights the theme of new life arising out of death, "a human beginning thrust from the inhuman natural scene" (63). It is her mother's death that frees Malfred to pursue a new life; an occasion that causes her to realise "what she had missed seeing by her dutiful habit of looking" (20) and that releases her from the stultification of Matuatangi. She likens herself to a hibernating animal emerging in the spring, after "many years of imaginative sleep", with its new found stores of energy (50).

Malfred's trained eye is acutely sensitive to the patterns of colour, light and shadow. As she travels across the Canterbury Plains on her journey north, now supposedly free from all the former constraints, she attempts to "seize the New View" and see things in a different way. She identifies faults in her previous paintings of the area and her thoughts prefigure much of what is to come in the novel. She sees the plains as a "world without walls" submitting to the "invasion of light and air and snow-coloured water" (21). She now observes that the artificial barriers that divide inside from outside are broken down and the forces of nature are able to exert their influence in an unhindered way, an idea that surfaces later in Malfred's perception of the invasion by nature on Karemoana.

On board the ferry, Malfred's language of art continues to develop as she paints mental pictures. She observes the

play of brown and white squares of light on the walls and realises that, unlike all her previous work, this painting will not readily conjure up pleasant memories of the scene for her viewers (23). The squares seem like little cells or prisons and the death imagery intensifies with the thought that the white squares are more like rectangles, or coffins, an idea reinforced by the black garb of the stewards. Similarly, her "New View" of the passengers rushing off the ferry contains violence as hands turn into hooks and faces become gashed. They, too, are set against the repressive background of brown and white squares and rectangles. Malfred's mind is so filled with death imagery that upon arriving in her Upper Queen Street hotel room she even describes herself as a "rectangular package" (28).

Although to her sister she denies her paradisal expectations of Karemoana (14), her thoughts betray the fact that she is anticipating "ideal retirement" (29). Her concept of bliss supposedly entails "no intrusion of people into [her] scenes" (29) and yet on the island ferry she finds herself primarily concerned with the proximity and number of her neighbours (34). The intensity of her forthcoming "state of siege" is preconditioned by her alienation from society, in contrast with Matuatangi where her life is inundated with people. She calls her journey a "pilgrimage" (6) and needs to undertake it alone. She must dispense with her "habit of passive living" (40) and must direct her own destiny. The "New View" she seeks to cultivate is a "burden of seeing;"

the burden of the archetypal lone artist struggling to be authentic in a world of false values. This is forced home to Malfred on her journey north across the Plains, "Malfred knew the heaviness of heart that always overcame her, crossing the plains. Such a burden of seeing was put upon each traveller, more than could be borne. But not all were aware of it . . ."(22) She refers to the "room two inches behind the eyes" as the "prison", a metaphor commensurate with her impending incarceration in her room in the bach on Karemoana.

On the first night in her bach troublesome new thoughts plague her mind. Her thoughts continue to be overladen with death imagery. She realises the freedom her mother's death has given her now that her vision is not "blocked by the nearness of demanding relatives - how mountainous her mother had been!" but ponders the fact that "death [is] a cold touch to be used for release into Life" (47). Her new found "freedom" is different from what she had expected. As she gazes out to sea, she feels that her life is pitted against the whole world, ". . . it seemed that the whole world ranged itself along the horizon's rim . . . with the relentless questioning that characterises the whole world. Tell. Tell. Answer or else. Give" (53). The dramatic ending of the novel, as suggesting the entry of Light into Malfred's life, is prefigured, "the beam of light that came suddenly through the window was the moon, hastily bundled in rags of cloud, and thrust into darkness" (53). However, Malfred's subsequent death infers an ironic prefiguration and with hindsight we

detect a series of traps for the ingenuous reader to fall into.

One of the traps is the multi-layered meaning of words or concepts. For example, the "element" on the island Malfred is warned about is a word loaded with ambiguous significance. It not only refers to the threatening undesirable sector of society on Karemoana, the 'outside', but also to the four elements of nature - air, water, fire and earth which also "invade" Malfred's life. Furthermore, the word takes on the religious significance of death and new life as symbolised in the eucharistic elements. Its scientific meaning as a pure or irreducible substance and its educational meaning as a foundation or beginning also have significance if this "element" is to be conceived as a form of enlightenment. This multi-layering of meaning typifies Frame's art. It does not entail the evasion of concrete reality for we are never permitted to lose sight of the real world that firmly underpins all of her work. However, reality for Frame is the transformation of the commonplace by the power of the imagination. Through the multiple meanings of words she subverts the materialistic value-system of society rather than reality itself.

Another trap is the way in which Malfred's mental and physical states invite the reader to make precipitous judgements. There is ample textual evidence to tempt the reader into making definitive clinical diagnoses that Malfred

is psychotic or suffers a heart attack. Malfred's sanity is clearly debatable, "the whole world lay without; within, there was nothing" (63); "Only Malfred's skin . . . took over the role played by wood, glass, iron, as defensive inviolable membrane . . . the knocking of the fists began to bruise her skin" (79). The chest constriction she experiences is symptomatic of a heart attack, "She lay without moving, her heart thudding against her breast, hitting and hurting, as if it were a shape of cast iron. Pain came in with her suddenly-drawn breath, and stayed, moving down her left arm, extending itself like an iron rod. She could feel the pressure of it" (80). Also, Malfred's sudden death at the end of the novel seems to suggest cardiac arrest. However, Malfred's use of language is not consistent with mental illness and, as the argument will show, the denouement is not wholly pessimistic but rather, paradoxically, signals the acquisition of ultimate enlightenment.

Malfred's assessment of the islanders is that they are "preyed upon by the sea" (55). The sea is marauding and symbolises danger. It encircles the island cutting the islanders off from the rest of the world. Malfred's room soon becomes her "island" and she is now isolated from society as from the fifth day onwards no more islanders enter her life. Language saturates her mind which now becomes dominated by thoughts and dreams. During her night-time or seemingly lifetime ordeal, language becomes the tenuous lifeline that keeps her connected to other people and to herself.

Malfred's first and only painting in her new home, created on the fifth night, is of the sea. She links it firmly to death by mixing her paints with lanolin, the substance clearly associated with her mother's death. The "storm of lanolin" (60) inside, which conceals death, is juxtaposed to the storm outside which comes without warning and backgrounds her torment. There may be no people in her scene but Malfred's need for human contact is made obvious by her personification of the elements. The wind encircling the bach and thudding against the window resembles her future tormentor, the "knocker", who will soon walk around the bach and bang on the door all night. Malfred seeks to counteract her fear by talking to herself, "Explaining her afternoon to herself Malfred said . . . " (60) but language fails her.

One form of plant life on Karemoana that haunts Malfred and that she knows she must paint some day is the mangrove swamp. This derelict area of the island inhabited by the outcasts of society fascinates her. It is the place where extremities converge and the barriers between the 'outside' sea and 'inside' land seem to break down. As the tide sweeps over the swampland the area takes on the appearance of a primeval forest, a place unravaged by human civilisation. It is a place where racial barriers break down and Maori plays alongside pakeha (61). Despite their squalor and outcast status, the mangroves speak to Malfred of hidden potential and she speculates on whether they, like the pohutukawa, will

one day "burst into flame" (62). Here the familiar fire motif not only speaks of an initiation into a different state of being but also of destruction and death, " . . . its flowers would die in a carpet of crimson ashes"(62).

The storm worsens and Malfred's disturbing thoughts on the mangrove swamp lead on to the insecure feeling that she and her surroundings are beginning to lose substantiality (62). As with the swampland, the outside seems to be intruding on the inside, "It seemed to Malfred that the whole world lay without, trying to get in" (62). She now doubts her identity as a separate human being and uses language to create her own identity and to rationalise her situation. She has paranoid feelings that the whole of nature has "turned against her" (63). Yet, she suspects some purpose may arise from the ordeal and fears that there may be a "climax of chaos . . . a human beginning thrust from the inhuman natural scene" (63).

Malfred's need for electric light and reassurance from the light switch in her room is symbolic of her quest for meaning and enlightenment in her life (63). Although language now begins to dominate her life, her use of language is ineffectual and like the visual offers no immediate salvation. The sound of her voice appears to trigger the persistent knocking that plagues her life. Instead of lifting her out of despair, her language aggravates it. It causes her to confront her fear rather than evade it, as her girls in

the air-raid shelter had done with their "Knock Knock. Who's there?" games. Malfred agonises over the way in which she has "wasted almost a lifetime living in restricted awareness" (69) and, furthermore, has also "trained [her] pupils to see in the same unimaginative way" (70). She is now in "the fullest state of awareness, of remembering, of knowing" (69) and this state heightens her sensitivity to the new influences in her life. Her thoughts widen out from the restricted confines of her tiny world to encompass "anyone from anywhere" (73) and her room becomes a microcosm for the world. Malfred craves contact with the outside world, yet the radio, with its humdrum messages of materialism and factual information which seem so unrelated to Malfred's plight, highlights the widening gap between the inner life of her imagination and the outside world she has left behind. Soon the besieger tampers with the main switch and Malfred is plunged into an even greater darkness.

The noise and fury of the storm is soon contrasted with a stunning silence in the second section of the novel entitled Darkness. The inside/outside theme is evident in Malfred's lurid thoughts about holes or perforations. Her thoughts connect the gaping hole in the ceiling where the light fitting had been, with the unnatural orifice that repulses her in the hospital patient's body, and her mother's mouth with the chocolate dropped in. A hole or punctured surface creates a leak that causes the inside and outside to merge. The darkness outside merging with the darkness inside

terrifies Malfred because it represents such a seepage between two distinct territories and the invasion of her personal space. She desperately desires light, or power over her domain of the visual, "It was terrible to be without light; it made one feel so powerless" (89). She attempts to regain some order and perspective into her life by torchlight but realises that she must not only adjust to the silence but to the darkness as well.

Malfred also loses power over the spoken word, and her blustering verbal threats addressed to the prowler produce no response. Yet, she knows that the spoken word can have great power to influence life, as reinforced by the language of radio advertising (94). She sees this type of language as another intrusion and she speaks her own words even louder in an attempt to "exterminate the sudden parasite" (94). Yet, in her imaginary telephone conversations Malfred abuses language; she uses it as bravado and a denial of her fear of alienation from the outside world. As readers, we do not condemn her for this but rather identify more closely with her dread that produces it. Silence envelops her but she seeks to resist it with language which becomes her only source of comfort and confidence. The sound of her own voice in the nervous platitudinous language that gushes out of her mouth serves as company for Malfred and as a substitute for all that is lacking in her life. Her thoughts belies her denial of fear and she pictures herself rolling down and down - not down a hole leading to adventure like Alice but down to

a hell stoked by the multitudinous "fire shovels" Malfred had fastidiously trained her students to draw and shade. Malfred's superfluous language in Karemoana contrasts strongly with her laconic style in Matuatangi and becomes an escape route that allows her to enact her private fantasies. As she has already discovered, human society is more important to her than she ever supposed. The conversation with her imaginary neighbour reveals both her true and imaginary selves: the terrorised, isolated, middle-aged woman set against the gregarious, carefree new-comer to the island (95).

The language of Malfred's telephone conversations operates on different levels of meaning which she uses for different purposes. There is the level of pure fantasy, "Yes, the police are here now . . . They've brought reinforcements from the city, in a police launch . . . " (97), that serves to bolster her flagging spirit. There is also the metaphorical level that originates from deep within her psyche and exposes the underlying truth about herself. The fixation she had with shading fire shovels as an art teacher not only reveals the emphasis she placed on representative rather than imaginative art but also the way in which this emphasis leads ultimately to self-destruction. She talks about "spring-cleaning the room 'two inches behind the eyes'", or clearing out the clutter of the past so that she can "see for the first time" (98).

Although Malfred's language originates from the world of dreams and visions, Frame is careful to maintain a firm grasp of the real world. We never cease to identify with a real woman crippled by the fear of violation by a persistent night-time prowler. Malfred has a vision of herself walking around a Karemoana that has become a place of exile for the decrepit of society who are securely warded away from the rest of the world by the sea (101). She becomes acutely aware of the defence mechanisms people set up in order to hide their true identity - like make-up or house paint. The post-cataclysmic scene she envisages is of an island whose soil is robbed of sufficient nutrients to produce green vegetables. She recognises her father in the face of an old man even though her father died before reaching old age. Malfred appears to lose control over her environment and imagines the room and the wooden walls speaking to her. Language continues to dominate her life, and her dreams of Karemoana as a prison continue in different forms. These dreams are full of people and of herself speaking with people. Malfred's physical circumstances have denied her the comfort of human society and language now acts as a paltry, temporary stop-gap.

The theme of death is never far from Malfred's mind as a procession of family members troop through her thoughts. She wants to know the secret of how her mother "managed" in the face of death and it seems that this knowledge comprises an important part of the "light" she seeks (115). Her family are

"knocking" at her door of her room and she deals with them one by one. Her father has already paid a brief visit and now her sister Lucy enters. She is unable to manage life let alone death, yet she trades her gross inadequacies for marriage and materialism, thus gaining success in the eyes of society. Malfred hears her mother knocking persistently on the door but firmly decides to ignore her as she does not wish to be influenced by the person responsible for turning her into "a walking cliché"(115). Even though Malfred came to Karemoana to give effect to her "New View", she knows that she is locked into her old ways of seeing. Her mother represents all that was safe and secure about the past as well as all that was restrictive and damaging to Malfred's "view". She has lived all of her life under the "shadow" of her family and especially of her mother. Malfred crystalises her feelings towards her mother into words which she refrained from expressing in her presence. She realises how artificial and repressive the concept of "loyalty" can be when it is devoid of genuine commitment (117). As her verbosity continues, her vision of the past clarifies into something almost too much for her to bear, "Can I escape her if I take my double-B pencil and return to my former ways of seeing, of making shade when the fire of looking is too fierce?" (119). Her life in Matuatangi, dominated by an absolute view of the world as light and dark, black and white, had been comfortably safe and secure but inadequate preparation for the real world that incorporates shades of grey.

There is little demarcation between the dream world and the real world in A State of Siege, ". . . Malfred had (or dreamed she had) emerged to see the long-treasured theories . . . as barnacles" (121). The world of dream or imagination assumes prominence for Malfred and she recalls her enviously negative response towards Lettice Bradley, her art student, who was able to explore the "secret store" of the imagination as none other had (121). Her painting of Maui greatly distressed Malfred because it represented an authenticity which highlighted her owm inadequacies. Lettice was a person who understood, and therefore was able to capture on paper, the riches of Maori myth, unlike the many who spuriously portrayed the "national character" for materialistic gain "putting kowhai, puarangi, manuka, rata, tarapunga on postage stamps and biscuit tins . . . " (124)

The lack of comfort Malfred gains from her memories of family and friends accentuates her feelings of loneliness and isolation. She then turns to the church for support but gains none from that direction either. The priest is unprepared to step outside the fixed confines of his job in order to help her. The way in which Malfred's pleas for help to representatives of service agencies, the church, law and medicine, go unheeded, also adds to her sense of alienation from society. The language of Malfred's telephone conversation with the imaginary Father Cawston is a mixture of the literal and metaphorical, as seen when she talks of the pohutukawa:

I look forward to seeing them, I have heard that in a good year when they are in bloom along the coast the island has the appearance of being ringed with fire. Hell is **your** comparison. Both sea and fire may be necessary barriers, protection for the derelict souls." (145)

Malfred's telephone conversation with the doctor further reveals the psychological trauma she is suffering. The people in the old photographs left by the deceased owner of the bach take on the likenesses of Malfred's father and Wilfred. We identify Wilfred because the reference to the "mildew" (150) reminds us of the seduction scene in the fernhouse. Malfred tries to convince herself with lies that she is not nervous. As she describes her perceptions of Karemoana on the telephone, her language darts from her honest perception of the island, "Karemoana is a derelict, dead island, the 'Skid Row' of the South Pacific", to illusion, "it has huge, brilliant flowers growing not on stalks but as branches" (152).

Silence takes over once more and as a result Malfred's feelings of depression worsen. The knocking had, at least, reassured her of the presence of someone else and the sound of her own voice had become a comforting noise but now silence aggravates her sense of vulnerability. She strongly identifies with the previous owner of the bach (157) whose mysterious death prefigures a similar ending for Malfred. The distinctions between them blur and the novel seems to turn

back on itself with an intermeshing of past and present. Malfred describes the present silence as "tyrannical" (160) as it terrifies her as much as the knocking had done. The silence heightens her sensitivity to all the previously unnoticed noises of nature and her world resembles that of a science fiction novel where humans have been conquered by the insect world (163). The sudden thud of the moth against the window pane followed by its entrance into her room yet again points to the stone episode at the end of the novel. Even the rain begins to splash inside and Malfred's protective devices against invasion continue to dwindle.

Malfred imagines the language that would be used in a police report on her ordeal. It would be officialese, a false jargon-laden language that would evade the truth of her night of panic. However, she can neither dismiss language nor deny its power in her life. She attempts to comfort herself by anticipating the contrast of a pleasant morning. She contemplates answering an examination question on the past night and we observe progress in the development of her imagination as she seeks to use "the earliest most vivid kind of writing that included the shadows of things seen" (166). She had previously taught her class to shade as though it were a separate entity. She now perceives light and dark to be an integral part of life. When morning comes and "all is well" she resolves to be a "criminal of vision" (167); a promoter of idiosyncratic rather than conventional vision.

Malfred's language in The Stone, the third section of the novel, arises from the dream-world with her "New View unfolding without hindrance, an island canvas that tries to make some patterns of her life" (175). She feels insignificant and anonymous and the visions of her friends and family add little meaning to her life. Malfred seeks to discover the "essence" of life in general and the essence of her own life in particular, "the pebble-core and simplicity of it" (177). She wants her "New View" to contain her own essence. She is now at the point where she can articulate the fundamental questions of life, "Who am I, then? Where do I creep . . .?" (178) For the first time in her life, Malfred acknowledges her need for help, "Save Me, Help,Help!" (178) However, unlike the past, when she has been "eaves-dropped for fifty-three years", there is now no-one to listen to her (178).

The period of confused thought passes, and through dream language she enters the "room two inches behind the eyes" to evaluate lucidly what she wishes to be saved from. She acknowledges that she is undergoing a "state of siege" and tries to identify her besieger. As an artist, she dreams in pictures and the scene she now depicts reflects her state of consciousness. It is a picture that gives her a sense of safety and contentment because it is of a windowless room with all its boundaries intact. The square patterned floor is reminiscent of a scene from the past: the squares Malfred envisaged on the ferry trip north. Squares have solid defined

shapes and she feels safe and secure sitting in one of them. She sees herself divided between two eras: the era of the vibrant, golden haired twenty-eight year old at the outbreak of war, and the era of the fifty-three year old "old fossil" that her school children called her (182).

There is something wrong with the room that causes Malfred great agitation. The solid boundaries that give her such security are breaking down and even the male/female distinctions blur as she notes that some of her aunts have moustaches. Malfred suddenly identifies the problem. There are no shadows in her room. Shadows signify fixed outlines, something that Malfred has relied so heavily upon in the past, and now she faces the vulnerability of a shadowless world. This realisation marks a crucial stage in Malfred's pilgrimage because it is accompanied by a similar trauma to the one which accompanies the ending. The sequence of time seems to break down further and we suspect that, on reflection, this moment telescopes into the denouement as the sudden blow that strikes Malfred (182) seems to merge with the stone flung through the window. The words, "Help, Help," (183) are identical to the words written on the newspaper wrapped around the stone.

The room is without light yet she discovers that she can see as well as in the daylight. The allegorical tale of Light trying to get into Malfred's room (183) implies that Malfred does not need external Light to come into her life but rather

that she has sufficient internal light with which to see her "New View". In the past she had relied upon the entrance of external Light to create its shadows for her to be obsessed by, but now she knows that she must "face [her] New View of the world without its help" (185). The imagery of the cavity of the dream-room is the same imagery used of the gap that Malfred's mother's death leaves in her life, a space that it is necessary for Malfred to fill herself.

All the family members that enter her dream-room now seem to have blurred outlines without the clear definitions from their shadows. Malfred's father enters her "room" and with the added insight of her "New View" she sees other people's view of him contrasted with her own view. In her "room" he is ghostly and insubstantial, compared with the man considered a pillar of society in Matuatangi. She never knew him as a person, only the "outer artificial layer and label" (191) that others had given him, therefore he seems to have no essence.

She next sees an apparition of her mother, a mother whom she cannot shut out of her room for any longer. She is drab and nondescript. Earlier Malfred had wondered how her mother had "managed" death and now the answer is clear - there was little to manage because she was always a "dead" person who merely bowed to the wishes of others.

Wilfred appears next but she does not think that it is

her mother or him that besieges her in the storm. Malfred observes that there is nothing to distinguish him as an individual. She cannot remember his "essence" but rather sees him merging with nature and other people. Malfred's memory of their time together in the fernhouse has changed from the reality of the event and they now abandon themselves to each other. Her memory is "clearly illuminated, and those darknesses that are never seen or known or acknowledged in waking life, are clear, too . . ." However, as he speaks to her in the "room" his words to Malfred are not words of love but words that depict the hatred and poverty of war. Malfred cannot cope with such an honest outburst and, equipping herself with her former school-teacher language, she orders him to leave the room (208).

Lucy, followed by Roland, Graham and Fernie now enter her dream room. They have the nondescriptness of her other relations. Lucy represents falseness and materialism as she subscribes to all the passing whims of fashion. Yet, Malfred is no better in her self-righteous judgements of them all and in her inability to accept these visitors for what they are. In this novel we are constantly aware of selves within selves manifested by different registers of language and now Malfred reverts to her language of the past as she reprimands them. The security of this language with its judgemental force behind it makes her feel superior. Her recollections of the non-verbal family communication that automatically assumed she should look after her mother fill her with renewed

resentment. Malfred has relied so heavily upon language to get her through her night of terror that she now begins to wonder whether her mother too had a secret thought life that nourished her during her illness (215). Malfred realises that she can never go back to Matuatangi as there is no home for her there now.

Malfred continues dreaming in the familiar way, seeing herself as a split personality. One half of herself travels across to the Auckland waterfront where she sits and observes her other half, a Matuatangi woman newly arrived. Her view of the new arrival is unflattering and is dominated by the way in which the woman seems to be imprisoned in her clothes. It seems that the woman's clothes have smothered any potential spiritual depth (220). She is so strait-jacketed by her clothing that there is no risk of a break in her "outline". The narrative looping in the dream reassures Malfred that her personal boundaries defy disintegration.

The woman fades away from view and an old vagrant who resembles Wilfred takes her place (222). Malfred easily forgets about the way she had closely identified with the man in his intense gazing. His dirty habits disgust her and once again she feels her former judgemental school-teacher self rise to the fore. The cursing of the earlier Wilfred fits the tongue of this man. Malfred copes better with the sight when she mythologises the old man into a heroic dragon-slayer. This intermingling of dream and myth underscores Malfred's

paradoxical romantic attraction to the hobo/Wilfred and her desire to break with some of the social taboos (e.g. of hygiene) as he does. He contrasts sharply with the Matuatangi Malfred in his disregard for propriety. His action of putting the discarded cigarette butt into his mouth and then later spitting it out violently at Malfred's feet links up with the future climactic events in the novel which also have to do with the inside/outside theme. Malfred's dreams have the added dimension of becoming dreams within dreams as she floats in and out of different selves. She falls asleep on the wharf seat and finds herself back in her white bach on the hill in Karemoana.

She wakes up suddenly at half past two, the "deadly hour", and thoughts of death swamp her mind. She runs to the dream room for consolation and security because at least the people she knows will be there. However, she cannot get in because the room is locked. Malfred is unable to leave the past behind and after a great effort she finally breaks open the door to discover herself in the broom cupboard of her Matuatangi home. The death imagery in Malfred's language intensifies especially with her delight in discovering her beloved fire tongs and fire shovel. We sense an ending close at hand when Malfred has a premonition of her own death and sees the old hobo/Wilfred, filling in the grave with her fire shovel which has changed into a garden shovel. She suffers sudden heart pain and is jerked out of her fantasies by the fierce knocking which starts up again. Malfred has the

desperate desire to live independently of her family and friends. She wants to move beyond shadows to discover the "ring of fire" (239). The knocking does not only signify a desire to get in but also a desire to get out. Malfred has been wanting to break into the "room two inches behind the eyes" but she equally wants to break out of it because the reality she finds there, her memories of Matuatangi and all she needs to turn away from, resolutely and cruelly mocks her.

The stone thrown through the window links up with the other important breakthroughs of the novel. The words, "Help Help", Malfred's own words, are the only ones intelligible to us but that does not mean that the words of the poem are unintelligible to Malfred. The newspaper reminds Malfred of the scrap in the pocket of the old vagrant who represented the breakdown of the bounds of social convention. The language of the poem reveals a further important breakdown of artificial barriers as the familiar looking, yet unintelligible words are composed of words that merge into one another, e.g. "who and done" becomes "whone".[1] These contractions reinforce the recurrent theme of the deception of appearances; we assume that we understand them until closer inspection reveals otherwise. The climactic event of the novel is synonymous with the breakdown of language, a theme Frame deals with in depth in The Carpathians. The words of the poem have the broken outlines Malfred had feared so much in her students' art work because they represented the

defiance of convention. Through these words, Frame underscores the way language itself comprises arbitrary symbols. (Frame is fascinated with the way an insertion of a mere hyphen or the changing of one letter can drastically alter the meaning of words whilst still maintaining an ironic link between them; the word "island" becomes "is-land" or the word "guest" becomes "guess".)

Malfred's reading of the poem has a fatal impact upon her, yet the cold stone grows warm in her hand promising light and warmth. Malfred has burst through the ultimate barrier; the barrier between life and death. Her intense struggle with a dangerous and destructive reality results in a paradoxical victory, as although the "promise of sun" (246) suggests a measure of enlightenment it is synonymous with death. We are left with the final pessimistic message that the only reward for the seeker of "truth", which for Frame is the transcendence and transformation of reality through the power of the imagination, is death. Yet not to embark on the search results in the infinitely worse indictment of "death in life."

NOTES

[1] Interpretations of the ending vary widely. In Leaving the Highway, (Auckland UP: 1990) 41-44, Mark Williams questions Alex Calder's reading of the denouement as expressed in his essay, "The Closure of Sense: Janet Frame, Language, and the Body," Antic 3 (1987): 93-104. Calder argues that the "poem" wrapped around the stone with its Lewis Carroll-like portmanteau words are full of meaning and bring about the "closure of sense." Williams, however, sees the "poem" as Malfred's bizarre interpretation of the newspaper that highlights her "abandonment of sense."

LIVING IN THE MANIOTOTO

In Living in the Maniototo, Frame offers the reader a paradigm for the imaginative use of language, and of the five novels examined in this thesis it offers the most thorough exploration of the theme. It clearly reveals the exclusivity of Frame's "domain" as the majority of characters are reduced to inarticulateness through mental or physical disease and their chances of acquiring salvation are negligible. In the novel, Frame presents her treatise on language usage and its practical application in the imaginative process of writing fiction. This process is the focal point of the novel and proves to be a challenging task for Mavis, the writer/narrator, who constantly encounters pitfalls and distractions that frustrate the completion of her novel.

The plot of Living in the Maniototo, considered as a sequence of events and occurrences, appears to be trivial in comparison with the significant metaphorical level which deals with the creative process of writing fiction. The plot is devoid of the cohesion that would result from an exciting climax and resolution but it provides the important superstructure that supports a complex network of interconnections between people and places. These interconnections powerfully reinforce both the pre-eminence of imaginative language usage for Frame and the significant themes which combine to portray an ambience consistent with

her characteristically pessimistic world-view.

In considering the mass of character interconnections, the reader notes that there are no "normal" characters in the novel; they are all eccentric, from Lewis to Theo. This fact paradoxically makes them all "normal" in Frame's world. In the novel, Frame is concerned with destroying the distinctions between the marginalised and centralised sectors of society, unlike many of her earlier novels, e.g. Owls Do Cry, which portray a permanently split world.[1] The novel reinforces Frame's consuming passion for reconciliation and unity between artificial divisions in society. We observe that even the characters mentioned in passing like Adelaide Garrett, are linked in with the main characters like Mavis. Hence, those marginalised through madness are centralised and there is no distinction between them in terms of normality. The theme of madness is never far from the surface in the novel where seven of the characters, from Lance's brother "who was a bit funny" (51) to the Martin twins with lycanthropy (123), are implicated to varying degrees. Frame closes the gap between the "sane" and the "insane" in drawing parallels between the characters in the novel who suffer from strokes and those who suffer from "madness" (i.e. between the physically ill and the mentally ill), as both categories of people are reduced by the same deprivation of language.

The interpersonal relationships in Living in the Maniototo contribute significantly to the nature of the

novelistic world. There are no vibrant, healthy relationships; they are all strained relationships where inadequate, pathetic people miscommunicate with each other. Mavis and Lewis plod along together in suburbia until his stroke when he is "suddenly, just an old man in a dressing gown wandering around the house and trying to put his hand up young Edith's skirt and even trying to seduce his son" (26). Mavis's second husband, Lance, is locked away in his obsession with debt-collecting and they share no genuine interest in each other's work. Mavis and Brian have a superficial relationship as his accurate, time-orientated mind does not blend with Mavis's imaginative mind. Mrs Tyndall and Mavis have a "gulf" between them, "the one forced into gratitude for nothing, the other self-appointed in the role of benefactor" (83). The Carltons and Prestwicks put on the appearance of being "two happy couples" (165) but Mavis sees beyond the façade, "one may calculate from the number of times each remarks . . . 'We have a perfect marriage,' that all four are oppressed by private unhappiness" (162).

The unhappiness of the characters leads to their escapist dreams of future fulfilment. Zita dreams of a life of taste (162); Doris cannot articulate her dream as she is "unable to compete with those who grasp their dream with such certainty" (162); Roger dreams of his desert and Theo dreams of rescuing the earth from erosion (162,3). It seems as though the whole novel has been built around the idea of dashed hopes which result in death or lasting unfulfilment.

Lewis dreams of sister cities before his death; Lance realises his dream of catching the notorious debt evader, Yorkie, but dies soon after; Tommy follows his dream by "being what he [wants] to be and doing what he [wants] to do" (37) which leads to his erasure; Brian builds his life on humanitarian concerns and dies prematurely; Mrs Tyndall dreams of material success via the radio jackpot and Brother Coleman's Diamond Account Book (84) and dies suddenly from a stroke; the four houseguests have their dreams but they, too, are erased, and Mavis dreams of writing her novel but is unsuccessful in doing so. The only person whose dream seems to be fulfilled is Brother Coleman, the gold-suited glitter evangelist, who successfully dupes the crowds into paying him money for a materialistic miracle.

The novel abounds in insecure characters who seek to bolster their sagging self-esteem by living achievement-orientated lives. Brian works himself into an early grave by humanitarian pursuits yet fails to confront his unhappy childhood, preferring instead to vent his unresolved trauma inappropriately on his nephew, Lonnie. Roger, "the translator of clichés into rules to live by" (156), lives his life according to books and other people's lives. He is a "shadow person" who, without originality, craves for ultimate reality through an experience of self-denial in the desert, yet his greatest achievement in the pathetic outcome of his dream is to create a shadow for a jackhare to take refuge in (177). Theo is "born into

vicariousness" and seeks to achieve his goals through the lives of others (145). He thrives on "rescuing people," especially his child-bride Zita, whom he guards jealously as his private property. He is obsessed with the erosion of the face of the earth but suffers the irony of being "eroded" of the power of language when he suffers a stroke and needs to be rescued by other people.

Frame bestows her characters with the power of language proportional to their sensitivity towards an imaginative vision of life. She explores the depth of their sensitivity through the metaphorical level of the novel with its twin themes of the morality of language usage and the creative process of writing fiction. The prologue of Living in the Maniototo, with its densely textured imagery, introduces the reader to the significance of this metaphorical level.

Language is a powerful force in Mavis's life, a "compelling shorthand" through which she achieves instant identity among strangers. Yet the narrator's universal identity implicates us all, for the power of language derives from our reliance upon it in our daily lives. We cannot escape words, be it in our thoughts or memories.

Language is a set of symbols: a "shorthand", which moves us beyond the textual to the sub-textual depths. From the first words of the novel we are challenged to make a daring exploration of these depths; to move beyond the surface level

of plot (e.g. the two husbands Mavis has buried) to the significance of language usage. The prologue highlights the familiar Frame motif of language as treasure (first encountered in Owls Do Cry) and the novel challenges us to uncover the "treasures of communication" which are "reinforced by myth" (13), just as Violet Pansy Proudlock does.

The narrator's gossipy Alice Thumb traits, "a secret sharer of limited imagining" (28), dominate in the first chapter as she overhears herself speak in the bus queue. Throughout the novel, the author points to the antithesis of this gossipy replication of language. Frame does not reject the writer's useful ability to eavesdrop and gossip, but rather advocates that these common uses of language be taken a stage further. Frame underscores the need to go beyond a mimetic response to life to a poetic response which closely observes the world in order to transcend and transform it through the imaginative use of language.

Language is the conveyor of memory which allows a person to be an "instant traveller, like the dead among the dead and the living" (12). The author reinforces the arbitrary nature of memory because the novel is Mavis's idiosyncratic creation of a past where the "truthful" facts are inconsequential, e.g. Mavis's recollections of her time in Baltimore are admitted to be "changed memories" (77). The different levels of reality that Mavis freely ranges over without any

disjunction between them, e.g. from Mavis's husbands and children to Maui's sister and Lot's wife, present us with an amalgam of myth and history. Thus Frame stresses the way in which language usage does not exist in a vacuum but in a continuum where present usage feeds off the past and myths become reality.

In the riddle on page fourteen, the skin is a metaphor for language. Despite the power of language to name and thus confer identity upon oneself and others, it is also powerless and easily traumatised, "the sun has burned me. I bleed" (14). The novel illustrates the way in which language can "break" through physical and mental disease (e.g. strokes and lycanthropy), yet it can also "mend" and "knit", suggesting creativity. Language has the power to close in and complete like a "garment", yet with the flexibility to "shrink" and "stretch". Language is "a prison you must stay in" because we cannot escape its usage, and the moral overtones of this metaphor are in keeping with a novel that depicts Frame's strict moral code of what constitutes "good" and "bad" language usage.

The third chapter expands further upon the motif of replica, varieties of which saturate the novel. The Garretts' home is "full of likenesses, of replicas, prints of paintings, prints of prints, genuine originals and genuine imitation originals . . . " (17). Their home is a microcosm of the world of replicas in which we live, where everything

is a sign for something else and hence derives value vicariously through what it signifies. An acquiescence to the state of affairs in the novel constitutes life on the lowest level, for Frame. The author issues the calls to "turn" from this world and enter the world of imagination. The novel is both Frame's treatise on language and a practical demonstration of the creative process of writing fiction.

Frame judges the language usage of the characters of the novel on a scale from mechanical replication to creative transformation. The first "character" the reader comes across in Blenheim is the dead poet who haunts the city in the form of the black fantail. Poesis is the epitomy of language usage for Frame and the dead poet is Blenheim's source of pride (22), a paradigm against which we judge the other characters. The theme of life in death is embodied in the black fantail as in Maori mythology the single fantail is the harbinger of death,[2] yet in the novel it symbolises life, that is, the poet as a form of constant inspiration.

Mavis and her first husband, Lewis, have an uninspiring twenty-year marriage that is fuelled by "'utility' conversations - pass me, fetch me, did you hear, have you read, have you seen; as if we were passing in the street" (25). Lewis's language parallels his professional slide from medical student to drain-layer. Due to a stroke, he loses his powers of language discrimination and the power to name. The lack of this "God-given power and poet-power" (211) reduces

him, according to the biblical inference,[3] to the level of beast. The motif of language as a "golden blanket" is introduced in relation to Lewis's loss. He no longer has access to the "wide, rich tapestry of language that could cover the whole earth like a feasting blanket" (26) but rather is left with the charred remains. Frame highlights Lewis's linguistic depravity in his inarticulate frenzy of excitement over mere replication, i.e. the twinning of Berkeley and Blenheim, which absorbs his attention until his death.

Mavis's first trip to Baltimore reconnects her with a past acquaintance, Brian Wilford, who directs a clinic for dyslexia sufferers. As a language therapist he demands close attention and the reader soon detects glaring discrepancies between his theory and practice. He works to bring about the healing of language usage yet speaks a language that is riddled with disease. Brian's workaholism, perfectionism and fetish for watches suggests an imprisonment within the time-frame of an achievement-oriented mould. His use of language merely reflects his psychological insecurities, e.g. his "dreadful doctorese" (92) and patronising language directed at his nephew, Lonnie (101). His conversations with Mavis deteriorate into those of a parent admonishing a child as he becomes swamped with his sense of responsibility towards Lonnie (106).

In Baltimore, Mavis comes into contact with the second

dead poet of the novel. She hears the howls of wolves in the wintry night and links these to the ghost of Edgar Allen Poe who died there. He is the only inspiration to Mavis for the imaginative use of language in a city which offers her copious examples of "bad" language usage.

Mavis leaves Baltimore for Blenheim, and her second marriage to Lance Halleton, the French teacher who handles language mechanically with his "daily distribution of the French language" (11), is as lack-lustre as the first. Lance exchanges his love of language for a love of numbers and a subsequent obsession with debt-collecting. He develops a new commercial language "with its descriptions drawn from the advertising of furniture and appliances" (51). His language reflects the subsuming of the imagination by materialism, "where now 'decramastic tiles' satisfies as 'pale flakes with fingering stealth'" (52). Mavis and Lance have "commentary conversations" as if they were "reporting events to a third party" (67). Lance's use of language is devoid of imagination and is in sharp contrast to what Mavis believes about language, "language in its widest sense is the hawk suspended above eternity . . . only able . . . to hint at what lies beneath it" (43).

Mavis identifies the origins of Lance's obsession with debt as the "hypotenuse longing" (45) and here Frame introduces the geometric metaphor, variations of which permeate the novel. The "hypotenuse longing" is expounded in

Mavis's "verse from the Manifold" (68-73) as the need for language to complete or give shape to the plethora of words which constitute its medium: to be like "skin".

The idea that the creative use of language has bounds is elaborated further in the narrator's language "code", "a prose sentence which touches like a branding iron is good . . . A sentence which stumbles on useless objects instead of on buried treasure is bad . . . " (50). Choosing to live by this code is likened to treading precariously a swing bridge above a "mountain river swirling with fashionably recognised goods and evils that [have] no relation to . . . the English prose paragraph" (50). It involves going against the status quo.

The author sets up a contrast between Conway and Wallstead; between "false" and "true" language where the dead writer is more alive than the living writer. Howard Conway, Mavis's writing teacher, champions the style of the fashion-conscious status quo in his misuse of language and hence is the butt of Frame's satire. He dispenses rules and regulations, thus stifling creative vision, e.g. his categorical response to first person narration is "Never use it" (61). Frame's authorial voice seems least disguised in the numerous didactic passages on the creative use of language, as in the refutation of Conway's style where the narrator gives her opinion on the usage of first-person narration:

> The writer taking on the 'I', takes a straight line

> that can be turned upon itself to become a circle or curved to become a hook or left alone as a prelude to infinity or have its back broken into the hypotenuse, the opposite, the adjacent.(71)

Mavis initially imbibes his teaching but discovers that her writing dwindles to gossip "without a trace of art" (55). She had expected language usage to be "like watching a fire run along a fuse, against time and life, to explode a once-buried seam of meaning along a disused word-face" and recognises Conway's writing to be "imitation" (54). The imagery of fire as a symbol for truth echoes the "ring of fire" in A State of Siege (239) that Mavis wishes to find. Conway subscribes to the "blowaway tradition" of popular romance fiction and constantly urges his students to "pour it all out" (55), insisting that anyone can write a novel. He panders to popular demand rather than seeking to transform it. The motif of the two dead poets symbolises the imaginative vision most valued in the novel. Death is no hindrance to their power to continually influence Mavis as an "angel of the imagination" (31). However, Conway's effect upon her is shortlived for she comes to believe that, " . . . nothing in art is forbidden. By critics and teachers, yes. By the painters, writers, composers, sculptors, no" (68).

The deceased writer Peter Wallstead also inspires the narrator to a greater use of the imagination. He had lived in the Maniototo, an isolated high plain. The literary élite are

as fascinated with the environs from which he wrote as in the works themselves. The Maniototo becomes a symbol for the higher plane of the imagination which rises above the surrounding conformity. Wallstead is true to his imaginative vision and thereby earns the title of "writer", unlike Conway.

Mavis marks the break with Conway's methods in her verse from the " Manifold" (68-73). The "Manifold" symbolises the wealth and variety of literary inheritance available to all who choose to "turn" or rise above a mimetic response to the world to a poetic shaping of experience. This verse contains a catalogue of the common misuses of language: unimaginative language, "I clung to the lowest bough making my only possible statement - scarlet on white"; conformist language, "I square with myself for the satisfaction of others"; commercialisation of language, "have a go at writing . . . and make a fortune"; instant language, "something they can turn into a script/ quick as a wink"; overflow language, "He unloaded all his stored-up drama, which fell apart at birth, lacking the life-dealing want"; "kit-set" language, " . . . those who, trained to write poems/ carry a kit of tales about the prince . . . "; language that destroys beauty, "they chainsaw the avenue of trees, they mow every lawn in sight"; and second-hand language, "those absent are . . . dissected picked over/ for a stray share to put/ on the table's empty page and plate."

When Mavis returns to Baltimore she discovers more about the misuse of language and the way in which it can be used to deceive. She buys a "tear gas pen" as a mild weapon of self-defence only to find that it turns out to be a "tear gas gun" (79). In Baltimore, Mavis spends much time with Mrs Tyndall with whom she communicates in meaningless platitudes (92). This falling short of the truth disturbs Mavis and she feels the need to justify her fundamental faith in the efficacy of language, "I have to cry out here that language is all we have for the delicacy and truth of telling, that words are the sole heroes and heroines of fiction" (92). Mrs Tyndall also has a stroke, and dies speechless. The villainous language of Brother Coleman, Mrs Tyndall's faith-healing hero, illustrates the misuse of language, as religious jargon, to cover up the hidden agenda of materialism (88).

In Berkeley, the four houseguests gush forth their lives, courtesy of the "Great Californian Confession" (154). This verbiage ironically conceals as much as it reveals and we see that Doris also suffers from the "hypotenuse longing", "One day, perhaps, I will write a book to tell my 'complete' story" (138). Mavis seeks to "complete" their stories in the "Great Shaped Confession" and delves beneath the words to explore their true meaning, "What prompts [Roger] to desire the desert/ except the longing for what he has not" (154). Mavis becomes increasingly aware of the arbitrary nature of language. She is fascinated by word associations and by the

way in which slight changes to words can open up a whole new dimension of meaning. As she ponders the topic of guests in her house Mavis recalls an early sewing class at school where she makes a "guest towel" which for many years she mishears as "guess towel". The idea of the mystery surrounding a "guest" causes her to marvel at the way in which meaning is enriched through word associations (133). Similarly, earlier in the novel, when she tells of her first book based on her experiences in a psychiatric hospital, she notes the important difference in meaning a hyphen can bring to a word like "disease", " . . . at that time it was thought a crime, a sin, a sign of disease instead of dis-ease, to be suffering from unhappiness" (27).

One of the house guests, Theo, has a stroke and resorts to communicating non-verbally through sign language, thereby joining the ranks of the many characters in the novel who communicate inarticulately. This theme of the breakdown of language is highlighted further in the connection between Adelaide Garrett and the Martin twins who all suffer from lycanthropy and communicate in barks, whimpers and howls. Madness is a recurring motif of the novel and Frame uses it to break down the false barriers between normality and abnormality. This is clearly evident in the link-up between lycanthropy and the howling wolves associated with Edgar Allen Poe. Hence madness, like poetry, is seen to be a dimension of the imagination. This different scale of values, where creative language usage is monopolised by the poets and

the mad, renders "normality" as profoundly arbitrary.

The three stroke victims, Brian and his dyslexia clinic, and the lycanthropic young people combine to highlight defective language usage and the way in which so many of the characters do not have access to the rudiments of language let alone the creative use of it. Mavis strives towards an imaginative use of language but most of the characters in the novel illustrate the abuse, misuse, breakdown or absence of language. This intensifies the pessimistic world-view of the novel, for if the creative use of language equates with moral value, then so many of the characters are disqualified at the outset.

In considering the theme of the creative process of writing fiction as described in Living in the Maniototo, we find ourselves in a paradoxical position of disadvantage and advantage. The disadvantage stems from an ignorance of the rules that govern this work of fiction. The novel appears to operate according to its own set of rules resulting in an imbalance of power between the writer and the reader where the latter feels disadvantaged, yet at the same time, in a position of rare privilege. Though we usually confront a work of fiction in its completed public form with all the loose ends tied in, in this text we enter a secret chamber and observe the private workings of the imagination.

The novel is a travelogue with the dominant metaphor for

the creative process being that of a journey which has as its ultimate destination the Maniototo, a secret plane of the imagination where creativity flourishes. It is a journey through different stages of sensitivity towards a poetic vision of life. The metaphorical journey is signposted throughout the novel by the verbs introduced in the page of contents that warn the traveller of what to "avoid" or "turn" from and what to "attend" to en route in order to achieve the goal.

As readers, we like to approach a novel with the conventional boundaries between reality and fiction firmly in place. However, Frame challenges our clear-cut distinctions and confronts us with the realities of other worlds we have hardly begun to explore:

> Those creatures and worlds that we know only in sleep and dream and mythology . . . are emerging as usual reality in the new dimension of living and dying. And when the unreal has been accepted and made real, new realities will present themselves, forces which become gentlenesses, gentlenesses which become forces.(39)

Frame's underlying assertion is that the writer of fiction must learn to tap the endlessly rich resources of the imagination which moves effortlessly between the "real" and "fictional" worlds.

Violet Pansy Proudlock, the ventriloquist narrator,

emphasises the purely fictional world of the novel as she feeds words into characters who admit to being dummies (139). She herself admits to being controlled by a higher power, "I found that I . . . was myself a mere talking stick or pocket head in the entertainment arranged by Reality" (158).

The dynamic identity of the narrator prevents us from being able to pin down the point of view. Our inability to be certain of the origin of the words forces us deeper into the fictional world and to an acceptance of the words on their own merit. A ready acceptance of this milieu saves our minds from working overtime in a feeble attempt to separate "reality" from "fiction". After all, the narrator herself admits to the futility of attempting to resolve an irresolvable paradox, " . . . I hoped to get away with my kind of commuting between 'real life' and 'fiction'" (118).

Throughout the novel we sense that the goal of the creative process is a poetic, rather than mimetic, vision of life: a vision that is dominated by the power of the individual imagination. Poesis is the ideal, "attendance upon the world" (58), "two poets dying in the streets of two cities and changing it in untold ways" (30). The novel, however, depicts a struggle towards this goal rather than the attainment of it.

The novel illustrates the way in which creative writing need not be thwarted by external environment. Mavis travels

to the other hemisphere in search of the perfect breeding ground for her novel but it eludes her. She leaves her suburban home base for greener pastures, as Blenheim does not inspire her creativity. Even its name illustrates the misuse of language, for it is inappropriately named after a "famous victory", yet it is saturated with a sense of loss (24). It celebrates the status quo and welcomes language teachers like Howard Conway who nourish the system. Mavis writes a novel and a book of verse in Blenheim but they are "poured out" very swiftly from the "overflow" of her experience, rather than from its depths (27).

Blenheim's dead poet and the Maniototo's Peter Wallstead are examples to Mavis of writers who do not succumb to the sense of loss but use it as a springboard from which to create something new and as such are immortalised and mythologised. The Maniototo is firmly linked to Blenheim with its battle-place names (56) and oppressively rigid approach to language as seen in the teaching of English as a second language to refugees (151). The decisive act of turning from what Blenheim represents is reflected in the "verse from the Manifold" (68-73). In this verse the major prerequisite for a writer is laid down, "No one told him that to write you have to be at the terrible point of loss,/ and stay there, wanting to write, wanting in, not out"/ (72). In Blenheim, Mavis also displays a sense of loss in her emotional detachment from people, surroundings and experiences. This is seen in the way both husbands' deaths are recorded with an ironic humour,

devoid of any human emotion, "He died not long after . . . and left me part of a drain-laying bank account which enabled me to travel" (27). The way Mavis assigns her bereavements to the level of phatic communion reflects her superficial involvement with her world, "I've buried two husbands, you know" (11). Even the traumatic years spent in a psychiatric hospital are recounted without a trace of emotion (27).

Mavis escapes one place of "loss" for the inner-city life of Baltimore only to discover that it suffers from the same universal condition. In Baltimore, Mavis comes up against writer's block in terms of progress on her novel. As in Blenheim, however, the redeeming feature of the violent city is an un-named dead poet from whom she derives much inspiration to progress in other ways, manifested in her assertion of the essentially arbitrary nature of memory and in the exploration of the dream world. The narrator recalls her Baltimore experiences from her home in Stratford, New Zealand, far removed from the scene in time and place, and she validates the human tendency to create one's own conception of the past, "My memories of Baltimore presented themselves, as memories do, changed in shape with new colours and clothes for the occasion" (77). Hence, it is irrelevant to question the "truth" of Mrs Tyndall's life and death as the "truth" is always shaped by the imagination.

We are denied the certainty of knowing whether Tommy was a "real" person or part of the narrator's dream world, as she

recalls her ability to "fashion a dream" from Baltimore (37). However, it is significant that the surreal episode of Tommy's elimination is given the same status as the real and metaphorical levels of reality in the novel as there is no disjunction between it and the surrounding narrative. The motif of the "keys" (30) with which the narrator unlocks the various locks on the outer and inner doors of Brian's home symbolises the unlocking of these other levels of reality. The Tommy episode also illustrates the omnipotent power of the writer to create and destroy a character without due consideration of the effect it may have on the reader, a factor later admitted by the narrator, "I don't believe that I had thought seriously about the responsibility in writing. I thought of it as a take-it-or-leave-it occupation, with words dropped along the way, characters created and cast aside . . . for after all it was 'only fiction', 'only' in the imagination where power is . . . the concern of the one who is imagining" (158).

In Living in the Maniototo, Frame presents us with a delightful smorgasbord of literary genres which mix and complement each other. We have a great deal of variety through which Frame underlines the ways in which the writer may escape enslavement to the conventions of prose narrative and draw from a rich variety of sources. The riddle gives way to the diary form; to poetry; to the parody of poetry ("The Lake Isle of Innisfree", 114); to the fairytale (Theo, gallant knight, rescues young damsel Zita in distress); to

confessional narrative (the "G.C.C."); to dream narrative (the different houses, 222); to religious satire (Brother Coleman); to satire of popular romance fiction (Howard Conway's novelistic style; and the two "happy" Berkeley couples); to detective fiction (why will Brian not answer the phone?); to tales of the supernatural (Tommy's eradication); to the travelogue; to satire of the exotic adventure story (Roger's "adventure" in the desert); and to the mystery story (the Garretts' death and reappearance; the eradication of Soule and the Carltons).

In Berkeley Mavis also experiences the haunting sense of loss for she searches, in vain, for Yeats along the Garretts' bookshelves. In each city the poet is spoken of early in the text and given pride of place, but here there is no dead poet to inspire her, only Grace Loudermilk who is not mentioned again. We sense the development in Mavis's approach to writing for she immediately "turns" from this loss and creates poetry out of it, thus shaping her experiences and fulfilling the "hypotenuse longing". There is no mention of the dead poets in Berkeley as Mavis learns to be her own muse and cultivate her own imagination.

Frame illustrates the difficulties of sticking to the task of writing fiction in her portrayal of Mavis succumbing to the pressures around her in Baltimore and Berkley rather than pursuing her novel. Her change of location within Brian's house symbolises a change in poetic sensitivity as

when she first arrives and hears the howling wolves she sleeps in an upstairs bedroom (28), but soon ensconces herself in "a basement room level with the sewers" (15). Similarly, in Berkley, when Mavis feels that the houseguests are clouding her vision and preventing her from writing her novel, she moves to a downstairs room. Mavis, however, is no pawn in the hands of her guests and we see the omnipotent control of the writer return with a vengeance in her eventual resurrection of the Garretts and her evaporation of the houseguests. Mavis freely indulges in "editing and in some cases embroidering" (138) Doris's story in a petulant pretence at regaining her control, but this is mere rhetoric as she has never lost it.

Mavis is constantly faced with the need to close in and "shape" her experiences as she realises that "writing is based on a carefully planned and controlled use of attention" (117). This is underscored by the contrast between Berkeley, which symbolises the imagination gone wild with its untamed foliage, and the emphasis on shape in the Garretts' house and section (133).

In Living in the Maniototo and in her next novel The Carpathians, Frame develops a new reader-response strategy. Whereas all of her novels call for an alert preparedness to delve beneath the surface in order to explore the sub-textual depths of meaning, in these two novels Frame places greater demands upon the reader. She expects the reader to have a

sharp retentive memory and powers of association and to give simultaneous credence to many different dimensions of reality. She manipulates the reader into forming expectations about characters and events which she subsequently undercuts. These games of subversion reinforce her authorial omnipotence and cast the reader in a subordinate roll where the reading process becomes increasingly uncertain.

The Prologue to Living in the Maniototo initiates the reader into the unsettling world of the novel where the multiple-identitied narrator describes herself as "a nothingness, a shadow, a replica of the imagined, twice removed from the real" (12). In a similar way, the "Note" at the beginning of the The Carpathians, acknowledged by "J.H.B.", bewilders the reader as the full significance of the "author's" identity is hidden until the novel's final paragraph. The narration leads us to believe that the novel's events are a faithful account of Mattina's experiences, whereas they are finally revealed to emerge from John Henry's creative imagination. The way in which Dinny Wheatstone's first person novella merges with Mattina's point of view further confuses the reader and undermines the relationship of trust between the author and the reader.

Living in the Maniototo is a novel that reinforces authorial omnipotence not only in the way Frame "saves" characters according to language usage but also in the creative writing process itself where the author reveals her

liberty to dispense with characters at whim. Alice Thumb's ventriloquist identity alerts us to this omnipotence, whereby the characters are mere mouthpieces through which the manipulative voice of Frame speaks. Many of the characters testify to this, including Alice Thumb herself (158). The ventriloquist is free to fold up the dummy when not in use and then "bring it back to life" at a later time, which is precisely the way Frame handles characters like the Garretts. Frame feeds such life-like language into the mouths of her characters that they become "real" to us; the greater the authorial skill, the greater our deception.

The surreal elements of both novels are another means by which Frame reinforces her omnipotence and cuts the ground from beneath the reader's feet. Tommy's vanishing and the death and reappearance of the Garretts in Living in the Maniototo underscores the way in which Frame moves with ease between different levels of meaning in the novel and challenges the reader to consider the possibility of "new realities" (39). Likewise in The Carpathians, the "presence" in Mattina's room, the "alphabet rain" and the sudden disappearance of the residents of Kowhai Street challenge the reader to reject a purely conventional view of reality.

The reader readily responds to Frame's ironic, wry sense of humour that invigorates the action of the novel. The amusing imagery of the Garretts descending to their grave amid the "steaming lamentations" of "half-sung arias", and of

Roger indulging in the shade of the desert prickly pear awaiting a spiritual revelation, capture the reader's imagination. We catch occasional glimpses of Frame's impish humour as in Lance's "persuasive voice, which . . . could move at a breath from a subjunctive to dative to imperative to copulative mood" (43).

Yet, as we progress through the novel the humour begins to take on disturbing characteristics. A gap gradually widens between the author and the reader and our amusement becomes progressively more restrained as we perceive that Frame's humour deals mainly with the dark side of life. The deaths of Mavis's two husbands are recorded with an ironic humour that underscores the unhappy marriage relationships. Lewis's death is spoken of in the same breath as the material gain Mavis accrues from it (27), and Lance's death is recalled in a similar casual vein, "And for all I know he might have choked on a remembered idiom" (64). In Frame's parody on Yeats's "The Lake Isle of Innisfree", his line, "And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes dropping slow" rendered as "And they shall have some company there in the large community room" (114), is only humorous in so far that it reinforces the "unreasonable sense of loss" (113) in the Garretts' house which is stuffed full of replicas. Likewise, in The Carpathians the humorous portrayal of many of the characters of Kowhai Street, like the Shannons, highlights their inadequacy and folly. It is when we realise this that we feel manipulated by the author, for we discover that we

have been endorsing a highly inappropriate humour based upon death and human degradation; a sardonic humour which reinforces Frame's pessimism. There is no escaping Frame's supremely negative vision of life, despite the humorous touches which appear, superficially, to be sheer fun.

Throughout Living in the Maniototo, the narrator becomes aware that the process of writing fiction can be a painfully slow one. She has rejected Conway's quick-fire method but now confronts the reality of not being able to produce a novel. As readers, we are brought very close to the frustrations, difficulties, diversions and interruptions of fiction writing. We become acutely aware of the discipline and singlemindedness needed in order for the creative writing process to succeed. The sustained irony throughout the book, however, is that the novel which the narrator is constantly diverted from writing is not worth pursuing because it is centred upon the experts' account, "the Watercress family, the known experts on Margaret Rose Hurndell" (108), rather than upon Mavis's own imagination. Hence, it calls for a mimetic rather than poetic response. The novel ends with Mavis still in pursuit of her elusive novel, which highlights the on-going learning process of writing fiction. What we have instead of her novel on Hurndell is Living in the Maniototo, an imaginative presentation of her journey towards a creative vision of life. Frame rewards Mavis with the novel Living in the Maniototo. She joins the ranks of Frame's "elect" because, unlike many of the other characters who

worship materialism, she values an imaginative vision of life above all else.

NOTES

[1] This idea is explored in Anna Rutherford's essay, "Janet Frame's Divided and Distinguished Worlds," World Literature Written in English 14.1 (1975): 51-68.

[2] In Maori Myths and Tribal Legends (Auckland: Longman Paul Ltd., 1964) 66-70, retold by Antony Alpers, the laughter of the single black fantail caused the death of the demi-god Maui by Hine nui te Po (goddess of the underworld). Maui, in the form of a caterpillar, had only just entered her sleeping body in order to destroy her and thus conquer death, when the fantail woke her, thus enabling her to kill Maui first.

[3] In Genesis 2:19-20, Adam's naming of the animals distinguishes him from them and gives him power over them.

THE CARPATHIANS

In The Carpathians, Frame celebrates memory as the powerful vehicle for authentic imaginative language. There is clear evidence of Frame's moral strategy in this novel, as with the other novels examined in this thesis. Frame saves Mattina Brecon from obliteration because she alone of the residents of Kowhai Street reveres the memory. As collector and preserver of the land memory of Puamahara, Mattina is the moral standard against which we measure the other characters in the novel. The residents of Kowhai Street practise the chronic neglect of memory and therefore suffer the cataclysmic annihilation of first their language and then themselves. Through her sensitive valuing of memory as a priceless treasure, Mattina escapes this death and acquires the status of Frame's "elect" along with other characters in Frame's canon like Daphne Withers, Thora Pattern, Zoe Bryce, Vera Glace, Malfred Signal and Mavis Halleton.

Frame's handling of this theme, however, is paradoxical as the value attributed to memory is progressively subverted in the novel. The novel's layered structure is revealed piecemeal with the ultimate revelation being that the novel is a son's imaginative creation of his mother's memory, a mother who dies when he is seven years old and whom he never knows. The subversion is absolute as the revelation occurs in

the final paragraph of the novel. John Henry Brecon, the writer/narrator, asserts his authorship in the introductory and concluding notes but the full significance of his identity is not revealed until the denouement. From the outset of the novel, we are led to believe that the novel relates Mattina's memoirs and through them demonstrates the redemptive value of memory, but these assumptions are systematically overturned. In the end, memory is revealed as arbitrary and it is the imaginative use of memory that remains of sole value.

The novel begins with the reader's comparison of Frame's acknowledgements with J.H.B's note. The placement of the latter before the commencement of pagination invites the assumption that it is further factual preamble before the fiction begins. The signature's indication to the contrary is the first of many unsettling features in a novel that systematically undercuts the reader's expectations.

The note at the beginning of The Carpathians informs us that the "characters" of the novel are "memory" and "point of view." These "characters" are greatly influenced by the discovery of the "Gravity Star" which casts the novel into a perpetual state of flux. The point of view is "removed, overturned" (7) and nothing is allowed to settle into a comfortable predictability. The Gravity Star subverts perspective; it brings about " . . . the prospect of the sudden annihilation of the usual perception of distance and

closeness, the bursting of the iron bands that once made rigid the container of knowledge . . . " (14). Distance and closeness become interchangeable. This concept is reflected in the behaviour of the residents of Kowhai Street who, though neighbours, freely acknowledge their estrangement from one another. They reflect the unsettled milieu of the novel as they are all misfits in their home environments; they are either about to leave, newly arrived, living in the past, or ostracised through disability, eccentricity or foreignness. The reading process is also affected by the Gravity Star as the reader's point of view remains in a state of flux.

The legend of the "Memory Flower" further unsettles the novel. The legend describes a young woman's search for and collection of the memory of the land. She releases it to the people when she eats the ripe fruit from a tree growing in the bush. The legend represents the destruction of the boundaries of time, and past, present and future merge, "Near and far, then and now, here and there, the homely words of the language of space and time appear useless, heaps of rubble" (14). The cosmic implications of the discovery of the Gravity Star are borne out locally through the legend of the Memory Flower. Their combined effect complicates the possibility of the novel's containing "the longing for the 'unchangeable certainty of truth'" (14). The urgent tone of the novel is apparent in the opening pages where the future of language is deemed at risk, ". . . and let these small words remain faithful to me in the brief time that may be

left for all the old written and spoken languages." (17)

Mattina Brecon represents the woman of the legend. Her obsession with "the power of distance of time as well as of space" (19) and its influence upon one's point of view leads her to venture abroad. Her captivation by the legend of the Memory Flower in a travel brochure causes her to leave New York and her shaky marriage, for Puamahara where she determines to live for two months and collect the memory of the land.

As Mattina, the foreigner, meets the residents of Kowhai Street she discovers herself to be a stranger among strangers; "Perhaps strangers never became at home in Kowhai Street?" (39) They all live isolated lives and their introductions attest to their estrangement, as with Dorothy Townsend; "We were strangers too . . . Perhaps we'll always be strangers" (22). The "stranger" motif surfaces frequently throughout the novel and dispels the cliché of community solidarity presupposed in small-town suburbia. They are estranged within their own families as well, as with Connie Grant who feels isolated in her son's home (92). The estrangement of the residents of Puamahara is more stereotypical of the New Yorkers Mattina has left behind. Mattina's daydreams erode distance and depict the influence of the Gravity Star upon her, "A strange land indeed, she thought, not knowing whether she referred to New Zealand or the United States of America, to Puamahara or to New York

City" (38). The brutal murder case Mattina immediately encounters forges further links between the two places.

The residents of Kowhai Street share a tenuous hold on their points of view which weakens their power over language. Dorothy Townsend questions the validity of her point of view; "And is this me, my point of view?" (20) Before her murder, the terminally ill Madge McMurtrie exemplifies the precarious hold on point of view. At first she experiences "the completeness of point of view, of self" (28) but when her relatives visit, as vultures encircling a dying carcass, she finds her point of view threatened. The language used to express her point of view stems from another age and reinforces her estrangement from her immediate family. Madge feels "everything flowing from her, from the town, from the land" (32) and her greatest grief is over the lost words; "the keepsakes, paddocks, creeks, deathbeds" (33). Through language, the narrator seeks to counteract the corporate memory loss of the incident and its survival as a puny police record (34). In the novel, both aspects of memory, remembrance and oblivion, are held in tension. Mattina remembers her affair with Big John Henry as the result of "chance memory or fancy that thrives in foreign soil, pushing up through supposedly sealed areas of the past" (35).

Mattina proposes to research the "land memory" (26) but the people supposedly closest to the possession of this memory in Puamahara, the Hanueres, are in the process of

discovering their Maori roots and are of little assistance to her. Mattina brings an urgency to her work because of the growing realisation of her own mortality. She is aware of an insidious illness invading her body from which there is no escape (36). She knows she cannot continue to blame the New York pollution nor expect to be free from the pain in "pure" New Zealand. The erosion of distance ensures that Mattina carries her problem with her. Throughout the novel, she re-evaluates her motivation for overseas travel and now suspects that her desire to absorb rapidly the lives of others reflects her increasing certainty of her own frailty (70). Mattina's fears for her own life accumulate in the novel and she later ponders whether her visit to New Zealand may have been motivated by sheer panic rather than by a noble cause (78). On another occasion, she realises that she suffers the common escapist tendencies of wanting to solve the problems of "elsewhere" rather than face up to the problems on her own back doorstep (89).

The theme of death is closely intertwined with the theme of memory. Hercus Millow speaks of Puamahara as a place where people come to die and as a repository of memories but also as a place where memories are threatened; "No doubt there's a concentration of memories in Puamahara; the fear of their loss, too, of withering and going out of shape" (39).

Frame satirises the suburbia which Mattina encounters in Puamahara, " . . . the way all lived, as animals, within

their territories . . . sometimes colliding like stars or bees" (44). However, the satire is gentle and less scathing than in the early novels because there is no fixed dichotomy between Mattina's world and the world of Kowhai Street, as there was in the cases of Daphne or Istina.[1]

The residents of Kowhai Street are quick to offer Mattina information about themselves. Hercus Millow gives her a thumbnail sketch of the neighbours but Mattina is more attuned to the subtle nuances of his language when he questions whether Madge's murder was a "good turn":

> Mattina felt a stab of anger against words that could be so arranged to seduce the speaker, the writer, the listener, the reader, into believing that a truth had been created or discovered; against the magnetic power that held the words together so that few dared separate them or examine them, but used them, again and again. (40)

Memory is not unconditionally venerated in the novel and Hercus Millow reinforces the way in which clinging to memories inhibits relevant living in the present. The distant past and memories of the war are far more alive to him than the recent past. Memory is a snug cocoon that encapsulates him in a time warp, and escapism is his only source of comfort in old age.

Mattina soon encounters the eccentric Dinny Wheatstone. Although she has lived in Kowhai Street for twenty years, she

introduces herself as a stranger (42). She describes herself as an "Official Imposter":[2]

> It's when you're so anxious to determine your level of ability . . . that you simplify your search for your own truth by adopting the sincere belief that you are an imposter, your accomplishments are nothing, after all - either you dreamt them, others invented them, or you've deceived yourself. (43)

Dinny dismisses Mattina's argument that everybody is an impostor of a kind by declaring that in the case of a "real" impostor the core of being never develops and one exists by "marauding among other people's points of view" (44). She appears crazy to Mattina, with her assertions of gathering knowledge from the air or from her "uncluttered being" (44). The impostor motif refers to the writer/narrator of the novel who creates Mattina's identity. Dinny may be the overt "Official Imposter" of the novella but John Henry Brecon is the secret impostor of the entire novel as he has seized all points of view and has deceived us into believing that much of the novel depicts Mattina's point of view.

The demarcation between fact and fiction in the novel is blurred and this theme gains momentum in the build-up to the disastrous climax. The Shannons crave to know from Mattina what the United States are "really" like but Mattina does not know because she has spent a lifetime searching for "reality" (48).

The theme of death weaves its way throughout the novel. The murder of Madge coincides with Mattina'a arrival and she overhears people say, "When murder like that happens in a place like Puamahara, that's the end" (48). She senses an inherent desperation in "lemon-and-rose and sheep-scented Puamahara" and wonders whether she will be the person to sound the alarm,"Help, help, help!" (48)

The second and largest section of the novel purports to be Dinny Wheatstone's novella which she gives to Mattina to read. However, we are constantly alerted to its authorial deception. Most of the material defies credibility as Dinny produces the detailed account of Mattina's life prior to meeting her. However, as Dinny is concerned to produce "the truth of disbelief" (51), such an objection is vacuous. She speaks of the "inevitable deceit of language" but equally of the "recognition of the hinterland of truth" within it (51).

Mattina rapidly meets all of her neighbours in Kowhai Street. Ed Shannon is a man whose outward composure fails to mask his desperate fear of failure. Although his conscious language is "fully manufactured in precast phrases and sentences", his aggressive ambition and consuming fears relating to every aspect of his life lead him to "cry out at night in his sleep" (53). His unsettled wife, Renée, despises living in the "dump" of Puamahara and pines for Auckland city life. Frame's satire of computer fanaticism is evident in the pride of place reserved for this most revered family

"member." The Shannon's computer dominates the living room and the lives of father and son. Ed triumphs by flying in "Reality Mode" where he has to cope with all the variables of life. His concept of "reality" is to travel to the United States or to fly in "Reality Mode." The computer is a "drug" that allays Ed's fears of the real world. His son, Peter, shows up his parents' confusion over "reality" when they deem the computer flight game "real" but not the murder game; "Then how can you tell which game's real and which isn't?" (62) Later in the novel, riding on the enthusiasm of their forthcoming move up north, Ed firmly establishes his sense of reality and declares that "Reality Mode" is "more real than real" (110). Ed's confusion over reality is reflected in his refusal to accept Madge's murder as "real."

Through Madge's "mentally disturbed" murderer, we are introduced to the theme of madness at the beginning of the novel. The theme resurfaces in Decima James, the fifteen year old autistic daughter of Joseph and Gloria who resides in the Manuka home on the edge of town, and again in Riki, the teacher of flax-craft on the marae who had spent thirty years in a psychiatric hospital. For Gloria James, her daughter's most devastating characteristic is her aphasia. Gloria equates speech with being "known" by oneself and others (73); therefore, without speech, Decima is "unknown". Yet Gloria's concept of this knowledge is superficial because her parting words to Mattina after her first visit are, "We're so pleased to <u>know</u> you" (74). Mattina is also obsessed with the

importance of "knowing" and all her travel abroad has been motivated by this desire. However, she now realises that the aim of her travels has not been merely to collect information about people but to collect the "truth" about them (75). She seeks to gain this from her encounter with the Memory Flower of Puamahara.

Mattina has had strong expectations of finding evidence of the Memory Flower in Puamahara, the place where "the history of the land was discovered and recorded" (60). She has expected to find " . . . the land memory growing in the air" (60) and Puamahara to be the place "for pilgrims . . . to be healed of their separation from the Memory Flower" (61). Instead she finds people dislocated from the roots of their land memory, with people like Renée living mentally in Auckland and Ed living in a world of illusion. Mattina equates memory with "treasure" (61) just as Daphne, in Owls Do Cry, equates imaginative language with "treasure".

Hercus Millow's memory is rooted in his prisoner-of-war camp rather than in the memory of the land of Puamahara. The motif of the effects of the Gravity Star is evident in Hercus' reminiscing on their discussions as prisoners-of-war. In their talk about distance, the scholar alerts them to the possibility of having the Carpathian mountains in their gardens (66). The title encompasses the combined effects of the Gravity Star and Memory Flower in their erosion of space and time. The Carpathians represent the wild, fertile region

in which the land memory needs to be rooted.

The tenuous hold of the residents of Puamahara on the land memory alerts Mattina to the fragility of memory, and in response she impulsively sketches "The Death of the Penultimate Madge" (76). The sketch is an imaginative portrayal of Madge's death which reinforces the novel's theme of the paradoxical nature of memory as both arbitrary and "true". Naming the sketch empowers Mattina and she feels that she is able to retain her increasingly threatened point of view. However, she harbours unsettling fears of "a suddenly unlabelled world with everything she had ever known by name, by word, vanishing, all identity lost, yet remaining in place as an overwhelming unknown power" (76-7).

Mattina senses time slipping away from her and she frantically begins to cram notebooks and tapes with all the sights, smells and sounds of Kowhai Street. As she does so, she feels herself reaching beyond the superficial stratum to a region of depth yet nearness, "like an animal of long ago and far away breathing near her in the dark" (79). Mattina soon discovers this "presence" to be a reality in her bedroom and, although she cannot see it, it seems to occupy a permanent space. She questions her sanity but also wonders whether she has retrieved a sample of the distant past.

Mattina discovers that her "collection" of facts about each family is not as tidy as she had expected it to be and

the despair of people like Connie Grant disturbs her. She thought she would "extract gold from each house and return to New York with a purseful of people whom [she] knew because she had mined their personal treasure . . . but that [was] not so" (93). Although the residents of Puamahara have the outward trappings of suburbia and are the same as people living anywhere in the world, Mattina senses that "their anchorage is so slight that one morning the street and the town may wake to find all is adrift in the space of anywhere" (93). She knows that she and people like Connie Grant have not been accepted into the society of Kowhai Street and she feels depressed with the possibility that her journey may have been in vain. Yet she knows, too, that the society of Kowhai Street comprises a "street full of strangers with empty baskets of love" (93) where no-one really belongs. Mattina fears that her visit to Puamahara may leave her with no more than superficial tourist impressions of the place; "They were so kind to me" (94). Dinny Wheatstone's "point of view" is that Mattina has treated the residents of Kowhai Street as animals in a zoo; she has collected information about them but she has remained unable to "sense or capture the human force that feeds the Memory Flower" (95).

The themes of estrangement and death are accentuated further when Mattina discovers George Coker's death two days after the event and then reads in the obituary of all his relatives who had spurned him in life. The speed with which George's estate is auctioned off startles Mattina but

nevertheless she, too, is swept away by the materialistic hunger and purchases his candlewick bedspreads. As she walks through the empty house with the Shannons, their blithe conversation centres solely on material possessions without mention of George Coker. However, the concentration of negative language portends doom: "she'd noticed the intense blackness outside as the store of darkness from George Coker's unlit house surged into the total night; the breathing presence in the bedroom added a density of time to the darkness" (100). Mattina begins to sense the dwindling of her substance and that of her environment. As with Malfred Signal, her room becomes a microcosm of the world. She now defines the presence in her room as two-dimensional which might indicate "a levelling of the present, the beginning of the reduction of the room, Mattina, the house, the street and its people, perhaps Puamahara . . . with their present image of themselves an illusion only" (101). Mattina suspects this to be the effect of the Gravity Star which has broken the boundary between distance and nearness, "thus overturning all thought" and giving birth to a "new language from a new way of thought" (101).

The imagery of the primeval swamp generating a new language, which we find in Scented Gardens for the Blind and A State of Siege, recurs in this novel:

> A world plunged into a swamp of absurdity, contradiction, when the dark shapes of various alphabets reached down their isolated forms, their

> hooks and arms and the cups and crosses and rods, to rescue the users of language who would then make the rescuers once again whole, meaningful, new. (101)

However, Mattina also cynically questions whether her "discovery" is not merely the belief that human society is still the same and always will be. Mattina's confused thoughts range from cynicism to hope. She justifies her lifelong support of the arts with the thought that if humankind has become two-dimensional, the role of the artist will be even more essential to "clothe the naked reality, restore the dimensions destroyed by the extraordinary events and discoveries within an ordinary town and country" (104). The consoling thought leads to Mattina's arrival at a sense of muted self-satisfaction which coincides with the welcome news from home that Jake's thirty-year novel in the making has reached completion, or so we are led to believe.

In Mattina's last few days she has an obsession to "know" and perhaps help Decima James, "Perhaps I, I alone, have some means, magical, intuitive, of helping the rare species . . ." (105). Decima's language of cries and chortles is not intelligible to others and Gloria speaks of her as being "new" because "nobody knows her" (106). Decima lives in her own "country" which could be as distant as the Carpathians or right next door. Mattina links her to the Gravity Star and suggests that she could be simultaneously distant and near. Decima embodies the themes of the novel

which reinforces Frame's tendency to centralise the marginalised sectors of society in her novels. Through her private language and "newness", Decima represents the region, in Frame's work, that holds the potential for a whole new language. We link her with Vera at the end of Scented Gardens for the Blind who eventually speaks a similar language, and with the language wrapped around the stone in A State of Siege. The significance of this new language is paradoxically sardonic and faintly optimistic and remains an enigma in Frame's work. The concept of a new language appears to be wholly pessimistic in that it comes out as an unintelligible assortment of primeval sounds and yet, analogous to infant verbalisation, it could also tentatively foreshadow meaningful communication.

Mattina's visit to the orchard of the Memory Flower on the edge of town develops into a spiritual experience. Whereas Mattina has always aligned herself with the creativity of other artists, she now has the unique sense "of being herself a creation united with the source of the Memory Flower" (114). This feeling leads to a sense of peaceful equilibrium:

> The orchards, the fountains of Ancient Springtime, the Memory Flower, had merged to banish the painful opposites and contradictions of everyday life . . . lost became found, death became life, all the anguished opposites reverted to their partner in peace yet did not vanish: one united with the

other; each two were lost and found. (114)

Mattina is attune to the significance of the Memory Flower and it has deeply affected her life but she believes that Puamahara has failed the Memory Flower. The citizens are uninterested in the retrieval of the land memory, channelling their energies instead into present-day materialistic pursuits.

At this point, Mattina's reading of Dinny's typescript comes to an end and it leaves her feeling caught up in a whirlwind, without her bearings in time and space. The worlds of the novella and of Mattina merge in her awareness of the breathing presence in her room, "an ancient distant presence that was new and close by, affirming the world of the Gravity Star" (115).

The unsettling after-effects of Mattina's encounter with Dinny's novella do not diminish immediately. While reading it, she had felt alarmed at her dwindling two-dimensional existence. However, as she believes in the "truth" of the Gravity Star, she must learn to accept the loss of logical thought and language and its replacement with brand new ideas and language. This disintegration of known language will accompany the destruction of people. She anticipates total change; a cataclysm that will strike Puamahara, as the home of the Memory Flower, and then spread out and destroy language everywhere, "leaving the world littered with the ashes of words, of letters . . . and because the human mind

would have reached a new stage in its thinking, no fertilising thought would fall on the ashes to resurrect each word and phrase and letter into a new blossom in the new season" (119).

Mattina amalgamates her Puamahara experiences into her memory "as a form of truth composed of the real and the unreal" (121) as Dinny had done in her writing. Contrary to Dinny's "point of view" in her Wheatstone Imposter, Mattina believes that the residents of Kowhai Street accept and trust her, and that they are now "close" (122). When Mattina visits Dinny to return the typescript, she experiences the awkwardness of knowing that Dinny has "seized" her point of view and "knows" her. Dinny knows about Mattina's mysterious illness even though Mattina has not informed her of it. Words become superfluous as Dinny knows them before they are spoken. Mattina wonders "if she were not being absorbed into the madness of another person, sharing it as a folie à deux" (123). Dinny counters her fears, "It's a world without words until we have suffered or experienced the transition, the adjustment both to new thought and new language" (123).

The awaited cataclysm strikes that night and Mattina is woken by the wild screams of the Kowhai Street residents. She senses suddenly the disappearance of the breathing presence in her room which has left behind, "a ragged spear of abandoned light . . . the vanished star?" (125) The presence in her room has been a brooding physical manifestation of the

amalgamation of memory and the Gravity Star. She has believed in and been influenced by its presence, in contrast to the residents of Kowhai Street who have either taken for granted or denied the significance of the Memory Flower. Mattina wonders whether the Gravity Star has now "seized Kowhai Street . . . to begin its work of transforming being, thought, language?" (125) On closer observation outside, Mattina notes that the cries of the people standing outside their houses are unintelligible, "the sounds were primitive, like the first cries of those who had never known or spoken words . . . yet within and beyond the chorus . . . there came a hint, an inkling of order . . . a new music" (126). Mattina feels transported back to an "Ancient Springtime" (126), a positive image that implies new growth.

However, the horror remains and the terrified residents, smeared with a substance resembling acid rain, continue to scream like terrified animals. As readers, we are caught up in the realistic portrayal of this apocalyptic episode. Distance is abolished and Mattina finds herself staring straight into Hercus Millow's face even though he is some distance away. She observes that the "midnight rain" takes the form of "the 'old' punctuation and language - apostrophes, notes of music, letters of the alphabets of all languages" (127). Mattina's attempts to converse with Hercus reveal the displacement of his language by primeval utterings and he is unable to understand Mattina's language (128). Mattina sees the people of Kowhai Street experiencing "the

disaster of unbeing" and they have become "unintelligible creatures with all the spoken and written language of the world fallen as rain about them" (129). The "rain" deposits a small scab on Mattina's hand which crumbles off into minute letters of numerous languages. She wonders whether the disaster signals the inauguration of a modern myth, the absorption of the knowledge of the Gravity Star, from which Puamahara could benefit in the future (130).

Mattina now views her journey to Puamahara in a new light which accords with the principles of the Gravity Star. Through the people of Kowhai Street, she has achieved "closeness through distance" with Jake in New York and memories of their life together flood her mind and transport her into a vivid past (132). These memories give her a momentarily secure anchor in life at a time when her world is spinning out of control. She believes that each of her journeys abroad has not only been in response to wanting to "know", and therefore "possess" people of other lands (124), but that each has also been an escape from the daily pressures of facing Jake, whose thirty-year novel in the making has transformed him into the embodiment of failure. When she returns from her six months in Nova Scotia, she feels that the people there have "linked her and Jake in a new kind of loving" (138). The next excursion to her newly purchased Bahaman island, Cloud Cay, follows another serious marital rift and, once again, on return she experiences a renewed passion for Jake. However, when she risks carrying

her problems with her, and the family and friends visit Cloud Cay for Christmas, reality sets in. Her previous romantic attachments disintegrate and the "idyllic" island becomes a battle ground for bitter feuding (145).

After lengthy reminiscing, Mattina returns to her present situation in Kowhai Street and observes the dead from each house being carried out in stretchers to be transported away in vans. She wonders whether the stretcher bearers had put them to death, "to advance a process of change: a people without a language is a lost people, a burden on the state" (148). Mattina discovers herself to be the sole survivor of Kowhai Street which is now up for sale. The rest of Puamahara is blithely oblivious to the catastrophe of Kowhai Street and life continues as if nothing had occurred, thus further reinforcing the motif of estrangement. Mattina attributes her survival to the power of memory which has facilitated her timely psychological escape from the death zone of Kowhai Street to New York. Memory has been her salvation and she affirms that "while races and worlds may die, if they are to change, to resurrect as new, they must remain within the Memory Flower" (151). Her hope in the possibility that someone might "use the persistence of memory to uncover the story and fictionally rebuild the individual residents of the street" (151) prefigures the surprising denouement where we discover this hope to be fulfilled in her son.

In order to quicken her own memory and as part of

Mattina's "possession" of foreign people she has invested in their land. Before her departure for New York, therefore, she negotiates the purchase of Kowhai Sreet. She inspects the properties with Albion Cook, the real estate agent, who unsuccessfully attempts to silence his fear with the soothing patter of real estate jargon:

> He was silent and then said suddenly, 'God help us, God help us.' He then began to talk the language of real estate. He described each house, its age, the fifties and sixties, post-war solid building . . . (154)

He is typical of the residents of Puamahara with his absorption in his own business affairs and his cold detachment from the disaster. Frame caricatures him in his unimaginative language that merely reflects the status quo, "He pointed to other trees, diagnosing them and, like a dentist, urging their removal" (154).

Ironically, Mattina fails to perceive her own method of detaching herself from her personal disasters. She has habitually used travel abroad to escape from the lost language of Jake's phantom novel. However, it all catches up with her and in Puamahara she confronts the very essence of lost language. She cannot escape from it and in returning home Mattina's expectations, and our own, are subverted when she re-encounters Jake's lost language. The novel she believed Jake had completed was, in fact, written by her son, John Henry. Despite his passion for language, Jake is unable

to marshall the words into a second novel and suffers the same loss of language as the residents of Puamahara. The male blackbird of New Zealand, "the unsatisfactory provider" (163) and butt of his jokes symbolises himself because he is unable to provide Mattina with his novel and the creative energy she vicariously thrives on.

She can escape neither the loss of language nor the loss of life, as on her return she is given the prognosis of less than a year to live. However, despite her terminally ill body, her memory remains healthy and she relates to Jake many details of her stay in Puamahara. She passes on to Jake her profound reverence for memory; "She had talked of memory . . . as . . . a passionately retained deliberate focus on all creatures and their worlds to ensure their survival" (172). However, she does not relate everything, as words with which to describe or explain the cataclysm fail her. Mattina urges Jake and John Henry to visit Puamahara and find out for themselves. John Henry is sensitively attuned to the significance of the Memory Flower and knows that her frequent reference to it in her final days is no mere delirium.

After Mattina's death, Jake fulfills her last wish and visits Puamahara. Initially, he encounters little worth remembering. Albion Cook revolts Jake with his "word-working face that seemed to be moving without inner substance, like a glove puppet with no hand inside it" (181). Jake is shocked to find Kowhai Street uninhabited, and Albion Cook fails to

convince him of the residents' mass migration to other parts of the country. When Jake questions Connie Grant, she readily recounts a very different story of the wholescale death and removal of the residents. Albion Cook unsuccessfully attempts to silence her and tries to drag Jake away from the "crazy" old woman. Connie Grant indicts Albion Cook with the knowledge of her relatives to whom he had sold their house. She claims to be the only person, besides Mattina, who is willing to remember their plight. Connie's outcry enables Jake to identify more closely with Puamahara. Jake had dismissed Mattina's murmurings of the cataclysm as delirium but he now believes her words. Mattina had "linked her life with Kowhai Street and Puamahara, and therefore Jake felt that his own life and memory had also become part of the property of Puamahara, while Puamahara became his life-property and memory-property" (184-5). With fresh enthusiasm, he determines to visit Decima James and the orchard of the Memory Flower.

Jake's visit to the Manuka Home counters his expectations. The children incorporate him into their boisterous play and he becomes their friend immediately. The children's exuberant acceptance of him counters the estrangement motif of the novel. Through these outcasts of society banished to the edge of town, Frame reinforces a connecting theme of all her work: the arbitrariness of "normality." She depicts these children as far more vital and authentic than the residents of Puamahara, the "normal"

members of society. Jake is astonished at their apathy towards the disaster of Kowhai Street. They are unfazed by the sudden disappearance of the residents of an entire street and have obliterated their memories of the event. They have, consequently, devalued memory and its facilitator, language.

Jake is a crucial "external" commentator in the novel. To him, language is of greatest value; "Words were his only valued property" (194). He does not need real estate to bolster his memory as he now possesses all that he needs; "the story of the Memory Flower; and Mattina's news of the Gravity Star, with Kowhai Street the first place to experience the overturning of the old ways when distance is near and the eastern mountains of Puamahara could be the Carpathians . . ." (194)

When Jake visits the orchard of the Memory Flower he discovers, as Mattina had, that the sculpture lacks beauty. To Jake, this stresses the ordinariness of memory and its availability to everyone. As Mattina had passed on the memory of Puamahara to Jake, so Jake accepts his responsibility to perpetuate the memory and to pass on "the full story" (195) to his son.

The subversion of our expectations in John Henry's concluding note leaves us with the paradoxical message that memory is both "true" and arbitrary. Throughout the novel, memory is depicted as integral to language. It is the

perpetuity of memory that has "produced" the novel even though it is ultimately subverted. However, the novel also depicts memory as arbitrary and in the end it is memory as an amalgam of fact and fiction that is valued, "the memory of events known and imagined, and the use of words to continue the memory through centuries" (196). The metaphor of the memory as "Ancient Springtime" and human beings as the "Housekeepers of Ancient Springtime" casts humanity in the crucial role of custodian of the memory.

In The Carpathians, Frame continues to develop the moral strategy of language usage laid down in Owls Do Cry. However, the harsh ironies of the first novel are absent as Mattina is more closely identified with the object of Frame's denigration: suburban materialism and its synonymity with the denial of authentic language. Mattina's paradigmatic status contains ambiguities that are absent in Daphne's. Frame reveals the mixed motives of altruism and selfishness that prompt Mattina to "collect" the memory of foreign lands and people. Furthermore, her psychological link with Dinny Wheatstone ironically reinforces the similarities between herself and the residents of Kowhai Street. Yet Mattina is set apart from the other residents of Puamahara by the undaunted priority of her quest for and perpetuation of memory. This elevates her to the moral plane reserved for Frame's "elect" and reinforces the supremacy of imaginative language in Frame's work.

NOTES

[1] Mark Williams, Leaving the Highway (Auckland UP: 1990) 30-56.

[2] The Century Hutchinson edition of The Carpathians gives the spelling as "imposter", though The Concise Oxford Dictionary gives the spelling as "impostor".

CONCLUSION

The theme of language usage is dominant in Frame's work and appears in all of her novels to varying degrees. Frame handles the theme by polarising her characters into the saved and the damned, with no middle ground. She judges the value of the characters in her novels according to her stringent moral code of language usage. Most of the characters fall short of the standard and are condemned to a world of false values, like Clara Strang who is enslaved by appearances, or Pat Keenan who worships safety. The characters she "saves" are the minuscule minority who choose to sacrifice convention, tradition, their reputation and their sanity for the use of a language of the imagination. Frame values these characters for their daring choice in embarking upon a lifetime struggle against the grain of society. They may waver and digress like Mavis Halleton, or become trapped in a nightmarish world like Malfred Signal, but they have turned in the direction of authenticity and they have begun the search. The ultimate reward she bestows upon her chosen few is death and oblivion for it is the only option superior to the unmitigated torture of social ostracism.

The suffering caused through marginalisation by society is more pronounced in the earlier novels where characters like Thora Pattern and Erlene Glace speak their imaginative language from a position of separation. They are outsiders

whose lifestyle is incompatible with a conformist society that seeks to squeeze them into its mould. However, the protagonists of Living in the Maniototo and The Carpathians speak their language from a position within society. They are more closely associated with the target of Frame's criticism yet they fight the same battle against the status quo and the ememy of the imagination which, in Frame's eyes, is materialism.

Frame's honouring of social outcasts and those who choose the imaginative vision of life is in direct contrast to her treatment of those at the "centre" of society. There is little "grace" for the seemingly successful of society in Frame's quasi-theological moral structure. They are inherently implicated in the marginalisation of the people she esteems. She is ruthless in her condemnation of them by highlighting their underlying inadequacies, as with Brian Wilford whose expertise in dyslexia is overshadowed by his inadequate personal relationships, or Ed Shannon whose technological knowledge is undercut by his inability to face reality. Such characters are devoid of the characteristics of language usage valued by Frame.

The language of the imagination that Frame rewards is the language of poesis which avoids the mere reflection of society's norms in order to transform and transcend reality. Poesis is the shaping of the "manifold" which gives Mavis insight into the truth of her world. It is the shaping of the

memory which is valued simultaneously for its verity and its arbitrariness. It is the language of insight and subversion that Thora Pattern speaks from "the edge of the alphabet" and the language of death in which Erlene and Uncle Blackbeetle converse. Frame's language of the imagination has the function of making whole, of completing or closing in like "skin" (LM 14). Yet it is a language free of the confining rules and regulations of writing teachers like Howard Conway who thwart creativity by promoting a language tailored to the commercial market.

Frame not only manipulates the characters in her novels by predetermining their fate; she also manipulates her readers. One way in which she achieves this is through the use of humour. Frame's whimsical, ironic humour involves us in the action of the novels. The humour has such ready appeal that we laugh before we realise that the butt of our laughter is human death and degradation. In this way Frame distances us by implicating us in the perpetration of the victimisation she denigrates. Frame also manipulates her readers by the subversion of expectations. This technique is especially apparent in the later novels Living in the Maniototo and The Carpathians. Frame evokes the existence of people, places and events so convincingly that we believe in them only to witness their instant evaporation or to discover that they exist merely as figments of someone else's imagination. This is another device that distances the author from the reader. It creates an uncertain reading process that keeps the reader

constantly aware of the sovereignty of the author.

Frame's philosophy of life holds out little hope for meaning and purpose except through a creative use of language accessible to a very few of her characters. She paints a predominantly dark picture where even the relieving light touches are deceptively shady. There is no celebration of goodness in her novels. They expose and attack the evil and folly of humanity: the reverence for materialism, violence, society's artificial polarisation of all that is "abnormal", false hope, and the denial of memory. We may condemn Frame's selectivity or her world-view but we cannot glibly dismiss them as jaundiced. Frame evokes her bleak world peopled with the "inadequate" and the "mad" so convincingly that we are compelled to acknowledge her portrayal of the truth, even if it is not the whole truth as we would wish to perceive it.

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