A World of Reading: An Intertextual Study of Janet Frame’s Novels

Thesis

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A World of Reading: An Intertextual Study
of Janet Frame’s Novels

Patricia Neville MA
Open University 2012
C9012470

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Candidate Declaration

No substantial part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or other qualification at any university or institution. A few paragraphs of Chapter Five on pages 143-45 originated in a less deeply researched form in my MA Dissertation (2012), and have been further developed. The entire work has been prepared by me alone.

None of the material has been published.

All translations are mine except where otherwise stated.

Grateful acknowledgement is made to the Radio Times for permission to use the illustrations on pages 80, 81, 202 and 203; and to Waitaki District Archives for the illustration on page 54.

I submit this copy of my thesis for examination.

Patricia Neville

July 2017
Thesis Abstract

This thesis sheds new light on Janet Frame’s major novels by investigating her extensive and wide-ranging personal reading throughout her lifetime. It demonstrates how she weaves together her literary sources to create a web of intertextual relationships. Frame’s poetic language and literary allusions encourage many-layered readings and Mikhail Bakhtin’s analyses of novelistic prose illuminate my central research question concerning the relationship between Frame’s reading and her novels. I detail the literary context of early twentieth-century New Zealand; available reading material; attitudes towards literacy; and Frame’s schooling. I make an exhaustive study of under-examined material in the children’s page of Frame’s local newspaper, the Otago Daily Times; school, college and university reading; and her reading during her maturity.

Frame considered poetry to be the highest of the literary arts, and I foreground the reading of poetry which chiefly informed Frame’s writing, including poetry which has so far not received critical attention, and show how her insertion of verse into her prose novels encourages a more investigative reading of her texts. I examine Frame’s use of the King James Bible, focussing on Frame’s use of the Bible’s poetic language, which has not previously been considered as part of her style, before analysing her references to key Shakespeare plays. Finally I explore Frame’s allusion to folklore, European and Maori myth and oral literature. I examine the psychological insight of folk tale into childhood experience and its use in elucidating dark and uncommunicative elements of Frame’s characters.

My investigation makes an original contribution to Frame studies by revealing that there are aspects of Frame’s literary hinterland and her intertextual use of it which merit more attention than they have received: this includes poets and prose writers who have made a major but largely unrecognised contribution to her novels; and I conclude that Frame’s intertextuality is deeper, broader and more self-conscious than has so far been considered.
Acknowledgements

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Contents

Chapter One: Introduction Page 1

Chapter Two: The Critical Context Page 22

2.1 Introduction

2.2 Early Response

2.3 Biographical Approach

2.4 The Europeans

2.5 New Wave of New Zealanders

2.6 Most Recent Critical Studies

Chapter Three: Janet Frame’s Reading Page 41

3.1 A Reader’s Paradise?

3.2 Early Years and ‘Dot’s Little Folk’

3.3 Schooldays

3.4 College and Dunedin

3.5 Hospital Years

3.6 Later Reading

Chapter Four: ‘Only the poets know’ Page 85

4.1 The Importance of Poetry

4.2 Poetry at School and College

4.3 Poetic Visionaries: Blake, Yeats, Rilke

4.4 Nineteenth-century English Romantics

4.5 New Zealand Poets
4.6 Walt Whitman

4.7 Poetry in the Novels

4.8 Sylvia Plath

Chapter Five: The Bible – Eden and Apocalypse  Page 143

5.1 The Bible as Intertext

5.2 Poetics

5.3 Ethics

5.4 Narratives

Chapter Six: Shakespeare  Page 174

6.1 On the Heath

6.2 Wild Waters

6.3 Shakespearean Dreams

Chapter Seven: Tending the Myths  Page 192

7.1 Folklore

7.2 Fairy Tales

7.3 Anglo-Saxon Poetry

7.4 The Ballad Tradition

7.5 Mythology and Survival

7.6 Memory and Language

Chapter Eight: Conclusion  Page 224

Bibliography  Page 232
List of Illustrations and Tables

Illustrations

Figure 1: Janet Frame’s Notebook  Page 54
Figure 2: BBC Radio Third Programme  Page 80
Figure 3: BBC Radio, The Poet’s Voice  Page 81
Figure 4: Mallarmé: ‘Un Coup de Dés’  Page 86
Figure 5: Walt Whitman  Page 126
Figure 6: BBC Radio, The Ballad in Child’s Day  Page 202
Figure 7: BBC Radio, Border Ballads  Page 203

Tables

Table 1: Janet Frame’s Letters and Poems to the Otago Daily Times  Page 50
Table 2: Propp’s Analysis of a Folk Tale  Page 195
Chapter One: Introduction

She weaves her prose from the thread and idiom of everyday speech [...] Janet Frame’s stories echo with voices.

Dorothy Ballantyne, Radio Review, 1952.¹

What I admire no end are her brilliant verbal associations – and they’re not merely verbal or literary.

Frank Sargeson, Letter, 1957.²

In these comments on Janet Frame’s early fiction, Dorothy Ballantyne identifies in Frame’s first book of short stories, *The Lagoon and other Stories* (1952), her interweaving of different voices, the voices of members of a community, neighbours and children, which Ballantyne sees as extending an existing New Zealand short-story tradition. Frank Sargeson, at that time New Zealand’s most influential writer, comments on Frame’s first novel, *Owls Do Cry* (1957), and indicates the development of Frame’s novelistic prose to include the voices of other writers and sources, pointing towards Frame’s intensely allusive, intertextual style and her original creative mindset. At the same time, Sargeson is puzzled, unable to pinpoint precisely the range or complexity of this novel, which departs so fundamentally from the social-realist style of New Zealand fiction which prevailed in the 1930s to the 1960s.

Sargeson had provided Frame with a home and space to write, encouraging her to feel she could be a full-time writer. He expected her to follow in a New Zealand literary tradition, and is stunned by her brilliant originality. Early critics chiefly focussed on biographical and narrative aspects of Frame’s novels, however, rather than their intertextual nature highlighted here by Ballantyne and Sargeson.

I propose to investigate this dominant intertextual characteristic of Frame’s prose, which draws on her wide-ranging personal reading over the course of thirteen novels, and I will demonstrate the ways in which she uses that reading to construct form, pattern and

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¹ Dorothy Ballantyne, transcript of a review for 4YA Radio (9 June 1952) given to Heather Murray, MS-4097/015, Hocken Collections, p. 2.
meaning. Frame had an extensive literary hinterland of European, American and New Zealand writing – in English and occasionally in French. She uses allusion, echo, pastiche, quotation and reference from an eclectic variety of sources, chiefly literary, in her creation of what Mikhail Bakhtin has termed ‘polyphonic’ texts, and in the course of this study I will draw on Bakhtin’s work which fundamentally aided my understanding of aspects of Frame’s style. The interconnectedness or ‘intertextuality’ of her style was central to Frame’s own identity as a writer, living as she did through her reading and her writing.

My research shines new light on Frame’s reading, and its impact on her style from childhood onwards. Material from hitherto under-researched newspaper archives and the archived correspondence of Frame’s friends and contemporaries testifies to a much wider range of reading than has so far been acknowledged, as well as Frame’s highly self-conscious participation as an aspirant artist in a world of literature.

**Janet Frame**

Janet Frame’s first published work, *The Lagoon and Other Stories*, won New Zealand’s prestigious Hubert Church prize in 1952 and Frame appeared initially to be following in the footsteps of other eminent New Zealand short-story writers: Katherine Mansfield and Frank Sargeson. Dorothy Ballantyne, who became a lifelong friend of Frame, was a librarian at Dunedin Teacher Training College in 1943 when they first met, and reviewed *The Lagoon and Other Stories* for a radio broadcast in 1952. In the review she states emphatically that Frame’s first published collection of short stories ‘is an important book’.³ She develops her argument by commenting, presciently, that although Frame is working within a living New Zealand tradition of short-story writing ‘she also extends that tradition’. Ballantyne saw the New Zealand short story as ‘something indigenous, native and peculiar to ourselves [...] our

³ Ballantyne, p. 1.
emergence from the chrysalis is recognized overseas’. 4 She saw New Zealand novelists, by contrast, being ‘as awkward as amateur actors making their first stage appearance with one eye on the audience and the other on the prompt corner.’5 In fact the award of the Hubert Church prize heralded a much broader literary career which took Frame well beyond the New Zealand short story. She ultimately published eleven novels during her lifetime, a book of poems, two books of short stories, and three volumes of autobiography. Further novels, poetry and short stories have been published posthumously.

Born in 1924 into a railway worker’s family, Frame spent her childhood in the South Island, and her schooldays in Oamaru, attending Teacher Training College and the University of Otago in Dunedin. At the end of her studies, Frame’s mental health failed, and between November 1945 and March 1955 she was in and out of mental hospitals, committed at times for several months at a time. After leaving hospital, Frame wrote her first novel while lodging with Frank Sargeson in Takapuna, on Auckland’s North Shore. She then travelled to Western Europe, and the USA, spending six years in Britain, and lengthy periods with American friends and at writers’ colonies in the USA before finally returning to settle in New Zealand in the late 1960s, where she lived, making frequent trips to the USA and Britain, until her death in 2004.

In spite of the extent of her travels, Janet Frame’s work is little known in Britain, and a number of reviewers and critics have commented on the lack of British editions of her novels and short stories. Frame’s publishing history and reception in Britain have been patchy. During the 1980s The Women’s Press in London issued six Frame titles, and this flourishing production came to an end when The Women’s Press ceased trading in 2000. At the time of writing, only four novels out of a current total of thirteen are available in UK editions: Owls Do Cry (1957), with an introduction by Margaret Drabble; Faces in the Water

4 Ballantyne, p. 2.
5 Ballantyne, p. 1.
(1961); *Towards Another Summer* (2007) with an introduction by Hilary Mantel; and *Living in the Maniototo* (1979) all within Random House’s Virago imprint; and a selection of poems, *Storms Will Tell*, with Bloodaxe. It would be good to see *The Carpathians* and the *Complete Autobiography* reissued in the UK. Although technology has made it easier to source books from overseas publishers, the lack of UK editions may make it less likely that Frame’s novels will be reviewed in the general press, or studied in universities, colleges and schools within the UK. Jane Campion’s film *An Angel at My Table*, based on Frame’s autobiography, was lauded at the Venice film festival in 1990, and brought Frame a new readership centred on her *Complete Autobiography*. Frame’s autobiography was also the subject of a prize-winning adaptation dramatised for BBC Radio by Anita Sullivan in two one-hour parts, first broadcast on 13th January 2013, in which she seeks to restore ‘the metaplay of reality and storytelling’ which she felt was missing from Jane Campion’s film. Regrettably, there is no pod-cast or published script, but the drama is rebroadcast periodically.\(^6\) The *Lagoon and Other Stories* was on the 2011-2012 syllabus for the French *agrégation*, a post-graduate national teaching qualification, prompting a French monograph, *Janet Frame, The Lagoon and Other Stories: Naissance d’une Œuvre* in 2010, co-authored by Claire Bazin and Alice Braun, referencing the English Bloomsbury Edition (1997); two more collections of critical essays; and a special edition of Paris University’s *Commonwealth Essays and Studies* devoted to Janet Frame in 2012.

Frame has, however, long enjoyed greater recognition in the USA than in Britain, especially during her lifetime when she was better-known among American artistic and publishing communities and had an active champion in the publisher George Braziller since he first published *Owls Do Cry* in 1957. Braziller took a personal interest in Frame, admired her work immensely and introduced her to other writers he published over a period of time he

\(^6\) Anita Sullivan, personal email, 1 March 2017.
refers to as his ‘thirty year journey with Janet Frame’ \(^7\) In San Francisco recently I noticed that the City Lights bookshop carried a full stock of Frame titles, across the whole range of her work, whereas in London major bookstores rarely display more than one or two.

The Janet Frame Trust has been active in publishing more of Frame’s work posthumously, but not always in the UK: *Towards Another Summer*, written in 1963, was published in 2007 in the UK as well as New Zealand; Penguin NZ issued a selection of non-fiction writing in 2011, *Janet Frame: In Her Own Words*; more hitherto unpublished short stories in August 2012, *Gorse is Not People*. Two further novellas, *In the Memorial Room*, written in 1974, and *The Mijo Tree*, written in 1956/57 were published in 2013 and *In the Memorial Room* received considerable critical attention in the UK. A collection of Janet Frame’s letters to William Theophilus (Bill) Brown, *Jay to Bee*, was published in the USA in 2016.

Frame’s achievements have been recognised in a variety of ways since she received the 1952 PEN/Hubert Church Award. She held the Burns Fellowship at Otago University in 1965, and the Katherine Mansfield Fellowship in 1974. She has won numerous literary prizes for her novels, short stories and for her autobiography; and was awarded an honorary doctorate in literature by the University of Otago in 1978. In 1983 Frame was appointed Commander of the British Empire for services to literature, and in 1990 became a Member of the Order of New Zealand.

**Context**

In this thesis, I will focus on Frame’s novels, and make reference to Frame’s three-volume *Complete Autobiography*, with occasional reference to her poems. I propose to examine the ways in which Frame makes use in her novels of her extensive formative reading; and

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\(^7\) George Braziller, ‘Thoughts on a 30 Year Journey’, *The Inward Sun*, ed. by Elizabeth Alley (Wellington: Daphne Brasell Associates, 1994)
developed a consciously intertextual relationship with the broad field of literature written in English (and occasionally French) through her use of literary allusions, echoes and references. Frame’s reading ranged from her childhood interaction with newspapers, her school and student reading of the English canon and some French literature, and her lifelong reading of an eclectic mix of poetry ranging from the Old English poets, through to Shakespeare, the English Romantics and twentieth-century poetry from New Zealand, Britain and America. This reading forms a rich and diverse literary hinterland from which Frame draws in her fiction.

This study will demonstrate Frame’s awareness of the breadth of her literary inheritance and her felt connection with other writers and with oral traditions. Frame lived through her reading, composing her novels with echoes of the poetry and fiction she loved. My review of existing scholarship in Chapter Two shows that there has not been a coherent and comprehensive study of Frame’s reading from her earliest years, through school and higher education, and through the years of her maturity. Consequently, my study will provide a more representative and exhaustive picture of Frame’s reading, using newspaper and other archival sources, published and unpublished personal letters and journals, in New Zealand, Britain, and the USA. Several of these resources have not yet been examined by Frame scholars, nor investigated for evidence of Frame’s breadth of reading.

My thesis aims to shed new light on Frame’s work by investigating her personal reading throughout her lifetime, enriching our interpretation of the novels and increasing our understanding of Frame’s working methods; and to show how her literary sources and her multiple voices – in ‘coexistence and interaction’ in Bakhtin’s phrase – create an intertextual relationship with the writers Frame felt were her community.8

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In her autobiography, Frame joyfully recounts her student discovery of the English literary tradition and its interconnectedness, and later of a New Zealand literature. Works from the English literary tradition had been her touchstone as a child, and at school she was also introduced to French literature, and studied both literatures and the French language at Otago University. As an adult she read a wide range of British, American, European and New Zealand authors. She immersed herself in her reading, taking her cue from the poets especially, and developing for herself a world of the imagination. Frame’s prose is suffused with the voices of other writers, especially poets, sometimes in direct quotation, sometimes in pastiche, and often seamlessly woven into the fabric of her prose. Her style is intensely poetic, and she held poetry to be the highest form of verbal art. As a student Frame was dazzled by Coleridge’s view of imagination in *Biographica Literaria* and wrote, that ‘the most magical word to me was still *Imagination*, a glittering noble word, never failing to create its own inner light’; and she clearly shared Shelley’s view of poets as ‘the unacknowledged legislators of the world’. Janet Frame was keenly aware of her literary inheritance, of her debt to the poetry of Shakespeare, Blake, Wordsworth, Yeats, Eliot and the King James Bible. In addition, Frame’s use of poetry from an oral tradition – mediaeval ballads, Anglo-Saxon poetry, nursery rhymes, myth and traditional stories, European and Maori, as well as lyrics from songs and contemporary New Zealand poetry – all contribute to the sense of her felt connection with literary traditions as they stretch back to time immemorial. Frame had a considerable familiarity with the language of the Bible from her mother’s Christadelphian faith and the family Bible-readings. Her use of biblical allusion has so far received limited attention and has chiefly been considered, for example by Jan Cronin and Gina Mercer, to discuss Frame’s authorial control, rather than her stylistic use of the poetics of much biblical prose.

In a 1955 review of Faulkner’s *A Fable*, Janet Frame summed up her sense of the value of artists and poets, commenting that ‘perhaps one may doubt whether William Faulkner is a novelist, but never that he is an artist who can take and transform, and never that he is a poet’. My aim is to show that the elements that Frame herself could ‘take and transform’, were a far more extensive and diverse range of text, observation and experience than has previously been recognised.

**Intertextuality**

T. S. Eliot expressed the view that ‘No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists.’ Eliot views the work of the later writer as a conscious, cerebral culmination of a long process of literary interaction. A similar point was made rather more pithily by W. H. Auden, writing in memory of W. B. Yeats:

> The words of a dead man
> Are modified in the guts of the living.

Auden’s image is a more organic, natural take on the same idea, suggesting that intertextual reference is an inevitable part of the cycle of living matter; and in a different image taken from the cycle of life Janet Frame takes up this theme in *In The Memorial Room*, commenting that, ‘In authorship, the author is not the tree scattering his books like leaves; the books are the trees; the author is shed, blown away, dies, to make compost for other leaves and other trees’.

Analogies between the cyclical nature of horticultural and agricultural growth and the cyclical nature of literature have a long history. The eighteen-century novelist Henry Fielding – much admired by the Russian academic Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975) –

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14 Frame, *In the Memorial Room* (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 2013) p. 113
devotes a whole chapter of *Tom Jones* to ‘Showing What is to Be Deemed Plagiarism in a Modern Author, and What is to Be Considered as a Lawful Prize.’ With a metaphor taken from the age-old right of English peasants to graze their livestock on common land, Fielding sums up his view that ‘the antients [sic] may be considered as a rich common, where every person who hath the smallest tenement in Parnassus hath the free right to fatten his muse’.

When the French-Bulgarian academic Julia Kristeva coined the word ‘intertextuality’ it became one of the most used and useful terms in critical writing, introduced in the 1960s through Kristeva’s access to the work of the Russian academic, Mikhail Bakhtin. In her essay ‘Word, Dialogue and Novel’, Julia Kristeva discusses intertextual relationships – in a broader context than poetry – and views ‘the literary word’ as ‘an intersection of textual surfaces rather than a point (a fixed meaning), as a dialogue among several writings: that of the writer, the addressee (or the character) and the contemporary or earlier cultural context’. In a similar vein, in ‘From Work to Text’, Roland Barthes uses the image of textiles rather than ‘mosaic’ in referring to ‘the stereographic plurality of its weave of signifiers (etymologically, the text is a tissue, a woven fabric). The reader of the Text may be compared to someone at a loose end’. Barthes shares Frame’s repeated use of metaphor from weaving, threads and textiles, ‘the rich, wide tapestry of language’. Barthes and Kristeva argue that intertextuality is an essential part of the fabric of a novel, whether the author is conscious of it or not; while Frame, conscious of her literary hinterland as the roots of her own writing, is deliberate and explicit in her own weaving of the threads of language. Kristeva acknowledges the insight of Mikhail Bakhtin, who argued that ‘any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text

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is the absorption and transformation of another’. Graham Allen argues that the term ‘intertextual’ is far from being transparent and consistent in use, and that attempts at a fundamental definition of it are ‘doomed to failure’. Within this fluidity of terminology I will aim to establish how intertextuality operates in Janet Frame’s writing, drawing chiefly on the work of Mikhail Bakhtin.

**Mikhail Bakhtin**

Mikhail Bakhtin frequently mentions his love of the eighteenth-century English comic novel; he refers several times to Henry Fielding and would have been aware of Fielding’s comment on the process which twentieth-century commentators call ‘intertextuality’. I have found Mikhail Bakhtin the most useful theorist, possibly because of his specific interest in the novel as a genre. His insights stem from his love of the novel as an art form – and in particular his love of Dostoevsky – rather than from a starting-point of linguistic theory. He saw language not as a system, but as a social activity; not as a ‘sign’, but as an interactive ‘act’, a ‘dialogue’. He argues for the novelist as a listener with an acute sensitivity in a comment which relates very much to Frame’s style,

> for the prose artist the world is full of other people’s words, among which he must orient himself and whose speech characteristics he must be able to perceive with a very keen ear. He must introduce them into the plane of his own discourse, but in such a way that this plane is not destroyed.

Bakhtin stresses the social context of language, its essential ‘dialogic’ or conversational nature, in an insight which has linguistic value far beyond academic literary discussion, but

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which Bakhtin relates to the creation of prose fiction, and more specifically to the novel of
the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Bakhtin’s insights into what he terms heteroglossia, the contextual fluidity of
meaning; and polyphony, an orchestration of different voices within a text, derive chiefly
from his study of Dostoevsky. He also references the novels of Smollett, Sterne, Fielding and
Richardson, Walter Scott and Dickens; Stendhal, Balzac and Flaubert; as well as Goethe and
Shakespeare. Readers in Stalinist Russia had access only to a heavily censored list of Western
writers, and modernist authors were for the most part strongly disapproved of. In Problems of
Dostoevsky’s Poetics (1929) Bakhtin mentions without demur the critique of Joyce and
Proust by another Russian academic, Valery Kirpotin, who refers to the modernists’
‘degenerate decadent psychologism’ and to ‘the decline and fall of bourgeois literature’.22
When Bakhtin first published his Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics in 1929 he was arrested
and exiled, but survived and later worked quietly as a teacher, unable to publish under his
own name. And he was understandably cautious.

In the years of the post-Stalin thaw Bakhtin was able to publish his work once again,
notably the four essays which make up The Dialogic Imagination. They appeared in Russia in
the 1960s and 1970s, and were translated into English in the 1980s. In these works, Bakhtin
traces the development of nineteenth-century prose fiction back to its origins in the oral
vernacular culture of the Middle Ages, with its travesties, parodies and folklore, and beyond,
to the Platonic distinction between diegesis (the poet’s speech) and mimesis (the imitated
speech of characters). Bakhtin mentions Thomas Mann, but only in passing, in his late essays,
published in Moscow in 1979, so it may be that his focus on the nineteenth-century novel and
its antecedents is a reflection of his interests rather than the repression of Stalin’s era. From
Joanna Woods’ recent study of the reception of Katherine Mansfield’s works in Russia we

know that in spite of the disapproval of modernist writing, Mansfield’s work was highly regarded there; however, Bakhtin makes no mention of her.\textsuperscript{23} His understanding of the interconnected development of literature is especially enlightening in relation to Frame’s interest in folklore and what lay beyond it. Bakhtin’s insights illuminate Frame’s intertextual practices and it is worth summarising briefly the main elements of what Bakhtin termed \textit{dialogic}, or polyphonic novelistic prose.

Bakhtin seems to have at one time thought Dostoevsky initiated the polyphonic style of novel, but later came to the conclusion that \textit{dialogic} prose is an inherent aspect of the genre, which Dostoevsky developed in his own style. Bakhtin distinguished between three categories of literary discourse:

1. Direct speech – the voice of the novelist
2. Represented speech – the speech of the characters
3. Doubly-oriented speech – speech which refers to something in the world as well as another speech act, and which Bakhtin describes as his ‘chief hero’.\textsuperscript{24}

Bakhtin refers to this third category also as ‘double-voiced discourse’, the subtle and sometimes almost imperceptible transition from one style to another. He saw how Dostoevsky lessened the hold of authorial discourse in rapid shifts of linguistic register – the kind of literary ventriloquism in which Janet Frame excels, and to which I will refer in later chapters of the thesis. Bakhtin’s view of the freedom and flexibility of the novel chimes also with the ambiguities and uncertainties of Frame’s novels when he writes in relation to the

\textsuperscript{24} Bakhtin, ‘Discourse in Dostoevsky’, \textit{Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics}, p.185.
novel genre of ‘an indeterminacy, a certain semantic openendedness, a living contact with unfinished, still evolving contemporary reality (the openended present)’.\(^\text{25}\)

Bakhtin views the novel as an essentially *dialogic* genre since ‘it is only in the novel that discourse can reveal all its specific potential and achieve its true depth’.\(^\text{26}\) Although mostly writing about Dostoevsky, Pushkin and Tolstoy, Bakhtin also comments on the use of language in the novels of Sterne, Smollett and Fielding; and makes interesting illustrated observations on Dickens’ *Little Dorrit*, noting that Dickens’ ‘entire text is, in fact, everywhere dotted with quotation marks that serve to separate out little islands of scattered direct speech and purely authorial speech, washed by heteroglot waves from all sides’.\(^\text{27}\) Bakhtin uses the language of music – ‘polyphony’, ‘counterpoint’ and ‘orchestration’ – to consider how Dostoevsky and other novelists incorporate and orchestrate ‘other people’s words’ in their novels in a way that illuminates Frame’s use of language in her fiction; and in particular the ways in which Frame exploits those polyphonic aspects of *dialogic* language which Bakhtin identifies as inherently novelistic, reaffirming the creativity and imaginative power of the writer.

Jennifer Lawn’s enlightening article on Bakhtin and *Owls Do Cry* analyses and illustrates Bakhtin’s account of novelistic language in some detail.\(^\text{28}\) In this first novel, as Lawn notes, Frame separates with italics the most densely poetic sections with their literary weaving, mostly Daphne’s songs from the dead room, from the narrative. Elsewhere the reader hears an interplay of voices of different characters, the most striking examples serving, as Lawn suggests, to convey the nature and thinking of Toby, Daphne’s epileptic and barely literate brother:

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\(^{26}\) Mikhail Bakhtin, ‘From the prehistory of novelistic discourse’ *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. 50.


Commitments. It was a long word for him because he had left school early on account of his fits, and his spelling had always been shaky, but heavens, what he had picked up in the meantime.  

In this brief piece, we hear Toby use his father’s favourite word, ‘commitments’, i.e. money; the voice of the general community, ‘left school early […] fits’; a school-teacher trying not to be too discouraging, ‘a bit shaky’; and Toby’s over-brightly optimistic mother, ‘but heavens’.

In later novels, Frame develops her use of this kind of interplay to include a broader interweaving of personal voice and literary allusion as well as language from other kinds of text, an eclectic discourse including Anglo-Saxon and texts which refer to contemporary fears of nuclear annihilation. Consider, for example this extract from *The Adaptable Man*, in which the Rev. Aisley Maude muses on the nature of post-war Suffolk.

The self remains: a complex doodle or pattern like those menacing structures you see in the lonely places of East Anglia – the incongruous temples built upon layers of destruction, where bombers fly in and lay their eggs in the concrete towers, and where the bell tolls for all. When men are like flies to be exterminated, there is no refinement or distinction of ‘me’ and ‘thee.’ It is ‘us,’ and ‘all.’ A yellow fire of light streaks down the sky, there is a taste of ashes in the mouth, the eyes expand, like frogs about to commit a spring vision on the surface of the weed-infested pond.

Frame links Suffolk’s Second World War vulnerability to invasion with the contemporary threat of nuclear war and the language of the guide book, ‘the lonely places of East Anglia’ and nature notes, ‘lay their eggs’ and ‘like frogs’, interspersed with references to poets and orators. Suffolk’s massive ancient wool churches, its ‘temples’, have been overtaken in size by the vast hangars and flight-towers of war-time American airbases, ‘menacing structures’, which continue to operate during the Cold War, after the end of World War Two. War-time propaganda still insists on ‘us’ and ‘all’ rather than ‘me’ and ‘thee’, taking the words of Donne’s sermon, ‘send not to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee’, distorting and manipulating them for support in ‘the bell tolls for all’.

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flies’, in his sense of man’s abject powerlessness, despairs at the possibility of a nuclear missile, ‘the yellow fire of light’, causing a final human instinctive reaction, ‘the eyes expand’ not in re-creation, ‘a spring vision’, but in a final expression of horror before destruction.\(^{32}\) He echoes J. F. Kennedy’s warning during the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis that in a nuclear war ‘even the fruits of victory would be ashes in our mouth’, a nuclear annihilation.\(^{33}\) From his reveries about a twentieth-century world he may lose, Aisley then recalls lines from the Anglo-Saxon elegy, ‘The Wanderer’, mourning the loss of another older world in the words of an anonymous seventh-century poet, ‘How that time has passed away, has grown dark under the shadow of night as if it had never been.’\(^{34}\) Frame’s evocative piece of polyphonic writing, with its brilliant interplay of different voices, typifies the complexity and constant allusiveness of Frame’s mature style. In subsequent chapters I will investigate further Frame’s imaginative exploitation of this dialogic nature of novelistic prose and her orchestration of ‘a diversity of individual voices’ which she uses to create and control a body of work characteristically her own.\(^{35}\)

**Existing Scholarship on Janet Frame**

The main critical writing about Janet Frame has come from New Zealand, Belgian and French academics, the European critics initially making the more innovative contributions to Frame criticism. Comparatively little critical writing has been published in the UK, although several essays on Frame have been published in the *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, in particular the October 2015 edition with its special focus on ‘Janet Frame: Ten Years On’.

Early critical writing about Frame in New Zealand tended to focus on her account of repressive, puritanical and punitive New Zealand society in the post-war years. Some critics,

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32 King Lear, IV.1.36.
particularly in New Zealand, have attempted to interpret her novels predominantly in relation to her extraordinary life history, the major work of this nature being Patrick Evans’ study, *Janet Frame*, in 1977. Other major studies and broader academic criticism of Frame, viewing her writing in relation to European writers, came in the late 1970s to the present day from academics in Paris, Liège, and Brussels notably Claire Bazin, Jeanne Delbaere and Marc Delrez. I am especially appreciative of the work of Jeanne Delbaere, who pioneered an approach to Frame’s metaphorical prose, highlighting Frame’s sense of connectedness with other writers, and the work of Marc Delrez who in his paper *Rilke and Frame*, continues to explore aspects of what he calls Frame’s ‘linguistic utopia’.

Bill Ashcroft and colleagues offer a persuasive postcolonial analysis of Frame’s *The Edge of the Alphabet*; Gina Mercer views Frame’s work from a feminist perspective; and Judith Dell Panney analyses Frame’s novels as allegory. Other critics consider the visionary nature of Frame’s viewpoint, notably Marc Delrez and Joel Gwynne. Alex Calder and Mark Williams both stress Frame’s New Zealand inheritance; Matthew St. Pierre takes a view based on semiotics, and Karin Hansson writes about Frame in terms of physical science.

One particularly significant recent line of critical commentary has concerned itself more with narrative structures and method, and authorial presence. The work of Jan Cronin, *The Frame Function* is notable in this field, and takes a very different approach in its exploration of Frame’s narratology from Delrez’s interest in Frame’s ethical and spiritual concerns, a divergence I will return to in later chapters. The wide variety of critical approaches would suggest the plurality of Frame’s work, and the difficulty of aligning her with any one particular genre of fiction. A number of critics appear to agree that Frame’s novels defy easy classification: Marc Delrez, Mark Williams and Jeanne Delbeare all express a concern that

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Frame might be too narrowly categorised; and Frame herself resisted literary labels. The current state of Frame scholarship is dealt with at greater length in Chapter Two.

In my own research, I am seeking to address the question of how Frame’s multiple voices coexist and interact, and the ways in which Frame constructs her own meaning from her borrowings and allusions. I consider the central importance to Frame of poetry and the imagination; her identification with past poets; and her sense of her own place in the community of artists and writers. The chapter structure is designed to consider the development of Frame’s style rather than a novel-by-novel account of Frame’s work and within this framework I consider the novels in clusters. My focus is on Frame’s major novels rather than short stories, as I believe Frame’s longer fiction gives greater scope for illustrating her intertextual use of other voices; I will also make use of Frame’s autobiographical account of her reading.

Archives

Frame’s literary papers are located at the University of Otago’s Hocken Library; further papers, mostly personal correspondence with Bill Brown, are located at Penn State University Library, Philadelphia. Access to Janet Frame’s papers at the Penn University archives is restricted until January 2019; and Frame’s papers in the Hocken Collections, Dunedin are restricted until 2019 or 2034. These collections can only be accessed with written permission from the Janet Frame Trust, although access to the correspondence of Frame’s contemporaries at the Hocken Library is often unrestricted. Of particular value in the Hocken Collections to this research were the papers of Charles Brasch, poet and editor of the New Zealand literary quarterly, Landfall; Frank Sargeson, and E. P. (Peter) Dawson, a literary friend of both Sargeson and Frame. The archive material of Frame’s American publisher in New York, George Braziller, is located at Princeton University, and this collection is open for
research use. The archivists at Princeton have helpfully supplied copies of relevant papers by email. I am privileged, through the kindness of Ann Cawley, to have been granted access to the letters written by Janet Frame between 1962 and 1990 to Dr. Robert Cawley.

There are specific copyright issues which affect the use of Janet Frame archives. When Janet Frame died in 2004 her copyright passed to her trustee and niece, Pamela Gordon, for the Janet Frame Trust. In an email dated 16 January 2014, Pamela Gordon replied to my initial enquiry about access with this comment on Frame’s wishes:

Janet Frame herself imposed these conditions concerning access to her personal papers and I am afraid that it is premature to attempt to circumvent her embargo. It is not possible to access these papers for at least another five years, and of course the copyright of unpublished material will also be strictly controlled well beyond that date as Janet Frame also insisted.\(^{37}\)

Of particular interest in restricted archives are the ‘lengthy series of daily letters’\(^{38}\) which Janet Frame wrote to Californian artist and musician Bill Brown in the 1970s, housed in the Pennsylvania State University Library Archives. These letters contain numerous comments on her writing and her views on literary issues, as we know from those letters which have been published. Brief extracts from them are cited by Jan Cronin\(^{39}\) and Michael King\(^{40}\) among others. An edition of selected correspondence between Bill Brown and Frame covering the years 1969-1971 was published in May 2016, and Ms Gordon was kind enough to supply me with pre-publication extracts from these letters, with permission to quote after publication.\(^{41}\) Further perusal of this published material has been fruitful, and complements edited correspondence between Frame and Charles Brasch as well as her correspondence with George Braziller in the 1980s and 90s.\(^{42}\) I was fortunate in being able to travel to Dunedin to undertake research in the Hocken Collections into the journals, letters and *Landfall*

\(^{37}\) Personal email from Pamela Gordon, 16 January 2014.
\(^{40}\) King, *Wrestling with the Angel*.
\(^{41}\) Personal email from Pamela Gordon, 13 May 2015.
\(^{42}\) Dear Charles, Dear Janet: Frame and Brasch in Correspondence ed. by Denis Harold and Pamela Gordon (Auckland: Holloway Press, 2010)
correspondence of Charles Brasch, and some of Janet Frame’s other contemporaries; to meet academic staff at the University of Otago and literary executors for Charles Brasch and Janet Frame.

**Janet Frame’s Reading.**

In Chapter Three I set out details of the reading resources available to Janet Frame and her family in early twentieth-century colonial New Zealand in the historical context of newspapers and libraries, accessed through New Zealand newspaper resources which I have researched at the British Library in London. I consider Frame’s reading of her local newspapers and her contribution to them through her school years, and the books available at school; and outline the influence of her childhood reading on her juvenile poems. I then detail her later reading at Teacher Training College and the University of Otago in Dunedin, during her hospital years and her adult life, and consider ways in which her prose reading informed her own novels.

**Poets**

In Chapter Four I outline the range of mostly English language poets who have informed Frame’s writing, and in particular the way in which she has been drawn to poets with a visionary view of the world, the Romantics and a number of poets of the nineteenth century, such as William Blake, W.B. Yeats, Rainer Maria Rilke, G. M. Hopkins and Walt Whitman. Important twentieth-century poets for Frame include T. S. Eliot, W. H. Auden, Dylan Thomas and Sylvia Plath. Frame considered poetry to be the highest of the literary arts, and I will demonstrate the way in which her allusions to poets contribute to the polyphonic texture of her own writing. I will establish links between Frame’s intertextual references to other
writers and her views on language and its relation to tradition and memory, and discuss these in later chapters.

**The Bible**

In Chapter Five I investigate Frame’s literary relationship with the Bible and her access to it from her earliest years within her family. I consider the extent to which the Bible, especially the King James Version, has embedded itself in the English language, and ways in which Frame has exploited this linguistic relationship to create a polyphonic use of different voices. In particular I discuss Frame’s use of the poetic nature of biblical prose; the extent of the Bible’s use as an authoritative text in ethical issues; and the use of some of the Bible’s narratives in the narrative structure of Frame’s novels.

**Shakespeare**

Chapter Six considers Frame’s references and allusions to Shakespeare, drawing on her reading at school and university, with particular attention to her use of the images and themes of *Macbeth*, *King Lear* and *The Tempest* throughout her novels. I consider Frame’s reference to the heath in *Macbeth* and *King Lear*; the storms in *King Lear* and *The Tempest*; and how these references underpin the part played by magic, fantasy and dream in her novels’ structure and language.

**Myth, Memory and Language**

Frame makes frequent use of traditional rhymes and songs and popular song and traditional folk stories which I investigate in Chapter Seven, to show that this use links with her interest in the preservation of memory in language. Frame’s reading of Grimm’s folk-tales inspired
her as a child; and I consider some of the theory and themes of folk tales; the links with magic and children’s understanding; and the significance of language and tradition and their relation to cultural memory. In this final chapter I aim to bring together Frame’s references to literature of pre-modern and pre-literate eras of oral transmission, Old English poets, myth and traditional oral tales from Europe and New Zealand. Frame had a love of Old English poetry from her time studying English at the University of Otago and an increasing interest in Maori language and culture, which is reflected in her later novels. I consider Frame’s sense of the timelessness of literature; its cyclical nature; and the sense in which literary works are inter-related; the interaction of language and memory; and Frame’s creation of a place for herself in a whole community of poets and artists. My close literary analysis and study of Frame’s reading and sources will further illuminate Frame’s working practices and offer some new interpretations of her novels.
Chapter Two: The Critical Context

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will consider the main critical commentaries of Janet Frame’s novels from the 1950s to the present day, as well as the use made of her three volumes of autobiography, published in 1982, 1984 and 1985; Wrestling with the Angel, Michael King’s biography of Frame, published in 2000; and Frame’s own non-fiction writings.

The three volumes of autobiography, published in 1982-85, are enlightening about Frame’s reading in her early life; the ways in which she related to her literary discoveries; and for Frame’s comments on the creative processes on which the novels themselves, of course, contain a number of reflections. Frame’s three volume Complete Autobiography is complemented by Michael King’s biography, Wrestling with the Angel, published in 2000. King writes with a historian’s meticulous concern for accuracy in dates, places, names and references; but as a number of critics have pointed out, was constrained by his respect for his still living subject. Andrew Dean asserts that King’s biography ‘relies upon a foundational misreading of Frame’s autobiography for its theoretical and material operations’, and Jan Cronin comments on the widespread belief that ‘Frame has succeeded in pulling off yet another virtuoso act of ventriloquism’. Frame set out some specific criteria in return for her co-operation, including her insistence that it was not to be a literary biography, understandable in the light of Frame’s distress at having her fiction read as straight autobiography; intrusions into her private affairs; and continuing erroneous comments about her ‘diseased mind’. These constraints are set out quite plainly in King’s preliminary note. King notes discrepancies in different versions of events in Frame’s life, a familiar phenomenon of confused memory which too often plays tricks and deceives – others may

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take these discrepancies as evidence of Frame’s manipulation of her biographer. However, my focus in this thesis is upon Frame’s use of language in her fiction, and I am indebted to the diligence of King’s research and recordings.

Further evidence of Janet Frame’s literary aims, reading, and working methods is to be found in her published and unpublished letters and non-fiction, and records of interviews. The posthumously published Janet Frame: In Her Own Words (2011) is a useful source in itself, and a search of the original sources of these edited extracts yields additional information. Further information is contained in the collection of her correspondence with Charles, Dear Charles Dear Janet (2010); the recently published Letters of Frank Sargeson (2012); the unpublished letters Frame wrote to Dr Robert Cawley, mainly from the 1960s and 1970s in the possession of Mrs Ann Cawley, to whom I am very grateful for access; Frame’s letters to newspaper editors as child and adult; and the volume of correspondence between Janet Frame and her American friend Bill Brown published in the early summer of 2016.

2.2 Early Response

Early critical acclaim for Frame began with her very first publication, The Lagoon and Other Stories, published in March 1952. The Lagoon and Other Stories was warmly received in a largely favourable review in Landfall that year, ‘a considerable achievement’, and led to the award of the Hubert Church Memorial Prize in 1953. Landfall is the pre-eminent literary journal in New Zealand, founded in 1947 by the poets Charles Brasch, Denis Glover and James Bertram, then senior lecturer at Victoria University Wellington. It is published quarterly and was edited by Brasch from its inception until 1966. Brasch opened the first edition with the assertion that far from being ‘a decoration on the surface of life’ that ‘there is

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no substitute for the arts and their unifying, their dignifying power.  
Contributors to volume one included James Baxter, Frank Sargeson, James Bertram, Ruth Dallas and Janet Frame, whose short story, ‘Alison Hendry’ appeared under a pen-name. The aim was to encourage New Zealand writing, and in particular talented, emergent writers, and ‘it is still the files of Landfall to which one goes for the heart of the writing of the time’.  

Frame appeared to be joining the ranks of New Zealand’s finest short story writers – a view taken by Dorothy Ballantyne in her 1952 radio review of Lagoon, Frame’s first and prize-winning book of short stories, in which she begins by saying that ‘This review had better start with a plain statement. Janet Frame’s Lagoon is an important book [...] short stories which will rank in New Zealand Literature beside Katherine Mansfield’s Garden Party and Frank Sargeson’s Man and his Wife’, adding that ‘Janet Frame works within the tradition of the New Zealand short story – and she also extends that tradition’. Early in 1952, Frank Sargeson was keen to have Dan Davin at the Clarendon Press include one of the stories in the Oxford University Press collection of New Zealand Short Stories. In August of that year, Dan Davin wrote about changes in New Zealand literature since the 1930s, commenting on earlier poets, who ‘had made poetry in whatever was the fashion before the last in England’ and those who would create literature and help towards the establishment of a special New Zealand tradition. He singled out ‘mutinously loud’ poets: R.A.K. Mason, A. R. D. (Rex) Fairburn, Allen Curnow and Denis Glover as well as Frank Sargeson. Among these established writers, Frame’s ‘new talent announces itself, apparently unheralded’ and Davin praises ‘newcomers like Mr. Duggan and Janet Frame. Bright new mirrors are being held up

to New Zealand nature and they will not exclude the visionary gleam’. Frame continued to publish poems, reviews and stories in the New Zealand Listener and in Landfall during the fifties. When Frame’s first novel Owls Do Cry was published in 1957, Winston Rhodes’ Landfall review stressed the novel’s disturbing and poetic qualities, and the universality of its poetic symbolism.

After Frame had moved to London, Geoffrey Moorhouse, writing in the Guardian in London in 1962, enthusiastically welcomed the publication of Frame’s third novel The Edge of the Alphabet: ‘nothing has been more exciting than the arrival of Janet Frame’. He saw Frame as a New Zealander ‘standing apart from even the best of New Zealand’s other contemporary writers. She does not, as the others do, strain to identify herself with the locality’. This issue of place has been taken up from a New Zealand point of view by Alex Calder among other New Zealand critics, and is discussed later. Frame published six novels in the sixties, to mixed reviews which often referred to her New Zealand origins and to Katherine Mansfield. Anthony Burgess, reviewing The Edge of the Alphabet for the Observer, ruefully points out that ‘women writers from New Zealand have to stand in the hard Katherine Mansfield light and take their wounds from it, gladly or otherwise’. Reviewers at the London Times, and in Landfall, were less enthusiastic than the Guardian’s Moorhouse about The Edge of the Alphabet. The Landfall reviewer writes of its ‘part failure, part success’ and complains of its ‘arrogance and spiritual pride’ though concludes that ‘the book’s virtues outweigh its flaws’. The Times reviewer condemned the final two-thirds of the novel as ‘tedious’ and ‘self-conscious’, conceding that the earlier New Zealand chapters

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13 Anthony Burgess, ‘In the Twilight Zone’ a review of The Edge of the Alphabet, Observer 18 November 1962, p. 25.
‘go some way to make intelligible Miss Frame’s reported standing in that country as its leading author’.\textsuperscript{15} Owen Leeming’s much-quoted comment that ‘she has a decided weakness for metaphor’ appeared in his \textit{Landfall} review of \textit{Scented Gardens for the Blind} in 1963, in which he discusses Frame’s ‘indulgent lapses into sheer meaninglessness’.\textsuperscript{16} By contrast, \textit{The Times} reviewer praises the novel as ‘impressive and certainly the best prose style to emerge from New Zealand since the days of Katherine Mansfield’.\textsuperscript{17} In 1966, reviewing the wide variety of short stories in \textit{The Reservoir} for \textit{Landfall}, James Bertram writes with admiration about Frame’s power as a writer. He says of his own reaction to Frame that ‘I find it hard to write of Janet Frame with any detachment, for she cannot put words on a page without generating the kind of magnetic attraction that seizes and locks the reader’s sensibility’; and in an emphasis on her stature as a writer rather than her origins, that she writes ‘with the burning urgency of Blake or Dostoievsky’.\textsuperscript{18} He concludes that ‘for the patterned words, and all the talent and courage behind them, we can only be grateful’.

\section*{2.3 Biographical Approaches}

Frame’s autobiography gives warning of the unreliability of memory, its honest fallibility, ‘its mixture of fact and truths and memories of truths’,\textsuperscript{19} and Frame had been disconcerted on a number of occasions to find that her fiction was taken for straight autobiography. In an interview with Lindsay Shelton, Frame insisted that she had been honest, that ‘though I kept strictly to the truth as I remembered it, my story naturally evolved into a fictional format. Yet nowhere did I swerve from the truth’.\textsuperscript{20} Frame wrote an autobiography, not a history: ‘found

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{15} Review of \textit{The Edge of the Alphabet}, \textit{The Times}, 15 November 1962, p. 16.
\item \textsuperscript{16} Owen Leeming, review of \textit{Scented Gardens for the Blind}, \textit{Landfall} 68 (December 1963), pp.388-89.
\item \textsuperscript{17} Review of \textit{Scented Gardens for the Blind}, \textit{The Times}, 25 July 1963, p. 13.
\item \textsuperscript{18} James Bertram, review of \textit{The Reservoir}, \textit{Landfall} 77(March 1966), pp. 290-92.
\item \textsuperscript{19} Frame, \textit{The Complete Autobiography}, p. 7.
\item \textsuperscript{20} Janet Frame in an interview with Lindsey Shelton for \textit{La Stampa}, Italy, September 1990, in \textit{Janet Frame: In Her Own Words}, p. 147.
\end{itemize}
fiction’ in her own phrase.21 She always insisted, moreover, that her novels were fiction. *Faces in the Water* is prefaced by the statement that ‘although this book is written in documentary form it is a work of fiction. None of the characters, including Istina Mavet, portrays a living person’.22

More major studies of Frame’s work only began to appear in the early 1970s. The New Zealand academic Patrick Evans, and Professor Victor Dupont in France, took an avowedly biographical approach to Frame’s novels. In his early critical works, *The Inward Sun* in 1971, a guide for students, and *Janet Frame*, in 1977, Evans attempted to relate the events of Frame’s life to her fiction; and used information from Frame’s former school and university teachers, an activity which Frame regarded as a breach of privacy. Evans also considers the influence of Frame’s reading, chiefly of Rilke, asserting that ‘The poetry of Rilke “enters” her artistic world and helps crystallize it as no other writer’s has done’.23 Evans underplays the significance of Frame’s other reading in suggesting that ‘the world of literature is a source of comparisons, generally speaking, but not a source of inspirations.’24 However, Evans’ essays on Rilke and Frame, and on Frame’s manipulation of the reader, look forward to future studies by Jan Cronin and Marc Delrez. In 1972, after Frame had published eight novels, Winston Rhodes issued a warning in *Landfall* of the pitfalls of an overly biographical approach to a writer’s work which ‘obscures a proper comprehension of the literary process’ instead of a focus on the writer’s achievements.25

The diagnosis of schizophrenia which Frame had been given in the 1950s had been refuted at London’s Maudsley Hospital in the early 1960s, though in the 1970s critics such as Evans and Professor Victor Dupont still pursued her with these erroneous perceptions.

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21 Janet Frame, Interview with Elizabeth Alley in *In the Same Room: Conversations with New Zealand Writers*, ed. by Elizabeth Alley and Mark Williams (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1992) p. 46.
1974 Frame wrote to Dr. Cawley that ‘a French professor has sent me 3 papers, one in French, the other two (one by him) in English. He makes constant reference to my “diseased days” and my “diseased mind.” [...] I have never had a “diseased mind” ’.26 Professor Dupont issued a retraction later in 1974 of the comments he had been making about Frame’s ‘diseased mind’ after he had met Frame and she had sent him a copy of a supportive open letter from Dr. Cawley.27 Cawley’s letter warned that anyone making accusations of mental illness ‘is running two risks. One is of public ridicule at the hands of scholars more knowledgeable and informed about these matters. The other is litigation.’ 28 This letter had some success in assisting Frame to manage her literary reputation in relation to the discredited diagnosis of mental illness. Dupont’s retraction is full and courteous, including the comment that ‘from a correspondence I recently had with that eminent novelist and a visit I paid her last summer in Menton, on her friendly invitation, it appeared that what had been mistaken for reliable testimony was idle gossip and misrepresentation of facts’. He also includes also a full reprint of Dr. Cawley’s open letter.29

Evans, whose enquiries Frame appears to have found distressingly prurient, continued to pursue his biographical approach in 1993, noting that he had come to be viewed as a ‘critical paparazzo [...] as I stumble through the shrubbery of her life.’ In spite of being haunted by a reputation for rooting around for dark secrets, Evans wrote in the same article of Frame’s ‘biomythography’ and the effect of Jane Campion’s ‘romantic and fanciful film version of Frame’s version of herself, so revealingly approved of by the writer’. 30 Campion’s film, based on her reading of the Complete Autobiography, has indeed been influential in creating an image of Frame in the public mind. Frame recognised the film as an art work in its own

26 Frame, letter to Dr. Cawley, 27 February 1974.
28 Letter from Dr. Cawley, cited in King, p. 389.
right, which ‘first celebrates the image, and only then the language [...] A film is a new creation’, a point she reiterated, explaining that ‘as I had given them the charge of making the film I did not disturb them, forever saying, “But it wasn’t like that”’.  

The Belgian critic Marc Delrez avoids, for the most part, biographical discussion of the novels; and whilst acknowledging the advantage of critics writing post-autobiography, is critical in this respect of the earlier approach taken by Patrick Evans, whose judgement he suggests ‘is only a stone’s throw away from a diagnosis of mental disorder’. In 2010, however, Evans revisited his study of the influence on Frame of Rilke’s poetry and considered Frame’s explorations beyond the traditional novel form, emphasising the novels’ sense of personal estrangement. He noted her distinct control over her novels’ point of view, and of the reader, and her use of imagery, leaving behind the by now deeply unfashionable biographical approach for a while and anticipating the work of later scholars who would investigate Frame’s relationship with the reader. In a 2011 study of Frame’s Holocaust imagery, Evans acknowledged, that *Faces in the Water* ‘is now agreed to be more than the autobiographical documentary some took it for on publication, and instead a consciously wrought work of art dealing with themes crucial to twentieth-century thought’.

### 2.4 The Europeans

Of particular note during the 1970s to the 1990s was the illuminating work of another Belgian academic Jeanne Delbeare, who edited a significant and influential collection of essays, *Bird, Hawk, Bogie*, on Frame’s work in 1978; and after the publication of Frame’s

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31 Janet Frame, in an interview with Lindsey Shelton for *La Stampa*, Italy, September 1990, in *Janet Frame: In Her Own Words*, p. 147.

32 Janet Frame, letter to Robert Cawley, 9 November 1990.


34 Patrick Evans, ‘Reaching for Rilke’s Angel: Janet Frame’s Translations’, *Journal of Postcolonial Cultures and Societies*, 1. 1 (2010).

Complete Autobiography revised, enlarged and updated this collection in 1992, with a comprehensive bibliography, as The Ring of Fire: Essays on Janet Frame. By including the work of scholars from America and Europe as well as Australasia, Delbaere widened discussion and emphasised Frame’s worldwide appeal rather than her nationality. Delbeare’s introduction to this collection, and her articles published elsewhere, form an elegant, perceptive study of Frame’s use of imagery and intertextual references, and she is one of a number of influential French and Belgian critics who have been at the forefront of Frame studies from the late 1970s to the present day. Their work is informed by Frame’s Complete Autobiography, a vitally important resource to any student of Frame, which sheds light on the history of her misdiagnosis of schizophrenia and her childhood circumstances; deals in some detail with her early reading and her delight in words; relates her access to books and libraries during her secondary school years; and details her literary discoveries at the University of Otago.

The Ring of Fire contains a number of articles from early Frame scholarship, through to the time of its update, to include articles on Frame’s later fiction, and illustrates some of the progress away from the focus on Frame as a fragile victim of provincial New Zealand. Robert T. Robinson’s 1972 essay relates Frame’s childhood fable to the context of provincial South Island society; 36 Vincent O’Sullivan views Frame as a gifted victim; 37 and Delbeare explores Frame’s quest for reconciliation, saying: ‘The poet knows that ‘beyond all man-made divisions there is a continuity of consciousness, a unity of experience which our limited and partial vision generally prevents us from recognising.’ 38 Delrez discusses Malfred’s failure of imagination in A State of Siege; 39 and Victor Dupont views Intensive Care in terms of the

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Nietzschean philosophy of the Superman. In the final 1992 essay, W. S. Broughton discusses Frame’s autobiography, which he considers ‘a single coherent work of art, as profound and as deserving of a claim to greatness as anything Janet Frame has written’, a theme to which Claire Bazin and Valérie Baisnée have more recently returned. Bazin also makes a claim for the autobiography that it is ‘a greater literary achievement than any of her other works’, and asserts that ‘Frame specialises in the art of reverting, inverting and changing the situations, and the whole Autobiography is a perfect illustration of this incredible skill or adaptability’.

2.5 The New Wave of New Zealanders

In a shift of critical focus from the European view of Frame’s universality, the New Zealand critic Mark Williams traces Frame’s ‘suburban gothic’ in Leaving the Highway, a 1990 study of six New Zealand writers who have ‘extended the tradition of New Zealand fiction’. He locates Frame’s themes of enclosure, ghostly happenings, female incarceration and nightmare as relating to the Gothic tradition extending from Radcliff and Poe, Rider Haggard and the sensation novels of the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Britain and New Zealand. He also discusses the debate around New Zealand’s English literary heritage of Shakespeare, the King James Bible, and the Romantic poets propounded by C. K. Stead; and the alternative acceptance by Pakeha of their location as a Pacific Island and the presence and contribution of Maori culture. Williams’s argument is a useful reminder for European readers who might overlook the specifically local shaping of New Zealand fiction. Williams, in common with Alex Calder, dwells on the importance of place to Frame, and the significance of her

40 Victor Dupont, ‘Jane Frame’s Brave New World: intensive Care’ in The Ring of Fire, pp. 149-160.
41 W. S. Broughton, ““With Myself as Myself”: A Reading of Janet Frame’s Autobiography”, in The Ring of Fire, p. 232.
homeland, a view that European critics tend to fight shy of; although Frame eventually returned from her self-imposed exile, safe from the prospect of further incarceration. In a letter to Charles Brasch in 1964, Frame had commented that ‘for me living away from New Zealand is a means of ensuring physical safety and security. How I wish it were not so! There is so much here to be written about – with passion if not always with love’. Delrez, for example is ‘wary’ of Williams’s argument that Frame’s fiction is dominated by ‘the artist’s responsibilities to the country of her birth’. Williams highlights New Zealand writers’ defiance of the pervading Puritan culture, just as American and British novelists and playwrights have chiefly challenged the culture of repression, stigma, shame and taboo in their own homelands. At Yaddo, in 1970, Frame gently mocks the straitlaced Dunedin she had left in a letter to Bill Brown: ‘The chief problem will be where to get my necessary supply of laughter: Dunedin is a prim place and my friends are on the sedate side. Limericks, frustrated sex – good heavens no.’ Calder argues, however, that ‘for Frame, the decision to return was literary. Home was where the language – though always changing, though always likely to refigure her backyard – was in place’.

There appears to be a distinct division here between New Zealand and European scholars as to the importance of Frame’s birthplace. This is understandable in terms of a shared knowledge of geographical place and of shared cultural background. As a south Londoner, I found Frame’s delineation of late 1950s Wandsworth in the autobiography both striking and familiar: the lodgings in Cedars Road which links Lavender Hill with Clapham Common; Battersea Tech; and the 137 bus. In my mind’s eye, I could see where she was walking and where the bus was taking her. Frame is pitch perfect in conveying the slow emergence from

44 Janet Frame, letter to Charles Brasch, 2 January 1964, in Dear Charles, Dear Janet, p. 11.
45 Delrez, Manifold Utopia, p. xiv.
46 Williams, Leaving the Highway, p. 39.
post-war utility and rationing, the lodging-house landlady, and the grey, staid aura around the
time of the Chatterley ban when the Beatles’ first LP was still some way off. There is
something especially seductive in reading about a familiar place and zeitgeist, which may at
the same time focus attention too much in on itself and oversimplify a complex and variable
individual sense of national identity. Earlier literary exiles rarely returned: James Joyce, D.H.
Lawrence, Samuel Beckett, Katherine Mansfield, Joseph Conrad – all made permanent
homes abroad. Frame ponders on exiles of various eras: Conrad, Nabokov and Samuel
Beckett, ‘who have had to go more deeply into the unknown by changing their language [...]’
all writers are exiles’. 49 Frame, however, was one of a later generation of literary exiles who
did return, and willingly. ‘I belong here’, as Frame told Elizabeth Alley, confirming both
Calder’s view and her own her comments in the autobiography. 50 ‘My reason for returning
was literary,’ Frame affirms; and in one of her characteristic composting images saw herself
as ‘a mapmaker for those who will follow, nourished by this generation’s layers of the
dead’. 51 Evidence for Calder’s view of the inspiration of Frame’s homeland and its cultures
becomes increasingly conspicuous in her later novels, culminating in her final novel The
Carpathians which focuses on a specific, if fictional, Maori legend. Whilst all critics
appreciate the universality of Frame’s depiction of the human heart, mind, and soul,
Europeans not knowing the locations or cultures for themselves may be less conscious of the
New Zealand origins of Frame’s inspirations.

Williams also stresses the significance of Christianity and the Bible in Frame’s fiction. He
argues that Frame’s view of Christianity, the Bible and especially the Book of Revelation,
feeds Frame’s imagination just as it had fed the imaginations of William Blake, D. H.
Lawrence and Walt Whitman; and that her novels are rich with the echoes of visionary and
religious poets. Frame’s is not a puritan view, but ‘the Blakean sense that Christianity is at

49 Frame, Complete Autobiography, p. 415.
50 Frame in interview with Elizabeth Alley, In the Same Room, p. 49.
heart a message about transforming, not repudiating, physical existence’.

Frame’s profound sense of the world’s spiritual bankruptcy, and suggests that ‘for Frame, the trick is to learn to live religiously, but without the gods’.

Williams is one of a number of critics, including Marc Delrez and Winston Rhodes who use religious discourse: ‘spiritual’, ‘religious’, ‘humanist’, ‘pilgrim(age)’ and ‘ethical’ to convey the non-material and other-worldly aspects of Frame’s work, sometimes with difficulties in finding appropriate terminology to convey these qualities in the work of a writer with no formal adherence to a religious doctrine.

Judith Dell Panney’s 1993 study of Janet Frame’s fiction, *I Have What I Gave*, is an exploration of Frame’s patterning and the allegorical features of the novels, having perceived a link between *Living in the Maniototo* and Dante’s depiction of Hell in the *Divine Comedy*. Gina Mercer’s *Janet Frame: Subversive Fictions* (1994) takes a feminist stance based on her study of Frame’s female imagery and references, and offers a detailed account of Frame’s delineation of male power. A view of Frame’s fiction in these narrowly allegorical or feminist terms, however insightful, arguably downplays the plurality of Frame’s novels and the importance of Frame’s exploration of language. This is a point Williams had made in 1990, commenting on the emergence of ‘women’s writing’ and its critique of male power. He asserts of Frame’s novels, that ‘to read them exclusively in these terms is to lose sight of their force and interest as works of fiction. The central and permanent feature of her art as a novelist is her preoccupation with language itself’.

Like Gina Mercer and Judith Dell Panney, Karin Hansson reads the novels almost as allegory, but viewing them from the perspective of modern physics, evolution, and the

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52 Williams, *Leaving the Highway*, p. 33.
53 Williams, *Leaving the Highway*, p. 54.
54 Williams, *Leaving the Highway*, p. 17.
stability of matter: to the point of describing the novels as ‘scientifiction’.\textsuperscript{56} Her case is not helped by biographical errors of fact which could have been avoided by reference to Frame’s autobiography, or to King’s biography. However, Hansson’s final chapter is an interesting discussion of the ways in which the novels deal with a ‘multiplicity of reality’\textsuperscript{57} and the increasingly complex rôle of the narrator in Frame’s later novels, and in this she looks forward to the work of Jan Cronin. Paul Matthew St Pierre also takes a semi-scientific approach in exploiting the disciplines and methodologies of biosemiotics, the science of signs in living systems, and concedes the irony of having to supply an extensive glossary ‘in a book that endorses my subject’s censure of ready-made discourse’.\textsuperscript{58}

\textbf{2.6 Recent Critical Studies}

The pre-eminent European critic of Frame is arguably Marc Delrez, whose \textit{Manifold Utopia} was published in 2002. Delrez seeks a way to account for the ‘otherness’ of Frame’s novels; her focus on inner realities rather than external realism; her use of language to explore the unconscious mind; what he sees as ‘a utopian dimension’\textsuperscript{59} in Frame, a utopian ideal which is infinitely deferred; and the fictionalisation of ‘the artist as an agent of transformation’.\textsuperscript{60} Delrez’s arguments are based on close readings of the novels, rather than an attempt to locate Frame’s writings in any one psychological or philosophical system of thought, discussing previous Frame scholarship in his introduction. He sees Frame’s postcolonialism as subordinate to her universality, and Frame as a novelist who ‘continues to defy easy classification’.\textsuperscript{61} His method of close reading complements the work of scholars who make links with Freudian psychology or systems of philosophical thought, for example

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{56} Hansson, \textit{The Unstable Manifold}, p. 56.
\item \textsuperscript{57} Hansson, \textit{The Unstable Manifold}, p. 123.
\item \textsuperscript{58} Paul Matthew St Pierre, \textit{Janet Frame: Semiotics and Biosemiotics in Her Early Fiction} (Lanham, Maryland: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2011).
\item \textsuperscript{59} Delrez, \textit{Manifold Utopia}, p. 13.
\item \textsuperscript{60} Delrez, \textit{Manifold Utopia}, p. 211.
\item \textsuperscript{61} Delrez, \textit{Manifold Utopia} p. xxix.
\end{itemize}
Jennifer Lawn and Chris Prentice, in Cronin and Drichel’s *Frameworks*, discussed below, and offers a progressive development of the work of Jeanne Delbaere in its elegant, meticulous analysis of Frame’s novels. Delrez’s use of the term ‘utopia’ has been queried by Lydia Wevers: Frame’s novels frequently attract the term ‘dystopian’ but its obverse is more problematic. As Lydia Wevers notes, Frame’s novels ‘would not usually be considered as examples of utopian writing’. Delrez makes this point himself, not wishing ‘to suggest that Frame’s writing can be called “utopian” in any classical sense’. Delrez’s ‘linguistic utopia’ derives from his attempt to account for Frame’s view of the world of the imagination and its infinite shifting perspectives ‘beyond horizons’; and highlights the difficulties of language in discussing aspects of secular spirituality. Delrez’s attempt to avoid a ‘regime’ of critical thought derives from his view that ‘perhaps Frame’s sense of adjustable perspective must be ascribed to her healthy distrust of absolutes’ and her ‘refusal of the status quo in all its forms’. Simone Drichel takes up Wevers’s point, querying ‘whether the persistent struggle against totalizing forms and being that is observable in Frame’s work should be called ‘utopian’,’ but recognises the linguistic issue, asking ‘if not utopian, what else are we to call Frame’s seemingly insatiable desire for a beyond?’

Cronin’s and Simone Drichel’s *Frameworks* (2009) is an edition of a selection of contemporary critical essays on Frame by New Zealand and European critics, which consider the way the novels work and their possible relation to various streams of philosophical and psychological thought, with emphasis on Frame’s later fiction and the autobiography. Cronin emphasises the distance travelled in Frame scholarship since the 1970s, and echoes Delrez’s

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64 Janet Frame, interview with Elizabeth Alley, *Leaving the Highway*, p. 54.
66 Delrez, *Manifold Utopia* p. 221.
67 Simone Drichel, ”‘Signposts to a world that is not even mentioned”: Janet Frame’s Ethical Transcendence’, *Frameworks: Contemporary Criticism on Janet Frame*, ed. by Jan Cronin & Simone Drichel (Amsterdam-New York: Rodopi, 2009), pp. 182-83.
criticism of Patrick Evans’ biographical approach in the Introduction to *Frameworks*, twice using the word ‘notorious’ in relation to Evans.\(^6^8\) Cronin’s opening essay pursues Frame’s Pauline reference to seeing ‘through a glass darkly’; the enigmatic, puzzling elements of *The Adaptable Man*; and the intertextual echoes of past poets which Frame employs. Cronin notes the fusion of lines from *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* in Rev. Maude’s quotations from Anglo-Saxon poetry, and the mis-spellings of the Anglo-Saxon, uncertain to what extent these were deliberate on Frame’s part. In fact, in a letter to Dr. Cawley, Frame makes clear her intentions and her irritation with the quality of the copy-editing: ‘Alas, the book is full of mistakes [...] I’m rushing away a frantic note to tell them at least, to correct their muddled printing of Anglo-Saxon quotations’.\(^6^9\) Jennifer Lawn considers the interplay between Frame and Freud in a reading of *Intensive Care* and *Daughter Buffalo*. In her review of *Frameworks*, Maria Wikse complains of an element of dogmatism in essays by Cronin and Lawn that ‘both hijack the author or the text in an effort to persuade us that theirs is the only reading’.\(^7^0\) Gina Mercer also comments, in a review of Cronin’s *The Frame Function*, on Cronin’s somewhat dogmatic use of expression, her ‘admonishing tones [...] the tone of an exasperated governess,’ which she sees as infantilising the author, in the manner of some of the earliest critics who ‘chastised her for her non-compliance with expectations’.\(^7^1\)

Lydia Wevers writes about the importance for Frame of artefacts as memory anchors in Frame’s autobiographical writing. She links Frame’s autobiography with ‘the broad context of Heideggerian philosophy’ while avoiding the temptation to ‘cram Frame’s richly overflowing texts into the shapes of conceptual logic’.\(^7^2\) Anna Smaill discusses the interplay between existentialist thought and Frame’s oeuvre; and Valérie Baisnée discusses the central

\(^{6^8}\) Cronin & Drichel, eds., *Frameworks*, p. xi.

\(^{6^9}\) Frame, Letter to Dr. R Cawley, 10 June 1965.


\(^{7^2}\) Lydia Wevers, ‘Self Possession – “Things” and Janet Frame’s Autobiography’ in *Frameworks*, p. 53.
importance of poetry and poetic language in Frame’s prose works. Isabel Michell considers Frame’s trope of migrancy and a sense of place, a well-trodden path in Frame scholarship, and uses the opportunity to include a discussion of *Towards Another Summer*, published posthumously in 2008. Marc Delrez discusses the themes of war and violence in Frame’s work, with an emphasis on the later novels. Chris Prentice discusses the two final novels in terms of Baudrillard’s literary theories; and Simone Drichel draws together some of the key questions in recent Frame scholarship, discussing the work of Evans, Delrez, Williams and Mercer, and Plato, in examining the concept of Utopia.

The most recent influential full-scale study of Frame’s work is Jan Cronin’s *The Frame Function: An Inside-Outside Guide to the Novels of Janet Frame*, published in 2011, in which Cronin attempts to deconstruct the novels to elucidate Frame’s authorial presence and authorial intent and adopts a term associated with police investigations: *modus operandi*, or *MO*. In *The Frame Function* Cronin systematically investigates Frame’s MO, the layering of Frame’s narrative levels, Frame’s control of the reader, and the ultimate elusiveness and deliberate ambiguity of Frame’s work. As Cronin says herself, her study is more concerned with the *how* than the *what*, and (one might add) the *why*; and is ‘not an introductory guide’.  

Her contention is that Frame privileges certain ‘load-bearing words’, Frame’s expression from *Living in the Maniototo*: ‘mirror’ for example, and ‘treasure’, ‘demarcating and supporting an authorially privileged (usually theoretical) context, which gets acted out in the text’.  

Cronin’s study represents a departure from well-worn paths, and at the same time picks up on the insights of earlier scholarship. In spite of her misgivings about Evans’ views on biographical approaches, she finds herself in sympathy with his sense of cracking codes or working out puzzles and of Frame encouraging the reader to take risks. In relation to linguistic codes, Cronin refers to Frame’s use of allegory, with reference to Judith Dell

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Panney’s study. Cronin highlights areas of scholarly disagreement with other critics, with Jennifer Lawn, for example over Freudian interpretations of Frame’s work and engages with the insights of earlier studies, particularly those of Marc Delrez and Patrick Evans. Cronin’s study of Frame’s narratology is a provocative, sophisticated and systematic account of the ambiguities of Frame’s novels and authorial intentions.

The history of Frame criticism is rightly full of disagreement and divergence, what Joel Gwynne described as ‘a game of critical tennis’, as well as the occasional pursuit of interesting byways such as those by Dell Panney, Hansson and St. Pierre discussed earlier. One of the common critical threads is that while theories of postcolonialism, feminism and postmodernism illuminate aspects of Janet Frame’s fiction, her novels finally resist such neat, singular classification. Both Delrez and Cronin acknowledge and investigate the essential plurality and ambiguity of Frame’s novels, and the ways in which language and ideas take precedence over realistic plot. In a 2012 essay, Delrez returns to Frame’s affinity with Rilke, taking up once again a theme to which Patrick Evans has also been drawn over time – although he does not mention Evans - rather than pursuing the interest in narrative method and form which Cronin has been exploring. Delrez also refers to the arguments surrounding Frame’s national identity, acknowledging ‘Frame’s role as a prime explorer of the New Zealand temperament and experience’, but suggesting ‘that she is like Rilke in view of her approach to identity as a process which is always linked to literary discovery’. In returning to his theme of ‘linguistic utopia’, Delrez relates Rilke’s concern with the negative themes of the twentieth century to Frame’s, arguing that both of them hold out the possibility of

77 Marc Delrez, ‘Rilke in Frame’, p. 2.
redemption other than through theological certainties, ‘and a view of art itself as the only possible vector of existentialist redemption’. 78

In her study of Maori literature, *From Silence to Voice*, Paola Della Valle argues for Frame’s indebtedness to Maori holistic vision and to the Maori view of mythology as the basis of history and fiction; 79 and Michelle Keown touches briefly on Frame’s engagement with Maori/Pakeha relations in her study of Pacific islands writing. 80 The Maori elements in Frame’s novels form a topic which would gain from further comment from Maori critics. Valérie Baisnée’s 2014 study of New Zealand women’s autobiography highlights Frame’s highly metaphorical, poetic account of her life, linked to myth, dreams, recollection, and memory: ‘Frame refuses to write a text bounded by genres: her autobiographical space intersects with those of fiction and myth’, a statement equally true of her novels. 81 Cindy Gabrielle’s 2015 study of Frame’s interest in Buddhism is a persuasive account of the imprint of Buddhism she has detected in the novels. 82 Studies which foreground the poetics of Frame’s fiction and ‘found fiction’ complement the work of scholars who take theoretical models of philosophy or psychology – fixed categories of knowledge – as a basis for their exploration of Frame’s oeuvre. The pursuit of different pathways keeps the debate wide and fluid.

78 Marc Delrez, ‘Rilke in Frame’, p. 8.
Chapter Three: Janet Frame’s Reading

3.1 A Readers’ Paradise?

Janet Frame was born into a culture which by the end of the nineteenth century had achieved in fifty years of settlement the highest ratio of public libraries per person in the world.¹

Frame’s home town was Oamaru, in the Otago district of South Island, between Christchurch and Dunedin. Writing about a reading community in early twentieth-century Timaru, a town about 70 miles north of Oamaru, Susann Liebich illustrates the ways in which ‘reading was integral to the intellectual, cultural and social landscape of a community’ through her study of John Barkas and his community of professional middle-class fellow-readers.² Lydia Wevers illustrates in some detail the importance of the reading community established by the provision of the station library at Brancepeth, north of Wellington.³ In his study of colonial libraries J. E. Traue quotes the 1844 propaganda of the New Zealand Company that ‘in no colony is literature more appreciated than in New Zealand’.⁴ Tony Ballantyne pursues this point in his study of the South Island town of Milton, of colonists who ‘struggled to build institutions, foster civic culture and “improve” themselves’. He stresses the part played by the Scottish Presbyterian culture these colonists had brought with them, with their sense of ‘the social importance of the newspaper and libraries’ and that they were ‘deeply preoccupied with the power of the word’.⁵ The statue of Robert Burns in Dunedin, a poet rather than an explorer or a community or church leader, testifies to this preoccupation, and in this chapter I will outline the reading context of Otago as a preliminary to my discussion of Frame’s early reading.

³ Lydia Wevers: Reading on the Farm: Victorian Fiction and the Colonial World (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2010)
Immigrants arrived in New Zealand in search of a better life, to escape the poverty created by the highland clearances in Scotland and by the British agricultural depression of the 1850s; to escape appalling working conditions at home – when there was work; and to avoid destitution and the threat of the punitive and shaming workhouse. Literacy was a means of personal, social and material self-improvement, certainly in New Zealand, which Melanie Nolan describes a ‘one of the more open societies in the British or developed world, with relatively more opportunity for social mobility’.

Lydia Wevers’ study of the Brancepeth Station Library illustrates the importance attached to books by people who lived in remote rural areas far from major towns and town libraries. Brancepeth Library was one of a number of station libraries, and was set up by the Beetham family who owned the Brancepeth Estate. The Beethams had come from England. Their books reflected the world they had left behind and were bought by the former English gentry to be shared with the whole community of workers and servants, people of varying social standing and means, and of various national backgrounds. Almost all the authors were English: Mrs Henry Wood, Walter Besant, Wilkie Collins. M.E. Braddon, Rider Haggard, Anthony Trollope, Stanley Weyman and Dickens, but included Alexandre Dumas, and pioneer novels from Australia and America. Most of Brancepeth’s workers were men, and it is clear that just about any man who could read did so. In the absence of a log of books borrowed, Wevers has gathered her evidence from the wear and tear of individual books, and from the marginalia she found in them, and demonstrates that reading was not confined to the gentry and upper servants. Book markings show ‘that some of the men working in the rabbiting camps and out-stations, engaged in dirty hard work, isolated, cold and lonely, with no domestic comforts and nasty food, were educated readers who carried books around with

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them and took pleasure in reading’. Wevers notes that library subscribers were all men, and suggests that ‘the wives of men on the station perhaps regarded a single membership as a family subscription’. This assumption would fit with the reaction of the Frame family who viewed Janet’s prize subscription to the Oamaru Athenaeum as bounty for the whole family. Wevers also includes details of the pay in 1908 of Brancepeth’s women servants, after deductions for board, ranging from £52 p.a. for the cook to £6 7s. 6d. p.a. for a sewing maid. Wevers’ illustrations show that the annual library subscription was £1 in November 1895, a prohibitive outlay for a single woman, who would have been earning less than the men. Some of the Brancepeth books show signs of having been marked for reading aloud, evidence of reading as a social activity, and possibly a way for poorer female servants to access books. Women live-in servants also had less leisure time on their hands, and whatever time they did have was likely to be spent in ‘useful’ occupation: knitting, darning, sewing and mending, perhaps while they were listening. Lottie Frame’s joyful request for a Dickens novel from the Athenaeum illustrates the reality of life for many women of her time and earlier: Lottie ‘had no time to read it’. She ‘touched it and opened it and flipped open the pages’.

The value placed on books across all classes, however, is unmistakable. Within the reading community in Timaru, ‘books were passed on, recommended, carried around and talked about in an active network of readers’. Books were a ‘memory anchor’ for immigrants from Scotland and England, and reflect the life, people and places they have left.

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7 Wevers, Reading on the Farm, p. 221.
8 Wevers, Reading on the Farm, p. 30.
9 Wevers, Reading on the Farm, p. 137.
10 Frame, Complete Autobiography, p. 70. Further references to the Complete Autobiography in this chapter are given parenthetically in the text.
11 Susann Liebich, ‘Connected Readers’, p. 3.
behind and their own experiences.¹² Nor were books always about self-improvement. There was a taste for sensation novels in New Zealand just as in Britain, the romantic, sentimental sensational Victorian novels were so much in demand that Wevers assumes that Brancepeth’s copy of *East Lynne* had been stolen or simply read to destruction.¹³ The *Otago Daily Times* for 1863 carried an advertisement for a serialised story by Benjamin Farjeon – later co-editor of the *Daily Times* – in the *Otago Witness*: ‘The Life and Adventures of Christopher Congleton’ and advertisements for ‘cheap editions of popular authors’ which could be obtained from the *Daily Times* branch office’.¹⁴ The list is similar to the one Wevers compiled for Brancepeth: lots of Dickens and Wilkie Collins, Thackeray, the Brontës, Dumas, Trollope, Fielding, Ainsworth, Bulwer; stories of sea voyages and travellers; Shakespeare, Burns and Byron; and ‘just published’, *Old New Zealand: A Tale of the Good Old Times* by a Pakeha Maori (F. E. Maning) which Wevers noted was one of only two New Zealand books among the heavily used collection at Brancepeth, its popularity evidenced by the Brancepeth copy being an 1884 edition. As Ballantyne notes, these New Zealand readers ‘were little concerned with the possibilities of “national literature”, but they were active consumers of verse, prose and drama’.¹⁵ This is a view shared by Dulcie Gillespie-Needham, who found that ‘the quality of fiction read by settlers, no matter the social position, revealed a taste for the romantic, the spectacular, and the sentimental’.¹⁶ Wevers cites William Pember Reeves’s memory of his time as a cadet on a sheep station that ‘I read every book I could lay my hands on, good bad and indifferent, quite without system’.¹⁷

Wevers and Ballantyne both point to the importance of newspaper reading in libraries, and to the way in which newspapers were also a focus for reading communities. The library

¹³ Wevers, *Reading on the Farm*, p. 177.
¹⁴ *Otago Daily Times*, 13 March 1863, p. 3.
¹⁵ Ballantyne, ‘Placing Literary Culture’, p. 100.
was used for reading newspapers as well as books, and that ‘the most sought-after items in
the Brancepeth library were not the books but the newspapers’. Such was their importance
that the fair distribution of newspapers became a contentious issue. As well as being a way
for isolated workers to keep in touch with the world, newspapers would also contain items of
literary interest. Ballantyne cites the Bruce Herald’s serialisation of novels, including some
locally written fiction. The serialisation of stories was also a significant feature of the Otago
Witness, a weekly of eighty or so pages, which until its demise in 1932 carried Dot’s Little
Folk, a three-page feature for children and young people up to the age of 21. On January 7th
1930 the Otago Witness also carried three full pages of two serialised stories: ‘Master Man-
hunters’ and ‘The Necklace of El-Hoya’; five ‘Ladies’ Pages’; a full page review section:
‘Literature and Life’ which included a review of Virginia Woolf’s A Room of One’s Own;
‘Notes and Queries’; a full page of brief anecdotes and poems in ‘The Sketcher’; and a
further full page of three complete short stories. The following month, the Otago Witness was
reporting on Thomas Mann winning the Nobel Prize for Literature, with a long article
discussing his major novels, as well as notes on the publication of critical essays by J. C.
Grierson, Cross Currents in English Literature of the Seventeenth Century, and a new novel
by John Buchan, The Courts of the Morning. In April of the same year, readers and
booksellers were warned about the banning of D. H. Lawrence’s Lady Chatterley’s Lover
across the dominions and the illegality of importing copies.

Although the Otago Daily Times located its literature and review sections in columns
between reports from the magistrates’ courts, religious notes and advertisements rather than
as full-page features, the newspaper also carried reviews of new novels, with brief,
sometimes terse comments. In January 1920 W. W. Jacobs’ comic short stories, Deep Waters,

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18 Wevers, Reading on the Farm, pp. 91-94.
19 Otago Witness, 7 February 1930, p. 68.
20 Otago Witness, 22 April 1930, p. 68.
is ‘in Mr Jacob’s best style’, but the reviewer is less impressed by E.M. Delderfield’s ‘miserable’ *Consequences*: ‘It is very hard to see why this book was allowed to see the light of day’.

A few months later the *Otago Daily Times* published a longer article, picking up comments in the British House of Commons about the state and future of marriage, discussing a variety of popular novels on the theme as well as contributions to the debate by G. K. Chesterton and George Bernard Shaw. After the *Otago Witness* ceased publication in 1932, the *Otago Daily Times* continued to report on ‘Recent Fiction’ and ‘The Latest Books’ across a wide range of literary and popular novels, as well as reproducing notices about the banning of books in different countries, for example James Joyce’s *Ulysses* in China and the Irish Republic. However, by 1934 information about the ‘talkies’ and radio was beginning to take up more space, with details of alternative pleasures. Whole pages were devoted to the latest Hollywood musical, *Flying Down to Rio* and other American films; and a New Zealand film, *Romantic New Zealand* ‘a full-length talking picture in glowing natural colour’.

### 3.2 Early Years and Dot’s Little Folk

Janet Frame’s childhood home had few books, but her parents, her mother Lottie especially, had a keen interest in stories, poems and songs, which helped to sow the seeds of Frame’s lifelong devotion to the literary world. Her mother published poems in the *Wyndham Farmer*, and came to be known as ‘Lottie C. Frame, the local poet’ (25). One of Lottie’s resolutely cheerful poems is quoted in King’s biography, and begins ‘Why be sad when autumn leaves/Flutter to the ground’ and another appeared in the *New Zealand Mercury* in January, 1938, and begins:

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21 *Otago Daily Times*, 10 January 1920, p. 5.
22 *Otago Daily Times*, 5 June 1920, p. 2.
23 *Otago Daily Times*, 2 June 1934, p. 4.
CRITICISM

I should not choose to criticise
A poet of the sunset skies,
Who has an aching in his throat
When gazing where the lilies float
Their golden bowls on quiet pools.
I leave the satire for the fools
Who care not for the poet mind
Nor seek anew delight to find.26

For Lottie, poetry does not reside in satire and criticism, but in a grateful appreciation of the beauties of the natural world. The adult Janet Frame valued the mind of the poet as a privileged person, and we see here that this was a view that Lottie also took, though Lottie’s style of poetry adheres to the Georgian conventions of the time. A poem Lottie had published in *The New Zealand Railways Magazine* begins:

> Where straggling fences on some lonely hill,
> The air, their fragrance with pure beauty fill,
> By summer’s breezes are their petals fanned,
> The sweet wild roses of our Maoriland.27

Referring to the turn-of-the-century English poets – Kipling and Newbolt, for example – Owen Leeming notes that they were paid ‘fulsome homage. And of course they were slavishly imitated in the Colonies. They were literature’s answer to the aspidistra’.28

In her autobiography, Frame records that Lottie talked about her favourite books: *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, *Tom Sawyer*, and American poets: Longfellow, Whittier; and the English and Scottish ballads. Frame’s father sang war-time songs and the popular songs of the era; he and Lottie were active in keeping up their Scottish culture of dance, music and song. He valued books, and brought home a copy of Oscar Wilde’s *Fairy Tales* which he had found among some rubbish (19), though his own taste ran to the stories of Zane Grey and Sexton Blake (101). On Sunday evenings Lottie held Bible readings when they ‘pored over the red-

letter Bible’ (34), and Lottie, a Christadelphian who believed in the Day of Judgement and the Second Coming, encouraged her children not to laugh at people thought odd, as they ‘might be angels in disguise’ (28). Lottie tended to stress the doom-laden Bible stories of The Garden of Eden and The Flood and she fed Frame’s childlike imagination with images and stories she would transform in her own writing as an adult.  

A further source of reading material for the Frame children was the weekly children’s page in the *Otago Daily Times*: ‘Dot’s Little Folk’, inaugurated on July 1886 by the *Otago Witness*, and taken over in 1932 by the *Otago Daily Times* when the *Otago Witness* ceased publication. The historian Keith Scott bases his survey of New Zealand childhood on this children’s page, focusing his attention on the experience of childhood of the generations of children who wrote to ‘Dot’ from the page’s inception until just after the end of the First World War. He mentions that Janet Frame was ‘the most famous literary DLF’ but ‘does not belong to this time,’ and my investigation of Frame’s correspondence with the page focuses on the period from the mid 1930s until the time the page ceased publication.

At its height in the early years of the 20th century Dot’s page was extremely popular, to the extent that the children’s letters ‘were taking up no less than three pages of the smallest type, when it was found necessary to restrict the space to eight columns’. The importance of the column was both social and educational, and became a valued reading community, as attested by a ‘Farewell Letter’ from Reta, who had reached the Page’s retiring age of twenty-one in 1906, and wrote of her ‘many true D.L.F. friends, of whom not a few are correspondents with me’ and adding that that the page ‘has been in some ways like a second education to me’. Tom L. Mills, who edited a selection of New Zealand children’s verse in 1943 makes a similar point when he comments that ‘one cannot speak too highly of the

29 King, *Wrestling with the Angel*, p. 20.
31 *Otago Witness*, 19 April 1900, p. 35.
tremendous encouragement given by the Press of New Zealand to child contributors’.  

Reports of social gatherings and the weekly meetings of the *Dunedin D.L.F. Literary and Debating Club* attest to its community importance for town-dwelling readers during the early part of the twentieth century. The continuing social significance of ‘Dot’s Little Folk’ as a reading community was also evident in a letter from Janet Frame’s younger sister June (‘Dancing Fairy’) who wrote in 1939 to say ‘Double Daffodil sits in front of me [...] Willow Blossom’s Sister sits three seats at the back of me’, Janet Frame (‘Amber Butterfly’) would mention her favourite correspondents in her letters: Fairey Fox, Quilp and Lady Canterbury Bell. The correspondents all had birthday greetings from Dot, and the deaths of Little Folk were also reported on Dot’s Page, prompting letters of reminiscence and condolence. June Frame wrote in August 1937 of Myrtle’s death, announcing that ‘I am sorry to say that we lost our sister, Good Queen Charlotte, in March. We do miss her so much. But we are going to see her when she wakes again’. 

The identity of the successive ‘Dots’ was kept anonymous, but the very first ‘Dot’ was the journalist and novelist Louisa Baker, who very much set the tone of the page and had a keen interest in both creative writing and in children. She promised that ‘Dot will never find any matter that interests the children too trivial to attend to, and hopes before long to be regarded as their friend.’ Baker returned to England by 1894, to pursue a career as a novelist, but her influence on the page endured. Baker invited the children to choose pseudonyms. Some of these names were patriotic: ‘Young Newzealander’ and ‘Scotch Lad’, but most children chose names from stories or fairy-tales and Frame was ‘Amber Butterfly’. In later years, Dot would select and print a ‘Letter of the Week’ by way of praise and encouragement. When Baker left in 1894, the editor William Fenwick took over the page

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34 *Otago Witness*, 13 June, 1906, p. 83.  
35 June Frame (‘Dancing Fairy’), letter in the *Otago Daily Times*, 23 October 1939, p. 11.  
36 *Otago Daily Times*, 2 August 1937, p. 15.  
37 *Otago Witness*, 16 July, 1886, p. 35.
himself, so that for a time, Dot was actually a middle-aged man, maintaining the standards set by Baker. Fenwick resigned as editor in 1909. Most of the page’s correspondents were from lower South Island, but a few letters came from further afield and occasionally from Canada: there were pen-friend arrangements with children in India, Ceylon, and Canada. Frame had her first letter published in 1935, and by 1936 was a regular correspondent. Her sisters also wrote in and occasionally had letters or poems published. By this time, Dot was Eileen Soper, who took over the page when the *Otago Witness* closed in 1932, and remained as Dot until 1938, resigning when she married. Like Louisa Baker, Soper was a journalist and after World War II she wrote novels for young readers and an autobiography. The table below shows Frame’s contributions and is as accurate as possible within the limits of the completeness of the *Otago Daily Times* and my own vigilance.

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**Table 1: Janet Frame’s Letters and Poems to the *Otago Daily Times*.**

From the early 1900s, young readers wrote to ‘Dot’ under their pseudonyms, and got a brief, positive response. In later years, ‘Dot’ would select and print a ‘Letter of the Week’ by way of praise and encouragement. Each Monday, there was a poem, an article of interest, part of a serialised story and then a selection of readers’ letters. The reading material was
aimed at a range of ages and included rewritings of classic literature and poetry from the English canon, as well as stories and poems aimed at younger children. In 1934, Dot’s page was serialising the story of Beowulf, pairing the Death of Beowulf with Walt Whitman’s ‘O Captain! My Captain!’ In 1935, the paper serialised ‘Thor and the Giants’, the Norse Sagas of Thor, Loki, and Freya, and classical Greek myths and legends appeared at various times. There appear to have been no retellings of Maori myths, or Maori correspondents, though in a letter about ancient monsters and tuatara Frame makes mention of the Maori legend of Taniwha ‘an old legend which you will probably know about a number of Maoris being eaten by a huge Taniwha’. The fiction and non-fiction items catered for a wide range of ages and interests. In amongst the children’s adventure stories there were more sophisticated items about the wider world, and fiction which required at least a degree of maturity. For example, a piece musing on shadows in relation to the coming of summer, links the beauties of the natural world, a story from ancient Greece, and reference to philosophers and poets. The final paragraph begins, ‘Plato speaks of human beings living in a kind of cave in which they do not see the actual shape of things but only their shadows’ and briefly links further shadows imagery from Thomas de Quincey, Shakespeare, Chaucer, Edmund Burke and the Bible. In spite of its often sentimental tone, the successive editors of Dot’s page took their responsibilities to the children seriously, both in responding positively to the children’s views and interests and in supporting the children’s developing literacy and literary skills.

The weekly poem with which the page usually began, drew on a mix of poems written for children, sometimes by ‘Anon’, but generally by well-known poets who wrote for children; poems from the literary canon; and occasionally poems from the correspondents. Poems included Edward Lear’s ‘The Owl and the Pussycat’, John Drinkwater’s ‘Moonlit Apples’, Rudyard Kipling’s ‘If’, three poems by James Joyce: ‘Noise of many waters’,

‘Strings in the Earth’ and ‘Air and Goldenhair’; poems by Walter de la Mare and Robert Graves, G.K. Chesterton, A. E. Houseman; Francis Thompson’s ‘The Daisy’, W. H. Davies’s ‘Summer’, Blake’s ‘Tyger’ and ‘Happy Piper’, and Cowper’s ‘Snail’. There are poems by Charles Kingsley, R. W. Emerson, Wordsworth’s ‘Daffodils’, Browning’s ‘Home thoughts from Abroad’, Robert Bridges, Tennyson, Lawrence Binyon, Edmund Blunden and W. B. Yeats’s ‘Lake Isle of Innisfree’. Just occasionally, the poet was not British. When Dot printed a poem from the southern hemisphere, there was a note to that effect. There were a few Australian poems, for example ‘Cradle Song’ by Louis Esson, with a reminder from Dot that ‘our own land is full of subjects around which poems could be made’.40 Twice during this period, Dot printed a children’s poem by Katherine Mansfield, described as ‘one of New Zealand’s own daughters, and while she was alive, one of the finest writers of short stories in the world.’41 The poem on this occasion was ‘The Town Between the Hills’; and the following year Dot printed Mansfield’s ‘Opposites’, a children’s poem, and wrote of Mansfield as ‘a New Zealand writer of whom we should all be proud’.42 The effect was arguably to suggest that Mansfield was the only New Zealand writer of any literary worth.

There is a distinct absence on Dot’s page of any New Zealand poems of the calibre of the British and American favourites, and apart from Mansfield’s, the only other New Zealand poems printed came from the columns’ readers. There had been a collection of New Zealand Verse published in 1906, revised in 1926 as a Treasury of New Zealand Verse, and a further collection, Kowhai Gold published in London by J. M. Dent in 1930, and this volume included the Mansfield poem ‘The Town Between the Hills’, which appeared on Dot’s page. Both collections have attracted disdain and derision, and the former collection is regarded as primarily of historical, not literary, interest. Allen Curnow, writing in his Introduction to his own collection, A Book of New Zealand Verse in 1951, says ‘there were good reasons of an

40 Otago Daily Times, 7 February 1938, p. 15.
41 Otago Daily Times, 6 June 1938, p. 15.
42 Otago Daily Times, 14 August 1939, p. 15.
historical kind [...] but those reasons are not available now’.\textsuperscript{43} He describes \textit{Kowhai Gold} as ‘trivial if sincere’ and exhibiting a ‘lack of any vital relation to experience, a fanciful aimlessness’.\textsuperscript{44} Charles Brasch was considerably harsher: ‘It shamed us in the eyes of the world. It set literature in a pretentious vacuum’.\textsuperscript{45}

There was a lot of encouragement on Dot’s pages for readers to send in their own poems, with frequent advice: Dot advised that poems should rhyme, and used Drinkwater’s ‘Moonlit Apples’ as an example: ‘Each verse follows the pattern set by the first verse – five beats in the first three lines, four beats in the fourth; the first three lines rhyming with themselves, the fourth line rhyming with the fourth line in the next verse. Then read it aloud and see how full of music its words are’.\textsuperscript{46} Children were exhorted to learn poems by heart and to relish the sound of them. Of Blake’s ‘Tyger’, Dot urged that: ‘This famous poem is one you should all know […] Learn the poem if you can, for to say it aloud is to receive a thrill of excitement up and down your spine’.\textsuperscript{47} Dot made it clear that free verse was not what was expected – pointedly to Fairey Fox who sent in such an offering. Poems had to have a rhyme scheme. Poems using ‘poetic diction’ and the kind of sentimentality of the time were praised for being ‘charming’. Fairey Fox did not take the criticism kindly, and responded with ‘You told me the rhyme could be improved. You surprised me, for the poem was not supposed to rhyme’.\textsuperscript{48} This was a distinctly interactive page, fulfilling some of the functions of present day social media. Dot’s feedback was a significant part of the Page’s success, and the children’s letters, poems and points of view were always taken seriously: the successive Dots responded to the letters as a good teacher might. Although comments were often made in hackneyed terms, ‘charming’, ‘pleasing’ and so on, Dot was often more specific, and

\textsuperscript{44} Curnow, \textit{A Book of New Zealand Verse}, p. 17.
\textsuperscript{46} \textit{Otago Daily Times}, 25 July 1938, p. 15.
\textsuperscript{47} \textit{Otago Daily Times}, 10 October 1938, p. 19.
\textsuperscript{48} \textit{Otago Daily Times}, 7 March 1938, p. 17.
‘pleasing poem’ was tempered by a comment such as ‘There is something wrong with the last two lines in the first verse, but probably you will be able to discover what it is for yourself’. This was one of Dot’s earlier responses to Frame’s poems, but Dot’s praise increased as Frame’s poems became more skilful and confident: ‘It shows some originality of thought, and the rhyme and rhythm are both good.’ Frame kept a notebook recording her poems, which was later uncovered when her home in Eden Street Oamaru was renovated. The comment Frame treasured and remarked on in her autobiography came for a poem called ‘Blossoms’, about an orchard, which prompted Dot’s praise for its ‘poetic insight and imagination’.

Reflecting in her autobiography on this comment made during her sixth-form years at school, Frame wrote: ‘But, oh, how sweet were the words, “poetic insight and imagination”. This was the first time anyone had told me, directly, that I had imagination.’ Frame ended this reflection by referring to a note in her diary of the time, ‘They think I’m going to be a schoolteacher, but I’m going to be a poet’ (132). Very occasionally, Dot was so impressed with a reader’s poem, that it was printed along with one from a published poet, the ultimate accolade for the children who sent in their own poems; Frame achieved this distinction twice.

Some of the children’s letters led to brief debates, mostly about gender-based rivalries and the challenges of childhood, but the impending war provoked a number of comments about the causes and ethics of the situation, as children tried to make sense of what was happening in the news. ‘Why do people fight with one another?’ asked Frame, ‘Simply

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50 Otago Daily Times, 13 November 1939, p. 11.
51 Janet Frame, notebook, Waitaki District Archive 88991.
52 Otago Daily Times, 2 October 1939, p. 13.
because they have been hurt, and must hurt someone else.’ Dot’s response aimed to engage
with the correspondent and encourage further thought: ‘So you think war is a hitting back,
Amber Butterfly? It is an interesting point of view. How would you prevent hurt in the first
place?’ Frame followed this up the following week, with a comment that Chamberlain and
Eden should unite in spite of their differences, but that ‘these two men do not appear to have
any idea of coming together, possibly because their feelings are hurt and they do not wish to
“grin and bear it”’. Dot’s response, perhaps feeling the correspondent was a little out of her
depth, was that ‘such a joining sometimes results in disaster.’ In the November following
the outbreak of war, an Oamaru correspondent, Fairey Fox, wrote a letter in which she
condemned all war on the basis of the Sixth Commandment, adding ‘What men receive the
Victoria Cross for in war time they are hung for in peace time.’ Fairey Fox’s views on
pacifism appear to be as advanced as her approach to rhyme and free verse. Just two months
after Britain’s declaration of war with Germany, it is surprising that such a letter was
published, but Dot replied at some length, sounding disturbed by the sentiments expressed,
and terminating the debate. Dot acknowledged the rightness of the sentiment, but justified
killing in self-defence, advising that Fairey Fox would understand better as she matured, and
adding finally: ‘However, I do not think it would serve any good purpose to discuss the
matter further.’

Frame’s letters were usually less controversial, describing what she saw and heard
around her and they could receive high praise: ‘an excellent example of what a best letter can
be, Amber Butterfly—one subject treated as fully as possible, and interesting all the way
through.’ A year later, Frame’s style was becoming more individual and less conventional,
and Dot was delighted with a lively letter describing what Frame could see ‘seated in a rather

54 Otago Daily Times, 28 March 1938, p. 17.
55 Otago Daily Times, 11 April 1938, p.17.
56 Otago Daily Times, 20 November 1939, p.15.
57 Otago Daily Times, 23 May 1938, p.15.
uncomfortable position in the hedge’. Dot responded with ‘I have enjoyed your letter immensely, Amber Butterfly. It is very well written, and describes in a vivid and entertaining fashion the life of the street as seen by you from your seat in the hedge’.58 Frame continued to contribute poems to Dot’s page which were increasing in length and becoming more complex during 1940 and 1941; and in February 1940 Dot responded by repeating her appreciation of Frame’s imagination, and adding: ‘I hope you will persevere with your writing of poetry. If you will study the works of the great poets, noting their choice of language and the smoothness of their verse, you will find this a great help.’59

During 1940 and 1941, Frame continued to submit poems to Dot’s page, and to the Mail Minor children’s section of the Oamaru Mail, occasionally sending the same poem to both. For the most part, these poems only now exist in the remaining archive copies of these newspapers, as when Frame left school she burnt her diaries and her childhood poems (140). The poems show a reluctance to depart from the clichéd ‘poetic diction’ which Frame felt was expected of her: violets are always shy; mist is silver; and lakes are crystal; and the praise she received for her efforts caused her ‘to feel trapped by the opinion of others’ (115). One of Frame’s poems from 1938, ‘Winter Mornings’ which she disparagingly described as her ‘usual factual account of the natural world’ was accepted by The New Zealand Railways Magazine, Frame receiving one guinea for it. The poem was later included in Tom L. Mills’s Verse by New Zealand Children, published in December 1943 (105).60 The pressure to conform to the much-praised derivative style influenced by the poets studied at school was considerable, and the very positive tone often sounds like Lottie, for example in the final stanza of ‘At Evening’:

Make things happy, golden moon, just
for this night of spring.

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60 Mills, Verse by New Zealand Children, p. 44.
Let the sleeping daffodils their evening
gowns retrieve,

Let all things dance in ecstasy; let every-
body sing,
Then no one ever shall forget the beauty
of this eve.61

By 1940, however, there are signs of an increasingly personal voice and of images
and themes which Frame would develop as an adult. Finding poetry in unlikely places was
one way of establishing an individual voice, as Frame says of her young self, ‘out of a desire
to be myself, not to follow the ever-dominant personalities around me, I had formed the habit
of focusing on places not glanced at by others’(115). In her poem ‘Dandelions’, she sees
these commonplace flowers as ‘A thousand marionettes of joy’, an individualistic choice
noted by Dot, who comments that ‘most people rather despise dandelions, but you have
shown that, like many other common things, they possess a beauty of their own’.62 Frame
showed the same tendency in letter in which she describes a fascinating pattern of colours
and pictures in a rock found in a nearby creek and declares ‘I do think it is marvellous that
they resemble little pictures painted by the most famous artist’, an early indication of the
significance Frame attached to the artist’s perception.63 More individual lines appear, for
example the opening lines of ‘The Awakening of Autumn’,

Autumn is resting to-night
Resting at peace in the glade;

before a return to the clichés of,

Days will be happy and free,
Skies will be powdered in blue
When dear autumn wakes.64

64 Frame, ‘The Awakening of Autumn’, *Otago Daily Times*, 1 April 1940, p. 11.
Frame’s poems to the *Oamaru Mail* were submitted under the pen-name ‘Amera’, in which she is praised as ‘an accomplished writer’ for her poem ‘City Flowers’. This long poem anticipates some of the themes of Frame’s novels, of urban decay and destruction, isolation and entrapment, and begins:

> There are thin flowers in dark city places  
> Huddled away from the world and her dreams,  
> Pitifully pressing their pain-shadowed faces  
> For quiet of mornings and ripple of streams.  
> Prisoners white, mid the dust and the grime;  
> Will freedom come soon? ---

Commenting on these poems for the *Mail Minor*, Patrick Evans notes that ‘most of these suffer from rather precious subject matter and overlush imagery, but are remarkable for their metrical control and general confidence’, and quotes in full ‘Anzac Evening’ by way of an example of technical skill and Framean themes. ‘City Flowers’ is probably a better example of both, and owes more to Frame’s reading of the early Yeats than the influence of Victorian and Georgian nature poems. In later years, Frame would be drawn especially to the visionary poets: Blake, Hopkins, Dylan Thomas and Yeats. Yeats’s concern with mythology and folklore, spirituality and death, the agrarian landscape and the natural world appear to have made an appeal to Frame’s sensibilities in her school-days. The first stanza of ‘City Flowers’ takes up Yeats’s rose imagery and continues:

> Will she have roses upon her pale feet  
> Dew-roses, warm roses, the roses of love,  
> Will she come dancing along the cold street  
> With stars in her eyes from the heavens above?

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65 Frame, ‘City Flowers’, *Oamaru Mail, Mail Minor*, 14 June 1940, p. 10.  
66 Evans, *Janet Frame*, pp. 25-26; *Oamaru Mail, Mail Minor*, 26 April 1940.
One of the poems Frame submitted to both the *Mail Minor* and Dot’s page was ‘Kittenhood’ the poem which Dot found ‘a little involved in places’. It reappeared four days later in the *Mail Minor* with a few very minor amendments, to regularise key repetitions and clarify the sense.

The Framean themes of silence and blindness find expression in Frame’s poem, ‘Empty Houses’, which begins:

You sad homes of silence, you little blind houses, awake!
Let the wind blow your cobwebs away;
Let the spirit of summer steal softly inside to your shadows, and shake
Through your corridors quiet the lingering laughter of day.

Isolation and silence are the theme of the following week’s poems, ‘Wind Flowers’ where the only sound is ‘eternal bird song’, and ‘the only light is the light of sun and star’, and where,

There is something felt in the silences up
in the wild, pure places

As an adult, Frame would develop a strong affinity with the landscape poetry of her South Island contemporaries, and the ‘wild, pure places’ become a notable feature of the novels, contrasting with the man-made environment and its materialistic culture.

A year earlier, Frame had written a poem for the *Mail Minor*, ‘When Soldiers March’. She quotes some stanzas in her autobiography, in which she writes of her inability to face the reality of war, and so

turned to the shallow acceptance of glorifying the dead, with Rupert Brooke as my hero [...] using to describe a dire event the latest “poetic” words in my vocabulary [...] the words ruled, you see; they held the keys of the kingdom, and I did not realise until I had spent a few more years growing and observing that the kingdom that glorified those words was as much a prison as my grey school serge tunic’ (123-24).

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As 1941 progresses, however, there is an increasing use of more direct, freer, colloquial language amongst the ‘poetic diction’ and naive patriotism; and further signs that Frame was developing her life-long love of Yeats. ‘The Aeroplane’ was perhaps prompted by ‘An Irish Airman foresees his Death’, and begins

We fancied that the pilot looked admiring, laughing down
From out a sea of sky on waves of light

concluding in a shift of mood and point of view,

And yet he did not really laugh. He fancied other things,
Our little town was London to him then,
And we who laughed were laughing to subdue a pain that sings
In its intensity;70

There is a Yeatsean feel to the opening to a poem about a poplar, written a month earlier:

Had I a poplar tree as gold as light
To sing in my laughing garden, I should be
In love with my tree.71

Yeats’s ‘He wishes for the cloths of Heaven’ was included in The Golden Book of Modern English Poetry, another of Frame’s school prizes. In the course of the poem, Frame comes to understand that the poplar is a free spirit, ‘poplar trees belong to winds and/ stars’ and cannot be possessed by anyone: ‘I cannot have my tree.’ If the tree – and its composting leaves – form one characteristic Framean image in the novels, the world of fairy tales is another common theme, especially in the later novels with their use of myth and legend. Fairies, the themes of folk-tales and the spirit world, and stolen children make their presence felt in the nature poems, for example ‘The Crocus’, which begins,

The spirit of the moon has hungry, starv-

He would steal my yellow crocus for his own.\(^72\)

The same language of fairy tale, of cobwebs and silken threads, lace and little blue sleeves, will-o’-the-wisp and water-sheevie appears in ‘A Mimihau Lullaby’ for ‘a mortal child’:

Sleep on, brown Meri-girl! A fairy’s flown
To shining Mimihau — and all for you.\(^73\)

The freedom that comes from reading, the fairies, magic, and the companionship of books all come together in a poem of 1940 which reads like a personal manifesto and is called simply, ‘Books’.\(^74\) Frame writes of a passionate love of reading, the sense of books as personal friends and the links with writers of the past, all themes which became central to her in her adult life and her novels. Simple direct statements cut through ‘poetic’ diction in the opening line celebrating the joy Frame feels: ‘I love my faithful, friendly books, / especially in the twilight’. She writes of the time ‘When every prisoned little bird soars / gladly from its cage,’ free from the sense of entrapment Frame felt in conforming to adult expectations, able to fly away ‘When all the spirits of the books steal/softly from each page.’ Even as a schoolgirl, Frame has a sense of the way in which books speak to their readers from another age, from time immemorial, ‘And unknown voices calling from the/ageless past it seems.’ In her novels this is the perception which would inform her of the importance of poetry and of story-telling of all ages. The final stanza of four ends with a repetition of the line which begins the poem, emphasising the escape, the friendship and the timelessness:

I love my faithful, friendly books, especially in the twilight
In twilight books awaken; they grow young instead of old,
Their crinkled covers glow with warmth and cast away the cold,
And through the cleanly pages glitter

shining hearts of gold

In July 1941, the outgoing Dot exhorted the readers to read the great classics of the language: the Bible, Shakespeare, or Lamb’s *Tales from Shakespeare*, Palgrave’s *Golden Treasury, Treasure Island, Alice in Wonderland*, Dickens, etc., and that ‘if you read only a few of these this winter you will feel your time has not been wasted’. Sad this piece was something of a swansong. In August Dot’s page underwent some changes, aiming to entertain younger children with puzzles and competitions with very few poems, no ‘best letter’ and no feedback. The page finally closed on 30th December 1941 with a note from ‘Your loving friend, Dot’ citing wartime paper shortage. Frame’s final poem, ‘The Dead Tree’, appeared on 8th December 1941, conveying a sense of loss in its opening lines: ‘Only the moon will know I came/Walking alone in her gracious light’, and concluding ‘A little lost wind began to cry/Under the staring stars in the sky’. Frame makes rueful reference to the closure of ‘Dot’s Little Folk’ in ‘Dot’, her short story fictionalising the page and its editor: ‘The war came [...] the confidences of children are not essential to the national economy’. The fictional male editor is revealed to be a paedophile, in a story which may reflect a sense of loss and betrayal felt by the real ‘Little Folk’ of the time at the downgrading and then final loss of their page. The short story conveys a sense of uncertainty of the newspaper’s purpose, using a slight variant of lines from T.S. Eliot, ‘But this set down. Set down, This’. The sense of loss was perhaps shared by the writer of July’s valedictory advice about reading. The wartime closure of Dot’s page ended well over half a century of service to children, in which ‘Dot’s Little Folk’ had given rise to a community of readers and friends — a ‘Facebook’ for its times, as Keith Scott’s publishers also note — creating friendships and sharing lives.

75 *Otago Daily Times*, 7 July 1941, p. 3.
76 *Otago Daily Times*, 30 December 1941, p. 2.
thoughts, feelings, poems and stories. As an outlet for Frame’s expression of her early enthusiasms it was clearly invaluable, and marks the beginning of the development of a literary community around her, finding friends in books, and a family of writers, about which she writes with such feeling in later life.

3.3 School Years

At school, books for beginning readers celebrated the heroes and heroines of the British Empire and colonial values, much as they did in Britain, and poems often reflected those printed in Dot’s Little Folk: poems by Walter de la Mare and John Drinkwater, for example. But Frame found a new favourite and life-long friend in Keats’s ‘Meg Merrilees’, and a taste for adventure in stories. At home, comics, newspapers and magazines – titles Frame’s father referred to as ‘the books’ – provided the light reading (53). Real books came as school books and school prizes. At the Waitaki Girls’ High School, Oamaru, text books had to be paid for, and could determine which classes Frame attended: geography rather than Latin was decided when Dad compared the cost of the text books (88). A Midsummer Night’s Dream and The Merchant of Venice were an early introduction to Shakespeare. Contes et Légendes was an introduction to French, a collection of traditional tales and fairy stories which Frame clearly cherished (88). A number of books came into the household as school prizes: Silas Marner, Emma and the Oxford Book of Light Verse; Longfellow’s Complete Works; and Girls and Boys Who became Famous, the last of these including the story of the Brontës (95). In a 1971 letter to Charles Brasch, Frame wrote ‘I loved the Mill on the Floss. We used to have a copy at home.’\(^{80}\) The importance of these books for Frame was documented much earlier in a poem she submitted for Dot’s page in the Otago Daily Times, ‘Books’, in which the sixteen-

\(^{80}\) Frame in Dear Charles, Dear Janet, 18 November 1971, p. 44.
year-old Frame wrote of her books that ‘Their crinkled covers glow with warmth and cast away the cold’. 81

Frame’s school poetry book was Mount Helicon, first published as an anthology for schools in 1922, in London, and seemingly aimed at the colonies. It contained much of the British canon from Shakespeare onwards, with some American and Australian poets; and one New Zealander, William Pember Reeves, represented by his poem, New Zealand: ‘God girt her about with the surges/And winds of the masterless deep’. 82 Thematic sections included ‘The Empire’, ‘Love of England’, ‘Patriotism’, ‘Loyalty’ and ‘Praise of Famous Men’. 83 However, like Palgrave’s Golden Treasury, it contained many of the best-loved poems in the language. It was a poetry book Frame returned to repeatedly after Myrtle’s death, searching for solace and answers in Walt Whitman’s ‘The Lost Mate’ and Poe’s ‘Annabel Lee’, poems which ‘told everything I was feeling [...] I understood all the deceptions of thought and feeling which tried to persuade the mourning bird that there’s been no loss’ (89). 84

The prose fiction Frame loved most as a school-child was Grimm’s Fairy Tales, initially borrowed from her friend Poppy, for whom it was also a ‘special book.’ As Frame began to read it, ‘suddenly the world of living and the world of reading became linked in a way I had not noticed before’ (43). Reading aloud to her sisters, Frame entered the world of ‘The Twelve Dancing Princesses’ and the girls became dancing princesses themselves: ‘Grimm’s Fairy Tales was everybody’s story seen in a special way with something new added to the ordinary rules of observation.’ (84) This encounter established the lifelong importance to Frame of folklore and tradition in literature, and is evidenced early in her childhood poems. When in 1975, Frame was asked to write an article for an education journal about a special book from childhood, she told of her delight in Poppy’s book of Grimm’s

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83 Mount Helicon, pp.x-xi.
84 Mount Helicon, pp. 204 & 149.
Fairy Tales, ‘in finding all the stories, old and new, together, and in tasting again and again the thrilling plunge of each first sentence.’ She again makes clear how important as companions books were to her, and concludes by saying that ‘when you read a book the words come to meet you and if you offer them the right hospitality, “Table, bring meat”, they stay’. 85

At High School, Frame read poetry from Ils Ont Chanté, published in 1937. 86 As an adult she remembered it as her first encounter with the poems of Paul Valéry, writing to her close friend Bill Brown that ‘it is strange to look back at myself as a schoolgirl and remember the pale green book, Ils Ont Chanté, which I loved and read over and over, especially the poem by Valéry, Le Cimetière Marin.’ 87 In his introduction, the editor, Whitmarsh, outlines some of the differences in structure of French and English poetry and the conventions of French rhyme schemes, and recommends pupils making a version, ‘a most pleasurable and profitable exercise’, a view with which Frame probably agreed. 88 Ils Ont Chanté contains several poems by Hugo, some poems by de Musset, Lamartine, and Baudelaire, as well as a few La Fontaine fables and some lesser known simpler descriptive verse.

Frame’s introduction to French prose literature was another book of fairy stories, A. H. Guerber’s Contes et Légendes, a retelling in simple French of folk tales from all over Europe and beyond, ‘intended merely as an introduction to general French reading’. 89 It was a varied collection. A number of the tales were Slavonic, a few Arabian, and one was about Buddha. There were stories retold from tales recorded by Charles Perrault, Edouard Laboulaye and A. H. Wratislaw, and other collectors of folk tales to which Guerber added notes about different versions in French, German or Slavonic languages. The variety of

85 Frame, ‘Tales from Grimm’, Education 2.9 (1975), in Janet Frame: In Her Own Words, p. 56.
87 Frame, letter to Bill Brown, January 1970, Jay to Bee: Janet Frame’s Letters to William Theophilus Brown, ed. by Denis Harold and Pamela Gordon (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2016), p. 41. This quotation and all subsequent quotations follow the presentation in the original text.
88 Whitmarsh, ‘Editor’s Note’, p. v.
stories had a value well beyond Guerber’s aim, however, and illustrated the way in which the folklore traditions were pan-European, with variations of the same tales known in a variety of languages and cultures, as Guerber indicates in her comments on particular stories. Typical of Guerber’s notes is the one on ‘Les Quatre Saisons’ where she observes that ‘This is one of the most popular of the Bohemian folk stories. It has been translated into many languages, and an elaborate version can be found in Laboulaye’s “Fairy Book”’. 90 Of ‘L’Amour d’une Mère’ she similarly notes that ‘this is merely the French version of a tale told by every nation, and has innumerable counterparts’. 91 The source of some of Guerber’s tales, A. H. Wratislaw, was a linguist, like the brothers Grimm. Wratislaw was a Slavonic scholar of Czech parentage, who had looked at eastern European folktales to learn more of their dialects, ‘but found myself tempted, by the extreme beauty of some of the stories to translate the major portion of them’. 92 He echoes Guerber’s comment about the number of variants from different countries, and that ‘incidents belonging to one tale will sometimes start up at a distance in another apparently entirely unconnected with it’. 93 More recently, Marina Warner makes the same point, noting of fairy tales that ‘stories slipped across frontiers of culture and language as freely as birds in the air’. 94

Frame’s imagination and aspirations, and perhaps the sense of justice apparent in her letters to Dot, were fed by these fairy tales which ‘report from imaginary territory – a magical elsewhere of possibility’. 95 They offer fictional miracles of hope, nearly always with a just and happy ending: ‘Fairy tales evoke every kind of violence, injustice, and mischance, but in order to declare it need not continue.’ 96 That Frame’s interest in this traditional literature was

90 Guerber, Contes et Légendes, p. 6.
91 Guerber, Contes et Légendes, p. 115.
93 Wratislaw, Sixty Folk-Tales, p. 101.
95 Warner, Once Upon a Time, p. xxii.
96 Warner, Once Upon a Time, p. xxiii.
lifelong is evident in her novels – discussed in Chapter Seven; in her sense of the connection between a mythological past and the realities of the present day; and the understanding she gained from folk tales that ‘any act was possible. Anything could happen. Nothing was forbidden’. 97

Frame’s last meeting with Poppy, who had lent her the book of Grimms’ *Fairy Stories*, came when the two girls were preparing to take different routes through the end of school-days. Poppy was entering the commercial class, and introduced Frame to Keats’s ‘Ode to a Nightingale’, which Poppy had learnt for a school presentation, reciting the poem ‘with a passionate intimacy as if the poem were directly related to her,’ as if this were a farewell to childhood, to ‘faery lands forlorn’. Frame watched and listened in amazement as ‘the words swept out of Poppy like a cry of panic’ (97). Poppy had loved Grimms’ *Fairy Stories* as much as Frame had, and seems to have felt she was about to be cut off from the world of poetry and imagination, just as Francie would be in *Owls Do Cry*.

Another school prize was *The Golden Book of Modern English Poetry*, part of J. M. Dent’s ‘Everyman’ series, first published in 1922; and updated in 1935 to include poems by Roy Campbell and T. S. Eliot, and to give greater representation to D. H. Lawrence, Wilfred Owen and G. M. Hopkins. The Maori writer Alan Duff recalls that when he was preparing his memoirs in the late 1990s he visited Janet Frame and ‘we sat in her living-room and together quoted one of our mutually favourite poets, Gerard Manley Hopkins’. 98 The 1922 volume included a few of the poets of the First World War as well as poems by W. B. Yeats, the greater part of the poetry belonging to the late nineteenth century (127). 99 It was where Frame found more poems by Francis Thompson, the poet she gave her talk on at school and felt she had ‘discovered’ for herself (128). This volume, like *Mount Helicon*, and from the same publisher, aimed to include the best of English (and Irish) poetry from 1870 and dwelt on the

97 Frame, *Tales from Grimm*, p. 56.  
Englishness of English verse in a preface to the 1922 edition by Lord Dunsany claiming that ‘here we have England all spread out before us’.  

Frame’s reading had been prolific. The ‘heroes’ of her school-days included the French poets Victor Hugo and Alphonse Daudet; the novelists Dostoevsky, Hardy, the Brontës, George Eliot, Jane Austen, Thackeray, and Washington Irving; the English Romantic poets; W. B. Yeats and Rupert Brooke. ‘And Shakespeare.’ (128) To underline Shakespeare’s pre-eminence, this two-word minor sentence in the Complete Autobiography is a two-word paragraph. At this stage, however, Frame had little knowledge of New Zealand writers. She associated the few whose names she knew with her mother, who had been in service with Katherine Mansfield’s family, the Beauchamps, and felt no affinity with them. Towards the end of her school years, choosing to give her presentation on Francis Thompson, Frame was surprised to find a class-mate praised for giving a talk about Katherine Mansfield, ‘when none of our English studies even supposed that a New Zealand writer or New Zealand existed’(128).

3.4 College & Dunedin

Frame’s literary discoveries continued at college in Dunedin, where at Dunedin Training College, Frame was able to enrol in addition for classes in English and French at the University of Otago. Frame’s friend, Sheila Traill, later Natusch, tells how Joan Stevens, then principal of the Training College, ‘soon kicked Jean and me up the road to Professor Ramsay’. University set books for English in Frame’s first year included Wuthering Heights, Villette; Antony and Cleopatra, King Lear and Measure for Measure; English Parnassus, an anthology of chiefly longer poems arranged chronologically from Chaucer’s

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Prologue to Edward Fitzgerald’s ‘Rhubaiyat of Omar Khayyam’; Coleridge’s Biographica Literaria; Wyatt’s Anglo-Saxon Reader; and some Middle-English texts. Frame clearly enjoyed the Old English, and in 1965 she gave a copy of her novel, The Adaptable Man to one of her lecturers, G. M. Cameron with the following inscription:

With gratitude for memorable lectures that inspired the preoccupation in this book, with St Cuthbert & Old English language; and with the (human) request that once again the printer, not the author, may bear the responsibility for errors in quotation.

In Frame’s second year, 1944, the Shakespeare set plays were The Tempest, Macbeth and Troilus and Cressida.

In the French B. A. syllabus for 1943, the prescribed period of literature was 1700-1789, the period which included Voltaire, Rousseau and Beaumarchais, whose Barber of Seville was a set text. Other set texts for 1943 were Jules Romains’, Knock, and Pierre Loti’s, Pêcheur d’Islande. The French literature text-book for this and all other years during the 1940s was René Canat’s monumental survey, La Littérature Française par les Textes, published in 1906. Canat reviews French literature from 1000 AD to the end of the nineteenth century, with commentary and examples from texts. In 1944, B.A. French set texts were Mérimée’s, Carmen and Other Stories, Molière’s Les Femmes Savantes, and Daudet’s, Tartarin sur les Alpes. Examination papers for 1944 indicate a wider range of reading expected, with questions on Balzac, Victor Hugo’s drama, Hernani, and de Musset’s poems as well as Mérimée. Michael King quotes from Frame’s university records that she was ‘a brilliant scholar in languages’, and Frame pursued her interest in French long after her university days.

Both the English and the French schedules at university were solidly traditional, and the English programme as completely anglo-centric as Frame’s school syllabus had been. As

102 University of Otago, Calendar for the Year 1943 (Dunedin: University of Otago, 1943), p. 166.
103 I am grateful to Dr Greg Waite of the University of Otago English Department for sharing this information with me and showing me the inscribed copy, 1 March 2016.
104 Cited in King, Wrestling with the Angel, p. 61, n16.
skilful a linguist as she was, Frame’s focus in her autobiography is almost entirely on her love of English literature. She reveals how dazzled she was by *Biographica Literaria* and wrote that ‘the most magical word to me was still *Imagination*, a glittering noble word, never failing to create its own inner light’ (163); and she shared Shelley’s view of poets as ‘the unacknowledged legislators of the world’ (121).\(^{105}\) She was especially drawn to the visionary poets, as Sargeson noted: ‘I got out of her that she likes very much Blake’s visionary poems, the Book of Revelations Dylan Thomas etc.’\(^{106}\) And Yeats, of course. At university, Frame discovered more twentieth century poets: Louis MacNeice, George Barker, Dylan Thomas, T. S. Eliot and W. H. Auden; and the novels and critical works of Virginia Woolf (165). ‘Few experiences,’ she wrote, ‘could have equalled the joy given by being at a University, perceived by me almost entirely through English literature’ (161). This joy came especially in the study of Shakespeare’s plays, especially *The Tempest, King Lear*, and *Macbeth* which suffuse the novels. As she would later write to Dr Cawley, ‘your friend Shakespeare, as usual, knew everything.’\(^{107}\) Frame tells how when she read *Measure for Measure* for the first time at university ‘the deeply reasoned play crammed with violations of innocence, with sexual struggle and comment, with long discussions on life, death and immortality, won my heart and persisted in my memory, *accompanied* me in daily life’ (158). (Frame’s italics)

### 3.5 Hospital Years

During the years between 1945 and 1954 when Frame was in and out of mental hospitals, either committed or as a voluntary patient, she read extensively. She found James Baxter’s poems; Alan Curnow’s *A Book of New Zealand Verse*, published in 1951, which became her ‘primer of New Zealand Literature’ (234); and she devoured Frank Sargeson’s *Speaking for...* 


\(^{107}\) Frame, letter to Dr R Cawley, 4 August 1964.
Ourselves, a collection of short stories by New Zealand writers, published in 1945. Frame came to a realisation that there was such a thing as New Zealand Literature and that there was no need ‘to borrow from a northern Shakespearean wallet’ (192). As usual, she writes about the books she discovered as though they were people, drawing a comparison from Grimm’s Tales when she says ‘it was almost a feeling of having been an orphan who discovers that her parents are alive and living in the most desirable home’ (193). In a letter to her friend John Money in 1948, Frame wrote of Dostoevsky and Rilke as her friends, saying that ‘I do not live here with these people, yet I do’. In hospital she kept by her a copy of Shakespeare’s plays and Rilke’s Sonnets To Orpheus in translation which she treasured almost as talismans, ‘when I clung to my copy of Shakespeare, hiding it under straw mattresses [...] not often reading it but turning the tissue-paper-thin pages, which somehow conveyed the words to me’ (239). In a reply to Patrick Evans’ enquiry in 1975 Sargeson confirmed that indeed Miss J did read The Godwits Fly – it was probably among the thousands of books she read when she was (so far as leisure went) a Hospital lady at large. I knew she read a good deal more Enzed lit. than I did –.

Whilst out of hospital in 1953, Frame also discovered Faulkner and Kafka at the Oamaru Public Library, and between December 1953 and January 1955, she had poems and stories published in the New Zealand Listener. In 1955 she wrote a poem, ‘The Transformation’, signed only ‘J.F.’ in response to Kafka’s novella Die Verwandlung (The Metamorphosis). In the poem she says Kafka ‘created his own music’ and:

He became the dream the dungbeetle
sucking feeding upon the excrement of word.

She reviewed Faulkner’s A Fable for Parson’s Packet in which she reaffirms her view of the value of artists and poets, commenting that ‘perhaps one may doubt whether William Faulkner is a novelist, but never that he is an artist who can take and transform, and never

108 Frame, letter to John Money, 26 August 1948, cited in King, Wrestling with the Angel, p. 98.
110 Indexes to the NZ Listener, Dec 1953-Dec 1954, Hocken Collections.
that he is a poet’. 112 At the time when Frame began her stay with Sargeson in 1954 her world had been peopled by poets, and like Istina Mavet in Faces in the Water, she had used books as ‘a reserve of warmth from which I could help myself’. 113 Frame knew little of what had been happening in the world, saying of herself that ‘I knew only of Prospero, Caliban, King Lear, and Rilke in translation, these, for me, being the occasions of the past decade’ (244).

3.6 Later Reading

Janet Frame was a voracious reader from childhood, and any investigation of her extensive reading in later life can only be very selective. Frame had the good fortune to meet Frank Sargeson in 1955, when he offered her a home in the army hut in his garden where she could write, and learn to be a full-time writer. As Kevin Ireland, one of Sargeson’s circle of literary friends notes, Sargeson ‘ran the best literary oasis in the desert’ at the time, and as Sargeson’s lodger, Frame became part of the ‘literary world that he had created as an alternative to the family’. 114 He introduced her to Proust’s À La Recherche du Temps Perdu and to Tolstoy, and together they read War and Peace, Anna Karenina, Resurrection and Tolstoy’s short stories, the characters from all these stories inhabiting Sargeson’s hut with them (253-55). Sargeson was of the opinion that reading very long books such as À La Recherche and War and Peace helped give a writer staying power and would build up Frame’s writerly stamina, as well as providing other literary benefits. 115 Sargeson discussed Milton and Shakespeare with all his callers, and would often quote from his copy of the King James Bible. Frame would almost certainly have borrowed and read Sargeson’s copy of Christmas Humphrey’s Buddhism: An Introduction and Guide, published in 1951, one of the

112 Frame, a review of Faulkner’s A Fable, republished in Janet Frame: In Her Own Word, p. 29.
113 Frame, Faces in the Water, p. 214.
115 Kevin Ireland, personal communication, May 2016.
new wave of Penguins and Pelican paperback editions of the classics, and Frame would pursue an interest in Buddhist spiritual philosophy during the following years. Sargeson read and discussed Kafka’s novellas, presumably in the slightly stilted 1933 translations by Edwin and Willa Muir, along with other modern writers; and ‘was devoted to his comprehensive collection of Penguin New Writing and to John Lehmann’s London Magazine, and every issue of Charles Brasch’s Landfall would have been eagerly devoured’.  

Frame had always enjoyed French literature, and Frame’s niece Pamela Gordon confirms that ‘of course she loved Balzac’. In London, Frame continued to read twentieth-century French novelists: Albert Camus, Marguerite Duras, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Nathalie Sarraute and Jean-Paul Sartre, these last two also published by Braziller, Frame’s American publisher. In 1970, George Braziller arranged for Frame to meet Sarraute in New York, and Frame wrote of her excitement to Peter [E. P.] Dawson, a friend she had met through Frank Sargeson. In her letter to Dawson, cited by Michael King, Frame wrote of her delight at being able to discuss the problems of writing with Sarraute, one of the foremost practitioners at the time of the nouveau roman. Frame had read Sarraute’s novel, The Planetarium (published in 1959) and was excited about Sarraute’s titular metaphor of the planets and stars for characters who pursue their own orbits, circling one another, each with their own interior monologues. These are ‘false stars’ as Sarraute explained in 1990 in an interview on ‘The Art of Fiction’ for the Paris Review, again using the image of the planetarium to illustrate her views. In this interview she discusses characterisation in the traditional ‘balzacian’ novel which she had rejected: ‘we are always for each other a star like those we see in a planetarium, diminished, reduced.’ Sarraute had found Proust, Joyce and Virginia Woolf ‘a revelation.’ She wanted to break new ground and come closer to the reality of people’s perceptions, rather than the external reality of the traditional novel which ‘seemed to have no

116 Grateful thanks to Kevin Ireland for further details of Sargeson’s bookshelves and literary activities.
117 Personal Email from Pamela Gordon, 11 May 2015.
118 King, Wrestling with the Angel, p. 316.
access to what we experienced.’ Frame has Harry Gill grapple with this issue as he tries to write his novel in Menton. ‘How can one begin to know,’ Harry asks himself, ‘and to say what one knows, to say what one feels and thinks, and, in the case of a novelist, what others feel, see and think?’ Sarraute’s primary interest was in ideas, she confirmed, and ‘it’s words that interest me. Inevitably. It’s the very substance of my work. As a painter is interested in color and form.’ In The Planetarium, the novelist Madame Lemaire is stunned by reference to her as Madame Tussaud, the maker of death-masks, a concept which possibly informed the ‘replicas’ in Living in the Maniototo. This is Madame Lemaire contemplating her life’s work:


(How lifeless everything is. A thin layer of shiny varnish on cardboard. Masks of painted wax. [...] They are plaster casts. Copies. No sensation of happiness. Not the slightest sign of life. It was an illusion. It was auto-suggestion. It’s all empty. Hollow. Hollow. Hollow. Completely hollow. Nothingness. The hollowness inside a painted wax mould. [...] Life is elsewhere.)

Frame’s conversation with Sarraute seems to have been very much a meeting of like minds. Frame ‘drank every word she said’ and reported Sarraute’s response: ‘it’s so gratifying to find someone who understands what one is trying to say.’ This understanding is reflected in Charles Brasch’s comment in his Journal on The Edge of the Alphabet, when he remarks on Frame’s ‘exposure of the gulfs, abysses, that underlie all our lives, of the constant attempt to conceal reality from our gaze which nearly all our activity represents.’

119 Jane Frame, In the Memorial Room, p. 75.
122 King, Wrestling with the Angel, p. 316.
123 Charles Brasch, Journals, 24 February 1963, MS-996-9/34, Hocken Collections.
In the 1970s, novels like *Intensive Care* (1970), *Daughter Buffalo* (1972) and *Living in the Maniototo* (1979) became significantly more experimental in form, and in 1988 Frame had to insist to Braziller that the titular metaphor *The Carpathians* was an appropriate title for a novel that was not a ‘travelogue’. The New York editors were doubtful, surprisingly for a company publishing Sarraute, and felt the title had ‘a very oblique reference to the text’. The British publishers, Bloomsbury, felt similarly, commenting that ‘if she insists on using *The Carpathians* as a title we ought to work a reference into the blurb’. Frame protested that the title was ‘carefully chosen’, having after much thought rejected ‘The Housekeepers of Ancient Springtime’, and Braziller’s preference for ‘The Orchards of Puamahara’ was changed back again.

Copy editors at George Braziller Inc. made substantial changes to Frame’s formatting and punctuation in her 1960s novels. Frame favoured the French system of punctuating dialogue, with a long dash rather than quotation marks, a more effective means of eliding speech with unspoken thought. The Braziller copy-editor changed Frame’s often idiosyncratic formatting to their house style, adding quotation marks, and capital letters where Frame begins a fragment or minor sentence in lower case. A brief section from *The Edge of the Alphabet* serves as an illustration. The most recent Random House edition (2005) has this:

> You witch-octopus whom I loved, who in the dark distressful ocean manoeuvred for me with your bright tentacles of comfort: (Are you all right, Toby?) [...] the dictionary epicentrum the point at which the earthquake breaks out, do we live there, is that the disturbance or epiphanym epiphyte hands out of your pockets, Toby, ...

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124 Frame, letter to George Braziller, undated but 1987/88, in Frame, Janet (Miscellaneous) undated archives of George Braziller Inc., Box 11/1, Archives & Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, University of Princeton Library, U. S. A. Subsequent references are to ‘Braziller Papers’.
125 Sam Tanenhouse, Braziller sub-editor, in a memo, 3.11.1988, Braziller Papers, Box 11/1.
126 Sarah-Jane Forder, Bloomsbury editor, in a memo to George Braziller, 15.3.1988, Braziller Papers Box 11/1.
127 Frame, undated letter to George Braziller, Braziller Papers Box 11/1; draft blurb for *The Carpathians*, Braziller Papers, Box 11/1.
The Braziller editing (1962) loses subtlety in its more conventional formatting, and is as
follows:

You witch-octopus whom I loved, who in the dark distressful ocean manoeuvred for
me with your bright tentacles of comfort.
“Are you all right Toby?” [...] 

The dictionary epicentrum the point at which the earth-quake breaks out,
do we live there, is that the distance or epiphany, epiphyle?
Hands out of your pockets, Toby, ...

This was not a new problem. Frank Sargeson, left in charge of the proofs for Owls Do Cry,
found himself having to defend Frame’s innovative and idiosyncratic style against over-
zealous copy-editors who wanted to make her style conform to the publishing conventions
of the time, and produced first proofs which Sargeson described as ‘a terrible balled-up job’.  
Frame might have expected American publishers of Sarraute’s nouveaux romans to be more
flexible. She enjoyed reading contemporary French fiction, she said, as French novels ‘are
concerned with things as against people [...] French novels are more adventurous than
English and their novel form more elastic’. 

French short stories were also a life-long interest, and Frame gave her English copies
of two French texts to her psychologist friend John Money, Maupassant’s Selected Short
Stories in 2000, and Camus’ The Fall and Exile of the Kingdom in 1969.  
Frame tells Bill Brown she is reading Camus’ Carnets in English, after her return from Yaddo to Dunedin,
making use of the library there, though she has a French edition as well. 
After her return to Dunedin, Frame continues to enjoy a book of Mallarmé’s poems ‘some beautiful things in it’,
amongst other modern French poetry. 
Later, when Bill Brown sends her Rilke’s Vergers, with some of his translations, she assures him that ‘I have a fairly good French dictionary as

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130 Sargeson, letter to Dan Davin, 20 July 1956, cited in King, Wrestling with the Angel, p. 143.
131 Frame in an interview for Critic, University of Otago, 19 March 1935.
132 ‘Inscribed books from Frame’, MS-1293/008, John Money Papers, Hocken Collections.
well as an excellent book of French idioms and figurative phrases full of interesting things, goodies and I’m going to work in between other work on a translation or two’. There is reference to one of Camus’ stories in *A State of Siege*. Frame quotes from Camus’ *La Femme Adultère*, one of the stories from *Exile of the Kingdom*, the story of Janine, whose journey with her husband across the southern Algerian desert leads to a transforming night-time experience as she visits an Arab fort while her husband remains asleep at their hotel. Her experience of the alien desert and its Arab communities forces Janine to acknowledge her loneliness and isolation in her marriage to the unimaginative Marcel, and her solitary escape to the fort is narrated in the language of a woman escaping to meet her lover. Janine abandons herself to the night sky and the moving stars, allowing herself to be possessed by the moment and the experience. Frame chooses not to translate this very moving moment and quotes a fragment of it in French. I will follow Frame’s example and leave the lines as Camus wrote them: ‘Devant elle, les étoiles tombaient, une à une, puis s’éteignaient parmi les pierres du désert, et à chaque fois Janine s’ouvrait un peu plus à la nuit.’ Like Malfred, Janine had chosen a life of security rather than freedom and risk and experiences a conflict between her desire for independence and a sense of guilt. Janine engages in an odd sort of adultery, as Malfred remarks of herself, that she ‘may be regarded as a promiscuous woman, even an adulterous woman, to lie so with the landscape of my country,’ making a link with a line on the same theme from Charles Brasch, ‘to lie with the gaunt hills like a lover.’

The character of Alwyn in *The Adaptable Man* may owe something to Camus’s apparently motiveless assassin, Mersault, in *L’Étranger*, who initially appears to lack human feeling. This emotional detachment is established in the novel’s opening lines, ‘Aujourd’hui,

maman est morte. Ou peut-être hier, je ne sais pas.’ (Mother died today. Or maybe yesterday, I don’t know’.) Camus carefully avoids attributing responsibility to Mersault for firing on an Arab labourer, whose lack of consequence is signified by the absence of a name, just the detail of his blue overalls, ‘en bleu de chauffe’. Alwyn’s victim is also just a labourer, a foreigner, another person of no consequence. For Mersault, ‘la gâchette a cédé’ (‘the trigger yielded’), and Frame similarly appears to separate the seemingly unfeeling Alwyn’s brain from his hands: ‘But Alwyn hadn’t used an axe to kill the Italian. His hands had been strong enough.’ Alwyn’s lack of empathy reveals itself further in conversation with his girlfriend Jenny. He tells her he wishes he ‘had a motive’, and when Jenny asks ‘For what? Marriage or murder?’ Alwyn replies: ‘Both.’ Later, when Jenny proposes, he fails to reply: ‘He looked surprised, frowned, laughed.’

Mersault came to a sense of the world’s ‘tendre indifférence’ (benign indifference), the indifference of nature to human mortality, as he prepared for his execution; Alwyn seems to have entertained this concept from the outset, as he adapts to the way in which he sees the world moving. He is of the opinion that his uncle and father are ‘poking around in yesterdays numbed by toothache or Godache’ and ‘are like infants in this modern age’.

Frame read French poetry as well as French fiction. She had always enjoyed Victor Hugo’s poems, and as an adult tried writing poems in French herself. Paul Valéry’s ‘Cimetière Marin’ was a favourite from her schooldays and Frame was intrigued to learn that Rilke was excited by Valéry’s poem when he came across it in the 1920s; and that Rilke had felt he had a lot in common with Valéry. In the same letter, she told Bill Brown she was

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139 Camus, *L’Étranger*, p. 66.
142 Frame, *The Adaptable Man*, p. 76.
143 Camus, *L’Étranger*, p. 98.
trying to locate a copy of Rilke’s French poems. She had read Rilke’s *Sonnets to Orpheus* in hospital in J. B. Leishman’s bilingual English-German edition. Frame had been reading about Rilke’s time in Paris, where he moved in French literary and artistic circles, probably when she came to Europe. Later, Frame and Brown translated some of Rilke’s French poetry, most notably the lines from ‘Vergers’ (‘Orchards’) which provide the epigraph and title to the second volume of Frame’s *Complete Autobiography, An Angel at My Table*.

While Frame was living in England, between late 1957 and mid 1964, the poetry programmes which she heard on the radio were carried on the BBC Third Programme, inaugurated in September 1946. The Third Programme was designed to have ‘no fixed points. It will devote to the great works the time they require. It will seek every evening to do something that is culturally satisfying and significant’. The illustration below is for the evening of 3 September 1956. The focus in poetry programmes was often on contemporary poets, as reflected in titles such as ‘New Poetry’, ‘The Living Poet’, ‘Poetry Today’, and ‘The Poet’s Voice’, in which poets read from their own recent and often unpublished poems. The evening illustrated ends with an item about the traditional ballad, in which there was a notable revival of interest in the 1950s and 1960s. Frame would refer to lines from the traditional ballads in her novels, notably *The Adaptable Man* and *Intensive Care*, discussed in Chapter Seven.

Frame was reading the poetry of Ted Hughes and Sylvia Plath, and records her considerable distress at the news of Plath’s death in February 1963, describing Plath as ‘a woman who was (I think) the best poet, or almost the best (man or woman) writing today [...] her work was good’. Frame began writing *Towards Another Summer* a few days after Plath’s death, names one of the novella’s minor characters ‘Sylvia’, and writes of her grief:

> Since you came to me last night,  
> and said  
> what you said  
> I rode on a red bus  
> inside a clot of blood  
> I rode in grief over London

Frame’s line: ‘You came to me; you said’, suggests that Frame, living in London at this time, listened to ‘The Poet’s Voice’, the BBC radio programme broadcast on 17 November 1962 in which Plath took part, which was ‘a selection of unpublished poems [...] read by the poets...
themselves’. It was rebroadcast in Plath’s honour on 17 February 1963, six days after her death, and a few days after Frame had begun writing *Towards Another Summer*. Ted Hughes notes that Plath was preparing ‘Lady Lazarus’, ‘Daddy’, ‘Fever 103’ and ‘Death & Co’ for the programme, poems which were published posthumously in *Ariel* in 1965. Plath’s late poems were also published in journals, and the last of these poems was possibly ‘Winter Trees’, written in November 1962 and printed in the *Observer* in January 1963. Frame’s allusions in her novels to the poets she enjoyed will be explored in Chapter Four.

Frame was interested in writing from all over the anglophone world. Sargeson had given her a copy of Olive Schreiner’s *Story of An African Farm*, and a novel of Doris Lessing’s, presumably *The Grass is Singing*, published in 1950 (255). Later, Frame enjoyed the work of other writers from southern Africa: Dan Jacobson, Alan Paton and Nadine Gordimer. She was intrigued by the point of view of these other ‘colonials’, aware that these gifted and high-minded white southern Africans, ‘despite their imagination and empathy were not writing from the unique point of view of native Africans’ (311). In London, Frame joined the local library ‘and greedily accepted the rule – “as many books as you wish” ’ (308). Among the novelists she admired were Margaret Atwood, one of the ‘stars of the evening’ at a literary festival in 1984, and Joseph Heller. Frame mistook an unamused John Wain for Heller at the same festival. She admired an earlier generation of writers, and

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154 Frame, report of Fifth International Festival of Authors, Toronto, 1984, In *Her Own Words*, p. 190.
singles out Joseph Conrad and Thomas Hardy, for their evocation of the natural world. Of Conrad’s *The Secret Sharer* she remarked that although he writes about ‘a world that clearly manages better without women […] he uses a special tenderness to describe the sea, and one feels included, then’. Hardy’s landscape is timeless: he is ‘the supreme describer of the countryside and the weather and climate of the land, and its inhabitants all under the sky that is forever the sky above the heath in King Lear’. 

Frame had a passion for indigenous and local varieties of language, and a high regard for the value of spoken language. In the 1970s Frame expressed her frustration with the practice of publishers who anglicise or americanise New Zealand English ‘often destroying the meaning and rhythm of the sentence,’ and her hope that New Zealand publishers would refrain from translating Maori words into English: ‘We want our words. If I write of a *bach* by the sea I do not want it to be turned into a bungalow or cottage or mansion. If we write of a *tangi*, we mean just that: a *tangi*.’ Frame made further comments on her interest in the revival of the Maori language in an interview with Marion McLeod in 1988, delighted that after years of linguistic neglect that Maori were ‘speaking and writing their own language and sharing its riches’. She went on to tell McLeod about her visit to a marae, where ‘there was a wonderful old woman who had extraordinary mana, like Rua, the flax weaver in the novel’, whose tangi Frame later attended. Frame wrote appreciatively of the work of the Maori writer Patricia Grace. While Frame was chair of PEN NZ in 1975, she awarded first prize for a ‘first work of fiction to a new writer’ to Grace for *Waiariki*, and commented in a letter to Bill Brown that Grace was ‘a genuine writer.’ Grace expressed her admiration of Frame with a

156 Frame, preparatory notes for an interview with Marion McLeod, Sept 1988, in *In Her Own Words*, p. 137.
contribution to Frame’s 70th birthday *Festschrift*, appropriately a version of a Maori myth. Grace suggested Frame was more likely influenced by people she had met and knew, but I will argue in Chapter Seven that Frame experienced a sense of kinship with the characters in Grace’s Maori stories.

Frame developed a long-term friendship with Maori poet and short story writer Jacqueline Sturm, a relationship noted by Frank Sargeson, who thought that ‘a curious sight is to see Janet in company with Jacqui Baxter, they are like two superior peasant women who communicate by having nothing to say to each other – meaning of course they get on famously’. There is further evidence of their close friendship in the poems Jacqueline Sturm wrote ‘for Janet’, such as these lines:

> Last year you sent me a photo
> Of your blossom tree in bloom.
> This, you wrote on the back,
> Is a poem.
> May your next spring be
> A revelation like the first,
> As poignant as the last.

Frame’s sense of the importance of indigenous forms of language is evident in her dismay at the capacity of dominant cultures to ‘almost vacuum-clean, overnight, another culture and language’, but was tempered in Britain by the ‘counter-invasion of culture’ of the Windrush generation of West Indian writers, as well as writers and their English from other parts of the Commonwealth. She read Samuel Selvon, for example, ‘who, living and working and writing of another land, in their English, yet seem to record, as if it were an underground stream flowing through their writing, the life of the West Indies’. In later

Elizabeth Alley, ed., *The Inward Sun: Celebrating the Life and Work of Janet Frame* (Wellington: Daphne Brassell, 1994)

Patricia Grace, personal email, 29 May 2015.


Frame, ‘Departures and Returns’, *In Her Own Words*, p. 64.

Frame, ‘Departures and Returns’, *In Her Own Words*, p. 60.
years Frame’s reading chiefly centred on her interest in poetry, and in short stories taken from a wide variety of cultures, including French and Russian.\footnote{166}

If Frame’s poem, ‘Books’, published in Dot’s page, was her childhood manifesto on the value of language and reading, her adult one was the article she wrote for the \textit{Times Literary Supplement} in 1964. In this piece Frame recalls her own ‘gateway’ into literature through her reading, and her interests as a novelist, and affirms in particular that ‘it is the shape, the words that make the shape, that I care most about’, summing up her view that the writer must travel ‘with no luggage but memory and a pocketful of words’.\footnote{167} In subsequent chapters I will consider how Frame set about shaping those words, reworking texts – prose, poetry, mythology and folklore – into a richly layered oeuvre of her own.

\footnote{166}{Pamela Gordon, personal conversation, March 2016.}
\footnote{167}{Janet Frame, ‘Memory and a Pocketful of Words’, \textit{Times Literary Supplement}, 4 June, 1964, p. 487.}
Chapter Four: ‘Only the poets know’

4.1 The Importance of Poetry

Janet Frame embraced poetry as the highest of all art forms, for as she asserted in her ‘Beginnings’ essay for *Landfall* in 1965 she had been born into a ‘pocket’ of poetry: ‘In my family words were revered as instruments of magic’. ¹ Frame shared Shelley’s view of poets as ‘the unacknowledged legislators of the world’, ² and she told Elizabeth Alley in the 1980s that she viewed poetry as ‘the highest form of literature because you can have no dead wood in a poem’. ³ Although Frame did not rate her own poetry very highly, and described herself as ‘a moth-hole poet/The light comes in too clearly’, she wrote poetry all her life, including substantial sections of verse in her novels. ⁴ As I illustrate in Chapter Three, Frame’s early poems for ‘Dot’s Little Folk’ in *The Otago Daily Times* and the *Oamaru Mail Minor* show how much she learned from the poems ‘Dot’ included in her page. Even more influential were the poets of her school anthologies, to which she refers frequently in her novels, as well as the poetry reading of her more mature years studying in Dunedin and in her later adult reading.

Frame’s sense of the use of poetry extends beyond verse forms and includes poeticised prose such as we find in the *King James Bible*, and in the work of William Faulkner, a novelist she considered to be a poet. As a child, Frame had begun ‘to collect other words labelled “poetic” [...] because poetry emphasised what was romantic’. ⁵ She had argued with her sister about which was more poetic ‘tint’ or ‘touch’, following the examples set by her mother, Lottie, and by ‘Dot’s’ view of the poetic. Dot had praised and published Frame’s poem about a blackbird, changing one of Frame’s chosen words, and Frame

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⁵ Frame, *Complete Autobiography*, p. 93.
was annoyed that she changed ‘gay’ blackbird to ‘blythe’ blackbird, for I thought blithe too clumsy. Over the years I remember my irritation over the change of my chosen word, just as I remember Myrtle’s pressure to change ‘touch’ to ‘tint’.6

As an adult, Frame might have agreed with Charles Brasch’s view that ‘every good poet in his own way creates a new world & remakes this one, modestly or magnificently’, 7 and Frame regarded risk-taking as an inherent feature of good writing. For Frame, ‘Poets are not afraid to drown’ and asks:

What is that tide flowing out of the room and into the street? 
Somebody’s best-kept words have got out.
We are in danger of wet feet!8

Frame read Mallarmé at Yaddo. As she wrote to Bill Brown, ‘I have Mallarmé’s poems from the library and a collection of modern French poetry’.9 Her reading would have shown her the French poet’s departures from the conventions of French forms, as in this example from ‘Un Coup de Dés’. Her adult poetry is no longer restricted by notions of ‘poetic diction’, traditional verse-forms or poetic subject matter, as in her poem about Kafka’s beetle, with its

6 Frame, Complete Autobiography, p. 119.
7 Charles Brasch, Journals, 8 February, 1952, MS-4084/025, Hocken Collections.
8 Frame ‘Poets’, The Pocket Mirror, p. 56.
evident debt to Rilke, and its distinctly unpoetic diction. Gregor Samsa, who lived a totally conventional life,

Anchored always
With featherweight balloon and mock of silent promise
He chose the transformation ....
... He became the dream the dungbeetle
Sucking feeding upon the excrement of word.¹⁰

Frame chooses to call this poem ‘The Transformation’ (die Wandlung in German) rather than ‘The Metamorphosis’ the usual translation of the title of Kafka’s novella, Die Verwandlung, in an apparent echo of Rilke’s line ‘Choose to be changed’ (‘Wolle die Wandlung’) from the Sonnets to Orpheus. Frame viewed the ‘featherweight balloon’ of Gregor Samsa’s conventional life as a trap to avoid and was aware, as she says, that ‘much of my life would be spent trying to escape from a prison’, and added that she did not want to use poetry ‘to put myself in human danger and to try to force a flow of love towards me. I was learning that the uses of poetry are endless but not always harmless’.¹¹

Frame employs the characteristic literary features of verse-writing in her prose: metaphor, rhythm, a marked use of alliteration, and a strong sense of sound; and as Marc Delrez notes, ‘her intertextual intrusions almost invariably take the form of a gesturing towards the realm of poetry’.¹² She exploits the quintessence of the Anglo-Saxon roots of the language, largely monosyllabic and alliterative — the language of home, landscape and feelings — in her densely metaphorical prose with its layers of voices and allusions. Some early reviewers found the overtly poetical style of her novels disconcerting. Owen Leeming criticised Frame’s ‘decided weakness for metaphor’ in his review of Scented Gardens for the Blind, but was pleased to find there were ‘no irruptions of poetry’.¹³ However, the New Zealand poet James Baxter, took a view of the function of metaphor within poetry which

¹¹ Frame, Complete Autobiography, p. 361.
¹² Delrez, ‘Rilke in Frame’.
applies equally to Frame’s prose: ‘In a good poem inward and outward knowledge are perceived, as it were, in the same instant, by a single intellectual act, and the natural form to enclose the moment of perception is the metaphor’.\textsuperscript{14} As Frame said of herself in a letter to Charles Brasch, responding to Leeming’s criticism, ‘but isn’t the need to compare, to perceive relationships the source of all art? […] I’m afraid I breathe metaphors, mostly bad or indifferent; it is the obsession with images that prompts me to write’.\textsuperscript{15} She found support for her style from Brasch, who said he thought that ‘Janet shares my interest in moulding language to greater intensity and richness’.\textsuperscript{16}

Frame also had a poet’s concern for the importance of sound in her prose-writing. Undated notes on Maurice Gee’s \textit{A Special Flower}, published in 1965, show that she was critical of Gee for using words which ‘were not made to work as instruments’, and noted that the ‘author has not a fastidious ear’.\textsuperscript{17} Frank Sargeson remarks a number of times on Frame’s habit of composing pieces in her head, ‘and then transcribes them as fast as she can make her pen move or her typewriter type’; in other words, she composes by ear and not by eye: Frame is a musical writer rather than a painterly one.\textsuperscript{18} She was an avid listener to music as well as poetry on the radio: ‘Beethoven on Mondays, Poems on Fridays, Bach on Wednesdays Schubert on Thursdays etc’.\textsuperscript{19} In her review of Frame’s 1952 prize-winning short stories, \textit{The Lagoon}, Dorothy Ballantyne asserts that Frame

belongs with the listeners of this world, not the watchers. She is not the first writer to weave everyday speech into her prose, but she is a pioneer in this respect. No New Zealander before her has used this speech so poetically, for what is really a lyric purpose.\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{15} Frame, letter to Charles Brasch, 2 January 1964, in \textit{Dear Charles, Dear Janet}, p. 11.
\textsuperscript{17} Frame, ‘Notes on Maurice Gee’s “A Special Flower”’, \textit{In Her own Words}, p. 223.
\textsuperscript{18} Frank Sargeson, letter to Charles Brasch, 3 October 1956, MS-2404/004, Hocken Collections.
\textsuperscript{19} Frame, letter to Sheila Natusch, 19 March 1947, \textit{Letters from Jean}, p. 9.
\textsuperscript{20} Dorothy Ballantyne, review of \textit{The Lagoon} read over 4YA Radio, June 1952, Heather Murray Papers, AG 587/016, Hocken Collections.
The importance of music to Frame may have lain partly in its rhythms and shape, but also probably as a language in itself, conveying feelings which may be beyond words. She wrote to Charles Brasch from the Macdowell artists’ colony in the USA that ‘my time at Macdowell has been memorable chiefly for the richness of the music I’ve had here. One of the painters was also a gifted pianist’. The ‘gifted pianist’ was William Theophilus (Bill) Brown, who became a lifelong friend, and Frame made recordings of poetry to send to him. Brown had given her a tape-recorder so that he could send her recordings of his playing, which she so much enjoyed. In thanking Charles Brasch for showing her his poems for his *Home Ground* collection, which she wanted to share with Bill Brown, she remarks that ‘Home Ground is like a piece of music. I didn’t discover this fully until I was reading it into a tape recorder’.

As an adult, Frame was especially drawn to those poets with a mystical vision of life: Blake, Yeats, Rainer Maria Rilke, T.S. Eliot; poets with a view of wonder and joy in the natural world: the English Romantics, Dylan Thomas, G. M. Hopkins; and those who looked at death directly, without euphemism or avoidance: Dylan Thomas, Sylvia Plath and Rilke. She also quotes and alludes to the poetry of people she knew or met: Stephen Spender – met briefly in California – and the New Zealand poets Alan Curnow, Ruth Dallas, James Baxter and Charles Brasch; and she continued to read Rilke’s poetry throughout her life, including the French poems in ‘Vergers’ (‘Orchards’), which she translated into English with Bill Brown in California.

One of Frame’s most perceptive early critics, Jeanne Delbeare, notes the way in which Frame developed a sense of being part of a family of poets and writers and that ‘Orpheus also links Janet Frame herself with Rilke and Ovid and all the poets of the past

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21 Frame, letter to Charles Brasch, 17 November 1969, MS-0996-003/062, Hocken Collections.
22 Frame, letter to Charles Brasch, 8 June 1972, MS-0996-003/062 Hocken Collections.
whom she has assimilated and whose voice is part of her own'.

C. K. Stead notes the poetic nature of Frame’s prose, suggesting the kind of poetic feeling she conveys. He describes Frame’s work as ‘dazzling [...] simple, direct, with glittering clarity (something she shares with Katherine Mansfield), and full of brilliant images. She was a poet of prose’.

Later critics have tended to concern themselves more with narratology than poetic language use. In this chapter I aim to restate the connection between Frame’s narrative and poetry, and add, for example, to the recent work of Marc Delrez and Valérie Baisnée, who suggests that Frame’s quotations and allusions ‘create an intertextual web of cultural references that run through her work’. I aim to explore the ways in which Frame dissolves the borders of prose and poetry using direct quotation, pastiche, parody and allusion to create a polyphonic texture of poetic prose and links to poets present and past.

Frame’s first novel, *Owls Do Cry*, written in ‘a poetic, imagistic, allusive style’ draws on experiences of childhood and her time in mental hospitals and weaves a variety of poetic voices from her prolific reading into a richly textured portrayal of inner life and the outside world. The child’s ability to see beauty, significance and magic in the everyday, and the literalness of understanding which is confused by euphemism and cliché are exploited to point up corruption and spiritual hollowness in the adult world. Frame draws on her memory of lines from Wordsworth’s ‘Intimations of Mortality’, which she had learnt by heart at school, as Daphne, Chicks, Francie and Toby Withers enter the story ‘trailing

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clouds of glory’ but find as they begin to mature that the ‘shades of the prison-house begin to close’ around them all too quickly.  

The novel is interspersed with Daphne’s songs from ‘the dead room’, the adult Daphne’s hospital cell, and in these songs Daphne brings together her family in memory, imagination and poetic allusion. The novel opens with Daphne’s first song, its densely figurative language resonant with imagery of childhood innocence, consciously recalling the first of Blake’s *Songs of Innocence* in its description of daybreak and birdsong: ‘piping like the child in the poem, drop thy pipe, thy happy pipe’. The rhapsodic and poetic cadences of Daphne’s song retain in adulthood the imaginative language and vision of the child: ‘and I planted carrot seed that never came up, for the wind breathed a blow-away spell’ (9). The syntax of Daphne’s rapturous lines ‘And the place grows bean flower, pea-green lush of grass...and the days above burst unheeded, explode their atoms of snow-black beanflower’(9) fuses Dylan Thomas’s celebration of childhood, *Fern Hill*,

> Nothing I cared, in the lamb white days, that time would take me  
> Up to the swallow thronged loft by the shadow of my hand

and Gerard Manley Hopkins’ joy in springtime and childhood innocence,

> When weeds, in wheels, shoot long and lovely and lush;

The imagery of Frame’s childhood poems discussed in Chapter One was drawn from the fields and gardens around her, and from the view of the world as she lay in the grass, observing the skies above her. Like Blake and Hopkins, Frame had a sense of the paramount importance of the beauty and sanctity of the natural world, an essentially Romantic view of nature as both consoling and uplifting, where nature is invested with personality and in which

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29 Frame, *Owls Do Cry*, p. 9. Further references to *Owls Do Cry* in this section are in the text.  
human moods and moral impulses are reflected. A striking example is the end of the disastrous picnic outing in *Owls Do Cry*, as the picnic-party leaves the ‘long-faced cow, melancholy now, because no-one came to milk it, standing by the manuka fence, under the fir tree that heaved not in any wind or storm but out of its own sorrow’ (146). Frame’s own poetry is full of birds, trees, the seasons; and the elements of life:

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Every morning I congratulate
The icicles on their severity.
I think they have courage, backbone,
Their hard hearts will never give way.32
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Her anthropomorphic description of icicles draws on primordial imagery of the earth’s elements, pursued with wit in ‘hard hearts’.

In 1958, Frame changed her name by deed poll to Janet Clutha, after New Zealand’s Clutha River, which she saw as:

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a being that persisted through all the pressures of rock, stone, earth and sun, living as an element of freedom but not isolated, linked to heaven and light by the slender rainbow that shimmered above its waters. I felt the river was an ally, that it would speak for me’.33
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Daphne’s songs end with a refrain which sounds through the novel like a death knell: ‘Sings Daphne from the dead room’ (9). Blake’s ‘dark satanic mills’ and his chimney-sweep are imaged in the Dickensian references to the woollen mills where people believe that ‘years ago small children had worked in mills, never seeing the sunlight for years’ (27), and in a polyphonic texture of poetic allusion drawn from a timeless continuity of poets, echoes of Blake’s chimney sweep, sold into servitude, merge with Eliot:

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The singe on the sleeve is worse than fire
The half-place than the knowing where,
Like seas between to the unhappy sailor.
Poor trafficking child, with no treasure (83).34
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The lines highlight Toby’s confusion. As Jeanne Delbaere remarks: ‘Like the *Four Quartets* Janet Frame’s novels are full of echoes, silent shades glide through them, vaguely recognisable, beckoning to us for a while before making way for others’. The voices of poets speak through *Owls Do Cry*, as they do in Frame’s subsequent novels, and to each successive reader.

### 4.2 Poetry at School and College

The poems of Frame’s schooldays are among the most keenly felt and frequently referenced, especially in the early fiction, but surfacing also in the later novels. As I illustrated in Chapter Three, the children’s poems of John Drinkwater, Walter de la Mare, Edward Lear, Lewis Carroll, W. H. Davies, R. L. Stevenson, and Eleanor Farjeon featured regularly on the ‘Dot’s Little Folk’ pages of the *Otago Daily Times*, as did poems by William Wordsworth, Walt Whitman and William Blake. Drinkwater’s ‘Moonlit Apples’ was a regular, and ‘Dot’ used it as the basis of her lesson in prosody. Whitman’s ‘Captain O My Captain’, Blake’s ‘Tyger’ and poems from Blake’s *Songs of Innocence & Experience* also made a number of appearances over the years along with Victorian nature poems and the children’s verse. The reading curriculum was based on the English literary tradition and included almost no literature from New Zealand.

Frame writes in her autobiography of her attachment to her school poetry anthology, *Mount Helicon*, which contained many of the best-known English poems from Shakespeare and Marlowe to those of the early twentieth century, and included poems by the American poets Walt Whitman, E. A. Poe, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and John Greenleaf Whittier, as well as poetry from the British Isles. As an adolescent, mourning the death by drowning of her older sister Myrtle following heart failure, Frame found ‘that the poets in *Mount Helicon*...”}

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were writing the story of my feelings. I could scarcely believe their depth of understanding,’ and she found herself agreeing with her mother’s habitual murmuring of ‘only the poets know, only the poets know’. In particular, Whitman’s ‘The Lost Mate’, his poem about a bird’s fruitless search for its lost love, seemed to understand the process of Frame’s grieving for Myrtle,

with all the false alarms and pondered might-have-beens, the anger and regret and the desperate reasoning that enlisted the help of magic, and ending in failure to find what was lost and the letting go of all hope of finding it.

In *Faces in the Water*, Istina Mavet recalls using some of these childhood poems in a talismanic fashion, much as she used her Shakespeare, to keep the horrors of her impending electrotherapy at bay: ‘Over and over inside myself I am saying a poem which I learnt at school when I was eight. I say the poem, as I wear the grey woollen socks, to ward off Death’. The poem was Drinkwater’s ‘Moonlit Apples’, and she manages to recite three lines of it before the electrotherapy machine takes over. The magic of the poem seems to invoke the protective limits of childhood, but fails to protect Istina. Later, on a Sunday walk around the hospital grounds, Istina sees the old men, who ‘were dead though their mouths moved’, as though they were the unresponding inhabitants of the house visited by de la Mare’s ‘Traveller’ who came ‘knocking at the moonlit door,’ another of the poems she had learnt as a very young girl at school. ‘A traveller’, observes Istina, ‘could knock for years at the door of that dismal ward […] and get no answer’.

The power which Frame felt poetry has to speak for us appears in *Scented Gardens for the Blind* to provide insight into the thinking of Erlene, the imaginary daughter of Vera Glace, who as we learn only at the end of the novel is an inmate in a mental hospital. Vera is a former librarian; has been living in the hospital for thirty years; and is an elective

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38 Frame, *Faces in the Water*, p. 17.
mute or aphasic, who projects her mutism onto her ‘daughter’, and invents an imaginary husband, Edward, in England. Erlene recalls the poems of her schooldays in her return to a childhood state, the poems of Walter de la Mare and R. L. Stevenson in the junior classes and those of E. A. Poe and Matthew Arnold in an older class. They signify an age of neatness and mathematical certainties, ‘Given, To Prove, Construction, Proof, Conclusion’.\(^{40}\) Erlene seeks to protect herself against the frightening uncertainties of the adult world. She cites the simplicity and apparent certainties of geometry and the children’s verse read at school; Stevenson’s ‘Bright is the ring of words’ forms the epigraph to *Mount Helicon*, Frame’s school poetry anthology. De la Mare’s ‘A song of enchantment’ and ‘Someone came knocking’ were regularly included in ‘Dot’s Little Folk,’ as well as in Erlene’s lessons at school, and ‘belonged among clapping games, beads, paper cut-outs’ of the ‘Infant Room’ (53). These verses contrast with the terrifying freedom of university which Erlene later contemplates, where ‘she was going to walk up and down the streets till late at night, thinking about Plato and Socrates, trying to solve the problems of being and not-being, hand in hand with Death’ and where she finally imagines herself wandering off and drowning, like Shelley (231-32).

Even as a young girl, Erlene had her suspicions about the optimism of children’s verse, finding more to feed her imagination in Mathew Arnold’s ‘Scholar Gypsy’, a poem she returns to a number of times. Her teacher, Miss Walters, is an uncritical reader, dismissing Arnold’s pessimism and despair in ‘Dover Beach’ with an overly bright ‘What nonsense, really [...] when poets write in this way it is usually because they are ill or overstrained; the despair is part of their illness’ (55). Erlene perceives Miss Walters’ fears, and her failure to confront Arnold’s nightmarish world from which the old religious certainties have gone. When Miss Walters reminds the girls of the tennis session at ‘Four-fifteen sharp’, Erlene

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silently responds: ‘Sharp and lonely’ (55). Erlene knows that the ‘Arabia’ of de la Mare’s poem, ‘where the princes ride at noon’, did not reflect the harsh realities of life, that ‘it had never been like that, there was all disease and desert and fighting and hunger’ (58). Erlene regards with despair the futility of reciting the poems she learnt as a child, Poe’s ‘Annabel Lee’ or Keats’s ‘Meg Merrilies’, the last poem her imaginary father heard her recite before he left for England, since ‘nothing she uttered would ever reach anyone’s ears’ and nothing would remain but ‘the stale smell of accumulated sentences and phrases; and no trace of a human being’ (227).

Arnold’s ‘Scholar Gypsy’ is the poem which Erlene recalls most often, and which meets her need for a text as a source of self-referencing. It retells an old story of a boy forced through poverty to leave his studies at Oxford. He found that the gypsies ‘had a traditional kind of learning among them, and could do wonders by the power of imagination’, in an apparent authorisation of Vera/Erlene’s state of living within her own imagination.41 The poem begins as a traditional pastoral elegy, but addresses Arnold’s sense of the value and power of the imagination, the perils of conformity, the loss of faith, and the value of the world of learning – the Oxford towers remain within his sight – all issues of importance for Frame. Arnold’s concerns with the ‘strange disease of modern life’, the value of the natural landscape for its peace and permanence, and ‘the sick fatigue, the languid doubt’, are also of abiding interest to Frame; and show how Arnold anticipates Rilke and Yeats.42

In her sessions in the mental hospital with Dr Clapper, Vera/Erlene recasts the psychiatrist as a character from a children’s story or fairy tale – Uncle Blackbeetle – taking the image from a real beetle on the window-pane, as a way of lessening the threat from this powerful authority-figure. She asks Uncle Blackbeetle if he knows Arnold’s poem, but her question remains unanswered. Later, Erlene tries to ward off her night terrors in bed by

thinking about the Scholar Gypsy, her child-like thinking suggested by her fears that he
would be unable to manage in New Zealand, as ‘he would get lost in the bush and not know
how to boil the billy’ (100).

As Erlene matures and joins the sixth form, her stock of poets expands to include
Milton, Wordsworth and Shelley, but she retains her attachment to ‘The Scholar Gypsy’, as
she tries to make sense of uncertainties and dreams which ‘refused to be drowned, but floated
accusingly within sight and sound of the dreamer’ (233). She is conscious of her lack of
experience of the world and of love and the limitation of her perceptions, thinking ‘But I
don’t know about love, Erlene thought. Love is the Scholar Gypsy and my mother and father
and the sound of trees at night’ (233). Finally, Erlene decides ‘there was no reason to speak
any more’ (237). The psychiatrist Dr Clapper’s ‘slaughter of the fly’, instinctively swatting a
fly with his newspaper, leads Erlene, conscious of her own powerlessness, to Blake’s poem:

Little fly, thy summer’s play,
my thoughtless hand has brushed away.

Blake’s simple verse-form and child-like language belie the poem’s underlying seriousness of
purpose, the wanton destruction of life, and points up the unthinking power of the
psychiatrist. Dr Clapper reappears with biblical images of power: ‘No fire would fall from the
sky; no God would descend to comfort his silent people’ which combine with a last glimpse
of ‘The Scholar Gypsy’ who ‘could wait forever now’ (236-37). Erlene exercises the one
power she has: the power of silence.

4.3 Poetic Visionaries: Blake, Yeats and Rilke

Janet Frame’s sense of affinity with the poetry of William Blake is evident from her earliest
writing, and her interest in Yeats, as I argued in Chapter Three, reveals itself in the poems of
her late childhood, for example ‘City Flowers.’ As a young adult, Frame was introduced to
Rilke’s Sonnets to Orpheus in Leishman’s translation, later enjoying other translations of
Rilke’s German poetry; and these three visionary, mystical poets, their symbolism and sense of the destructiveness of the modern world make their presence felt in the language and themes of Frame’s novels.

The warmth of Blake’s Christianity chimes with Lottie Frame’s insistence ‘that God was kind’ and her Christadelphian belief that ‘only God knew whether or not there was an angel inside a beggar or swagger’. Frame’s novels make frequent reference to the value of the commonplace and the sense of the world as precious; and display a Blakean concern with apocalypse, and the ways in which the world falls short of its potential. Mark Williams describes Lottie’s faith as a ‘Blakean sense that Christianity is at heart a message about transforming, not repudiating, physical existence’, quite different from the attitude of the dominant puritan Christianity in New Zealand at that time. Frame is inspired by Blake’s independence of thought and spirit as well as his sense of the value of an artisan culture, of craftsmanship, increasingly sapped by a soulless and often cruel factory system: his ‘dark satanic mills’. Blake took his imagery largely from the natural world, birds, trees, flowers and the land itself; and the pastoral imagery of the Bible. For Frame, too, the freedom of wild life contrasts with the constraints of modern life.

Frame frequently uses references to canonical poetry to underline the shallowness of parts of modern culture. In Living in the Maniototo Irving Garrett is a town planner in Berkeley, California, but as we learn later, has ‘not planned any real towns I can’t drive you to one of my towns. They’re not built. My plans are studies, exercises’. Nothing is real, natural or of any practical value. By way of contrast, Tommy, the Baltimore jeweller who dies suddenly and mysteriously, is a ‘craftsman and artist’ (33). Similarly, the Americanised New Zealand shopping mall, tellingly named “Heavenfield” in fictional Blenheim (on

43 Frame, Complete Autobiography, pp. 37, 28.
44 Mark Williams, Leaving the Highway, p. 33.
45 Frame, Living in the Maniototo, p. 195. Further references to Living in the Maniototo in section 4.3 are given parenthetically in the text.
Auckland’s north shore) is in its inappropriate scale ‘a huge windowless pretence’ with an aviary ‘where canaries and lovebirds sing, and fly in flashes of blue and yellow, an arrogant costly restoration and reminder, however, of the lost noise of the sun’ (23). This denial of the value of the natural world is contrasted by the novelist Mavis, a guest of the Garretts who have gone travelling, in her description of a skunk in the Berkeley garden where the natural world re-imposes itself on a world from which it has been all but destroyed, the pride and dignity of the skunk’s movements compared to those of a wealthy inhabitant with a sense of her own entitlement:

I saw a skunk coming down the steps by the corner of the house, walking sedately step by step, like a woman in a black and white fur coat going to the opera, walking down the stairs of the circle to take her place in the front row. Seen by everyone, with her glossy furs, but possibly wearing a more discreet brand of perfume. I felt the gratitude that I always feel at the sight of creatures of the wild going about their daily affairs undisturbed (215).

In the spiritual wastelands of Blenheim, Berkeley and Baltimore, nature is all but obliterated. With a child’s innocence and eye for the unvarnished truth, Brian’s nephew Lonnie, ‘a milk-and butter-fed child’ from New Zealand, is baffled by the artificial cityscape he finds himself in, and cannot understand why there is no daylight, or why there is ‘no outside’ (101). Mavis, born like Lonnie in a land of earthquakes, has a sense of herself as ‘a guest, as are all who live there, of the Taranaki mountain’ (133). She understands and accepts the risks of living in a natural environment. This respect for the natural world is also seen in the choice of title for Mavis’s novel ‘The Green Fuse’, from Dylan Thomas’s poem ‘The force that through the green fuse’, in which nature is seen as both creator and destroyer:

The force that through the green fuse drives the flower
Drives my green age: that blasts the roots of trees
Is my destroyer.46

Roger, one of the quartet of fictional guests who interrupt Mavis in her novel-writing, is for the most part a ridiculous figure. He is unrealistically engaged in a spiritual visit to the

Californian desert, ‘sounding hopelessly like a boy who’s just seen a film about the desert’ (166). He has his own unexpected moment of epiphany, however, when a hare, a real, trembling creature of the natural world, trustingly shares Roger’s patch of shade:

> With the quivering hare crouched beside him, Roger progressed from loneliness to a blessed feeling of shared aloneness. He and the hare were at home together, and this was all that being at home meant, no more, no less. Just sharing a space in peace (177).

The spare and unadorned simplicity of the language here and the half-rhyme of ‘space’ and ‘peace’ underline the importance of the incident. When the sublime moment had passed, Roger — slumped and waiting for rescue — thinks again of Yeats, the poet’s lines to a friend whose work had come to nothing;

> Bred to a harder thing than Triumph (186).

In Berkeley, the Garretts’ book collection announces that theirs is ‘A house without Yeats’ (114). In shifts of register, Frame’s parody of ‘The Lake Isle of Innisfree’ fuses echoes of Yeats with the materialist concerns of the Garretts, purchasing their conventional retirement home:

> They will sell this house and go soon, for their name’s on the waiting list, and they’ve paid a huge deposit for the suite with a view of the shore (114-15).

For Mavis, this is a loss, an awful failure of imagination. She invokes ‘Byzantium’, Yeats’s metaphor for his own spiritual journey to an artistic infinity:

> No rage. No towers.
> Only the Garretts’ lives demanding
> I want a Shakespeare like the real Shakespeare
> I want a miraculous marble table.
> We have all, all, and “the agony of flame that cannot singe a sleeve” (115).

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Like Blake and Yeats, Frame frequently invokes the wild birds. For Blake a bird is a symbol of childhood innocence as well as freedom from constraint, since a caged bird cannot sing for joy. In Yeats’s ‘Lake Isle of Innisfree’, one of the poems of Frame’s schooldays, the bees, linnets and crickets all have their freedom; and Yeats hears the lake’s waters ‘in the deep heart’s core.’ Frame uses verse to break free of generic boundaries, and Mavis’s use of verse in the novel, the prose poetry, pastiche and parody mirror her concern with escaping from conventional constraints. In her ‘Hypotenuse’ poem, she reflects on the creative process, taking as an image a Scarlet Tanager, a South American bird which precariously survives the winter to sing again in spring. Like the birds of Yeats and Blake, this bird sings a life affirming song:

And then, my blood-color furled, I flew to the highest
bough and I sang
in detail, without violence, a civilised version of my song (69).

The image of a bird is a recurrent one in Frame’s fiction. In the natural world a bird is free, but bound by instincts, in particular in migrating birds, the homing instinct. From Charles Brasch’s poem, ‘Islands’ Frame takes the title of her novella, Towards Another Summer, its closing words and its epigraph:

... and from their haunted bay
The godwits vanish towards another summer.

She uses the image of the native New Zealand bird, the godwit, in an extended and powerful metaphor in which the migratory bird, though free, is easily unnerved and left in a state of fluttering panic, in a more complex and personal vision of the wild bird than the timelessness of Yeats’s wild swans, or in Blake’s joyous birdsong. The novella’s protagonist, Grace Cleave, a New Zealand novelist on a weekend visit to a friendly journalist and his New Zealand wife, feels that overnight she ‘had changed to a migratory bird’, a feeling so strong that she checks under the bedclothes for feathers, and is relieved to find that, unlike Kafka’s

Yeats, ‘Lake Isle of Innisfree’ Mount Helicon, p. 270.
Gregor Samsa, she still has her outward human form. The extended image of the wild bird expresses her vulnerability and panic-stricken helplessness after her perceived failure to shine in a literary interview at the BBC’s Bush House in London, when she subsequently ‘ruffled her feathers, flapped her wings wildly, went hysterically out into the Strand’. The migratory nature of the godwit also conveys Grace’s bouts of homesickness, heightened by her browsing among her hosts’ New Zealand book collection, especially Allen Curnow’s seminal 1951 *Book of New Zealand Verse*, which left her ‘a migratory bird instantly in her New Zealand world’. It was a book she kept by her bedside at home, but which she appears to find too painful to read in London, and in reading poems from her host’s copy, she feels herself to be exiled, ‘suffering from the need to return to the place I have come from before the season and sun are right for my return’. While she explores the freezing village on her lone walk, Grace muses on stories from Greek mythology about the escape through flight of deities transformed into migratory birds, a nightingale and a swallow, linking the imagery of birds and her own plight with the mythology of the ancient world: ‘Philomela; Procne; it was an old tradition; we must tend the myths, she thought; only in that way shall we survive’.

In an article on Frame’s poetry, Valérie Baisnée argues that for Frame the natural world ‘provides nourishment and maternal protection, as well as “feeding” the poet’s imagination on the level of language. Images of trees further help to root language in the world,’ and trees are a link with biblical imagery of the tree of life and the cross. The New Zealand poet Bill Manhire, in his introduction to a posthumous collection of Frame’s poetry, notes the dominance of Frame’s pastoral imagery and argues that ‘it would be hard to find a

51 Frame, *Towards Another Summer*, p. 38.
52 Frame, *Towards Another Summer*, p. 38.
54 Frame, *Towards Another Summer*, p. 98.
55 Valérie Baisnée ‘A Home in Language’, *Frameworks*, p. 91
more fecund sense of the natural world in any recent writer’ a point which also holds true for Frame’s novels.\(^{56}\) I will focus for the moment on her use of tree images.

As Baisnèe notes, ‘at the centre of Frame’s landscape-consciousness’ stands the tree. As a symbol it reveals that the poet’s longing for “my place” is not simply atavistic but also metaphysical. It is part of an interrelated system of growth, death, and rebirth’.\(^{57}\) Frame makes striking use of leaf fall and composting to convey her view of the writer’s intertextual relationship to the cycle of literature. In the words of Harry Gill, the novelist who takes up a writing fellowship in *In the Memorial Room*, ‘In authorship, the author is not the tree scattering his books like leaves; the books are the tree; the author is shed, blown away, dies to make compost for other leaves and other trees’.\(^{58}\) The uprooting of the pear tree which links the three sections of *Intensive Care* is presented as sacrilege, the destruction of natural life by people who have lost touch with their land and its history. Milly is distraught, ‘I am robbed and betrayed’, she says, when her father takes an axe to the Livingstone pear tree after a branch fell with the weight of snow. ‘It was like the tree speaking’, Milly thought, ‘and it scared them’. Milly feels a strong personal connection to the tree and its roots:

> ‘Under the Livingstone pear tree is like being under some kinsiderate creature where its ribs have leaves growing on them and stretching out and waving to jostle the rain and snow off your head, keeping you dry, and it’s a place for me to be when there are not many places in the world just to be [...] under the Livingstone pear tree I always find myself waiting.’\(^{59}\)

The image of the tree had been part of Frame’s writing since the days of writing for *Dot’s Little Folk*. Her 1939 poem about an orchard, ‘Blossoms’ drew the praise from Dot which Frame treasured, ‘poetic insight and imagination’.\(^{60}\) Frame’s final poem for Dot’s page, ‘The Dead Tree’ begins in hope,


\(^{57}\) Baisnèe, p. 103.

\(^{58}\) Frame, *In the Memorial Room*, p. 113.


\(^{60}\) Frame, ‘Blossoms’, *Otago Daily Times*, 2 October 1939, p. 13
'New born it seemed like everything  
—Bird, bud and blossom—
but ends in desolation,

And my apple boughs were not aflame  
With blossoms; and only the moon
knew why
A little lost wind began to cry  
Under the staring stars in the sky.  

The poem expresses her sorrow at the passing of the publishing institution which had been a significant part of her life.

The images of trees and orchards abound in Rilke’s poetry, which Frame first encountered in 1948 through a copy of the *Sonnets to Orpheus*, in J. B. Leishman’s bi-lingual edition first published in 1936, and revised in 1946. The first of Rilke’s *Sonnets to Orpheus*, appears to have struck an immediate chord with its invocation of Orpheus, the musician-poet, and the images of trees, even in Leishman’s wooden translation:

A tree ascending there. O pure transcension!
O Orpheus sings! O tall tree in the ear!

(Da stieg ein Baum. O reine Übersteigung!  
O Orpheus singt! O hoher Baum im Ohr!)  

The image of spring as the kind of poetry-loving child Frame had been might also have had a direct appeal:

Spring has come again. Earth’s a-bubble
with all those poems she knows by heart, —

(Frühling ist wiedergekommen. Die Erde
ist wie ein Kind, das Gedichte weiß;)  

Marc Delrez suggests that Frame felt an affinity with Rilke as ‘her approach to identity as a process which is always linked to literary discovery and therefore necessarily subordinated to

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63 Rilke, *Sonnets to Orpheus*, I.xxi, p. 74-75.
poetic transformation’. \textsuperscript{64} This affinity would prove to be life-long, a shared interest in the value of the natural world, the destructiveness of industrialisation, the loss of conventional faith, and a sense that in life we should openly acknowledge the advent of our own death. In the 1970s, Frame would read and translate Rilke’s later French poetry, in particular ‘Vergers’ (Orchards) with Bill Brown in the USA, the fecund and self-reviving orchard still a significant image for Frame.

Rilke had a huge impact on twentieth-century British and American poets, on W.H. Auden, Stephen Spender, W. B. Yeats and T. S. Eliot, all poets whom Frame read and admired; and Rilke’s poetry has been translated or ‘versioned’ by a very wide variety of English-speaking poets including, in Frame’s time, Stephen Spender, Cecil Day Lewis and James Bertram, a friend and collaborator of Charles Brasch. In the USA, Auden reviewed the first English translation of Rilke, and references him frequently in his own poetry, for example in his \textit{Sonnets from China} where he refers to the composition of Rilke’s \textit{Sonnets to Orpheus}:

Tonight in China let me think of one  
Who for ten years of drought and silence waited,  
Until in Muzot all his being spoke,  
And everything was given once for all.\textsuperscript{65}

In an attempt to account for the appeal of Rilke amongst anglophone poets, Karen Leeder suggests that anglophone poets had a strong sense that Rilke was addressing them directly, inviting a response, feeling that in translating and referring to his poetry they were in conversation with him.\textsuperscript{66} Patrick Evans argues that Rilke ‘showed Frame a powerful and enduring spiritual response to a world from which traditional meanings had been removed in

\textsuperscript{64} Delrez, ‘Rilke in Frame’, p. 2.  
the advance of modernity’. Frame seems to have felt an affinity with Rilke because he was a poet who lived, like Frame, entirely for art; he was acquainted with the prominent artists of his day, including Rodin and Cézanne. Rilke was commissioned to write a monograph on Rodin in 1902, noting the sculptor’s working method of close observation, and later became Rodin’s secretary. Rilke translated poetry from French to German, and in his preface to his translations of Rilke’s French poetry, A. Poulin Jnr. notes that Rilke’s French poetry was much admired by Paul Valéry and André Gide. At the writer’s colony at Yaddo, Frame learnt more about Rilke and his connections with French poets. She tells Bill Brown that ‘I’ve had a whole world of feeling overturned or unburied by reading in the story of Rilke in Paris – how R. was influenced by Valery’s “Le Cimetière Marin” [...] Rilke liked the poem because to him it was “a perfect poem”; I liked it because I liked it and it moved me’. Frame’s immediate feeling for Rilke’s poetry is evidenced in a letter to John Money in 1948, the year she first encountered the Sonnets to Orpheus, when she quotes:

Be not afraid of suffering, render
Heaviness back to the earth again;

Rilke also made his presence felt among New Zealand poets, and in 1949, Landfall included Rilke’s 4th Elegy from The Duino Elegies in an English version rendered by James Bertram:

O Trees of Life, o when in winter mood?
We are not singleminded, have no instinct
Like migratory birds.

(O Bäume Lebens, o wann winterlich
Wir sind nicht einig. Sind nicht wie die Zug-vögel verstümmelt.)

69 Frame, letter to Bill Brown, Jay to Bee, p. 41.
70 Frame, letter to John Money, cited in King, Wrestling with the Angel, p. 98; Rilke, Sonnets to Orpheus, LIV ed by J. B. Leishman, p. 41.
In these opening lines, the poet remarks on man’s lack of harmony [‘nicht einig’] with nature – ‘singleminded’ is an odd translation of ‘einig’ here – but the poem rehearses the common New Zealand themes of migration and the relationship with nature. This version of the ‘4th Elegy’ was available to Frame while she was living in Frank Sargeson’s army hut where she had access to past issues of Landfall, every copy of which ‘would have been eagerly devoured.’ The Landfall editor Charles Brasch quotes a number of times from Rilke’s poetry in his Journals, for example these lines from ‘Archäischer Torso Apollos’: ‘Du musst dein Leben ändern (“You must change your life”): is this not a demand that much of greatest art makes of us?’ And in an entry a little later, Brasch remarks of Patrick White’s Riders in the Chariot, ‘what a commanding silence […] from page after page the cry comes up: Du musst dein Leben ändern.’

Rilke continued to be part of Frame’s correspondence with both Bill Brown and Charles Brasch, and she later read more of Rilke’s German poetry in a bi-lingual edition translated by C. F. MacIntyre, of the University of California, at Berkeley. When she found the apple tree in her garden had but one blossom and one apple, she wrote to Brown that ‘Rilke would have had something wise to say about this smallest tree and its one blossom’, and a little later tells Brown ‘I should have a quote from Rilke here – he’s said everything’. She told Brasch about her American friends Bill Brown and Paul Wonner visiting Muzot, where Rilke wrote his Sonnets to Orpheus, and as autumn approached in 1973, after a very parched summer, she quoted in English in a letter to Brasch from Rilke’s ‘Herbsttag’ (‘Autumn Day’),

73 Kevin Ireland, personal email, 2 February 2016.
75 Frame, letters to Bill Brown, 7 April and 5 August, 1970, Jay to Bee, pp. 104 & 246.
76 Frame, letter to Charles Brasch, 18 November 1971, in Correspondence with Janet Frame, 1967-1972, MS-0996-003/062, Hocken Collections.
Lord it is time. The summer was too long.\footnote{Frame, letter to Charles Brasch, 30 March 1973, MS-0996-003/214, Hocken Collections.}

(Herr: es ist Zeit. Der Sommer war sehr gross.)\footnote{‘Herbsttag’, translation from \textit{Rainer Maria Rilke: Fifty Selected Poems} trans. by C. F. MacIntyre (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1947), pp. 36-37.}

After Brasch’s death, Frame wrote a memorial piece about a visit from him when he brought her some anemones, and she recalled ‘the Rilke poem’ about these flowers. She had remembered the poem’s first word in German, ‘Blumenmuskel’ (‘flower-muscle’) and quoted it, and ‘Charles finished the quotation, speaking in German’.\footnote{Frame, ‘Tributes from friends’, \textit{Islands} 2. 3 (Spring 1973), p. 252; Rilke, \textit{Sonnets to Orpheus} 2.v.}

Like Rilke, Frame lived in the literary world, and as I have already demonstrated believed in the exalted role of the artist in society. And like the early twentieth-century writers already mentioned, she seemed to feel Rilke was addressing her directly, in spite of Leishman’s stilted translation – she found better versions in later years. Writing to Bill Brown in 1970, she describes the Leishman translations in a Penguin edition of Rilke as ‘shocking’, and the Leishman translation of ‘The Swan’ as ‘unforgivably bad’.\footnote{Letters to Bill Brown, 11\textsuperscript{th} & 17\textsuperscript{th} April, 1970, \textit{Jay to Bee}, pp. 104 & 114.} Frame acknowledges the use in \textit{Faces in the Water} of translations of Rilke’s \textit{Sonnets to Orpheus} in the 1930s by the New York translator M. D. H. Norton; and later she discovered and particularly enjoyed translations from the 1940s by C. F. MacIntyre.\footnote{Pamela Gordon, personal conversation, 7 March 2016.} Her bi-lingual editions of Rilke’s poetry, both Leishman’s and MacIntyre’s, seem to have led her to consider the German original where the English and German words are clearly related, and when the syntax is simple, as we see from her anecdote about the anemones and her occasional inclusion of Rilke’s German in the text of her novels.

In \textit{Faces in the Water}, the medical staff appear to be reinterpreting Rilke’s words ‘Wolle die Wandlung […] Choose to be Changed’ in favour of surgery, ‘ ‘‘Choose to be changed’ muses Istina, ‘with the flame with the flame be enraptured’ – but in too many cases
the flame was the ice-pick of a leucotomy’. Towards the end of the novel, however, when Istina has been allowed into the library van, her thoughts return to Rilke’s sonnet as she wonders more positively, ‘cannot one exercise one’s will as a living hammer to force the shape of change?’ Frame returns to the theme of controlling one’s own life-change in *Living in the Maniototo* when Zita, in her response to Theo’s stroke, hopes that it will ‘force them both to realise that their changelessness was a dream and that change need not be a continued nightmare’. A refugee of the 1956 Hungarian uprising, Zita has lost her language, culture and homeland, and has embraced change as Rilke exhorts, unlike her mother, whose fearfulness has led her to embrace elective silence; or Theo who, as Zita’s pun identifies, aims to control everyone around him: ‘Theo has a *stake* in everyone he rescued’. (Frame’s italics). Frame also shares with Rilke the sense of a need to face death as part of the natural cycle of life, as in the lines she quoted in English to John Money, cited earlier:

Be not afraid of suffering, render Heaviness back to the earth again.

(Fürchtet euch nicht zu leiden, die Schwere, gebt sie zurück an der Erde Gewicht)

Looking back from Taranaki at her time in America, Mavis had seen how close death is to the process of “going to seed”, for both are really an abundance of life which shocks and frightens by its untidiness, its lack of boundaries and the finality of its choice of a place to grow.

Thora Patten, the narrator of *The Edge of the Alphabet*, quotes the opening lines of the same sonnet, in German at first, continuing in English, as Zoe, one of the novel’s protagonists, struggles between life and death.

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82 Frame, *Faces in the Water*, p.4 14; Rilke, *Sonnets to Orpheus*, 2.xii, trans. by Leishman, p. 111.
87 Rilke, *Sonnets to Orpheus*, 1.IV.
O ihr Zärtlichen . . . 
Step now and then you gentle-hearted into the breath not breathed for you. 89

Later on, in Hyde Park, Zoe returns to another Rilke sonnet, twisting her piece of silver paper — her piece of creativity — in her fingers, asking: ‘Was anything real at all? Nothing’. [Frame’s italics] 90 Zoe chooses her own moment to ‘render heaviness back to the earth again’ as she ‘lay down, arranged and ordered, to die’. 91

Rilke’s musing on life and music in his poem ‘The Neighbour’ (‘Der Nachbar’) is inverted by the elderly poet Turnlung in Daughter Buffalo into part of his extended treatise on death which he says is ‘heavier than the heaviness of all things’, where Rilke was writing about life, (Das Leben), not death, and his lines read:

Life is heavier 
Than the heaviness of all things.

(Das Leben ist schwerer 
Als die Schwere von allen Dingen.) 92

Turnlung, whose own poems form chapters of the book, also recalls Henry Vaughan’s meditation on ‘beauteous death, the jewel of the just’, which Turnlung once had to paraphrase for an exam; and after punning reflections on dual/duel/jewel, he relates Vaughan’s seventeenth-century metaphysical poem to his own experience, ‘There have been deaths in my own life which touched the pressure points of my experience, enriching it as if by fine jewels’. 93 Turnlung returns to Vaughan later in conversation with Edelman, adding that ‘jewel is a treacherous word’. Turnlung’s feel for the metaphysics of Rilke and Vaughan,

89 Frame, The Edge of the Alphabet p. 96; Rilke, Sonnets to Orpheus I.iv, trans. by M. D. Herter Norton.
90 Frame, The Edge of the Alphabet, p. 273; Rilke Sonnets to Orpheus, 2.viii. Frame’s italics.
91 Frame, The Edge of the Alphabet, p. 274; Rilke Sonnets to Orpheus, 1.iv.
92 Frame, Daughter Buffalo, p. 433; Rilke, ‘The Neighbour’, MacIntyre, pp. 28-29.
however, is lost on Edelman, whose prosaic mind can only wonder ‘if he’d had an unpleasant experience with jewels or jewel investment’.\(^94\)

Frame’s interest in Rilke was a lifelong affair. Lines from Rilke’s later French poems *Vergers (Orchards)*, form the title and epigraph to the second volume of her *Autobiography*, *An Angel at My Table*:

> Reste tranquille, si soudain  
L’Ange à ta table se décide;  
Efface doucement les quelques rides  
Que fait la nappe sous ton pain.\(^95\)

> (Stay still, if the Angel  
suddenly chooses your table;  
gently smooth those few wrinkles  
in the cloth beneath your bread.)\(^96\)

The appearance of the angel forges a link with the angels of Frame’s mother, Lottie and her Christadelphian belief; and Frame’s own memories of being transported, in a large choir in Dunedin, by singing Beethoven’s ‘Ode to Joy’ from the *Ninth Symphony*. She says, ‘I remember the happiness and recognise it as one of the rewards of alliance with any great work of art, as if ordinary people were suddenly called upon to see the point of view of angels’.\(^97\) Frame quoted the opening lines of Rilke’s poem, in French, in birthday poems she wrote for her American friends Bill Brown and Paul Wonner.\(^98\) She asked a friendly French PhD student who had come to visit her to record some of these Rilke’s French poems for Brown and Wonner,\(^99\) and ‘Reste tranquille’ was also a poem which Frame requested be read, in French, at her funeral.\(^100\) Rilke’s poem sings in tune with Frame’s views of art, and, as

\(^94\) Frame, *Daughter Buffalo*, p. 504.  
\(^95\) Frame, *Complete Autobiography*, p. 144.  
\(^96\) Poulin, trans., ‘Orchards 3’, *The Complete French Poems*, p. 133. All subsequent translations of Rilke’s French poems in this chapter are by Poulin, unless otherwise stated.  
\(^97\) Frame, *Complete Autobiography*, p. 175.  
\(^101\) Jocelyn Harris, personal conversation, 26 February 2016.
Delrez asserts, is ‘an evocation of the numinous moment of inspiration’. On his way to take up his literary fellowship in the novel In the Memorial Room, the novelist Harry Gill calls on Rilke’s angels as he approaches Menton:

Les Anges, sont-ils devenus discrets!¹⁰²

(Have the angels turned discreet!)

Harry is dazzled by the light and the shining greenery of the trees which ‘bath my eyes with blessing’ as he contemplates his imminent blindness and the loss of his view of the natural world:

Et que mes rouges, mes verts, mes bleus,
Son oeil rond rejouissent.
S’il les trouve terrestres, tant mieux
Pour un ciel en prémises.¹⁰³

(And let my reds, my greens, my blues
Make his round eye rejoice.
If he finds them earthy, good!
For a paradise of premises.)

In Frame’s final novel, The Carpathians, the repeated phrase ‘ancient springtime’ is her translation (or Bill Brown’s) of Rilke’s ‘printemps antique’ – Poulin has the far less euphonic ‘antique spring’ – from the title poem of Rilke’s Vergers, written, as he says, in a borrowed language (‘langue prêtée’) about his long held fascination with orchards:

Peut-être que si j’ai osé t’écrire,
langue prêtée, c’était pour employer
ce nom rustique dont l’unique empire
me tourmentait depuis toujours: Verger.¹⁰⁴

(If I dared to write you, borrowed tongue, perhaps it was to use this rustic name whose rare kingdom always has tormented me: Orchard.)

¹⁰¹ Delrez, ‘Rilke in Frame’, p. 9.
¹⁰² Frame, In the Memorial Room, p. 28.
¹⁰³ Frame, In the Memorial Room, pp. 28-29.
Frame links Rilke’s ‘ancient springtime’ with the orchards around the fictional New Zealand town of Puamahara, where a memorial to the fictional legend of the Memory Flower is located and the motif of the ‘ancient springtime’ pervades the novel, narrated by novelist, John Henry Brecon, son of the protagonist, Mattina. He creates a story which merges details from his mother’s notebooks and father’s published writings with his own creative imagination to make permanent the memory of the parents he hardly knew, and in doing so John Henry becomes one of the ‘Housekeepers of Ancient Springtime’ who aims with ‘the use of words to continue the memory through centuries’. Lawrence Jones asserts that, ‘The Carpathians celebrates art as the child of memory and language’, and his perception chimes with Frame’s comment to James Baxter, that ‘poetry is in memory’ and that ‘you can annihilate time if you have enough power in you’. On his visit to Puamahara after Mattina’s death, Jake muses on change and perception, where ‘the trees, as in Rilke’s poem, have their roots in the sky’. In Puamahara’s orchard, in spite of the ravages of man-made pollutants which threaten to destroy the natural treasures of the environment,

the blossoms had survived one more year. The acres of rows of glorious white and pink were no more nor less than a plan of time and space recorded by memory, the Housekeeper of Ancient Springtime, and reinforced by human memory using words, spoken and written language.

As I argued in Chapter Three, the renewal of trees in the orchard was a key image for Frame from childhood onwards, and here she links this image with her thoughts about the place of language in memory and the glories of the natural landscape. Frame’s concern with landscape, of course, was something she shared with the poets who were her New Zealand

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108 Frame, letter to James K. Baxter, undated, but written from Christchurch, probably in 1947, James Baxter Correspondence, MS-0975/177, Hocken Collections.
contemporaries; and with the English Romantic poets who had dazzled her as a young woman, and to whom I will now turn.

4.4 The English Nineteenth Century Romantics

The English nineteenth-century Romantic poets were, as I have shown in Chapter Three, a major part of the school poetry-reading diet in New Zealand, and Janet Frame’s first encounters with Wordsworth, Keats, Coleridge and Shelley came through her reading of ‘Dot’s Little Folk’ in the *Otago Daily Times*, and through *Mount Helicon*, her school poetry anthology. The University syllabus also relied entirely on the English canon, and Coleridge’s *Biographica Literaria* was one of the first set books which Frame encountered.111 In Coleridge, Frame ‘found the feast of imagination spread almost in loving fashion, in great kindness and abundance’.112

The Romantic poets were inspired by the natural world around them, the lake poets – Wordsworth and Coleridge – by the sublime lakes and mountains of Cumbria. In London, Frame was drawn to Hampstead Heath where Keats lived, where she walked as far as the pond, and ‘began to repeat to myself, naturally’ lines from Keats’s ‘La Belle Dame sans Merci’, aware that she was one of thousands who had done so, ‘at the sight of the tall brown rushes growing at the edge of the pond’.113 While she lived in England, from the summer of 1956 until the autumn of 1963, Frame went camping in the Lake District where she ‘roamed the Fells all day visiting places known to Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley’.114 She sent a postcard from Windermere to her friend Sheila Natusch, the naturalist from Stewart Island, telling her ‘This photo is familiar and might have been me a few days ago [...] and I at last

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111 Frame, *Complete Autobiography*, p. 163; University of Otago Calendar, 1943.
found somewhere alone with only the raven curlew for company’. Frame shared the Romantic poets’ belief in the importance of ‘Imagination’. She also shared their view that the artist possessed a heightened faculty of insight which tended to set him or her apart from society.

Echoes of lines from the major and occasionally minor Romantic poets are heard throughout Frame’s novels, and Frame’s writing is imbued with the spirit of a Romantic view of landscape and people, but she often uses specific references to romantic poetry and music to point up a gulf between her characters’ imagination and their more prosaic aspirations. In *Owls Do Cry*, Daphne’s sister Chick is desperate to ‘fit in’ to the respectable conventions of Waimaru, a town of conformist, conventional lives; and to conform to the codes of her perceived social superiors. She reads Brontë novels vacantly, and has vague recollections of Wordsworth’s ‘Daffodils’; she plays Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony to impress the visiting Dr. Bessick and his wife, her social superiors in Waimaru, since she feels ‘quite safe with the Fifth Symphony. I can mention about fate knocking on the door and that kind of thing’. With rather more mature aspiration in *The Adaptable Man*, Muriel the childless second wife of farmer Vic Baldry unsuccessfully attempts to coerce the poets and an inherited magnificent glass chandelier into her barely understood romantic aspirations for a better life. Keats’s ‘Ode to a Nightingale’ is remembered for its ‘extravagant’ lines about red wine, ‘I’ve heard that this was Keats’s favourite wine’, although she says she is ‘not up on poetry at all. It amazes me that poets still write’. Muriel is usually more interested in the practical activities of the Women’s Institute; and beauty needs to go hand in hand with practical usefulness: ‘She was not a sly romantic who fires arrows in chosen places with skill and

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115 Frame, postcard to Sheila Natusch, 18 May 1961, MS-2544, Sheila Natusch Papers, Hocken Collections.
precision; she was honestly unable to handle the weapons that her rarely felt needs put before her from time to time’. 118

Frame makes particular use of these romantic allusions in *A State of Siege*, in which Malfred Signal, retired art teacher, aims to paint the natural scenery around her from her new isolated island home as ‘a new view’, but consistently fails to move beyond the conventional view of landscape to an imaginative vision. As an art teacher Malfred had been dutiful and conventional, and her paintings of the natural world ‘were prized for their water-colour likeness to the original scenes’. 119 Malfred felt acutely envious and resentful of the talent of her pupil, Lettuce Bradley, ‘an ordinary schoolgirl’ who had ‘found her way to the secret store’ in her paintings, who ‘had been able to absorb, as a mindless sponge absorbs food from the sea, the myths and legends of her own country’ (136). In her awareness of her own artistic shortcomings, Malfred seeks to unlock the ‘room two inches behind the eyes’ (36), a phrase Frame found in a book about the German romantic composer, Wagner, in the bach on Waiheke which she rented. 120 Malfred echoes Shelley’s ‘Ozymandias’, ‘Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair,’ part of a web of suggestive allusion to Romantic poetry, when she asks ‘Where were the people to look on the scene and know its meaning?’ (47). Frame may have been thinking of Rodin’s view of art as contemplation, having read about Rilke’s time in Paris with Rodin. 121 Malfred repeatedly uses the phrase ‘as I see it’ and in her desire to change the way she sees and paints the world around her Malfred tells herself that ‘I’ll stare at it, I’ll see it, I’ll paint it as it is’ (53). In Rilke’s description of Paris life, *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, the protagonist, Brigge, repeatedly says that he is ‘learning to see [...] everything penetrates more deeply into me and does not stop at the place where until now it always used to finish.’ Finally Brigge decides he ‘ought to begin to do some work, now that I

119 Frame, *A State of Siege*, p. 35. Further references to *A State of Siege* in section 4.4 are given parenthetically in the text.
am learning to see’.

That Malfred fails in her aim to create a new vision seems inevitable, given her inability to free herself from the stultifying habit of subverting her individuality and personal freedom to the social and familial pressures imposed on her, and which she has lived by all her life, unlike Brigge, who experiences a measure of independence. Malfred’s paintings never upset the status quo; her life has been measured in teacups: ‘(Yes, Miss Henderson; no, Miss Wallace; do you take sugar and milk, Miss Ford?)’ (53). Unlike Elizabeth Barrett Browning, she does not escape. Malfred has no rescuer, and expects none. She rejects as fanciful the notion of ‘the dream in the human mind that some agent, some time that was never too late, would bring permanent longed-for release from imprisonment!’ (68). Instead her sleep is disturbed by dreams of her rejection of her former would-be lover, Wilfred.

When she moves into her new home on Karemoana, Malfred finds a selection of books waiting for her: Romantic poetry selections of John Keats, Matthew Arnold and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, ‘that other woman who had been set free’ (68), but significantly no modern poetry and no New Zealand landscape poetry. Malfred recognises the volumes she finds are the kind of books which are conventionally given to children and students as presents or school prizes, as she arranges her ‘big Beautiful New Zealand books’ (65) among them, full of conventional paintings. Like Erlene in Scented Gardens for the Blind, Malfred draws her stock of poetry almost entirely from the anthologies she read at school or as a student; but Malfred is a middle-aged woman, not a young girl. The limitations of her reading parallel those of her painting, the stifling effects of her dutiful life which leave her unable ‘to explore beyond the object, beyond its shadow, to the ring of fire, the corona at its circumference’ (239).

Malfred begins reading from *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, ‘as the pleasant indulgence of one who is at last alone, in charge, and at rest’ (68). However, she is soon disappointed that her surroundings do not correspond to her understanding of the Romantic vision, to Keats’s Grecian Urn: ‘Where is the vision of perpetual youth, where are the lovers, the frozen blooms on the Grecian Urn?’ (76). Phrases from Keats’s ode ‘To a Grecian Urn’ and ‘To a Nightingale’ merge as Malfred ‘wondered, this was immortality? The vision was this street, not the scene on the Grecian urn. And one could grow tired of immortality, one could plead to die because one was not doomed to do so’ (76). Malfred’s fundamental failure of vision is highlighted by her inability to be inspired by the English Romantics in her new surroundings. She is unable to fulfil her aim ‘first of all, to observe, to clean away a dusty way of looking’ (37), and remains fixed and immoveable, like the lovers on the Grecian urn.

On her fifth day on Karemoana, when Malfred begins her seascape, the links with her past life are plentiful, and there is no sense of the promised fresh start. On the contrary, she uses the child-size tubes of paint she has found in the bach, and mixes them with the hoarded tubes of lanolin from her late mother’s sick-room. The resultant stench of death distresses her, and in the painting she calls ‘My Last Days in Matuatangi’ [...] ‘no one could make out in this foam of lanolin the arms of someone being drawn under by the waves’ (79-80) an echo of Stevie Smith’s best-known poem, ‘Not waving, but drowning’. Malfred’s feelings of hopelessness increase on the long final night of the storm, and her despair that the space in her life left by her mother’s death was like a fruitless, barren spot ‘where it was too late for any other object to grow’ (180). She longs for the childlike simplicity and comfort expressed by John Clare:

\[
\textit{untroubling and untroubled here I lie} \\
\]

\[^{123}\text{Stevie Smith, ‘Not Waving but Drowning’, \textit{Stevie Smith: Selected Poems}, ed. by James MacGibbon (London: Penguin Books, 1987), p. 167. Smith’s poems, and especially this one, were broadcast frequently in Britain during the 1960s. Her \textit{Selected Poems} were published in December 1962.}\]
The novel’s concluding sentence draws on Matthew Arnold’s ‘Dover Beach’. In *Scented Gardens for the Blind*, Erlene’s teacher, Miss Walters had dismissed Arnold’s despair at the world’s sufferings:

> To lie before us like a land of dreams,
> So various, so beautiful, so new,
> Hath really neither joy, not love, not light,
> Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;

She briskly describes the feelings expressed in this poem as ‘nonsense, really [...] Why the world is full of hope and joy!’ Neither Erlene nor Malfred experience ‘hope and joy’. Malfred’s hopes of ‘a land of dreams’ bring her neither light nor peace; she finds no ‘feast of the imagination’. Arnold’s opening lines are a prelude to the tumult which follows them,

> The sea is calm tonight.
> The tide is full, the moon lies fair
> Upon the Straits

The quiet echo of these lines at the close of Frame’s novel – ‘and the sea lay calm at last’ (244) – concludes the turmoil of Malfred’s final tempestuous night.  

4.5 New Zealand Poets

Janet Frame’s appreciation of poetry in English was not confined to British poets: she had been introduced as a schoolgirl to the poetry of Walt Whitman, Edgar Allan Poe, John Greenleaf Whittier and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow – all found in the pages of her school anthology, *Mount Helicon*; and her mother Lottie had a great love of Longfellow and Whittier. Frame also formed lasting friendships with New Zealand poets she read, among them Charles Brasch, Ruth Dallas, and James Baxter, and was pleased to meet poets whose work she had read. At a reception in New Zealand House London in 1984, on her way home

from a writers’ conference in Toronto, she says ‘I met for the first time, Fleur Adcock, our fine poet’, claiming her as a fellow New Zealander despite Adcock’s permanent home being in London, and at the same reception she was similarly pleased to see another London-based New Zealand poet, Kevin Ireland, whom she had not seen since he was a visitor to Frank Sargeson’s bach in Takapuna in the mid 1950s.127

Looking back in her Autobiography at the year 1945, Frame notes the determination of Allan Curnow to publish an essentially New Zealand poetry anthology, A Book of New Zealand Verse; Frank Sargeson’s aim in editing the New Zealand short-story collection, Speaking for Ourselves; and James Baxter’s first published book of poems, Beyond the Palisade.128 Two years later Brasch established the New Zealand literary quarterly, Landfall, ‘to reincarnate the tradition in local form’.129 Baxter, who was at school in England for three years as an adolescent, makes clear that he values both British and New Zealand influences: ‘There was no conflict, but both armies were real; tradition was not alien nor shadowy, N. Z. Landscape and life was immediate[...] I think I can make something out of N. Z. for myself. Her people’.130

These publications mark the moment of Frame’s realisation ‘of New Zealand as a place of writers who understood how I had felt when I imported J. C. Squire to describe my beloved South Island rivers’ and she delighted in ‘our land having a share of time and not having to borrow from a northern Shakespearian wallet’.131 The establishment of a New Zealand tradition was not always uncontested, however. Curnow’s selection of poems for his New Zealand anthology was mostly welcomed by James Baxter, who wrote to Curnow to say that ‘You have indeed created something sturdy and lasting; something long-needed;

127 Frame, draft report of the Fifth International Festival of Authors, Toronto, 1984, In Her Own Words, pp. 192-93.
128 Frame, Complete Autobiography, p. 192.
130 James Baxter, letter to Allen Curnow, 7 July 1945, James Baxter Papers, MS-0975/177, Hocken Collections.
131 Frame, Complete Autobiography, p. 192.
something of a classic nature’. He offered, however, criticism of some of Curnow’s choices. He thought Arnold Wall ‘has for me too great a tang of the Kowhai Gold insipidity’; and he disliked Ursula Bethell’s Latinisms, though he admired ‘her strength’. Paul Millar, in his introduction to Baxter’s Selected Poems suggests that Curnow’s selection of Baxter’s landscape poems had not been representative of Baxter’s output, and Charles Brasch who declared his love ‘for this lavish country with its great contrasts of wild mountains & foaming green trees [...] it goes to my head like wine, and it touches my memory & my heart’ was later critical of what he saw as Curnow’s narrow view of New Zealand poetry, complaining about ‘Curnow preaching again; the gospel according to A. C.’ in Curnow’s introduction to the 1961 Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse.

Frame does not appear to have been engaged in this debate, focusing more on the South Island poets she admired: the poets who were her contemporaries and became her friends, in particular James Baxter, Ruth Dallas, and Charles Brasch. Frame wrote to Baxter from Christchurch, her letter undated but written probably in 1947. She wrote about her belief that ‘poetry is in memory [...] the more I read of your work the more I feel you are remembering the real way’. Writing many years later to Bill Brown, Frame described the Baxters as ‘a gifted, sensitive family’, and sent Brown ‘some very fine translations’ of Rimbaud’s ‘Seven Year Old Poet’ which James Baxter had written. In an earlier letter that year to Bill Brown, Frame described Ruth Dallas as ‘a gifted poet’.

Frame comments a number of times on Brasch’s poems in letters she wrote to him, explaining why she enjoyed them, for example that ‘I liked your poem At Pistol Point very

132 James Baxter, letter to Allen Curnow, 7 July 1945, MS-0975/177, Hocken Collections.
134 Charles Brasch, Journals, 26 December 1957, MS-4084/032, Hocken Collections.
136 Frame, letter to James K. Baxter, James Baxter Correspondence, MS-0975/177, Hocken Collections.
137 Frame, letter to Bill Brown, 1 August 1970, Jay to Bee, pp. 249 & 251.
much: it was poised between something and nothing, now and after, being – not being, movement—stillness, taking hold of the coat sleeve of the wind’. Frank Sargeson relates an incident in a letter to Brasch when Frame had returned to New Zealand in 1964 and was visiting, but finding Sargeson was out, made herself at home reading his new books. Sargeson tells Brasch he returned to find ‘she had read all your poems. She was astonished (I think that is the right word) – she didn’t say much, but it was some time before she came out of her bemusement’. The poetry book in question was probably *Ambulando*, published that year, containing poems which recall the distress of a very painful love-affair, and the need for silence and concealment, as in these lines:

> For life? Your life and mine?  
> This moment of waking dream is all the life  
> I dare ask or imagine;  
> These words; this silence: the heart instructed;  
> And in your eyes life and death new-born.  

The poems by the apparently austere and reticent Brasch which so amazed Frame, and which she seems to have drawn on for *Daughter Buffalo*, as I discuss below, are referred to by one of the characters as ‘a fine book of poems by one of our poets’.  

Frame’s empathy with the natural world of New Zealand and landscape poetry is evident in her novels, and occasionally quoted or referenced directly, particularly the landscape poetry of the South Island poets. Writing to Sheila Natusch from Takapuna, shortly before leaving for Europe, Frame told her friend that ‘I envy you the way you seem so much a part of everything that grows [...] you seem to know them because they belong to you’. I have referred in Chapter Three to the link Frame makes between Camus and Brasch in

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139 Frame, letter to Charles Brasch, 17 October 1968, Charles Brasch Correspondence, MS-0996-003/062, Hocken Collections.
140 Sargeson, letter to Charles Brasch, 4 July 1964, MS-0996 002/346, Hocken Collections.
142 Frame, *Daughter Buffalo*, p. 586. Further references to *Daughter Buffalo* in section 4.5 are given parenthetically in the text.
143 Frame, letter to Sheila Natusch c. 1956, Sheila Natusch Papers, MS-2544, Hocken Collections.
Malfred Signal’s reference to Janine’s feeling for the Algerian landscape as a kind of adultery, and Brasch’s line from *The Silent Land*, ‘Man must lie with the gaunt hills like a lover’. Frame’s major declaration of her love for this poetry, however, occurs in *Towards Another Summer*, written in 1964 when Frame was living in London, in which the home-sick Grace Cleave takes up her host’s copy of Curnow’s *Book of New Zealand Verse*. She recalls a train journey through the halt at Waianakarua, of the ‘plantation of gum trees crackling smooth grey flames of leaf, shaking blue dusty smoke as the wind touched them’; and Brasch’s poem ‘Waianakarua’, which tells of

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Tall where trains draw up to rest, the gum-trees
Sift an off-sea wind
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Grace reads Brasch’s ‘A View of Rangitoto’ and cites the final two stanzas, lines which recall a comment made by Mavis in *Living in the Maniototo* about her home in volcanic Taranaki, in acceptance of the risks of living in a natural environment, where she is ‘a guest, as all are who live here, of the Taranaki mountain’; and which belongs, like Rangitoto, to ‘A world of fire before the rocks and waters’. Reading these lines, Grace, ecstatic, ‘made a wild movement with her hand as if she were trying to lift the volcano from between the pages’. Grace watches her host’s New Zealand father-in-law dozing and dreaming of home ‘of the Canterbury plains’ and in a phrase from Curnow’s poem, ‘Time’, one of the poems Grace returns to in Curnow’s anthology -- of ‘the Nor’wester “nosing among the pines”’. In his introduction to this anthology, Curnow stresses the importance of *place* in New Zealand writing, and that ‘it is this vital discovery of self in country and country in self,

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147 Frame, *Living in the Maniototo*, p. 133.
which gives the best New Zealand verse its character’.\textsuperscript{151} Frame’s feeling for the land and for
the Taranaki more closely resembles Brasch’s feeling for New Zealand’s mountains, ‘because
among them, visibly, audibly, the earth is still being made – in grandeur and terror, as
yesterday’.\textsuperscript{152} A full account of New Zealand landscape poetry is beyond the scope of this
study, but Ruth Dallas also encapsulates a sense of being rooted in the landscape,

\begin{quote}
O far from the quiet room my spirit fills
The familiar valleys, is folded deep in the hills.\textsuperscript{153}
\end{quote}

Although Frame made a number of long-distance journeys in later years, including a year
spent mostly in the USA, she made New Zealand her permanent home when she returned
from London after seven years away. Writing in her autobiography some years later, she
expresses a sense of being at one with her native landscape, its history and its future, so that
‘living in New Zealand would be for me like living in an age of mythmakers; [...]to know the
unformed places and to help form them, to be a mapmaker for those who will follow’.\textsuperscript{154} This
was a perception which Charles Brasch knew Frame shared with him, expressed in the poem
which he dedicated ‘To Janet’:

\begin{quote}
I am the sea, I am the wind,
Everything and nothing, with you.\textsuperscript{155}
\end{quote}

\subsection*{4.6 Walt Whitman}

During her trips overseas, Frame spent a considerable amount of time in the USA, staying in
writers’ colonies or with American friends. In the USA, Frame reacquainted herself with the
poetry of Walt Whitman, and in her subsequent letters from New Zealand to American
friends, makes frequent reference to it. Writing about \textit{Leaves of Grass}, Whitman declared his

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{151} Curnow, introduction to \textit{A Book of New Zealand Verse}, p. 21.}
\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{152} Brasch, \textit{Journals}, 3 February 1949, MS-4084/022, Hocken Collections.}
p. 26.}
\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{154} Frame, \textit{Complete Autobiography}, p. 415.}
\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{155} Brasch, ‘With You (To Janet Frame)’, \textit{Collected Poems}, p. 204.}
pride in being ‘An American bard at last! [...] We shall cease shamming and be what we really are’. In this aim we can see a parallel with Allen Curnow: Whitman, a century earlier in another new country, aiming for a specifically American poetry. Whitman abandoned conventional rhyme schemes and verse-forms and aimed to express himself freely in the voice of the American vernacular. His best known or most anthologised poem is ‘Captain, O My Captain’, an elegy for Whitman’s hero, Abraham Lincoln; but in its conventional metre and rhyme scheme it is atypical of Whitman. Most of Whitman’s poetry is characterised by its freedom from traditional verse-forms and its colloquial language; and his stated desire to create a purely American poetry – indebted to the British poets of the past, but unshackled, creating its own style and in an American vernacular idiom.

Mention has already been made of the solace Frame found in Whitman’s ‘The Lost Mate’ when her sister Myrtle died; and her correspondence with Bill Brown reveals her continuing delight in Whitman’s poetry, as well as an appreciation of Emily Dickinson. From the MacDowell artists’ colony in the USA, Frame wrote to Bill Brown in lines she had ‘recovered from the secret manuscripts of Emily Dickinson’ and which read

\[
B \text{ you are gone away} \\
\text{even au revoir only} \\
\text{was hard to say.} \\
\text{We are lonely.}
\]

Frame was amused by the American habit of referring to people by their initials. In a more serious vein, she later wrote to Brown from Dunedin that ‘life continues very much a la Emily D with little of her courage and none of her talent.’ In her correspondence with Bill Brown, Frame refers often to him and to his partner Paul Wonner as her ‘live-oaks’ from

Whitman’s poem ‘I Saw in Louisiana a Live-Oak growing’. Whitman declared in the poem that the live-oak ‘makes me think of manly love’, and for Frame it was an image of her friendship with these two American artists. Frame also comments frequently on the sequence of poems which Whitman later added to *Leaves of Grass*, and which form the elegy to Abraham Lincoln, especially ‘When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d’, taking one of its lines to describe her daily life ‘in the large unconscious scenery of my land’. In the USA, Frame listened to Paul Hindemith’s *Requiem*, written in 1946 after the death of Franklyn D. Roosevelt, with a libretto drawing on Whitman’s eloquent elegy for Abraham Lincoln. Bill Brown sent Frame a recording of it to listen to again at home in Dunedin, and in thanking him Frame wrote,

now is the time for me to listen to it when my thoughts are so much in the U.S. [...] Whitman’s words are a large part of the beauty of The Requiem but I love the music too, the words are embedded there as if they were growing.

Frame’s reading of Whitman’s poetry permeates *Daughter Buffalo* (1972), which is set largely in New York. Talbot Edelman, a young medical student of ‘death studies’ has an encounter with an elderly man who introduces himself unexpectedly: ‘I’m Turnlung’, and who bears a physical resemblance to the common image of Walt Whitman, ‘an elderly man with a trim triangular beard and straggly grey hair’. Turnlung is not American, but has come to America ‘to take a closer look at death’ (415). As he takes over the narrative from Edelman, Turnlung invokes T. S. Eliot’s ‘Gerontion’, ‘I am an old man, a traveller down Instant Street’ (420) and biblical lines from The Book of Job (422). His words gradually take on an increasingly

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162 Frame, *Daughter Buffalo*, p. 414. Further references to *Daughter Buffalo* in section 4.7 are given parenthetically in the text.
Whitmanesque and prophetic tone in their simple diction, repetition and biblical cadence. In her novels, Frame uses – in among prose chapters – sections of free verse with diverse functions, reflecting imaginative processes; the layering of voices; and the subtle and sometimes unknowable workings of the human mind. Turnlung’s words echo Whitman’s ‘Song of Myself’:

I am a bottle with a message in it. I will float back and forth in the dark for many years. (426)

Turnlung’s lines resonate with Whitman’s message that

I am the poet of the Body and I am the poet of the Soul,
The pleasures of heaven are with me and the pains of hell are with me. 163

There are specific references to Whitman’s tropes, the lilac bushes, for example, which were laid on Abraham Lincoln’s coffin – Lincoln died in May when the lilac was in flower. Turnlung and his former lover Selwyn had planted lilac bushes in memory of Turnlung’s Aunt Kate, with their ‘heartshaped leaves which defy a writer to trespass on the territory of Walt Whitman and T. S. Eliot’ (446). Frame reworks the story of the solace she gained from Whitman’s poetry after her sister Myrtle died, as Turnlung’s headmistress friend says ‘I was able to use the incomparable facilities for grief and mourning given by Walt Whitman’, quoting the opening lines of ‘The Lost Mate’: ‘Once, Paumanok, when the lilac-scent was in the air and the fifth-month grass was growing’ (454).

Frame’s matter-of-fact portrayal of Turnlung’s homosexuality as an ordinary aspect of his life – and Edelman’s difficulties in acknowledging his – mark the rare inclusion of a positive portrayal of sexual desire in a Frame novel. Physical passion is usually either thwarted, as in Malfred Signal’s rejection of Wilfred in A State of Siege, or reduced to farce as in the ‘love-a-dove’ antics of Peggy Warren in Intensive Care. Daughter Buffalo was published in 1972, when anti-sodomy laws, inherited from the British, were still on the

163 Whitman, ‘Song of Myself’ Stanza 21, p. 45.
statute books in many American states. The process of repealing these laws had begun in some states from 1961 onwards, but they were only finally and completely overturned in 2003. The law in England and Wales was partly liberalised in 1967, in response to the Wolfenden Report published ten years earlier; but not in Scotland, Northern Ireland or the Channel Islands until 1982; and not in New Zealand until 1987. Frame was aware of the tension the legal situation created in the lives of homosexual men – and this included a number of her closest friends – and it was reflected in their writing. She was living in London when the Wolfenden Report was published in 1957, and sent Sargeson a copy of it, as the wrapping around a little present of ‘some pansily-scented snuff’, much to Sargeson’s amusement. Sargeson had received a letter in 1949 from the English novelist E. M. Forster, whose novel Maurice with its subject of homosexual love, was published posthumously. Forster had read Sargeson’s novel I Saw In My Dream, and found it ‘extraordinarily haunting’. Sargeson shared this letter with his friend E. P. (Peter) Dawson, and felt it necessary to ask her to ‘please never refer to it in print. I should feel such a worm – at least if any reference to the letter appeared in print until after the kind man was dead’. We might assume that in this letter of 1949, Sargeson was protecting his own interests as well as showing respect for Forster’s. Frame’s reading of Charles Brasch’s Ambulando would have made clear to her the inner turmoil of the reserved, austere and fastidious Brasch, who reveals his feelings in ‘Break and Go’, which begins

No one has clean hands,  
None a pure heart.  
We shall be part of one  
Another to life’s end  
Whether we would or not.  
But now break, go.  
Let silence fall like snow:  
Together we offend.  

165 Sargeson, letter to E. P. Dawson, 29 December 1949, MS-2404/003 Hocken Collections.  
Given the need for secrecy, Whitman is possibly as open as he could be in his expression of his own sexuality in *Leaves of Grass*, declaring

> Here to put your lips upon mine I permit you,  
> With the comrade’s long-dwelling kiss or the new husband’s kiss.  
> For I am the new husband and I am the comrade.  

Frame takes up Whitman’s coded ambiguities of ‘manly love’ and ‘comradeship’, as Edelman oscillates between love and hate, retreat and abandonment, resentment and gratitude for Turnlung who, he says, ‘gave me permission to mourn and rejoice over my own life [...] We made love to our own lives and deaths’ (256).

In *The Leaves of Grass*, Whitman’s Framean view of the unending cycle of life is expressed in his answer to the child’s question ‘What is the grass?’ The grass is not only a symbol; it is the evidence, since as Whitman replies to the child:

> The smallest sprout shows there is really no death  
> And if ever there was it led forward life, and does not wait at the end to arrest it.  

Turnlung expresses this sense in a paradox of his own in the prose Epilogue to *Daughter Buffalo* as he ponders the final stages of his own life, ‘what matters is that I have what I gave; nothing is completely taken’ (587). The reversion to prose in the Epilogue, the details of Charles Brasch’s *Ambulando*, the New York Dead Letter Office and to Turnlung’s retirement home in subtropical New Zealand with its ‘lovely beach’ and ‘magnificent view’ (587) mark the return from Turnlung’s dream and memory world of Whitmanesque verse, to tangible prosaic reality.

**4.6 Poetry in the Novels**

In an interview for the Australian National Library’s sound recordings, in 1977, Frame talks about various aspects of her novel writing and her poetry. She says she’s never written ‘a real

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167 Whitman, ‘Whoever you are holding me now in hand’, *Leaves of Grass*, p. 98.  
168 Whitman, ‘A Song of Myself’ 6, pp. 33-34.
poem, but I keep trying’, and then reads a piece which she describes as ‘just an idea I wrote
down, just developed it. I don’t call it a poem, I don’t call it anything. Well, I call it
“Hypotenuse”’. Frame used a revised version of this piece in Living in the Maniototo, one
of a number of insertions into the novels of poetry and significant sections of free verse or a
prose-poetry hybrid. In this section and the following one, I will discuss Frame’s use of
prose-poetry and free verse in relation to some of her novels, with a special focus in the next
section on the first two parts of Intensive Care. Reference has already been made in Chapter
One to Frame’s admiration for Sylvia Plath, and traces of Plath’s late poetry can be seen in
Intensive Care, as I shall show, as well as in Towards Another Summer.

The term ‘prose-poem’ is most famously the coinage of Charles Baudelaire, the
nineteenth century French poet, who wrote to his publisher, Arsène Houssaye, that he had
dreamed of writing with ‘le miracle d’une prose poétique, musicale sans rythme et sans rime,
assez souple et assez heurtée pour s’adapter aux mouvements lyriques de l’âme, aux
ondulations de la rêverie, aux soubresauts de la conscience’ (the miracle of poetic prose,
musical without rhythm or rhyme, supple enough and jarring enough to adapt itself to the
soul’s lyrical movements, to the ebb and flow of dreams, to the sudden start of awareness).170
Frame had read some of Baudelaire’s work while she was at Yaddo, and continued to do so
when she returned to Dunedin in 1970, both through library books and on tapes which Bill
Brown sent her.171 Baudelaire’s well-known description of his ‘prose poétique’ makes an
interesting fit with Frame’s cross-genre poetic style, and her use of free verse within the prose
novel facilitates the layering of multiple voices, combining suppleness and sudden shocking
jolts as well as the lyricism of which Baudelaire writes. Baudelaire’s hybrid style was
revolutionary in its time, and Frame had read avidly the modernist novelists – James Joyce,

169 Frame, Oral History Recording for the National Library of Australia, 14 December 1977, in In Her Own
Words, p. 102.
170 Baudelaire, letter to Arsène Houssaye, Le Spleen de Paris: Petits Poèmes en Prose (Paris: Gaillard, 2013),
pp. 4-5.
Virginia Woolf, D. H. Lawrence, William Faulkner – who had also attempted to embody Baudelaire’s ideals in their writing. Frame’s cross-genre writing has been called ‘subversive’, for example by Gina Mercer.\textsuperscript{172} Frame counters and confounds expectations, and her poetic sections serve a variety of purposes.

The verse sections of Frame’s novels, very obscure in places, often serve as more than just an addition to or subversion of the narrative, and draw on the nature of poetry to delve more deeply than the conscious mind, to reveal, like dreams, the workings of the unconscious. In her reflections on her writing, Frame mentions the ‘Ophelia Syndrome’ a term which describes the way a person can be made to think or feel in a certain way through the presence and pressure of authority figures; ‘a poetic fiction’ had supplied Frame with the basis for a number of her fictional characters, which ‘allows a writer to explore a variety of otherwise unspoken or unacceptable feelings, thoughts, and language’.\textsuperscript{173} This use of poetry to access underlying thoughts or feelings is addressed in a variety of ways by other contemporary poets. For example, in an interview for the \textit{Paris Review}, Ted Hughes suggests that poetry is often ‘a revealing of something the writer doesn’t want to say but desperately needs to communicate’; a powerful tool in \textit{Intensive Care} in the gradual revealing of Naomi’s hidden distress.\textsuperscript{174} The poet and critic Ruth Padel notes the importance of the reader’s response when she asserts that ‘the reader’s unconscious as well as conscious mind is at work in reacting to the poem, just as the poet’s conscious and unconscious thoughts work together to make it’.\textsuperscript{175} Verse sections can give a greater insight into the mind of characters unable to communicate; create a parallel version of the prose story; provide a commentary akin to a Greek chorus; develop a multilayered, multi-voiced structure; or serve as a kind of allegory, like the ‘Hypotenuse’ in \textit{Living in the Maniototo}.

\textsuperscript{172} Gina Mercer, \textit{Janet Frame: Subversive Fictions} (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 1994)
In *Living in the Maniototo*, the desire for freedom from authority and convention is a recurrent theme. Mavis, tired of obeying the ‘Thou Shalt Nots’ of her creative writing class ‘decided to break the rules’. She elaborates the creative process with her ‘Hypotenuse’ poem and begins by declaring

I am not Scalene, old warrior with the shortened foot hobbling by, 
nor isosceles prayer-pointing the sky, 
but part of the whole only, hypotenuse.177

The artist is the hypotenuse, the linking agent, creating shape and wholeness. The poem continues as a celebration of art with the images of the scarlet tanager, the South American bird which perilously survives the winter to sing again in the spring. Like the poet, the bird sings a life-affirming song:

And then, my blood-color furled, I flew to the highest 
bough and I sang 
in detail, without violence, a civilised version of my song.

This is a poem without a metrical or rhyme scheme, relying on alliteration, lineation and a division into irregular stanzas to distinguish it from prose. The following chapter – Chapter 12 – consists entirely of further lines from ‘I Am Hypotenuse’, celebrating the artist and declaring the futility of trying to create a work of art by playing by the rules, like the man with the steam-cleaning business, trying to write a novel,

He unloaded all his stored-up drama 
Which fell apart at birth, lacking the life-dealing want.178

In Frame’s first novel, *Owls Do Cry*, the ‘Songs from the Dead Room’ are sections of poetic prose within a novel in which the prose itself is densely metaphorical, as discussed earlier in this chapter, but which are not obscure. These songs are Daphne’s thoughts and feelings in which she brings together her family in memory and imagination, unable to express herself to the people around her, and not given the opportunity to do so. They are

176 Frame, *Living in the Maniototo*, p. 68.  
italicised to mark them out from the main body of the writing, appearing at intervals like a Greek chorus, a voice for the voiceless, encompassing her joys and fears and presaging her fateful end.

Elsewhere, verse sections are used enigmatically, and as an alternative commentary on the narrative, and in later novels begin to require a level of ‘decoding’, to indicate a subtext to the surface level of meaning. In The Edge of the Alphabet, the third chapter interrupts the narrative with a verse commentary on timelessness, introduced with a line from a common traditional ballad form in an echo of W. H. Auden, ‘so I walked out one evening’ and continuing with lines about ‘the monster in the mudflats’, the primeval, pre-lingual monster who dies out ‘unwilling to change or camouflage’. Auden’s poem declares that ‘Time will have his fancy’ and that ‘the glacier knocks in the cupboard’, and Frame’s lines follow a similar theme, asking

\[
\text{Will Time publish us too as grotesque, purposeless,}
\text{beyond the range of human language, between the pages of ice.}
\]

Auden’s poem ends ‘And the deep river ran on’, and Frame’s narrator, returning to prose, asserts that ‘The dead return, they mingle, their smell is layered over the living and the present.’179 In this novel, the protagonist, Toby Withers, Daphne’s brother from Owls Do Cry, is likewise inarticulate, and although he has insights is for the most part portrayed as simple-minded; and in verse the narrator articulates thoughts and ideas for which Toby is unable to find words or comprehend. Or the narrator, in this case Thora Pattern, paints a word-picture in verse of the post-war London in which Toby arrives, of winkle-picker shoes and West Indian immigrants, with an alternative to Toby’s limited point of view in its commentary on the repetitions of life

A man receiving treatment at King’s College Hospital

179 Frame, The Edge of the Alphabet, pp. 16-17; W. H. Auden, ‘As I walked out one evening’ Collected Shorter Poems, pp. 84-85.
For nails driven through his hands and feet.\textsuperscript{180}

Charles Brasch, notes ‘the exposure of the gulfs, abysses, that underlie all our lives, of the constant attempt to conceal reality from our gaze which nearly all our activity represents’, as he records his appreciation of Frame’s insights in his journal.\textsuperscript{181}

\textbf{4.8 Sylvia Plath}

I have discussed the choric verse sections of \textit{Daughter Buffalo} – the imaginative, creative insights of Turnlung – with their American, Whitmanesque cadences – in an earlier section of this chapter; and made reference in Chapter One to Frame’s evocation of Sylvia Plath in\textit{ Towards Another Summer}, into which Frame wrote her sense of bereavement at Plath’s death. We know from Frame’s comments to Robert Cawley that she regarded Plath as one of the finest modern poets, and in lines of verse, Frame alludes to Plath’s themes of violent death and family relationships, and to Plath’s interest in bee-keeping:

\begin{quote}
Dear mother, dear father dear husband dear child, 
there is no answer, 
this microphone like a beehive celled with honey 
is blocked forever with the sweetness of death.\textsuperscript{182}
\end{quote}

I will now take a closer look at the verse sections of the first two parts of \textit{Intensive Care}, published in 1970, which are remarkable in their use of free verse and their relationship to Plath’s poetry, especially her late poems, which were published individually in journals, magazines and newspapers during Plath’s lifetime, and published in posthumously in \textit{Ariel} in 1965.

Plath and Frame share an ability to focus on states of crisis derived from a personal experience of anxiety and despair, transformed by extraordinary linguistic skill and dazzling, often savage imagery; and given universal significance. Carole Ferrier notes that Frame’s

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{180} Frame, \textit{The Edge of the Alphabet}, pp. 118-19. \\
\textsuperscript{181} Brasch, Journals, 24 February 1963, 63-64 Insert, MS-996-9/34, Hocken Collections. \\
\textsuperscript{182} Frame, \textit{Towards Another Summer}, p. 49.
\end{flushright}
treatment of psychological depths has ‘affinities to some of the poems of Sylvia Plath’ and that in *Intensive Care*, daughter Naomi’s verse letters to her ‘First Dad’, Tom Livingstone, suggest that he ‘takes on for his daughter the colossus-like qualities of Sylvia Plath’s *Daddy’*. I would suggest that Ferrier’s intuition is correct here, and that the character and situation of Naomi strongly suggest a link with Plath’s poetry and Plath’s pre-occupation with the dysfunctional dynamics of family relationships.

In her introduction for a radio broadcast to her poem, ‘Daddy’, Plath said ‘here is a poem spoken by a girl with an Electra complex. Her father died while she thought he was God’. Adherence to the Freudian theory of infantile sexuality remained largely unchallenged into the 1970s. In 1976, Bruno Bettelheim, the Freudian psychoanalyst and influential advocate of the importance of reading fairy tales for children, restated Freud’s belief [...] that ‘what his female patients recollected was not something that had happened, but what they wish would have happened [...] that the patients when little girls had been far from innocent’. This was a conclusion Freud came to in 1897, when he came to believe that his original view – that all of his patients had been subject to incest – had been in error since ‘in all cases, the father, not excluding my own, had to be accused of being perverse [...] whereas surely such widespread perversions against children are not very probable’. Freud then developed his theories of female infantile sexuality and the Oedipus complex, that in adult neuroses ‘it appeared that between the symptoms and the infantile impressions were interpolated the patient’s phantasies (memory-romances), created mostly during the years of adolescense’.

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Bettelheim has since been strongly criticised, in particular by Alice Miller, the German psychoanalyst and originally a Freudian, whose extensive work with disturbed children led her to challenge Freud’s theories. She relates Freud’s 1896 report that ‘in all eighteen cases of hysterical illness treated by him [...] he discovered [...] repression of sexual abuse by an adult or by an older sibling who had in turn been abused by adults’, the findings he would subsequently reject in 1897.\(^{188}\) Miller’s views ‘conflict sharply with Freud’s theory of infantile sexuality [...] genuine sexual maturity’ she asserts, ‘coincides with physical maturation in puberty’.\(^{189}\) Miller takes the view that in rejecting his 1896 findings of abuse, Freud was swayed by his patriarchal bias, and by the powerful Judeo-Christian commandment to ‘Honour thy father and thy mother,’ causing Freud to respond ‘by treating a subject that he wished to bury under the weight of taboo’.\(^{190}\) She takes the view that as remarkable as Freud’s work is, there is now more information available than Freud had access to.

Miller’s book was originally published in German in 1981, and for the American edition in 1984 she added a note that

> when this book appeared in Germany in 1981, I was virtually alone in my thinking, for the sexual abuse of children was still a forbidden subject in Europe. I didn’t know that the situation had already changed in the United States, that the topic was being discussed openly there and had become a matter of public concern.\(^{191}\)

Among other commentators on this issue is Marina Warner, who described Bettelheim’s Freudian views as ‘controversial and flawed’, criticising him for overlooking changes in cultural attitudes over time and for his continuing patriarchal stance: ‘he enrages me as he has

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\(^{189}\) Miller, *Thou Shalt Not Be Aware*, p. 122.


\(^{191}\) Miller, *Thou Shalt Not Be Aware* p. 309.
done many other lovers of fairy tales—especially feminists who take issue with the psychoanalytic premises about female nature, destiny, and sexual identity.192

In 1970, when Intensive Care was published, the sexual abuse of children had not received the recognition it has in more recent years, and any suggestion of such abuse was more likely to be disbelieved, ignored, suppressed or ascribed to a fault or psychological state in the child, as in an Electra complex. Frame was aware of the way in which sex-role stereotypes often lay at the heart of how mental illness was seen, and how society treats girls and women, responding to the victim with blame or disbelief. A recent study of pre-war Seacliff inmates revealed that ‘women who failed to keep their households clean […] could be liable to incarceration’. Committals were often by family, authorised by two general doctors and a magistrate.193 Frame gifted a copy of Women and Madness by an American psychologist Phyllis Chesler to her friend Phillip Wilson, the New Zealand writer. Her sardonic inscription is ‘something romantic from Janet’. The book’s subtitle is When is a Woman Mad and Who is it Decides?194

The experiences of abused children have long been overlooked through taboo, fear of destroying a family, and fear of losing parental love. Virginia Woolf, writing in 1939 in her late fifties, describes her frightening and shame-inducing experience at the age of six, when her half-brother – a young adult – set her up on a table and began an increasingly intimate exploration of her body; and though she ‘stiffened and wriggled’ he would not stop. She wondered ‘what is the word for so dumb and mixed a feeling? It must have been strong, since I still recall it.’195 Who could she possibly have told, who would not simply have dismissed or scolded her? Even at eighteen, Virginia could cause embarrassment amongst her family with

192 Warner, Once Upon a Time: A Short History of Fairy Tale, pp. 113 & 125.
a comment about Plato, reprimanded with a whispered ‘They’re not used to young women saying anything’. In later years she narrated her experience of abuse as a six-year-old in letters to friends, and recalls it her ‘Sketch of the Past’, which was not published until 1972.

Frame’s treatment of Naomi and her sister Pearl in Intensive Care is psychologically subtle, and initially ambiguous; Naomi’s verse hints at the turbulence lying beneath the surface and combines Baudelaire’s ‘ondulations de la rêverie’ (the ebb and flow of dream) with his ‘soubresauts de la conscience’ (sudden starts of awareness). Frame shares Plath’s disdain for cliché and platitude as well as her use of savage images of pain, violence, and anger, the ‘boot in the face’ of the Daddy whose daughter feels he has betrayed her, as Pearl and Naomi are betrayed.

Naomi’s father, Tom Livingstone, is damaged by his experiences as an eighteen-year-old soldier in the First World War, his personal relationships distorted by shell-shock and the impact of the horrors he has witnessed, cherishing the memory of the young nurse, Cissy Everest, with whom he fell in love in England. After the armistice he returns to a loveless marriage in New Zealand; and the devastating effects of war leave him unable to engage in a loving and caring relationship with his wife and two daughters, Pearl and Naomi.

The novel opens in free verse with dreams of the loved and protected child in which

the child played a poem
protected by mild adjectives.

Frame moves swiftly to violent images of cruelty and copulation, where children are

tripped, trodden on, pulled apart
limb by limb, bonfire
in feast, explosion, and orgasm.

No-one is named in this opening choric verse which forms the novel’s first chapter; the reader is left with startling images, not knowing who the speaker is, or whether this is dream.

197 Frame, Intensive Care, p. 27. All subsequent references to Intensive Care in section 4.8 are given parenthetically in the text.
fantasy or a reflection of reality. The brief second chapter, again in verse, takes A.A. Milne’s ‘Happiness’ and suggests a reason for Tom’s ‘great big waterproof boots’ in language which reflects the viciously angry battle-field destruction of life. The reader then meets Tom Livingstone, convalescing from his war-time injuries, in chapter three. Here the prose narrative begins, and Tom, now sixty-five, returns to London to look for his lost love, Cissy Everest, where ‘all dreams lead back to the nightmare garden’ (32). The loss of innocence, the loss of Eden, is established.

Naomi introduces herself in terms reminiscent of the younger Plath, ‘student, typist, writer-of-verse’ in images of internal bleeding with ‘I picked raspberries, haemorrhaging them into a tin bucket’ (40). Blood, betrayal, pain and death combine with recollection of unacceptable truths. Plath’s ‘Daddy’ died when his daughter was a child, young enough to think of her fearsome father as God, ascribing to him in her anger an imagined Nazi past. For Naomi, pain is relived as she matures and understands her betrayal, ‘the pain of grief brought to birth by thinking’ (87). The loss of innocence and the paradise garden is brought about by the father who, she says in a biblical phrase, ‘gave us knowledge’ (86).

The reader is kept in a fluctuating dream-filled sense of ambiguity as Tom fantasises about an alternative life and family with Cissy Everest, and the truth about the death of his wife Eleanor is clouded. Did he really push her into the slurry pool, or only imagine it in his desire to be rid of her? Or did Naomi poison her with the weed-killer? (146) Was Pearl adopted and subsequently sent away to boarding-school? (145) The reader becomes aware of the unreliability of narrators and the extent to which Pearl, Naomi and Tom all attempt to escape into a fantasy world. The reader is certainly led to believe Tom killed the ailing Cissy – not out of merciful compassion, but in a fit of anger that she had ‘failed’ him (60). Tom’s other daughter, Pearl, attempts to deceive herself in the language of an imagined fairy-godmother as she struggles unsuccessfully, in misery and anger, with the consequences of her
suppressed feelings: the weight she cannot lose and her habit of trying to control everyone else’s life (144). In a final unspoken comment on her relationship with her father, Pearl fails to attend Tom’s funeral.

Naomi’s relationship with her father is frequently couched in language which describes an Electra complex. Naomi notes Tom’s understanding – and not jealousy – of her bringing her boyfriend, Donald, to the Bonfire Night party, but insists that ‘I had to be loyal to you, dear First Dad’ as Donald hangs himself (156). Tom’s sudden brush with truth, when Peggy Warren crudely wonders about his daughters, ‘surely you didn’t love-a-dove them?’ leaves Tom reduced to angrily embarrassed bluster (113).

Naomi is destroyed by the impossibility of telling the truth, illustrated at Christmas, when the meal is ‘followed by the love-sleep’ (183), and Naomi uses her present of a John Bull printing set to print only formulaic phrases and conventional symbols. Like the six-year old Virginia Woolf, Naomi does not have the words to express that which she in any case feels obliged to conceal, Frame’s poetry suggesting the tension caused by the breaking of sexual taboo. Christmas for Naomi is ‘Pain and Santa’, and in Naomi’s penultimate verse chapter the language of anguish and destruction runs through the lines of verse unmistakably, the cause of her illness that ‘we never grew out of Christmas’. The intensity and bitterness of the language, ‘pain’, ‘break’, ‘stain’, ‘startle’, ‘harm’, ‘cut’ and the crudity of expression create a picture of childhood betrayed and destroyed:

Growing up we grew in
Like unhealthy fingers and toenails;
You cut us to the quick.

Naomi sees the green crickets

carolling with their arse as men and women are doing
on the lupined beach.

She has to pretend ‘the sticky mess’ is bird lime; performing ‘the favour, your favour’ leads her eventually to ‘wake to grief of destruction’ (236).
Frame ends the second part of *Intensive Care* with Naomi’s final choric verse as she faces her imminent death in quieter mode, with a sense of resignation and detachment, self-consciously acknowledging the coming end, now that ‘all is a dream at Christmas time’ and ‘the barrier is broken with death’. She recalls the deceptions of her childhood with their false hopes and promises:

> Look, there’s a honeybee
> with a basket of poisonous fruit under its arm.

She leaves unsaid the words she found unsayable, unable to solve ‘the crossword pain’, looking

> at the words between the lines between the words
> between the pages
> of the going going gone book.

as she and her father ‘are recovered’ under the earth (250-51). The sense of finality in the last piece of choric verse, provides a fitting conclusion to what was originally envisaged as the end of a novel, with its inevitable reminder in the imagery of a darkening world closing itself down, of Plath’s final poem, ‘Edge’,

> as petals
> of a rose close when the garden
> Stiffens and odors bleed
> From the sweet deep throats of the night flower.198

These closing chapters have arguably received less attention than they merit by critics, perhaps through the greater interest in the dystopian future of Part III, and Frame’s decision to join Parts I and II with Part III ‘and “make them fit” willy-nilly’ as she describes in a letter to Dr. Cawley, writing about her decision to join the two books. In this letter, Frame argues that

> when one is in the habit of making patterns even such an apparently arbitrary pattern as joining two books together as part of the process because supposedly one’s whole being – conscious and unconscious is at work [...] I think it is so important in writing to do only what one wants to do, for then I feel that one’s “unconscious” mind

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(whatever that is) is in a relationship of trust with one’s conscious mind, and the unconscious can take over as the “automatic pilot”.  

Although Frame’s thoughts here refer initially to a structural decision, her comments relate very much to the at times perplexing ambiguity of the verse within the novels. It is clear from Dr Alice Miller’s comments in 1984 about the taboo nature of child abuse that in *Intensive Care*, published in 1970, Frame was ahead of her time in her understanding and honest delineation of dysfunctional family dynamics and the hidden cruelties which could be suffered by children in such families. Frame’s use of verse in Parts I and II of *Intensive Care* invites the reader to probe beneath the surface, transcend the barriers of taboo, and acknowledge the secret fear and pain experienced by Naomi. In Frame’s multi-layered texture of language, Naomi’s verse chapters give voice to unspoken or unspeakable thoughts and feelings, and these voices are interwoven with the poets of Frame’s reading. In particular, there are echoes of the poems of Sylvia Plath, whose savagely honest poetry Frame so much admired.

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199 Frame, letter to Dr Cawley, 27 April 1974.
Chapter Five: The Bible

5.1 The Bible as Intertext

There is a notable variety of reference and allusion in Frame’s novels to the Bible, whose language is part of her habit of thought, stemming from her constant exposure to the Bible at home as well as at school. Frame claimed to have no commitment to any organised religion: ‘nothing definite’ was her response to a query about her religious affiliations in an interview after her final illness was diagnosed.¹ She took a well-documented interest, however, in Buddhism, and had a life-long concern with ethical and spiritual matters.² Frame told Elizabeth Alley that ‘when we lived in Oamaru, the influence of religion diminished, for me, and was replaced, possibly, by the influence of words’.³ Her novels illustrate how the loss or absence of faith may nevertheless leave a love of the Bible’s poetry, words, and music, which Frame employs in her ‘explorations’ of ethical and spiritual issues. She calls on the Bible’s stories, poetry and ancient psalms and their links with mythology; and she exploits biblical poetic rhythms and syntax for their sense of timelessness; and because of the nature of the English Bible she does so in a way which goes beyond Bakhtin’s view of the Bible, whether used piously or parodied, as an ‘authoritative and sanctified’ text.⁴

The Bible is the most significant and influential text in English literature, the most widely read and heard, and the supreme intertext.⁵ The King James Bible, which was appointed to be used in all churches in 1611 and became the most familiar English Bible, was a revision of translations chiefly of William Tyndale and Miles Coverdale, with which writers from the late 1520s onwards would have been familiar. Tyndale’s desire to create a

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¹ Frame, in an interview with Anthony Hubbard for the Sunday Star-Times, 7 December 2003, cited in Janet Frame: In Her Own Words, p. 158.
³ Alley, In the Same Room: Conversations with New Zealand Writers, p. 42.
⁴ Mikhail Bakhtin, ‘From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse’ in The Dialogic Imagination, p. 69.
⁵ An earlier version of comments on the Bible on pages 143-45 of this chapter formed part of my MA dissertation (2012).
translation which ordinary people could understand in their own language and his response to
the poetry of his Greek and Hebrew originals combine to create a work which uses largely
monosyllabic English of Saxon origin, simple syntax, and memorable, rhythmic, everyday
phrasing. The Bible was designed to be read aloud, so the use of poetic rhythms had a
practical purpose. C. S. Lewis describes Tyndale as ‘the best prose writer of his age’; and
David Norton asserts that the Bible is ‘a primary creator of our well-favoured language.’
Melvyn Bragg refers to ‘the skill or often the genius of the greatest of the English translators
in finding the resonant native word, discovering a rhythm, making it memorable’; Tyndale’s
commitment to what we would now call ‘verbal equivalence’ ensured that he rendered the
original poetic idiom and imagery into poetic English; and he and his fellow translators left
the language a lasting legacy, to which anglophone writers of all eras have responded, and
about which they have assumed a common knowledge. The language of the King James
Bible has been compared to ‘a watermark in the vocabulary, and in the patterns and rhythms
of daily speech,’ thus unavoidable even for a writer or speaker unaware of its presence. A
pervasive linguistic presence, the Bible’s stories, poetry and aphorisms make this presence
felt everywhere: the dying Falstaff who ‘babbled of green fields’; Keats’s
imagining of Ruth, ‘in tears amid the alien corn’; and ‘The Samaritans’ as the name of a
befriending charity, all assume a common understanding of allusion and reference. We have
idiomatic expressions which most people no longer recognise as biblical such as ‘a fly in the
ointment’, and ‘the skin of my teeth’ used in wide variety of situations; and even

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12 Ecclesiastes 10.1.
Cockney rhyming slang: ‘Adam and Eve’ for ‘believe’. Literary titles that draw on biblical phrases abound: Golding’s *Lord of the Flies*; Yeats’s *The Second Coming*; Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath*. Popular songs and oratorios sing the stories: ‘The Waters of Babylon’; Handel’s * Messiah* and Haydn’s * Creation*; Dixieland jazz songs such as ‘Joshua Fit the Battle of Jericho’ and Negro spirituals; often in the language of the King James Bible. Advertising slogans plunder and adapt phrases from the scriptures, and biblical cadences echo in the oratory of leaders like Winston Churchill and Martin Luther King.

Poets in particular have responded to the language and rhythms of the Bible: devotional poets like Donne and Herbert; but also the atheist Shelley, responding to the words of Matthew: ‘Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.’

Is not to-day enough?
Why do I peer
Into the darkness of the day to come?
Is not to-morrow even as yesterday?

The American poet Walt Whitman uses biblical cadences and poetic rhythms, the characteristic biblical parallelisms and repetitions, the sense of exultation and despair, the Bible’s simplicity of vocabulary and syntax:

I saw battle-corpses, myriads of them,
And the white skeletons of young men, I saw them,
I saw the debris and debris of all the slain soldiers of the war,
But I saw they were not as was thought.

Frame consciously exploits the inherent biblical characteristics of present-day English, biblical poetry and the King James Bible’s social, poetic and spiritual significance.

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13 Job 19. 20.
16 Matthew 6. 34.
In *The Adaptable Man*, the Reverend Aisley Maude, whose room had been furnished with both the King James Bible and the New Testament of the New English Bible (NEB) highlights the poetry of the familiar seventeenth-century translation compared with the NEB, published in 1961, its translators much criticised at the time for failing to realise ‘that the music of the phrase, of the paragraph, of the period is an essential constituent of good English prose’.\(^{19}\) For the Reverend Maude, moving between the two versions was to go ‘from Beauty to Abomination’.\(^{20}\)

The original title of Frame’s first novel, *Owls Do Cry* was ‘Talk of Treasure’, which became instead the title for the opening chapter. It is an allusion to an exhortation of St Matthew in which he refers to ‘treasure’ in both its material and spiritual senses:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal:} \\
\text{But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal:} \\
\text{For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.}\end{align*}
\]

Frame interrogates the word ‘treasure’, one of her ‘load-bearing’ words which act as base-note or leitmotif throughout her novels, as she examines its variety of meanings, both material and ethical.\(^{22}\) She alludes repeatedly to the words of Old Testament prophets, the Bible’s poetry and stories, in particular to the creation myths.

### 5.2 Poetics

Frame makes frequent reference to the poetry of the Psalms, the Beatitudes, the Song of Solomon, and Ecclesiastes, weaving echoes, themes and cadences through her prose and storytelling. She takes poetic biblical verses as inspiration, and uses biblical cadence and rhythm in her own writing. At certain times, she employs direct quotation, allusion, parody of

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\(^{19}\) T. S. Eliot, letter to the *Sunday Telegraph*, 16 December 1962, p. 7.  
\(^{21}\) Matthew 6.19-21.  
biblical texts, biblical syntax and style interwoven with snatches of poetry and the voices of characters in a verbal orchestration, or at other times she follows a theme or ‘load-bearing word’, which she examines from all angles.

In Faces in the Water the inmates learn that ‘weeping is a crime’ and are exhorted ‘like Lear and Cordelia to pray and sing’ in an allusion to the lament of the Hebrew captives which begins:

By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept,
when we remembered Zion.
We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof.
For they that carried us away captive required of us a song;
And they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying,
Sing us one of the songs of Zion.
How shall we sing the Lord’s song
In a strange land? 

Frame weaves a direct reference to King Lear, which in itself alludes to the psalm, with allusions to the same psalm all through the novel, layering echoes of the lament. Frame is here reworking the theme of a text which dates from nearly three thousand years ago, and is familiar through a number of musical settings: by Bach for example, and Verdi’s Nabucco, as well as more recent versions; appropriations for book titles; and the psalm’s use in Jewish and Christian ritual. The reader is thus invited to meditate on a shared history and a shared humanity. For the inmates are indeed prisoners in ‘a strange land’. Like a Hebrew captive in Babylon, Istina is exhausted by her treatment, saying ‘I could not absorb any more fearful possibilities; I was so tired; if it rained, the harp hanging on the willow tree would get wet, and still I did not care’. As Istina sinks ever lower in the institution’s hierarchy of wards and personal hopelessness, ‘wasted’ in her incarceration, she ‘remembered the weeping willow, and the harp now destroyed by frost and damp’. When she returns from the depths of Lawn

23 Frame, Faces in the Water, p. 9.
24 Frame, Faces in the Water, p. 36.
25 Psalm 137.
26 Frame, Faces in the Water, p. 59.
27 Frame, Faces in the Water, p. 82.
Lodge to a convalescent ward she ‘stayed all day and every day near the willow tree circling it and trying to charm it with riddles’.  

Other inmates sing the songs required of them, incongruously launching themselves into recent popular and romantic, optimistic tunes of the time. Hilary sings of her passion for Harry in the words of ‘My dreams are getting better all the time’, soon to be severely punished for acting on the feelings behind the song. At the dance where the women are made up ‘like stage whores’, Istina dances with Eric to the tune of ‘Destiny’. Carol, who talks incessantly of marriage and her engagement ring, sings snatches of her favourite song, ‘Some enchanted evening, you may see a stranger.’ The affinity of the nurses’ behaviour to the Babylonian captors who required ‘mirth’ is stressed constantly on the wards, where the inmates ‘learned not to cry in company but to smile’ and with the ‘amusement’ of the degrading lolly-scramble which fills Istina with disgust. The Hebrew origin of Istina’s surname, ‘Mavet’, meaning ‘death’, the shaved heads and the holocaust imagery of the ECT procedures link the biblical Hebrew captives with the hospital patients and with the Jewish and other inmates of twentieth-century death camps, pointing up a timeless, endless cycle of inhumanity.

In other novels, a number of Frame’s characters invoke lines from the Beatitudes, the affirmation of morality, humanity and compassion which begins

Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven  
Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.  
Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

29 Frame, *Faces in the Water*, p. 158.  
30 Frame, *Faces in the Water*, p. 165.  
32 Frame, *Faces in the Water*, p. 140.  
33 Frame, *Faces in the Water*, p. 32.  
34 Matthew 5.3-5.
In *Owls Do Cry*, these verses are one of the Bible texts which inform Amy’s life, but which promise more than they deliver, and are frequently recalled by Daphne. Amy is one of life’s peacemakers, poor and meek, but feels far from blessed at the end of Christmas, as she ‘cried herself to sleep for disappointment and loneliness’.

At the girls’ school, religious observance is shown to be little more than a formulaic and conformist routine, as the Beatitudes are followed rather too swiftly by banal announcements, the poetry of the lines truncated. Daphne later recalls these lines in one of her songs from the dead room:

> Francie, come in you naughty bird, the rain is pouring down, and fire is pouring down. Now, be careful kiddies, for wherever you walk you may meet an angel; for angels walk upon the earth among people, and the day Christ comes He too will walk unknown upon the earth. And blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Lines from the Beatitudes are interspersed with her mother’s nursery rhymes, admonitions, Christadelphian beliefs, poetry and grandmother’s songs after Francie’s death:

> grandmother breaking her back on the hot Virginny sun grandmother what big eyes you have; and the boy in the fox’s belly, unstitch, boy girl or day locked in the suffocating belly of memory.

The lines form an orchestration of memories, song and poetry which seem to sum up the whole of Daphne’s life so far.

The long years of Daphne’s incarceration are expressed in biblical rhythms and psalm-like cadences: ‘And Daphne lived there alone for many years’. They are suggestive of timelessness and the long reach of history: ‘nor do the people there move, nor can you walk there’. Daphne wants to look at the outside world ‘to see if God were saying

> Blessed are the meek and poor in spirit’.

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35 Frame, *Owls Do Cry*, p. 95.
37 Frame, *Owls Do Cry*, p.49. Frame’s italics.
38 Frame, *Owls Do Cry*, p.132.
40 Frame, *Owls Do Cry*, p. 130.
Frame’s repeated use of biblical syntax suggests a poetic, visionary prophet in the wilderness: ‘And Daphne lived there alone for many years, amid the assault and insinuation of sound in days unshining and night without darkness’.  

As the dark farce of the picnic outing comes to an end, and the nurses grumble and ask Daphne what she thinks, Daphne keeps her thoughts to herself, but expresses them in a fusion of biblical echoes, thinking, ‘if I travel a hundred miles to find treasure, I will find treasure. If I travel a hundred miles to find nothing, even if I bring money with me, to lay it down in exchange, I will find nothing’.  

Daphne’s thoughts echo St Matthew: ‘what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?’, and are overlaid with those of St Paul: ‘And though I have the gift of prophecy and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.’  

Alone, and in her silent thoughts, Daphne shows her understanding of St Matthew’s concept of the ‘treasure’ of the human heart.

Like Daphne, Naomi in Intensive Care expresses her deepest thoughts and feelings in verses which only she and the reader hear, and like Daphne she draws on familiar lines from the Bible as well as remembered snatches of song and poetry. In particular, Naomi alludes to the lines from Isaiah which begin ‘comfort ye my people [...] Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill shall be made low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain’.  

Near the beginning of Intensive Care, Naomi writes from her hospital bed to ‘Dear First Dad’, Auden’s phrase for Adam, the first man. During his time in England, Tom did not once visit his daughter. Naomi’s letter, however, is addressed to him in the Recovery Unit at Cullin Hall in lines which invoke the Beatitudes, Isaiah, and a punning play on the word ‘recovery’ which recurs all through the novel. In her letter we hear

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41 Frame, Owls Do Cry, p. 131.
42 Frame, Owls Do Cry, p. 145-46.
43 Matthew 16.26; I Corinthians 13.2.
44 Isaiah 40.1& 4.
the voices of Naomi, a parody of St. Matthew quoting Jesus, Isaiah, the former violinist Miriam, and in a final startling shift of register the protest Cicely could only think, being suffocated and unable to speak:

Blessed is he whose sin is recovered.  
I do hope to recover the city by nightfall.  
The woods hope to recover their primeval  
Silence, intervals and rests and music, the  
Heart its belief and hope.  
The day will recover its night.  
The night its morning.  
The death its birth.  
The valley its lost mountain.  
The mountain its departed valley.  
‘Stop! Stop!’

There are varying layers of time in this polyphonic piece and a variety of voices and voiced thought; a collection of different discourses, expressing a variety of values and ironies. There is also an assumption of prior knowledge of biblical phrasing which not all readers would possess but who may nevertheless enjoy and appreciate the poetic rhythm of the lines and an awareness of the way in which the different voices from within and without the novel come together in ‘co-existence and interaction’.\(^{47}\) This quality of Frame’s prose in *Intensive Care* was noted by, among others, the American critic Kenneth Burke who wrote that ‘the pages are rich in their development by associative turns, the range of modulations by which she depicts her characters’ attitudes and circumstances’.\(^{48}\)

In the final chapters of Part 2, the novel returns to the Recovery Unit at Cullin Hall among Tom Livingstone’s former fellow-patients, and a reprise of the fusion of biblical cadence, with allusion to Isaiah and Miriam’s music. None of them have ‘recovered the city by nightfall’, and the biblical prophecy has delivered neither the promised solace, nor ‘that the crooked places will be made plain instead of being made acceptably, recognisably,

\(^{47}\) Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, p. 28.  
\(^{48}\) Kenneth Burke, letter to George Braziller Inc., 20 April 1970, Braziller Papers, Box 11.
crooked’. The only ‘recovery’ is the grave, ‘six feet down and three across’. The dying Leonard came to the same conclusion, thinking about his own death and the words of Psalm 24, ‘The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof, the world and they that dwell therein.’ Soon, he thought, the earth would ‘recover all’, leaving no trace of him, and that the earth was ‘its own recovery unit’.

In *Daughter Buffalo*, a meditation on the place of death in people’s lives, death is sanitised, automated and financed out of sight of the living. Edelman, ‘medical graduate, a student of death’ expresses his suspicion of the comparison of different aspects of life with seasons, ‘that each held their sadness or joy’ evoking the biblical assertion that:

To every thing there is a season,  
And a time to every purpose under heaven:  
A time to be born, and a time to die;  
A time to plant,  
And a time to pluck up that which is planted.

The entrance of Edelman’s companion Turnlung to the novel, ‘I am an old man, a traveller down Instant Street’ recalls the opening line of ‘Gerontion’, T. S. Eliot’s meditation on life, death and sexuality, and references to events in the life of Christ. Gerontion’s epigraph from *Measure for Measure* could also apply to Turnlung:

 Thou has nor youth nor age  
 But as it were an after-dinners sleep  
 Dreaming on both.

By the end of the novel, the reader is uncertain whether Turnlung dreamed Edelman and his time in New York, or if Turnlung was a figment of Edelman’s imagination and dreaming, however real the characters have seemed during the narrative; and the multiple voices here

52 *Frame, Daughter Buffalo*, p. 401.  
53 Ecclesiastes 3.1-2.  
54 *Frame, Daughter Buffalo*, p. 240.  
invite the reader to read beyond the lines to the other texts. Frame recalls how *Measure for Measure*, ‘the deeply reasoned play crammed with violations of innocence, with sexual struggle and comment, with long discussions on life, death and immortality, won my heart and persisted in my memory, accompanied me in daily life’. 56 (Frame’s italics). The Duke’s reflections on the value of life and death, and his words of comfort for Claudio were conceivably Frame’s starting-point.

Turnlung’s language is couched in the cadences of the Bible, which he quotes and echoes. At his first meeting with Edelman, Turnlung complains of the violations of language, the euphemisms for death, each one a ‘password’, with the psalmic retort: ‘He sendeth out his word and melteth them’. 57 He quotes Job’s cry of anguish: ‘How long will you vex my soul and break me in pieces with words?’58 Echoes of Psalm 23, ‘a mountainous banquet set before me’59 are blended with snatches of nursery rhyme ‘round and round the mulberry tree on the cold and frosty morning of language’ suggesting that Turnlung thought the ancients had a surer grasp of the meaning of life than twentieth-century man. Turnlung’s language has the style of an Old Testament prophet in its repeated declarations: ‘I write from a land where the Bible is written in the daily newspaper [...] I write from a land where the obsession is the death of all [...] I write from a land as haunted by death and guilt as the Ancient Mariner’. 60

His assertions are in the style of biblical rhetoric characteristic of American oratory, from Abraham Lincoln to Martin Luther King and Barack Obama, layered with reference to ‘dangerous days’ (425) in the poetry of Burns, Coleridge and Genesis, and they invite the reader to concur with the suggestion that the poets of all ages understood the human condition better than anyone.

58 Frame, *Daughter Buffalo*, p. 422; Job 19.2. Frame’s italics.
59 Frame, *Daughter Buffalo*, p. 422; Psalm 23.
The Bible’s poetry comes to Russell Maude’s mind during his airport meditations in *The Adaptable Man*. He recognises that it is the beauty of the Bible’s language which has drawn his brother Aisley to a life as a clergyman as much as faith or their clergyman father’s example; and that he, Russell, lacks ‘the complex My Son, My Son, which if truth were known, is perhaps the reason behind Aisley’s pursuit of religion’. 61 Indeed, Aisley is experiencing something of a crisis as his church attempts to modernise, and Aisley suffers the repeated sensation that ‘God had moved’. Aisley is a lover of poetry, from Anglo-Saxon to Stephen Spender, and had cringed at his late wife Katherine’s unpoetic and inappropriate banalities in her attempt to ‘reclaim Aisley from his drab parsonic Anglo-Saxon dream,’ especially when Katherine led the local newspaper to report that they wanted to ‘transform the church from a medieval white elephant to a bang-on space-age tiger’.62 For Aisley, the poetry of the Bible is an intrinsic part of his life; and his ear, like Frame’s, is keenly attuned to its music. The point is emphasised by the inability of Aisley’s nephew Alwyn to respond to a John Donne sermon: Alwyn can hear only the archaic inflections with which one can ‘think a fancy trite thought and make it sound meaningful’.63

Arriving to stay with his brother’s family and convalesce as he recovers from TB, Aisley settles in his room with the copies of the Bibles left for him and begins to read from the King James version St Paul’s familiar letter to the Corinthians, ‘For now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face’ and as he reads on ‘Aisley could feel the peace and love steal over him’.64 Turning to the NEB, Aisley finds that ‘glass darkly’ is rendered as ‘puzzling reflections in a mirror’. Aisley’s sense of the discordance of this wording chimes with the view of T. S. Eliot, among other scholars and critics, who felt that the NEB failed even to achieve a level of ‘dignified mediocrity’, and had lost the essential ‘music of the

63 Frame, *The Adaptable Man*, p. 266.
spoken word’. On its publication in 1961, the NEB dominated the front page of the *Times Literary Supplement*, with an article about translation issues, and a further article on ‘Language in the New Bible’. From the beginning, most of the criticism was of the infelicities of wording and the failings of the literary panel, ‘dozing brothers of the craft’. Aisley clearly agrees, and in an image which recalls Frame’s repeated reference to St Matthew’s words on material and spiritual treasure, Aisley expresses his view that the modern scholars ‘had undertaken the task of convicts breaking stones, monotonously striking day after day until they destroyed a quarry of jewels which they still imagined to be stones’. For both Aisley and Frame the King James Bible is one of the poetic jewels of the language.

### 5.3 Ethics and Spirituality

When *Owls Do Cry* was reviewed for the first time, in *Landfall*, the reviewer Winston Rhodes made striking use of religious discourse to convey his reaction to the spiritual and ethical qualities of Frame’s first novel, which ‘glows with the light of a poetic vision of life’. He comments that

> The emotional effect of *Owls Do Cry* is such that instead of confining myself to the language of criticism, I feel tempted to talk about life and human suffering, about the values of civilisation and the search for meaning, about the empty heart and the bewildered mind [...] [Frame] is concerned with the gradations of human sensitivity, with our kinship in suffering, with the pathetic variations of death in life, and with man’s pain-swept pilgrimage in search of he knows not what.

Successive critics have similarly employed religious discourse to discuss Frame’s work, ‘spiritual’, ‘ethical’, ‘visionary’, ‘utopia’, and ‘pilgrimage’, whilst noting Frame’s lack of adherence to an orthodox religious doctrine, discussed below. As Mark Williams remarks,

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69 Winston H Rhodes, Review of *Owls Do Cry*, p. 331.
‘for Frame, the trick is to learn to live religiously, but without the gods’.  
Frame shares with William Blake not only a profound sense of the way in which human behaviour falls short of its potential in society’s concern with material gain, but also Blake’s sense of the possibilities of transformation. In notes she made for interviews in the 1980s, Frame asserts that ‘it’s my belief that there’s an indestructible goodness in all things, states, everything. Religious people would call it God’.  

Frame’s secular spirituality is a concept which causes critics problems of semantics and philosophy. For orthodox Christians, ‘secular spirituality’ is a contradiction in terms, and the incorporation of religious discourse within works of literature is also an issue for critics who hold fundamental adherence to the Bible as doctrine. T. S. Eliot, writing about Paradise Lost, takes the view that: ‘it is a glimpse of a theology that I find in large part repellent, expressed through a mythology which would have been better left in the Book of Genesis, upon which Milton has not improved’. Writing about Blake, Eliot admonishes him for his lack of doctrinal orthodoxy:  

What his genius required, and what it sadly lacked, was a framework of accepted and traditional ideas which would have prevented him from indulging in a philosophy of his own, and concentrated his attention upon the problems of the poet.  

C. S. Lewis sternly asserted that ‘those who read the Bible as literature do not read the Bible’. A fixed viewpoint of this kind would preclude an appreciation of Frame’s subversive treatment of doctrine and religious texts. Marc Delrez’s humanist endeavours to find an appropriate form of words to convey Frame’s concern with the ‘beyond’, a spiritual, but not necessarily a biblical or a religious search for enlightenment, led him to suggest that ‘her pursuit of totality is spiritual in essence’ and a few pages later that ‘her primary impulse

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71 Williams, Leaving the Highway, p. 54.  
72 Frame, ‘Notes for Interviews’, In Her own Words, p. 120.  
is not political so much as existential, philosophical and possibly even religious’. In a further quest for words, Simone Drichel, disagreeing with Delrez’s use of ‘spiritual’, opts for ‘ethical’. This continuing semantic search to define Frame’s idea of a world beyond this one, beyond the corona, is in itself testament to Frame’s outward-looking world view and her desire to ‘explore beyond the object, beyond its shadow to the ring of fire,’ and her interest in Buddhism.

Cindy Gabrielle, in her account of Frame’s interest in Buddhist thought, calls attention to the interest in Buddhism shown by a number of Frame’s close friends. Gabrielle notes the discussions Frame had about meditation with James and Jacquie Baxter and Charles Brasch; as well as evidence of her reading in eastern and Buddhist philosophy from the books she borrowed or had in her own possession.

Lottie Frame’s Christadelphian faith would have sown the seeds for a radical rejection of orthodox dogma: Christadelphianism shares a number of features with other non-conformist sects which developed in Britain from the seventeenth century, notably a challenge to the authority of the established church; elected unpaid lay preachers and more democratic egalitarian governance; meeting houses instead of churches; and pacifism. Mark Williams asserts that Frame’s ‘debt to the Christadelphians is registered chiefly in her religious sense of the commonplace’; and Frame’s belief in the ‘indestructible goodness in all things’, cited above, is one which is shared by other dissenting sects, of which possibly the most familiar, both in Britain and the USA is the Religious Society of Friends (‘Quakers’), whose watchwords are ‘silence’ and ‘witness’. Silent meditation is a central feature of Quaker meetings, and an awareness of this practice among British and colonial societies may

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77 Simone Drichel, ‘“Signposts to a world that is not even mentioned” Janet Frame’s Ethical Transcendence’, Frameworks, p. 184.
78 Frame, State of Siege, p. 239.
79 Cindy Gabrielle, The Unharnessed World, p. 4.
80 Williams, Leaving the Highway, p. 32.
make an interest in Buddhism appear less of an esoteric departure of thought than it might for readers from other parts of Europe more accustomed to Huguenot or Lutheran Protestantism. Frame’s friendships with a number of people with an interest in Buddhism: Bill Brown and Paul Wonner in California; Ruth Dallas, Charles Brasch and Karl Stead in New Zealand, would have encouraged her reading and added to her own knowledge of Buddhist thought and practice. As Gabrielle convincingly argues, Frame’s interest in Buddhism leaves its mark in her fiction.

Frame felt strongly about a range of ethical issues, as evidenced by her surviving correspondence. In a draft letter she condemns the homophobia with which the New Zealand Labour MP Colin Moyle was treated. In 1977 the Prime Minister Robert Muldoon accused Moyle of being questioned by the police about homosexual activities, apparently in an attempt to gain political advantage, at a time when homosexual activities were still illegal in New Zealand. Frame wrote that

> A politician’s sexual preference is surely irrelevant. What is always relevant is the reminder that humanity has a tragic history of using itself and its supposed obligations (‘They were only being human.’ ‘They were doing their duty’) as an excuse for inhumanity.  

There is further testimony in her letter to the *Otago Daily Times* over a proposal to build a very large 100-bed institution for handicapped children, urging a more humane approach to their welfare, in which Frame notes that

> Our country with its small population has an unequalled opportunity to practise being human instead of identifying itself always with its larger population of sheep and aspiring to Sheeplity and Sheeplhood rather than to Humanity.

Frame opposed the 1981 Springbok rugby tour, joining the protest march in Wanganui against the blatant racism of the New Zealand rugby sector, and writing to the local newspaper mocking the overriding importance of sport, partly in verses of a ‘song’:

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81 Frame, draft letter, *In Her Own Words*, p.176.
82 Frame, letter to *Otago Daily Times*, 16 September 1968.
My name is Footy Pool, of Rugby I’m the fount.
I’m a faithful Rugby son.
I have so many freedoms, far too many to count,
Responsibilities I have none.\textsuperscript{83}

Writing to Bill Brown about \textit{Intensive Care}, Frame says ‘I put a lot of myself into it, I think, I don’t mean me as a person, but me and how I feel about many issues’,\textsuperscript{84} and Frame’s concern with racism; the treatment of anyone not conforming to social norms; and the inhumanity of people who unquestioningly follow orders make themselves felt in her novels. In Part Three of \textit{Intensive Care} Frame makes extensive use of biblical quotation, allusion and parody in the apocalyptic tale of ‘the time of the fires in Waipori City,’ and the horrendous issues it raises, of genocide and eugenics; and the dismissal of anyone deviating from the ‘normal’.\textsuperscript{85} First published in 1970, at a time of considerable anxiety about the possibility of nuclear war and the fear of a man-made apocalypse, the novel draws on prophetic Old Testament sources in its account of the inhumanity of people who through fear of losing their own lives comply with the requirements of an authoritarian regime and agree to carry out the requirements of the Human Delineation Act.

Milly Galbraith, the ‘doll-normill’ chronicler of the approach of ‘Deciding Day’ finds the print in her Bible is ‘too small for comfort’ and that ‘many of the words don’t have enough meaning’ (289). Nevertheless, Milly, with her particular ‘in-telly-gents’, becomes the voice of conscience in her post-Atomic community, drawing on her semi-understood readings of random pages of the Bible, feeling the importance of these texts and the power of the language, even though they are not fully accessible to her. In conversation with Sandy, Milly responds to his familiar phrase from the Song of Solomon, ‘I should say the winter should be past’, and refers to the rest of the verse, which reads

\textsuperscript{84} Frame, letter to Bill Brown, late April 1970, \textit{Jay to Bee}, p.126.
\textsuperscript{85} Frame, \textit{Intensive Care}, p. 389. Further references to \textit{Intensive Care} in section 5.3 are given parenthetically in the text.
For lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone;
The flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land.\textsuperscript{86}

The reference to Solomon’s love-song forms an incongruous prelude to Sandy’s detailed quotation of the Prime Minister’s speech, couched in the specious language of a corrupt politician in which he outlines his plans for ‘disposal, with other waste’ of ‘broken bits of humanity’ (293). The winter, the nuclear winter for much of the world, is very much of the present; the lush and abundant natural beauty of Solomon’s world destroyed.

As Milly continues her account, she includes lines from the random Bible pages she has found at the minister’s suggestion. Errors in her transcription suggest her lack of understanding but in the extracts she quotes Frame makes her show how the biblical desolation parallels the fictional nuclear destruction of the twenty-first century. Isaiah’s picture of the wondrous restoration of Jerusalem for the returned exiles, ‘and I will make the place of my feet glorious’ is followed immediately by the lamentation on the state of Zion, ‘how is the gold become dim’ (349). When Milly quotes the call for six executioners to slaughter the idolaters, and the man ‘with a writer’s inkhorn’ to mark the foreheads of those to be spared, she reminds Sandy that the Bible ‘is all blud and fyre, desserlitt cities’ (349). The Bible is used in this context as a holy text, in Bakhtin’s words as ‘the authoritative and sanctified word of the Bible’: Sandy and Milly’s use of its stories and poetry underline their status as victims of a cruel and deliberate destruction.\textsuperscript{87} Sandy, filling his own inkhorn, responds to Milly’s quotations in a verse of biblical cadence and imagery,

\begin{quote}
That is a God’s intention
a city of desolation
the sun to crack open all life and draw forth
the shimmering garments of growth.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{86} The Song of Solomon 2.11-12.
\textsuperscript{87} Bakhtin, \textit{The Dialogic Imagination}, p. 69.
And in a punning mix of registers, employing the language of international telecommunications, Sandy asks finally,

How can I read you Roger, if they have destroyed the book? (350-51)

In The Rainbirds, Frame also uses biblical allusion to explore ethical issues surrounding people’s treatment of those who fall outside the bounds of convention, but in a smaller-scale domestic, quiet suburban setting. In her letters to Dr. Cawley, Frame wrote about The Rainbirds, comparing it with A State of Siege, expressing the view that ‘The Rainbirds [...] is I think a book of more consequence, perhaps less narrowly lyrical and more concerned with people.’\(^88\) In an earlier letter, she told him that the novel concerned ‘the domination of little things, of triviality over our lives’.\(^89\)

Frame uses two biblical narratives, the Easter story and the story of Lazarus, to explore the inability of the people around Godfrey Rainbird to see beyond the trivial and the conventional. In her subversive use of the Lazarus story, Frame employs biblical imagery and parody to illustrate the absurdity, hypocrisy and callousness of the community’s response to Godfrey’s recovery from an apparently fatal accident. Godfrey’s wife Beatrice is at a loss. From the outset she is unsure about coping with the rituals and conventions of death and bereavement, which ought to have brought comfort, and she does not know how to manage ‘the absurd and tragic inconvenience of his resurrection’.\(^90\) The community’s failure of compassion is highlighted by the insensitivity of the clergyman who refers to the ‘biblical happening in Dunedin’ without offering any practical or pastoral help and wonders at Easter if Godfrey would ‘care to be welcomed again into the Church’.\(^91\)

Godfrey’s increasing despair and the absurdity of his situation are marked by the strikingly odd developments in his reading. His dismissal letter informs him that it is ‘no

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\(^{88}\) Frame, letter to Dr. Cawley, 8 July 1965.
\(^{89}\) Frame, letter to Dr. Cawley, 8 May 1965.
\(^{91}\) Frame, The Rainbirds, p. 44.
longer sopible for me to plomey you’, and the minister reads the ‘Drols Pryer’.\textsuperscript{92} Frame’s enigmatic version of the Lord’s Prayer, however, is not simply a playful, whimsical view of an inverted world, but a critical parody relying on the reader’s knowledge of the biblical source, and as such it belongs to an ancient tradition of ridiculing sanctified texts. Bakhtin gives an example from fourteenth-century French, which reflects on the horrors of war:

\begin{tabular}{ll}
Pater noster, tu n’ies pas foulz & Our father, you are not crushed \\
Quart tu t’ies mis en grand repos & For you have set yourself in comfort \\
Qui es montes haut en ciel.\textsuperscript{93} & Who have ascended high into heaven.
\end{tabular}

The French prayer usurps the sacred Latin after ‘pater noster’, and complains about God creating an easy life for himself in heaven – the French verb is reflexive – compared with the deprivations of earthly existence. Frame’s choice of anagrams and neologisms, creating pejorative or negative new words, conveys a similar feeling of betrayal and disenchantment: ‘Our afther which rat in heaven; hollowed be thy mane […] for veer and veer, mean’.\textsuperscript{94} The callous betrayal of Godfrey and society’s unimaginative failure of compassion, its hollow meanness, is further emphasised by the Good Friday trip to the beach, from which Godfrey comes away ‘shivering, exposed to a winter loneliness’,\textsuperscript{95} a phrase which echoes St Matthew’s ‘there was darkness over all the land’ as Christ dies on the cross.\textsuperscript{96}

Ministers of the established church do not fare well in Frame’s novels: there is a considerable distance between the sense of human potential on the one hand, and on the other the platitudes and conventions with which the clergy preach, unable to give either effective ethical and spiritual leadership or offer succour to those most in need of their help. Milly Galbraith declines the Reverend Polly’s invitation to pray, and her father’s response to the departing minister is ‘Good riddance’.\textsuperscript{97} Benign, on the whole, but banal, ineffectual, and

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\textsuperscript{92} Frame, \textit{The Rainbirds}, p. 408. \\
\textsuperscript{93} Bakhtin, \textit{The Dialogic Imagination}, p. 78. \\
\textsuperscript{94} Frame, \textit{The Rainbirds}, p. 411. \\
\textsuperscript{95} Frame, \textit{The Rainbirds}, p. 361. \\
\textsuperscript{96} Frame, \textit{The Rainbirds}, p. 361. \\
\textsuperscript{97} Frame, \textit{Intensive Care}, p. 363.
\end{flushright}
trapped by conventions and church hierarchies, they may find themselves with ‘a congregation of two women and a dog’.\textsuperscript{98} Or they may entertain, like Aisley, the somewhat Trollopeian criticism of clerical self-important pomposity that ‘God once had the power of weaving in and out of precedence, at times clumsily marshalling Himself behind the Bishop’.\textsuperscript{99} Aisley articulates his dilemma by referring to the ‘cynic’ who identified the need for a different way of looking, ‘that what I needed was a new camera’. Fearful of the immensity he glimpses, however, Aisley ‘longed once more to set up the obsolete camera before the moss-covered monument of my Christian faith’.\textsuperscript{100}

Aisley takes refuge in contemplation of an era of pre-church monasticism. He muses on the life of the seventh-century monk St. Cuthbert who was at one with the natural world and ‘had the faith to walk in the waves’.\textsuperscript{101} just as Aisley desires to be ‘close to the first fluid world, the sea’.\textsuperscript{102} The desire for simplicity does not, however, preclude a level of self-perception and an awareness of the behaviour of others, and Gabrielle’s discussion of the influence of Buddhist teaching is surely well founded here. Aisley is mindful, aware, and attentive, though still disconcerted by his inability to find answers, or for his beloved Bible scriptures to supply them. Weary of pretence, of hiding his ‘candle under a bushel’,\textsuperscript{103} Aisley is disturbed by his perception that Alwyn ‘is all that everyone thinks he is not’.\textsuperscript{104} Eventually Aisley wonders if Alwyn ‘will confess to having murdered Botti Julio’ and whether ‘he may even be the father of Greta’s child’.\textsuperscript{105} Retreating from these anxieties to the imagined age of

\textsuperscript{98} Frame, \textit{The Adaptable Man}, p. 236.  
\textsuperscript{99} Frame, \textit{The Adaptable Man}, p. 21.  
\textsuperscript{100} Frame, \textit{The Adaptable Man}, p. 5.  
\textsuperscript{101} Frame, \textit{The Adaptable Man}, p.213.  
\textsuperscript{102} Frame, \textit{The Adaptable Man}, p. 78.  
\textsuperscript{103} Matthew 5.15.  
\textsuperscript{104} Frame, \textit{The Adaptable Man}, p. 52.  
\textsuperscript{105} Frame, \textit{The Adaptable Man}, p. 213-14.
Cuthbert, Aisley wonders if he can take comfort from the promise that ‘the last shall be the first’. 106

Religious discourse is, of course, what one would expect of a clergymen, and in complete contrast to Aisley’s charitable and introspective spirituality is Brother Colman in Living in the Maniototo, an American evangelical pastor who cynically exploits the language of the Bible for his own material advantage. The narrator, Mavis, is living in the house of her friend Brian in Baltimore, and Brother Colman preys on the soul of Mrs Tyndall, Brian’s African-American cleaner, in jewelled malignity, ‘with diamonds glittering at the lapels’. 107 He has subverted the instruction to ‘go and sell that thou hast and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me’. 108 Mrs Tyndall is the poor, donating her $5 a month, a widow’s mite, to Brother Colman’s ‘Diamond Account Book’, 109 and seems to gain some warmth, some hope of a better life hereafter. However, exhorting his congregation to ‘Give all you have to God...empty your purses at God’s feet...’, 110 the rapacious self-styled evangelist has converted spiritual treasure into a money-making scam. Brother Colman’s corrupt world is one ‘where thieves break through and steal,’ as Frame returns again to St Matthew’s view of material and spiritual treasure, which she had first investigated in Owls Do Cry, and to which she returns time and again in subsequent novels. 111

5.4 Narratives

Frame’s use of the Bible to provide part of a narrative framework is most apparent in the two novels which are sometimes treated as companion pieces, The Rainbirds and A State

106 Matthew 20.16.
107 Frame, Living in the Maniototo, p. 87.
108 Matthew 19.21.
109 Frame, Living in the Maniototo, p. 84.
110 Frame, Living in the Maniototo, p. 88.
111 Matthew 6.19.
of Siege. In Frame’s version of the Lazarus story in *The Rainbirds*, it is Godfrey who supplies the cynical alternative narrative to the simple joy and gratitude of Martha and Mary, sisters of Lazarus. By contrast to the biblical sisters, Beatrice is more concerned for the cost of the unused coffin than with planning the kind of celebration prepared for Lazarus by Martha and Mary; and the banal financial embarrassment occurs to Godfrey too, who thinks about Lazarus having to ‘fork out for his expensive perfumed shroud and the funeral feast’.\(^{112}\)

Godfrey muses further on alternative possible outcomes for Lazarus: that his wife might have another man, or that his recovery might excite jealousy among less fortunate neighbours, based on his own experience of people who step outside the accepted conventions. His sense of being ‘*baptised* in the joyousness of being alive’, as in Lazarus’s second chance of life, is a short-lived reverie (347). His ‘green pastures’ and ‘still waters’\(^{113}\) ‘had become without warning a torrent that dropped suddenly into a small dark hole in the earth’ (348).

Godfrey is conscious of other people’s revulsion and fear, and that ‘Lazarus had been wrenched by death out of people’s lives; he was not going to be accommodated so readily into the living’ (372). He thinks about being buried alive, and ‘the fear of being pronounced dead and in another man’s power haunted him’ (442). Godfrey’s story contains echoes of Balzac’s subversion of the Lazarus story, *Le Colonel Chabert*, as Marc Delrez briefly notes.\(^{114}\) There is evidence that Frame ‘loved Balzac’,\(^{115}\) whose novels she would have encountered at the University of Otago, if not at school.\(^{116}\) The reader who remembers Balzac’s novel is nudged towards a complementary view of the dilemma faced by Godfrey and Beatrice, and a layered used of the Bible narrative.

Balzac’s Chabert, one of Napoleon’s chief officers, is left for dead after battle. Buried under other corpses in a common grave, he gruesomely struggles out and spends several

\(^{112}\) Frame, *The Rainbirds*, p. 372.

\(^{113}\) Psalm 23.

\(^{114}\) Delrez, *Manifold Utopia*, p.185.

\(^{115}\) Email from Pamela Gordon, 11.05.2015.

\(^{116}\) University of Otago Calendar, 1943-44.
years recovering. Returning to Paris, he can no longer find a place in society; and like Godfrey Rainbird is seen as an embarrassment and a threat wherever he goes. Referred to throughout as ‘le défunt’ (‘the deceased’), his legal status, Chabert struggles unsuccessfully to regain his money, his previous living status, and his hostile, bigamously remarried, and terrified wife. He is ridiculed by street urchins who resemble those of Anderson’s Bay in Frame’s novel, and is supported by one lone voice of compassion, his lawyer Derville – more outspoken than the lone doubting voice in Godfrey’s community. The living would prefer Chabert and Godfrey to remain dead, and Chabert’s words could have been Godfrey’s: ‘J’ai été enterré sous des morts, mais maintenant je suis enterré sous des vivants, sous des actes, sous des faits, sous la société tout entière, qui veut me faire rentrer sous terre!’ (I was buried beneath the dead, but now I am buried beneath the living, beneath the red tape, beneath the whole of society, which would send me back under the earth.)

Both men suffer lost illusions: Chabert returns to post-revolution France to find a Bourbon king back on the throne; Godfrey, an immigrant from England, finds New Zealand failing to live up to the promise of ‘all those posters of painted cows generously yielding their milk’. Godfrey and Chabert both experience an overwhelming sense of loss and despair, and are threatened by a society which would deny them Lazarus’s second chance of life.

That The Rainbirds is not Frame’s most successful novel appears to be a matter of common agreement. Critics have been less enthusiastic about this text, especially the earlier and initial reviewers, finding that the narrative requires ‘forbearance,’ or ‘an effort;’ or is ‘something of an anti-climax.’ In these instances, Frame’s use of the biblical narrative is viewed solely as a critique of New Zealand society of the time. More recently, Jan Cronin asserts that ‘what prevents the Lazarus model from being a viable context for the

118 Frame, The Rainbirds, p. 249.
interpretation of Godfrey’s experiences is context itself: the different settings of their
stories’.  I would like to suggest, on the contrary, that in Frame’s use of biblical narrative,
reworking and subverting, like Balzac, the story of Lazarus, points up a greater universality
of Godfrey’s sense of loss, and what Marc Delrez refers to as ‘the inner dimension of
Godfrey’s quest’. Balzac’s novel is a classic of nineteenth-century physical and
psychological realism, rooted in the detail of the legal, financial and social system of the
time; Chabert’s return from the grave may be gruesome, but it is located in French history.
Frame’s concern is with the inner reality of the minds of Godfrey and Beatrice and their
struggle to make sense of, and come to terms with, the bizarre events of their quiet suburban
lives.

In her early comments on The Rainbirds, Frame remarks that the novel ‘enables me to
spend all my time discussing death! And life! And the domination of little things, of triviality
over our lives. This man’s wife has loved him dearly, yet she has resigned herself to
widowhood!’ Beatrice has no comprehension of Godfrey’s ‘inner dimension’, as Delrez
describes it. His repetitive occupation assembling plugs leaves his mind free to wander and
wonder, and to notice small details, like fly-specks on windows, and differing kinds of time.
Her imagination, like her speech, goes no further than commonplace cliché: ‘People are only
human aren’t they? I mean they’ve their lives to live’; and using ‘the sun and the sky’, as
Godfrey perceives, ‘as a personal smoke-screen’. Godfrey ruminates on death and the
passage of time, and refers to an epoch before anno domini, to biblical times when life was
apparently uncomplicated ‘if you had no desire to survive and no sense of smell’. He looks
across at Dunedin, which resembles ‘a biblical city’, Jerusalem; and later, in an allusion to

122 Cronin, Frameworks, p. 54.
123 Delrez, Manifold Utopia, p. 186.
124 Frame, letter to Dr. Cawley, 8 May 1965.
125 Frame, The Rainbirds, p. 430.
126 Frame, The Rainbirds, p. 373.
127 Frame, The Rainbirds, p. 441.
the Book of Revelation, expresses his desire to ‘lie here in my deckchair while the sun shines on the city of Jerusalem’. These deliberations take on a broader personal and spiritual significance for him, which he is unable to share with Beatrice: ‘I don’t think you understand what I’m talking about. I’m talking about destruction, about the lie and the truth, the white lie, the grey lie, the yellow, green and technicolour lie, and the black lie’. 

The dominant emotion for Beatrice, as for Chabert’s wife, now a ‘Comtesse’, is fear. Balzac’s graphic delineation of Parisian poverty, the legal position of women as possessions, and Chabert’s implied threat, clearly convey what the future holds for the Comtesse if Chabert proves his identity: ‘Je vous ai prise au Palais-Royal’ (‘I picked you up at the Palais-Royal’): a return to the streets and to prostitution. Beatrice’s fears are more mundane and far less defined – but her descent, the loss of the children, her increasing reliance on alcohol, and her suicide, are final; and she can see no other future than the grave. She lacks even Godfrey’s faint apprehension of a new Jerusalem, and none of the simple pleasure of just being alive, which Lazarus and his sisters felt, and which Godfrey woke to, sensing a ‘new abundance of warmth and life’ on the morning of Beatrice’s death, as ‘he stood complete once more upright on the earth his space secured’.

Of all Frame’s novels, the use of biblical narrative structures is most apparent in A State of Siege, the story of an unmarried art teacher from South Island, who retires to an island in the warmer climate of the North Island, to make a new life for herself as a painter. The novel opens with a simple minor sentence: ‘A South Pacific paradise.’ It ends with an apocalypse; and in the course of the novel, references to Genesis and to the Book of Revelation would perhaps appear to offer the reader the hope of a definite pathway through

128 Frame, The Rainbirds, p. 452.
129 Frame, The Rainbirds, p. 430.
130 Balzac, p. 86.
131 Frame, The Rainbirds, p. 492.
132 Frame, The Rainbirds, p. 493.
133 Frame, A State of Siege, p. 31. Further references to A State of Siege in section 5.4 are given parenthetically in the text.
the narrative, as the protagonist, Malfred, makes her early adjustments which are linked to the Genesis account of the stages by which God created the earth. The trail, however, leads to ambiguity and mystery, as Malfred confronts the unknown and the unknowable. Karemoana is a sunny island of subtropical fruit and year-round flowers, a favoured retirement destination and holiday venue, which seems to offer Malfred, free finally of her filial duties of care for an aged invalid mother, the chance to retire early; lead her own independent life; and find ‘a New View’ as a painter (48). Malfred’s journey north is a ‘pilgrimage’ (34). The island’s link with the Garden of Eden, in spite of Malfred’s protestations of ‘I don’t expect a paradise’ (40) continue in her journey towards Karemoana; in her anticipation of her arrival; and in the language of the narrative, most explicitly ‘On the afternoon of the fifth day’ (78) as Malfred prepares to paint the sea, in an echo of God’s fifth day creation of the sea and its creatures in Genesis.\textsuperscript{134}

Malfred’s time on Karemoana is from the outset beset with ominous signs of menace, whether real or imaginary, as the biblical imagery of the paradise garden is interwoven with elements of the distinctly secular film noir, one of the dominant film genres of the 1940s and 50s in films such as The Big Sleep, The Third Man, Notorious, and Casablanca. On her arrival, Malfred is immediately struck by the remoteness of the bach, the odd stares of the other people in the taxi, the broken panes in the call box, and the problems with the telephone line: all the stock-in-trade of the film noir, which may have been Frame’s reason for her comment to Dr. Cawley that ‘you will find A State of Siege pretty corny’.\textsuperscript{135} The film noir tone of the novel develops in conjunction with biblical allusions: Malfred rings the agent from the call box and hears a voice ‘like a prophet’s voice to her ear’ (60). Malfred’s insecurity, anxiety and despair increase as the narrative moves towards its apocalyptic conclusion. The mood of the film noir develops with her feelings about her lost love and

\textsuperscript{134} Genesis 1.20-23.
\textsuperscript{135} Frame, letter to Dr. Cawley, 23 June 1965.
stifled sexuality, love being ‘the most treacherous invader’ (71). Her paranoia increases as she listens to the unexplained knocking in the darkness of the long night, as ‘the enormity of what lay outside began to touch Malfred with a cold brand that slid in a snail-track of sweat across her forehead’ (82) and as she is overtaken by repressed fears, distorted memories and unresolved ambiguous desires of her abortive affair with Wilfred. The tension escalates as she makes her desperate mock phone calls.

The film noir nature of the narrative was not lost on Vincent Ward and Timothy White, whose highly acclaimed film of the novel won a number of awards in 1978,136 much to Frame’s delight. She is reported as telling Tim White she thought the film was ‘a beautiful poem’.137 Ward appears to have had an appreciation of Malfred’s attempts to find a ‘New View’. In a discussion about film-making he suggested that ‘the more beautiful the surface of a picture, the more it operates like a windowpane and separates you from the content [...]’. You have to break the lovely surface of things; smash your fist through the panel of glass and pull the people out from behind it’.138

Frame had approved of these two young film-makers as they were newly out of film-school and she felt they would be ‘more ready to take risks and do what they feel they want to do. They are not conservative’.139 It is also clear from Ward’s comments in the interview just cited, that they were drawing on American film practices rather than European, which Ward felt takes its character from a painterly tradition. ‘American film’, he comments, ‘has more immediacy, less poetry. It draws from a tradition of newsreel and photojournalism’.140

Further layers of literary allusion in the novel increase the sense of impending doom. Malfred recalls Macbeth’s dark night, with the knocking that appalled him and his musings

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on sleep; and Wilfred reappears in Malfred’s imagination in his soldier’s uniform, with a bloody face like Banquo. Frame links the knocking in *Macbeth* with the Book of Revelation: ‘Behold, I stand at the door and knock’;¹⁴¹ and a doom-laden echo of Macbeth, facing his fears. The knocking is insistent, and Malfred’s response to it relates to both the ‘prowler’ and to Wilfred: ‘however hard he knocked at the door, and however long he stayed, she would never let him in’ (139). The stone is biblical too, a further reference to Revelation: ‘To him that overcometh [...] I will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.’¹⁴² As Malfred clutches the stone hurled through the window, she tries to read the print on the newspaper surrounding it. The handwritten words ‘Help! Help!’ are clear enough, but the newsprint which seems as if it should be meaningful is composed like *Jabberwocky* in words which have recognisably English morphology, endings and English word elements, repetition and a sense of shape; and is tantalising in its suggestion of unfulfilled desire, ‘sorrowbride’; fire, ‘fuming of perburning’; threat, ‘wolpe’; and death, ‘done to fleath.’ (244)

The ambiguity of Frame’s reshaping of her biblical source – Malfred’s stone does not deliver redemption and enlightenment – is highlighted by Jan Cronin. In deviating from the original source, Frame invites readers to ponder and explore ambiguous possibilities of interpretation rather than solve a puzzle with one single answer or interpretation; and to make connections of their own. Jan Cronin is surely justified in asserting that ‘Frame’s fiction forces the reader to take risks’,¹⁴³ as Frame’s literary allusions and references weave in and out of each other, specifically or as just faint echoes, explicitly or ironically. Gina Mercer, by contrast, interprets the novel as a feminist study, casting Malfred as an Eve figure, who

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¹⁴¹ Revelation, 3.20.
¹⁴² Revelation 2.17.
‘desires knowledge of the most disturbing, even deadly kind,’ an interpretation which I would suggest is too narrowly feminist.

In her study of Frame’s interest in Buddhism, Cindy Gabrielle argues that ‘the Tibetan Book of the Dead forms the backdrop’ to the novel, and that Malfred has already died, Karemoana being a version of Hades or Limbo. Similarly, Marc Delrez, in his article published in Ring of Fire, intuits a link with William Golding’s Pincher Martin, published in 1956, finding the similarities ‘truly remarkable’: Martin’s story is a seaman’s tale of apparent island survival after shipwreck, the reader only learning at the end of the novel that Martin drowned at the time the ship sank, and was therefore presumably in limbo or purgatory. Although at a literal level, the stone Malfred is still clutching when she is discovered contradicts this idea, Delrez maintains in his later work that Malfred is metaphorically dead at the beginning of her journey, and that through the imagery of decay and decrepitude on the island, ‘the idea of her death is never allowed to slip from the reader’s mind.’

The remarkably wide range of interpretive critical writing about A State of Siege highlights the novel’s ambiguities and the extent to which readers bring their own experience, reading and perceptions to bear in their interpretation of it. I would argue that these multiple possibilities are entirely deliberate, evidenced by the interlacing of the ambiguities of film noir with the apparent certainties of the biblical texts in Malfred’s doomed search for a paradise garden, a level of ambiguity on which Charles Brasch remarks in his comment on the novel as ‘above all a poem – much-veined richly-coloured stone that one wants to turn over and over in one’s hand – a crystal that seems to contain all worlds’.

144 Mercer, Janet Frame: Subversive Fictions, p. 115.
145 Gabrielle, p. 55.
147 Delrez, Manifold Utopia, p. 139.
The Bible is the one inescapable text common to all readers in English, both indirectly by virtue of its legacy within the language itself; and by the way writers have also responded to its language and rhythms. Frame exploits the particular location of the Bible in the English language, its lexis, syntax and narratives so firmly embedded in both everyday expression and in spiritual and ethical discourse, in a way which invites the reader’s complicity in exploring layers of significance, ambiguity and allusion in the novels.
Chapter Six: Shakespeare

6.1 Upon the Heath

As an aspirant author, the schoolgirl Janet Frame knew that she had to engage with Shakespeare as ‘it would be impossible to think of being a writer if I didn’t like reading Shakespeare’. Her teacher’s vivid reading of the witches’ opening speech from *Macbeth* captured her imagination, and Frame was cast to play Lady Macbeth in a school production of the sleep-walking scene, though the project was overtaken by the pressure of exams and did not materialise. Her thoughts were for ‘the wild Scottish moors and battles and battlements and the haunting [...] and in the language used to describe the weather, the sky, the dark, to match the nightmare within the characters’, and as she matured she developed an acute awareness of the magical power of words to create a world on a bare stage, or a blank page.

Mark Houlahan, who has written extensively on the impact of Shakespeare in New Zealand, refers to the arrival of settlers with ‘double-columned Bibles and Shakespeares’. These volumes have been brought from Britain as ‘twin talismans of sacred and secular English authority’. Frank Sargeson makes the same point in his Shakespeare centenary essay for *Landfall*, when he writes of ‘powers attaching to his [Shakespeare’s] name which were as mysterious as they were undefined’. These comments bring to mind both Frame’s and Istina Mavet’s use of their Shakespeare editions as talismans. In an earlier article, Houlahan echoes early New Zealand critical commentary on Frame in his brief note that ‘Frame enlists Shakespeare on the side of those in revolt against 1950s conformity’, and

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refers to the general ‘mimicry of Englishness’.

This viewpoint might be considered a harsh criticism of New Zealand settlers, who were behaving as emigrants do the world over: taking with them their religion, language, music, stories, poems, songs and drama, as well as their trades; emotional succour as well as practical survival skills.

Houlahan’s article for the 2002 *Shakespeare Survey* surveys the relationship with Shakespeare of two New Zealand writers: Ngaio Marsh, and Janet Frame; the Australian Randolph Stow; and the Samoan Albert Wendt. In his comments about Frame we can see the shift in perception of Frame’s work from the quasi-sociological approach of the 1950s and 1960s, characterised by a critical reaction to Frame’s early novels as a satirical attack on puritanical New Zealand culture, focusing instead on Frame’s life-long relationship with Shakespeare. He asserts that Frame ‘takes the tradition-bound Shakespeare she inherited and uses him as a rhetorical weapon against that society’, though his analysis of her use of *King Lear* illustrates a much broader creative imagination. This development is underlined by Houlahan’s more recent comment that the entry in the 1998 *Oxford Companion* was ‘written a long time ago. Likely I would frame issues differently now’.

In the 2002 *Shakespeare Survey*, Houlahan makes the point that ‘Shakespeare pervades Frame’s fictions more elusively’ than is the case in other New Zealand literature. He notes Frame’s ‘freewheeling implosions’ and her idiosyncratic and original intertextual use of her knowledge of Shakespeare, ‘a Shakespeare deeply recalled, a Shakespeare of isolated fragments of words which float into Frame’s worlds to radiate their textual power’.

Frame shared her love of Shakespeare with Frank Sargeson, and had the opportunity to discuss their favourite plays while she was living in Sargeson’s army hut. Sargeson reveals

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8 Mark Houlahan, personal email, 12 December 2015.
in a letter to Winston Rhodes that he had once been cast as Ariel, soon after he went to live in Auckland in 1925, although this proposed production of The Tempest was abandoned.\textsuperscript{10} Michael King refers to Sargeson’s habit of reading in bed in the morning – often Milton or Shakespeare.\textsuperscript{11} In 1940, Sargeson wrote to his friend Peter Dawson, referring to Dawson’s imaginative letters, that ‘I prefer the poetic (if I may use the term) people who make you expand to the scientific people who try to tie you down. The difference to my mind is the difference between Shakespeare and Bernard Shaw’.\textsuperscript{12} The death of his close friend Harry Doyle in 1971 brought Sargeson’s mind back to Shakespeare again, recalling the death of Falstaff, and King Lear.\textsuperscript{13} In ‘Shakespeare and the Kiwi’ Sargeson, having tended to dismiss the playwright in his youth, describes the attachment he developed to Shakespeare as an adult, becoming ‘drunk with the understanding that the totality of splendour which attached to the world of Shakespeare’s imagination was inseparably rooted in words’, and accepting the ‘positive invitation to enter the landscape of the poet’s imagination’, a view which Frame had developed as a child at school.\textsuperscript{14}

Frame’s love-affair with Shakespeare’s plays and his poetry developed further at the University of Otago, where she listened to Professor Ramsay ‘analysing each word of Shakespeare, transmitting to us his own sense of wonder at Shakespeare’s language and its meaning. Like the sea from Oamaru, Shakespeare and his language travelled with me to Dunedin and were treasured for sharing my new life and the life of “the girl that was gone”’.\textsuperscript{15} Professor Herbert Ramsay was appointed Professor of English Language and Literature at the University of Otago from January 1921, when he was thirty-four, and led the

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\textsuperscript{10} Sargeson, Letter to H. Winston Rhodes, 19 February 1966, Shieff, p. 382.
\textsuperscript{12} Sargeson, Letter to Peter (E. P.) Dawson, 13 May 1940, Shieff, p. 29.
\textsuperscript{13} King, Frank Sargeson, p. 378.
\textsuperscript{14} Sargeson, ‘Shakespeare and the Kiwi’, p. 51.
\textsuperscript{15} Frame, Complete Autobiography, p. 157.
\end{flushleft}
University’s English department until his retirement in 1950. A Scotsman, he had taken First Class Honours in Classics at St Andrew’s, Scotland, and had been Associate Professor at the University of Western Australia, Perth, before coming to Dunedin. Professor Ramsay’s influence on Frame endured, and Frame’s life-long friend and fellow-student, Sheila Natusch records that his ‘magnificent lectures on Shakespeare [...] all delivered in a rich Scots burr, stayed in our minds for good’. Professor Ramsay remained in their thoughts and in their correspondence. In 1966, Frame wrote agreeing with Sheila that it was ‘exciting that Shakespeare and Prof may be published together at last’. Although Frame’s letter does not mention the nature of this proposed publication, Sheila Natusch makes it clear that Ramsay was concerned ‘with apparent botch-ups of the texts as written by Shakespeare’ and that Professor Ramsay had difficulty getting his work published, as his work failed to ‘cut much ice with these [sic] who decide these things, the makers-or-breakers’. In 1994, Professor Ramsay’s son Frank was attempting to complete his father’s work correcting the original copier’s errors, and had sent printings of their emendations of four plays to Yale University Press for their consideration.

Ramsay shared problems over publication with his fellow lecturer, Dr Gregor Cameron, whose work was turned down by the University of Otago Press. Frame wrote in 1980 to Sheila suggesting Dr. Cameron try the University of California Press, at Berkeley, after she had met Kenneth Burke, the American academic, at the Writers’ Colony, Yaddo. Burke, she said in a letter in 1980, ‘reminded me of our great professors and lecturers at Otago

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19 Natusch, p. 29.
– full of daring imaginative thought, engrossed in literary studies’. In the historical account of the university, Ramsay is described as a man of ‘often unorthodox views’.

The two friends visited Professor Ramsay in his retirement, Frame marking one such occasion with a poem, celebrating the love of language they shared:

Clone,
plene in his rale after so calid a time had milled its fee,
durant, he burndered, cleamed in the day’s coltering zone.

Then we sat under the plum tree
on the wet grass-covered stone
while he talked of Hamlet.

The set plays for 1943, Frame’s first year at the University of Otago, were *Antony and Cleopatra*, *King Lear* and *Measure for Measure*, and in 1944 were *The Tempest*, *Macbeth* and *Troilus and Cressida*. The plays Frame draws on most are *Macbeth*, *King Lear* and *The Tempest*.

Macbeth’s witches visit several of Frame’s protagonists and make their presence felt early in the Suffolk village of Little Burgelstatham in *The Adaptable Man*, where ‘The Heath is a lonely place. It’s damp and cold; witches get rheumatism’. This is the primeval heath which links Little Burgelstatham’s wild and magical, pagan past with its apparently sleepy present, where the ‘train stops briefly, and will soon not stop at all’ reminiscent of Edward Thomas’s ‘Adelstrop’. Beneath the Arcadian pastoral scene is the ‘burgel, [...] a burial place of the heathen’, after which the village is named; and reference to the witches on Macbeth’s Heath alerts the reader at the outset to the hidden irrational feelings which lurk behind the everyday human facade. The journalist Unity Foreman, sitting in her London office, decides to disregard her early lines for her ‘Letter from the Countryside’ column, but in referencing

22 Morrell, p.174.
24 University of Otago Calendar, 1943-44.
Macbeth’s witches these lines are closer to the undercurrents of village life than she imagines:

Surely nothing is drowned, face-downwards,
Turning in violence from the Olde English dream?

Is there a place for the dying toad, like a lump of wound lava? spurt of blood,
the adder, grinning rat, deadly nightshade?26

In *Towards Another Summer*, novelist Grace Cleave’s encouragement to the journalist wanting to visit: ‘Do, do’, causes her to envisage herself as ‘the old frustrated witch dancing round the cauldron’,27 her own words bringing to mind the incantation:

And like a rat without a tail,
In a sieve I’ll thither sail
I’ll do, I’ll do and I’ll do.28

Frame’s intertextual musing, as Jan Cronin notes, is in keeping with her assertion that ‘nothing was simple, known, safe, believed, identified. Boundaries were not possible, where nothing finished, shapes encircled, and there was no beginning’.29 The witches come in a dream to Toby Withers in *Owls Do Cry*, disturbing him in the words of the witches’ incantation which his sister Daphne had taught him, ‘on the heath with Hecate, in thunder and lightning,’ and reveal themselves as his three sisters, Francie, Chicks and Daphne, rehearsing all his fears and insecurities before reverting to ‘bony women shrieking Aii-aii-aii,’ as his dream fades.30

In *A State of Siege*, during Malfred’s long sleepless night in her isolated Karemoana bach, Frame takes issue with Macbeth’s view of ‘sleep that knits up the ravelled sleave of care’ as ‘neither hopeful nor exact’. She continues by asking if it ‘would not be more comforting for the many who are not Shakespeare if sleep were to destroy rather than knit up

26 *The Adaptable Man*, p. 45.
27 Frame, *Towards Another Summer*, p. 28.
28 *Macbeth*, I.3.8-10.
30 Frame, *Owls Do Cry*, pp. 79-83.
all the ravellings?" The Shakespearean links between dreams, sleep and comfort are pursued as Malfred’s anxiety gradually increases, and initially, ‘she had not time to let her fear make way for fantasy, though she remembered the knocking on the gate in *Macbeth*’. Eventually, however, the fearful knocking in *Macbeth* is interwoven powerfully with the images of knocking and the stone from Revelation, and with the image of Wilfred as Banquo’s bloody ghost, as Malfred’s fear and the tension increase. When finally the stone crashes through the window the wild Shakespearean storm enters Malfred’s house, and all the comforts and safety of home are shattered.

Images from *Macbeth* alluding to unbearable distress appear elsewhere in Frame’s novels. In *Daughter Buffalo*, Lennox’s account of the tempestuous night of Duncan’s murder also makes its presence felt to Edelman, dreaming of his father’s visit to his grandfather at his old people’s home. The two ageing men, engaged in mutually incomprehensible monologues, warn of ‘dire combustion and confused events new hatched to the woeful time’. In *Intensive Care*, Frame uses an elliptical reference to Macduff’s horror at the murder of his wife and children, ‘all my pretty ones at one fell swoop,’ to convey the devastating sense of loss of part of themselves felt by the maimed and disabled inmates of Cullin Hall.

The tempestuous storms in *Macbeth* and *King Lear* are associated with the barren heath and the absence of shelter, a timeless, isolated terrain. The epigraph for *Living in the Maniototo* is attributed to the *Encyclopaedia of New Zealand*, which describes the Maniototo as ‘unforgettable landscapes composed of severe lines’ deriving its name from the Maori, ‘mania, a plain; toto, bloody’ for a novel which explores, among other ideas, the significance of place as well as of Shakespeare.

31 *Macbeth* II.2.37; Frame, *A State of Siege*, p. 179.
32 Frame, *A State of Siege*, p. 84.
33 Frame, *Daughter Buffalo*, p. 417; Macbeth II.3. 56
the Maniototo suggests that this particular wild heath does not lack spiritual wealth, and in *Living in the Maniototo* the heath becomes a metaphor for the artist’s imagination, in contrast with the urban wastelands of Blenheim (Frame’s name for Auckland in this novel) and Baltimore, a city of cages and howling wolves. The Garretts, who lend Mavis their Baltimore house to write her novel while they travel in Europe, pay a kind of empty homage to Shakespeare, and have reduced him to a hollow mask, like those created by Madame Lemaire, the novelist in Nathalie Sarraute's novel, *Planetarium*, which Frame so admired. The mask is ‘toothless, eyeless’ but the Garretts describe it as ‘the usual likeness’. In their house of replicas, Irving Garratt ‘spoke familiarly, as of a cousin or uncle, as people do of Shakespeare who keeps open house and is therefore everybody’s prized relative’.

In Frame’s imagination, the Shakespearean heath connects with Thomas Hardy’s Egdon Heath, the Brontës’ wild Yorkshire moors, and the titular terrain of the Maniototo. The heath is a wilderness where people are either at one with the forces of nature, or at their mercy. Frame alludes repeatedly to the wild places of *Macbeth*, *King Lear* and *The Tempest*, and in *The Carpathians* Mattina Brecon ponders on ‘the rediscovery of the old truth that human beings everywhere had not travelled very far from the heath in *Macbeth*’. The magical and incomprehensible devastation of Kowhai Street robs most of its inhabitants of the trappings of their lives and their ‘world of imposture’. As Janet Wilson asserts, Mattina is ‘spared the devastation wreaked by the gravity star because she understands the importance of artists in society and their value in recovering the meaning of the past through memory and language’.

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36 Frame, *Living in the Maniototo*, p. 16.
39 Frame, *The Carpathians*, p. 84.
The heath in *King Lear* is the ultimate expression of desolation, grotesque cruelty, and helpless suffering. It is the setting for a consideration of humanity and what it is to be a human being, above the level of the dumb beast. The heath and Lear’s distress are recalled in the experiences of two inmates of mental hospitals, Daphne in *Owls Do Cry*, and Istina Mavet in *Faces in the Water*; Godfrey Rainbird, the latter-day Lazarus; and Edward Strang, Vera’s imagined husband in *Scented Gardens for the Blind*. Daphne’s experiences of the operating procedures call to mind the blinded Gloucester as the nurses order the women to take their teeth out ‘as a precaution against choking, your eyes out, like Gloucester, to save you sight of the cliff and the greater gods who keep their “dreadful pother” above your head’. Istina’s copy of Shakespeare’s plays acts as a talisman, and ‘it seemed as if the book understood how things were and agreed to be company for me and to breathe, even without my opening it, an overwhelming dignity of richness’. The inmates of Lawn Lodge, the ward for the most intractable patients, recall for Istina the figure of Lear, wandering on the heath and the

Poor naked wretches wheresoe’er you are
That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm.

Like Daphne, Istina thinks of ‘the confusion of people, like Gloucester, being led near the cliffs’. Edward Strang is unsettled by his daughter Erlene’s lack of speech, and sees it as a threat to both sanity and survival, since spoken language for Edward is an essential part of being fully human, and sane. Edward recalls Lear on the stormy heath, addressed by a semi-coherent Mad Tom, who appears bereft of all the trappings which separate man from animal.

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41 Frame, *Owls Do Cry*, p. 46. Further references to *Owls Do Cry* in this chapter are given parenthetically in the text.
42 Frame, *Faces in the Water*, p. 98.
43 Frame, *Faces in the Water*, p. 98; *King Lear*, III.4.28-29.
He quotes Lear’s words to Tom, ‘thou art the thing itself; unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art’.  

A vaguer memory of King Lear comes also to Godfrey Rainbird. His inability to find answers to his family’s questions and their lack of empathy with him prompt a pained remembrance of Cordelia’s compassionate response to a confused and tormented Lear, ‘No cause. No cause.’ The words are ‘from some play he’d seen’ lodged somewhere in his mind, title and playwright’s name forgotten. In his distress, the half-remembered play re-emerges from deep in Godfrey’s memory as he identifies himself with ‘an old man on a heath and thunder and lightning’.

6.2 Wild Waters

Although Frame quotes, echoes or alludes to lines from several of Shakespeare’s plays, it is The Tempest which appears to have stirred her imagination more than any other. The play’s ambivalence, uncertainties and challenge to preconceptions pervade the whole of Frame’s oeuvre, and its deployment of theatrical magic features strongly in her later novels. Diane Caney writes interestingly about the inspiration of The Tempest, drawing chiefly on Frame’s life-writing, with some reference to the early novels, Owls Do Cry and Faces in the Water. She focuses on the imagery of stormy seas, magic and otherness; and also on the themes of exile and return, drawing on colonial issues and the control exerted over Caliban, an obvious connection for Frame, born into a colonial culture. I wish to focus in this section, however, on the storm, Prospero’s magic, and the magic of language.

Frame, The Rainbirds, p. 436; King Lear, IV.7.75.
Frame writes of learning Ariel’s song, ‘Where the bee sucks’, at school, and studied *The Tempest* with Professor Ramsay.\(^{47}\) By the time she found herself in hospital, Frame ‘had absorbed the spirit of *The Tempest*. Even Prospero in his book-lined cell had suffered shipwreck and selfwreck; his island was unreachable except through storm’.\(^{48}\) The identification with Prospero is intensely personal, as Caney illustrates. Both Frame and Prospero are exiles from their own lands. Prospero, the word-magician is saved by his books, just as Frame, confined to a hospital or living in Europe and America, is saved through writing hers; and words for Frame had always been ‘instruments of magic’.\(^{49}\)

When Jane Campion’s film, *An Angel at my Table* (1990), based on Frame’s autobiography, won the special prize at the Venice Film Festival in 1990, the Italian academic Claudio Gorlier asked Frame in an interview about her relationship with Prospero:

> Magic is a keyword in your work. One of your novels, *Owls Do Cry*, takes its title from a line in *The Tempest* by Shakespeare. Do you feel a certain kinship with Prospero, the protagonist of *The Tempest*, and his magic art?

Frame plays down the personal connection, however, and is reluctant to stress the closeness of the kinship, ‘because if I was I would be Madame Prospero;’ and stresses what is for her the important point that ‘*The Tempest* is about an artist finishing his art, somehow with overall magic help’.\(^{50}\)

Ariel’s song supplied the title for *Owls Do Cry*; Ariel’s phrase ‘tricks of desperation’ forms the title of the first part of Volume Two of the *Complete Autobiography*; and this same exchange with Prospero is its epigraph. Frame’s novels are suffused with the imagery of storms, islands, the sea and magic, and the stormy seas become an image of inner turmoil.

\(^{47}\) University of Otago Calendar, 1943-44.  
\(^{48}\) Frame, *Complete Autobiography*, p. 239.  
\(^{50}\) Claudio Gorlier, ‘Parla Janet l’angelo della Nuova Zelanda’, *La Stampa*, 29 Sept 1990. Frame’s English response is taken from *In Her Own Words*, p. 148, from which Gorlier’s questions are omitted.
Ariel, trapped and howling in a tree until Prospero ‘made gape the pine’ and freed him, suffered ‘torment/To lay upon the damned’.  

His piercing cries find an echo in Daphne’s ‘songs from the dead room’ of the mental hospital, where telegraph poles replace Ariel’s tree and ‘the wind is lodged forever in the telegraph wire for crying there on a grey day’ (48). The same image occurs in the description of the storm on Karemoana, as ‘the wind screamed in the telephone and electric wires,’ and here the wild storm abates only to leave Malfred with a terrifying silence rather than a release from her turmoil.  

Toby Withers, Daphne’s brother in *Owls Do Cry*, resurfaces in *The Edge of the Alphabet*, becoming a protagonist and taking a much bigger rôle in the later novel. His desire to return to his homeland leads him to embark on the sea-voyage to Britain, and in a confused pre-seizure state while waiting for his ship to set sail, he addresses his rescuer from the turbulent sea as ‘You witch-octopus whom I loved, who in the dark distressful ocean manoeuvred for me’. For Daphne, ‘the sea will creep into the sleep of people and flow round and round in their head, eating out caverns where it echoes and surges till the people become eroded’ (19). At night in Daphne’s dormitory were ‘the rigid, afraid and wandering people, knowing the mountain outside and the wild storms there, huddling into their bedclothes’ (137); and Toby dreams of his sisters, Francie and Daphne, ‘in a storm they could not see or understand’ (30). The natural dangers of the sea form Istina’s ‘festering dreams’ where a great gap opened in the ice floe between myself and the other people whom I watched, with their world, drifting away through a violet-coloured sea where hammerhead sharks in tropical ease swam side by side with the seals and the polar bears. I was alone on the ice.

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51 *The Tempest*, 1.2.292; 288-89.
54 Frame, *Faces in the Water*, p. 4.
Standing up to get dressed, Istina is ‘buffeted by the waves in the mid-ocean of the room’, and at the point where she faces the possibility of a leucotomy and feeling ‘no longer human’ Istina knows she would have to find shelter in ‘a safe nest between two rocks on an exposed coast mauled by the sea’, a haven, like Prospero’s, to shelter from the stormy elements of her life.

6.3 Shakespearean Dreams

Frame aimed in her writing ‘to make the shape best suited to the time, the place, and the dream’, and she alludes frequently to Shakespearean dreams and dream-like states, magical happenings and the irrational unconscious feelings and desires dreams express. Frame recognised a personal imperative to devote her ‘time wholly to making designs from my dreams’ and described her mother ‘who wrote poems as remedies’ as ‘a dreamer’. Like Shakespeare, she uses dream as a creative device, anticipating a serious response and an awareness of the importance of dreams in exploring an alternative reality.

References to Shakespearean dreams are frequently suggestive of a romantic possibility, and alternative life. Francie, preparing to leave school, had studied A Midsummer Night’s Dream at school, and knew ‘that a man called Shakespeare, in a wood near Athens, contrived a moonlit dream’ (20); but Francie, who dreamed of singing in opera, and had ‘sent away for the free book on becoming an opera singer’ finds those dreams at an end when her father announces that she will go to work at the woollen mill (28). Grace Cleave’s homesick musings find expression in ‘I know a place’, not where ‘the wild thyme grows’ but where ‘the matagouri, the manuka, the cabbage tree grow’. Toby day-dreams as he pores over the

55 Frame, Faces in the Water, p. 58.
56 Frame, Faces in the Water, p. 190.
58 Frame, ‘Beginnings’. Landfall 73, p. 46.
60 Frame, Towards Another Summer, p. 59; A Midsummer Night’s Dream II.1.249.
atlas ‘How simple to travel, and on a night like this, a spring night with the air outside so thick with hawthorn and plum and powdered catkin that it had to be elbowed and brushed aside before it could be breathed’ (77) and his thoughts echo Lorenzo’s wonder at the beauties of the natural world

In such a night as this,
When the sweet wind did gently kiss the trees.61

Alwyn muses on the futility of people’s hopes and dreams, referring to the dreams of The Tempest and perhaps echoing those of A Midsummer Night’s Dream.

a pitiful hope [...] that the new world was near, that this was the new time, that man could at last, feeding upon his burden of dreams, become his dreams, prove the truth of “we are such stuff as dreams are made on”; dreams would blossom from dreams.62

The dreams of Frame’s protagonists often turn to nightmare, rather than delivering a ‘new world’, and are linked to a collapse of the rational mind and to madness, like Lady Macbeth’s sleepwalking. Shakespeare’s readers and audiences have always been indebted to his insights into the human psyche and his dramatic use of dreams in connection with troubled minds, and in a letter Frame wrote to her psychiatrist Dr. Cawley, she refers to ‘your friend Shakespeare, who, as usual, knew everything’.63 This view of Shakespeare’s omniscience is also expressed by Charles Dickens, passing Bethlehem Hospital (Bedlam) on a night walk through London in 1860, and linking dreams and sanity, he wonders are not the sane and the insane equal at night as the sane lie dreaming? [...] I wonder that the great master who knew everything, when he called Sleep the death of each day’s life, did not call Dreams the insanity of each day’s sanity.64

Confined to a modern-day mental hospital, Istina cannot escape her nightmares. She tells the reader ‘I dream and cannot wake and I am cast over the cliff and hang there by two fingers that are danced and trampled on by the Giant Unreality’.65

61 The Merchant of Venice, V.1.1-2.
63 Frame, letter to Dr. Cawley, 4 August 1964.
65 Frame, Faces in the Water, p. 7.
Dreams are a link with memory, often suppressed memory and our inability to escape from the past. Like her brother Toby, Chicks is distressed by her dreams. She dreams of herself at a circus with a panther, ‘I could not remember my act’ (103). She is even more unnerved by her dream of the desert in which ‘the sand was grains of gold’ (115), where she calls out for her parents and Francie, Toby and Daphne, but ‘Nobody came’ (117). Chicks deceives herself; suppresses any imaginative or questioning thoughts within herself; and in her dreams is confronted with the fears she cannot face in her waking life. When Amy dies, Chicks is embarrassed by the prospect of her more sophisticated acquaintances sneering at her. In her italicised reverie, however, she remembers her mother who, ‘knew her bigness and sweetness and could not move for spilling some of it’ (118). She stops herself abruptly feeling ‘I am half Daphne in writing this, it is not my usual way; as if a spell had come over me’ (119); and Daphne had also seen there was a spell on Francie, who had got hold ‘of the wrong magic’ (32).

Dream is also a nightmare for Grace Cleave, a modern nightmare of Prospero’s storm in which ‘her ship explodes, is burned; flash in the sky, stain in the sea; nothing human recovered’. As Grace emerges from her dream she asks ‘Oh God why have I been deceived? Which world do I inhabit? Down, dream, down!’ She has no Miranda to plead for

A brave vessel
Who had, no doubt, some noble creature in her,
Dashed all to pieces.

Dream as memory, intuition, and nightmare come together most vividly in Naomi’s letters to her father, Tom Livingstone, whom she addresses as ‘First Dad’, Auden’s phrase for Adam before the curse. Her letters act as a chorus, commenting on the action and the various strands of the narrative. She appears to absorb other people’s dreams, and dreams Tom’s suffocation of Cissy Everest and parts of Tom’s later life. As with Prospero’s magic, we can never be

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67 The Tempest, 1.2.6-8.
entirely certain where reality ends and imaginative fantasy begins. Truth is elusive. There is a thread of violence and abuse which runs through the entire novel; the reader is uncertain whose testimony, or whose memory conveys the truth; ‘all dreams lead back to the nightmare garden’; 68 and Naomi’s letters, discussed in Chapter Four, suggest her father was predatory. Tom’s other daughter Pearl suppresses nightmares of her own. Loving and caring relationships appear to be beyond reach in this family, but in the ambiguities created by this dream-like novel it is not possible to be sure if Tom has sexually abused both daughters, or abused only one of them and neglected the other.

The ambiguities of Frame’s novels find their most striking form in Living in the Maniototo, with its ‘magical technology’69 and technical wizardry. Mavis is diverted from her novel by the need to write the story of her imaginary guests, narrated to one of her alter egos, Alice Thumb. Magic intrudes on reality, as though Prospero were hiding in the shadows. The death of Tommy, the Baltimore artisan jeweller, early in the novel is a sudden shocking ‘plague of unreality’ as he dissolves in ‘blue fury’ detergent ‘and all that remained of Tommy were two faded footprints on the floor’.70 Baffled, Mavis and Brian agreed to say nothing of the incident, trying to understand how ‘worlds that we know only in sleep and dream and mythology’ intrude into what they understand as reality.71 At the end of the novel, Mavis is stunned, as is the reader, by the brutally sudden revelation of her own self-delusion regarding the imaginary guests and imaginary inheritance from the supposedly dead Garretts: ‘—how snugly I had nested myself within it!’72 Even worse is the shocking news that her dear friend Brian really had died and that she had missed the telegram from his sister, a piece of ‘real’ information lost while Mavis/Alice was consumed by her fantasy. Mavis had declared earlier

68 Frame, Intensive Care, p. 32. 
69 Frame, Living in the Maniototo, p. 39. 
70 Frame, Living in the Maniototo, p. 38. 
71 Frame, Living in the Maniototo, p. 39. 
72 Frame, Living in the Maniototo, p. 236.
that she had ‘decided to break the rules [...] because nothing in art is forbidden.’

When the Garretts return, however, she desperately tries ‘seizing facts’, but to no avail, as reality and the world of the imagination painfully collide.

In her last novel, *The Carpathians*, Frame makes use of elements of the inexplicable which some critics refer to as magical realism. The term was coined in the 1920s in relation to the visual arts, and though elements of magical realism are as old as story-telling itself, the term has come to be associated most with the Latin American writing of, among others, Alejo Carpentier, Jorge Luis Borges and Gabriel García Márquez for the inclusion of unreal elements within an otherwise naturalistic fiction, and Franz Kafka, whose work Frame had discovered in the Oamaru Public Library in 1953. Frame was essentially interested in legend, mythology and folklore, which I will discuss in the next chapter, and it is this interest which she shares with Marquez.

Although Frame undoubtedly drew inspiration from a wide variety of sources, she segues suggestively from one to another, without adhering to any genre in particular. I would argue that the major inspiration for the Kowhai Street letter-storm is *The Tempest*, in which Frame took a life-time interest, and in which Prospero conjures up a tempest to shipwreck his treacherous brother. *The Carpathians* abounds with the imagery of *The Tempest*. The wailing, shrieking, sobbing Kowai Street residents with their torn clothes look and sound like victims of a natural catastrophe, and ‘from each house came a succession of horrifying human cries as if from someone trapped within the walls’. It is the sound of *The Tempest’s* shipwrecked passengers, cursed by the boatswain: ‘A plague upon this howling! They are louder than the weather or our office.’ As the storm abates, Mattina sees ‘the halo of morning light on the farthest peaks of the mountains, as if beyond the peaks there were another world with another

73 Frame, *Living in the Maniototo*, p. 68.
74 Frame, *Living in the Maniototo*, p. 239.
77 *The Tempest*, 1.1.34-35.
morning and promise of a day that bore no relation to Kowhai Street. In this, she appears to have an intimation akin to Miranda’s ‘brave new world’, sharing the same sense of wondering uncertain awe.

_The Tempest_ is an act of imaginative collusion between the writer-magician and the audience, just as _The Carpathians_ is between the writer and the reader; and the reader is deceived as to the ‘truth’ and to the identity of the narrator. J. H. B. warns us at the outset that this is his ‘second novel’, but our imaginative involvement with Mattina’s journey of exploration causes us to forget these words, until we emerge from the dream and are disabused by the revelation that John Henry Brecon’s parents, Mattina and Jake, died when he was seven years old. We have been deceived, but we are agents in our own deception, just as Prospero reminds his audience of their collaboration in the magic they have just witnessed:

> Gentle breath of yours my sails  
> Must fill, or else my project fails

Frame’s spell, like Prospero’s, is broken; and we return to our own worlds.

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79 _The Tempest_, V.1.183.
80 Frame, _The Carpathians_, p. 25.
Chapter Seven: Tending the Myths

7.1 Folklore

Janet Frame saw in Shakespeare a kindred spirit with an understanding of the significance of dream, myth and folklore and the interconnectedness of these primeval elements of culture; and she makes repeated reference to poetry from ancient oral cultures, to classical mythology, Anglo-Saxon poetry, traditional ballads, nursery rhymes, fairy tales and folklore. In this chapter I will investigate the significance Frame perceived in folklore and mythology, and the ways in which she used these elements of traditional literature and oral culture in her novels, with particular reference, finally, to The Carpathians, in which we see the culmination of Frame’s developing interest in Maori mythology, language and culture. Grace Cleave, in Towards Another Summer, insists that ‘we must tend the myths [...] only that way shall we survive’. Frame’s concept of myth is a broad one, embracing folklore, poetry and song from oral tradition, the biblical myth of Genesis, classical and Maori mythology, the northern European gods, and the myths more recent cultures have created for themselves.

Frame takes particular pleasure in folk tales, and in her 1975 article for New Zealand’s Education journal, she writes of her delight in Grimms’ tales, and of how much they taught her and satisfied her needs as a child:

I found the book so satisfying. I think now, in the convention of its story-telling, the journeys, meetings, the matter-of-fact descriptions of marvels, the talking animals and trees, and in the way the stories had their heart in family – brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers, rich and poor, whose goodness and wickedness had been found out and described without fear. Any act was possible. Anything could happen. Nothing was forbidden.

The English use of the term ‘fairy tale’ for these folk tales is misleading. Fairy tales, with their magical elements, rarely feature fairies as such, and are certainly not as innocent as the term ‘fairy tale’ might suggest; still less a triviality to be dismissed. The stories retold by the

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1 Frame, Towards Another Summer, p. 98.
2 Frame, ‘Tales from Grimm’, Education 24.9 (1975), republished in In Her own Words, p. 56.
Brothers Grimm are *Märchen* (Tales), *Hausmärchen* (Household Tales) or *Kindermärchen* (Children’s Tales). Perrault’s stories are simply *Contes* (Tales). They are directly told folk tales of the vicissitudes of life, often of childhood, of cruelty and survival, related in a simple style accessible to very young children; and I take the terms ‘fairy tale’ and ‘folk tale’ to be synonymous and interchangeable in this context.

Frame’s attachment to these tales, especially Grimms’ Tales, and her sense of their value are shared by a number of earlier scholars and writers. One of these was Louis MacNeice, who would have been a familiar name to Frame through his work for BBC radio and his poetry. He attended an English boarding-school as a child, a long way from his home and family in Northern Ireland, and tells how ‘fairy stories have always meant much to me as a person, even when I was at public school where to admit this meant losing face’;\(^3\) and Charlotte Brontë’s character, Jane Eyre, was enchanted by the stories her nursemaid Bessie told her on winter evenings ‘from old fairy tales and older ballads’.\(^4\)

The importance of fairy tales for children was confirmed by the eminent Austrian-American psychoanalyst Dr. Bruno Bettelheim’s hugely influential Freudian study of fairy tales, which was published in the USA and the UK in 1976, shortly after Frame’s article for the New Zealand *Education* journal, quoted above. This work had appeared in the *New Yorker* in December 1975, was republished in the UK by Peregrine books in 1978 and reprinted as a Penguin book in 1991, so gaining a wide readership, in particular among people working with children.

Frame’s only book for children, *Mona Minim and the Smell of the Sun* (1969) makes clear in its opening her feeling for the timelessness of fairy tale: ‘Once upon a time, not long ago, almost now’.\(^5\) She uses the traditional opening, but adds her own update, bringing the time-honoured beginning up to the present. The story tells the tale of a House Ant [sic], Mona

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Minim, who longs to see and smell the outside world and gain her independence, but falls through a crack in the stairs and is rescued and adopted by a kindly Garden Ant, before finally setting off on her return journey home – a lost-and-found theme common to fairy tales. As with Grimms’ tales, Frame’s story is a direct if lyrical tale for children – with a darker heart to it – which younger and older children and adults can enjoy at their own level of understanding. In her review for the New Zealand Listener, Marion McLeod expressed her doubts about its suitability as a children’s tale ‘for the innocent child reader’ as the ‘story is quite ominous in its overtones, and I suspect a sensitive young reader might well be upset by the dark paradox at the heart of the tale’.\(^6\) There seem to have been no such doubts in the minds of book reviewers for the New York Times in 1969 when the story was chosen as one of the ten best children’s books in the 9-12 category, as a ‘wise and gently ironic fantasy’.\(^7\) Frame dedicated the story to the young son of her American friends, the Marquands, and to her niece, Pamela Gordon. Marc Delrez agrees with McLeod, however, asserting that ‘one can understand why her predilection for confronting themes and mediations was thought to make her [Frame’s] tale unsuitable for its implied public’, and he makes a brief mention of Bettelheim’s views on the value of fairy tales to children, ‘if one is to believe Bettelheim’. Delrez argues that the fairy tale is for Frame ‘a kind of facade for her more personal existential explorations, which are ushered in as it were through the back door of the text,’ identifying links with her adult fiction.\(^8\) These comments by McLeod and Delrez miss the point that Frame and Bettelheim have identified, however, namely the essential dark heart of all fairy tales; and like the New York Times reviewer, they value the wisdom of these stories.

Bettelheim held a view of fairy tales that ‘more can be learnt from them about the inner problems of human beings, and of their right solutions to their predicaments in any

\(^6\) Marion McLeod, review of Mona Minim and the Smell of the Sun, New Zealand Listener, 5 September 1992, pp. 52-53.
society than from any other source within a child’s comprehension’, a point of view with which Frame demonstrably agrees. It is a view also expressed by the Swiss-German psychoanalyst Dr. Alice Miller, who made therapeutic use of fairy tales in her work with disturbed children, and asserts that fairy tales are ‘where the whole truth about human cruelty, as only a child can experience it, finds expression’.

Scholars and writers have been enchanted by these traditional tales, some through being asked initially to translate them. The American Professor of German, Jack Zipes, and the British Czech scholar, A. H. Wratislaw, began, like the Brothers Grimm, as translators of German and Eastern European tales; and the novelist Angela Carter’s translation of Perrault’s tales from French inspired her feminist revisiting of the genre in *The Bloody Chamber*, as well as in the stories she wrote for children. The Russian Vladimir Propp attempted to analyse and codify the various types of Russian tales and their narrative elements in 1928, and his work was translated into English in 1958. Propp uses a series of symbols where, for example, a simple tale about a kidnapping and rescue may be expressed as

\[ \beta^3\delta^1A^1B^1C^1H^1I^1K^1w^0 \]

and tabulated as in Table 2 below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(\beta^1)</td>
<td>Three daughters go walking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(\delta^1)</td>
<td>They stay too long in the garden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(A^1)</td>
<td>A dragon kidnaps them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(B^1)</td>
<td>A call for help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(C^1)</td>
<td>Three heroes search</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(H^1)</td>
<td>Three battles with the dragon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(I^1)</td>
<td>Girls’ rescue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(K)</td>
<td>Girls’ return</td>
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<tr>
<td>(w^0)</td>
<td>Reward</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Table 2: Propp’s Analysis of a Folk Tale*

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9 Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment*, p. 5.
10 Miller, *Thou Shalt Not Be Aware*, p. 234.
Propp’s study is specifically concerned with narrative structures; and variants on narrative patterns. His analysis illustrates the patched and mended nature of fairy tales, the way in which story-tellers in oral and mostly illiterate cultures told and retold traditional stories adapted to suit their own circumstances. Similarly, Lorna Sage notes that ‘fairy tales, in their multiple reflections on each other, and their individual and internal layerings of interpretations’ have ‘no core, or point of origin, or ur-story “underneath”, just a continuous interweaving of texts’.12

Most current commentators are more concerned with the content of the stories themselves, with their variety of interpretation, and their cultural and emotional significance. In his account of the Grimms’ collection, Jack Zipes details the Brothers’ concern ‘to preserve, contain and present to the German public what they felt were profound truths about the origins of both German culture and European civilisation’.13 Zipes describes the way the Brothers Grimm refined the stories: they were retold to appeal to a German bourgeois audience, eliminating erotic and sexual elements, and stressing the values of order, thrift and industry, so that the tales were tailored to their social, religious and cultural context. Later writers have similarly interpreted fairy tales to suit their own conditions, the square-jawed clean-living hero of Disney’s Snow White, for example, who takes a more prominent role than in the traditional tale; or James Thurber’s conclusion to his moral fable of a thoroughly modern American Red Riding Hood,

— for even in a nightcap a wolf does not look any more like your grandmother than the metro-Goldwyn lion looks like Calvin Coolidge. So the little girl took an automatic out of her basket and shot the wolf dead.14

The apparently indestructible traditional fairy tale frees writers from the confines of empirical knowledge, taking the reader into the realm and imagery of dream and myth, and Frame exploits this literary genre to explore beyond perceived reality. Freud, in common with his compatriots, was well versed in the tales retold by the Brothers Grimm, and their value for children has been affirmed by twentieth-century psychoanalysts, Bruno Bettelheim and Alice Miller. Marina Warner notes ‘that fairy tales are cast in the language of the psyche, with the forest and palaces, snow, glass, and apples symbolizing deeper concealed truths’ and that this view ‘has become widely accepted’. Frame makes extensive use of this primordial imagery of trees, snow and ice, and of mirror-reflections and dreams in her novels and poetry to explore the darker corners of the human soul. She blends fairy tale with other features of oral literature and song, to point up the sense of personal trial and exclusion from the mainstream of society, the ‘inner problems of human beings’ in Bettelheim’s phrase quoted earlier, and often weaves lines from disparate songs, poems and stories into a patchwork of her own, in keeping with the spirit of fairy tale retelling.

7.2 Fairy Tales

In _The Uses of Enchantment_, Bruno Bettelheim is emphatic about the importance of the darker elements of fairy tales, that they should not be shorn of their cruelty and pain, and that ‘an element of threat is crucial to the fairy tale’. _Mona Minim_ shows that Frame thought so, too. The traditional fairy tale served a ‘siren function’ as Warner puts it, ‘saying the unsayable and tolling a warning in the night’, and a repertoire of tales of poverty, starvation, violence, child abandonment, imprisonment, rape and incest; and wicked or hapless parents and step-parents abound. Children and young adults are tested and undergo trials of fortitude and tenacity before the final happy ending. On her way home, Mona Minim is not spared the

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15 Warner, _Once Upon a Time_, pp. 113-14.
16 Bettelheim, _The Uses of Enchantment_, p. 144.
17 Warner, _Once Upon a Time_, p. 80.
distressing side of life, which comes as an encounter with the dying Queen Antonia in her spoiled wedding dress, trying to shed and eat her lacy wings so that she can lay her eggs and found a new colony while her husband also dies. She pleads with the horrified Mona to help her tear off her wings, and dies while Mona ‘looked up into the sky and saw there was no sky, only darkness and night’. Mona is a resourceful and robust young ant, however, and is soon planning her route home.

Frame repeatedly expresses experience in terms of fairy tale, as well as legend and ancient poetry or ballads. During her time living in Sargeson’s Takapuna hut in the mid-1950s, Frame used the language and protagonists of the fairy tale in an account of the generous and kindly but patronisingly patriarchal attitudes of her host and his circle of literary friends, in a form which is ostensibly less confrontational and more tactful than a direct statement of feelings might have been. The piece is an effective metaphor for the kind of exclusion from the mainstream which Frame experienced. ‘I am banished in a hut’ she writes, ‘a scullion’ receiving her food from a prince at the palace, who in turn is visited by other princes. She is not ‘our class of royalty’ so the princes ‘humour her, certainly; but not speak much to her’ [sic]. She dreams of leaving to ‘live my scullion’s life, without the emptiness and loneliness of a grand palace’ with ‘people who are scullions like myself’.

In Frame’s first novel, *Owls Do Cry*, written in Sargeson’s hut, the book of Grimms’ fairy tales with its curly writing is treasure itself. Daphne, one of the four siblings in *Owls Do Cry*, would quote from one of the stories which had captured her imagination when she was lost for an answer to what was said to her, ‘Rapunsel, Rapunsel, let down your hair; quoting from the prince who climbed the gold silk rope to the top of the tower’. In his rage, Daphne’s father resembles Rumpelstiltskin. On the night of the hospital dance Daphne recalls *Cinderella*, but there is no glass slipper for Daphne who escapes wistfully into a reverie in

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19 Frame, ‘A Statement’ in *In Her Own Words*, pp. 221-22.
20 Frame, *Owls Do Cry*, p. 11.
which Flora Norris and Sister Dulling are the Ugly Sisters; and there is no rescuing Prince, since ‘at ten o’clock sharp the people were stripped of their finery and thrust back into the ashes.’

Daphne’s powerlessness and inarticulacy in the mainstream world and her dismissal by others as insane serve to hide her humanity, which manifests itself in her moral clarity, imaginative perception and compassion. Her innermost, unarticulated feelings are revealed when Frame links her with the imprisoned daughters of fairy tale and the words of past poets, though there is no happy ending for Daphne. Frame links Rapunsel in Daphne’s songs from the dead room with the ancient Greek legend of Theseus unwinding silk thread in the labyrinth in his quest for the minotaur, and Blake’s ‘Happy Piper’, erasing boundaries between Daphne’s words, the author’s voice, different poets and texts, weaving them in and out of each other.

The primordial imagery of *Faces in the Water*, written a few years later, has been noted above, and again fairy tales are part of the fabric of the novel. Istina likens herself to one of the little birds in *Hansel and Gretel*, picking up the crumbs which were not intended for her, as she listens to the conversation of two doctors. One of these doctors, a ‘tubby loud-voiced intelligent intuitive prince in the forbidden castle’, shows her unexpected kindness, rescuing her from the chaplain who had dismissed her. She describes another inmate, immobile on the grass with his roller, as one of those people who are ‘under a spell and stuck to whatever they touched’. Istina is more articulate than Daphne, but her humanity is just as effectively hidden beneath the concealment of hospital clothing and the hospital’s punitive régime. The doctor rescues Istina from her prison by treating her like a

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22 Frame, *Faces in the Water*, p. 207.
human being, deliberately including her in everyday tasks, and as such is ‘an intuitive prince’.

Greta Maude, the dentist’s wife in The Adaptable Man, finds refuge from the tribulations of her life in her hut in the garden with Maplestone’s Chart of plant pests and diseases, living ‘her social life among vegetables’ in the Suffolk village of Burgelstatham. Greta thinks in terms of Grimms’ tales. She thinks of fairy tale rescuers, ‘Searchers’, who take forlorn travellers ‘to the Great House for feasting and fires. For thousands of years these same Searchers have been moving in and out of fables, myths, histories, stories’ (126). Greta had given up all hope of acquiring the status of a metropolitan professional dentist's wife, lacking the patience, she felt, of the princess who ate and slept with the Frog Prince, in the hope that ‘one day he would bring fulfilment of all her desires’ (92). Instead she expects to suffer the ‘pains and penalties of misbehaviour’ (127) of fairy tale, and believes that her incestuously conceived child ‘will be a little prince with wrinkled skin’ (94) as a punishment for her sin.

7.3 Anglo Saxon Poetry

In The Adaptable Man, Frame links the traditional world of fairy tale and the genre’s location with other elements of ancient oral culture in the Reverend Aisley Maude’s feeling for Anglo-Saxon poetry, with which Frame had imaginatively identified at the University of Otago in the 1940s, and which is here rooted firmly in Suffolk and Northumbria. In a letter to Dr. Cawley, Frame expresses the joy she had experienced during university lectures, being imaginatively transported to the time and place where the Anglo-Saxon poems had been composed, and refers to ‘the Anglo-Saxon whom I met hundreds of years ago in a Northern

25 Frame, The Adaptable Man, p. 92. Further references to The Adaptable Man in section7.2 are given parenthetically in the text.
forest’. In November 1965, the year of its publication, Frame gave a copy of *The Adaptable Man* to Gregor Cameron, her former lecturer, inscribed ‘with gratitude for memorable lectures that inspired the preoccupation in this book with St Cuthbert and Old English language’, and apologising for ‘errors in quotation’. Frame made clear her exasperation with the publishers, writing to Dr. Cawley that ‘alas, the book is full of mistakes [...] I’m rushing away a frantic note to tell them at least, to correct their muddled printing of Anglo-Saxon quotations’. She sets *The Adaptable Man* in the ancient county of Suffolk, part of the former Danelaw, the land settled by the Danes after the ninth-century battles between the Saxons and the heathen Danish invaders – the fictional village of Burgelstatham named after its heathen burial place.

Suffolk remained a very rural county, barely touched by the Industrial Revolution apart from the railway, with an agricultural landscape largely unchanged for many centuries. Here ‘the place-names are more memories than names’ (11), and during her time living in Suffolk, Frame found villages populated by people rooted in the apparent immutability of the place. Frame wrote to Dr. Cawley that

Suffolk continues to be interesting and peopled by strange characters whom I knew better years ago in mental hospitals. Bob (the gardener) has a sister who might have walked straight from Cliffhaven and yet she lives here and is accepted and no-one considers her unusual.

The Rev. Aisley Maude quotes from the Old English elegiac poems, ‘The Seafarer’ and ‘The Wanderer’, interweaving lines from each poem. ‘The Seafarer’ relates the feats of endurance of a mariner alone at sea, and ‘The Wanderer’ tells of the trials of a man exiled from his homeland, facing a hostile world alone. These elegies date from the 7th century, the time of St Cuthbert, with whose legend Aisley closely identifies. Aisley has

26 Frame, letter to Dr. Cawley, 1962.
27 Frame, inscribed copy held at the University of Otago. Grateful thanks to Dr. Greg Waite for sharing this with me.
28 Frame, letter to Dr. Cawley, 10 June 1965.
29 Frame, letter to Dr. Cawley, 24 June 1962.
returned to the Anglo-Saxon world of East Anglia, of Northumbria [...] he is St. Cuthbert himself, saying his prayers in the sea [...] while the two seals come out of the deep water to warm him “mid heora flyce” (77).

Frame makes a link of the imagery in their yearning, tribulations and endurance between the fairy tale imagery of Greta’s feelings and the Anglo-Saxon poetry of Aisley’s, as Greta sees her brother-in-law ‘living in a fairytale’ (270). Greta identifies herself with characters of folklore, but the Rev. Maude identifies with the distant historic figure of St Cuthbert around whom myths have developed. Fairy tales and the Anglo-Saxon laments are both from a distant past and anonymous; and they both tap into primeval emotions, universal and unchanging human needs, the unending cycles of life, and the human psyche.

7.4 The Ballad Tradition

Frame also uses snatches of traditional ballads, which were featured frequently in both popular radio broadcasting as well as the more erudite radio programmes on the BBC’s Third Programme, during the Folk Revival of the 1950s and 60s, when Frame was living in England. These ballads were re-worked and much travelled like the fairy tales; and like the fairy tale told their story with a sparse directness. Ballads, like fairy tales, often exist in a number of versions and variants throughout northern Europe and beyond: migrants took their oral culture with them, especially to America, as Francis James Child notes in his mid-nineteenth-century numbered collection of ballads and their variants. Recordings of Child ballads and others were heard frequently on the radio, as in the illustration from the Radio Times. Alwyn in The Adaptable Man, sings snatches of one of them, the Appalachian ballad, ‘Tom Dooley’.

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It is a story of a jealous killing, in the ballad tradition, suggestive of Alwyn’s guilt in murdering Botti Julio, the Italian labourer.

In *Intensive Care*, Frame exploits this violent thread of ancient culture in the story of Tom Livingstone’s grandson Colin and the woman with whom he has an affair, Lorna, and in my reading of the story of Colin and Lorna, I show how Frame employs the narrative structure and imagery of the traditional ballad. Frame cites lines from two ballads, ‘Lord Livingston’ and ‘Lord Thomas and Fair Annet’, (often ‘Clerk Tamas’) which both tell of thwarted love, jealousy, revenge and death. Although some ballads differ little from fairy tales, the traditional ballad rarely has a fairy tale happy ending, relating for the most part stories of lost and unrequited love, revenge, violent death and bloodshed, suggested by the illustration in Figure 7 from the *Radio Times* of a programme devised by Louis MacNeice which Frame may have heard, and Frame’s use of lines from ballads strikes an ominous note in her story of the Livingstone family in *Intensive Care*. The lines which Frame takes from different ballads do not augur well for Colin and Lorna:

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\begin{align*}
\text{I dreamed a dream concerning thee,} \\
\text{O read ill dreams to guid} \\
\text{Your bower was full of milwhite swans,} \\
\text{Your bride's bed full o' bluid’}
\end{align*}
\]

Frame begins Colin’s story with a four line verse from ‘Clerk Tamas’ who hunts down a woman he desires – ‘fair Annie’ – in the woods, followed by a verse from ‘Lord Livingston’ in which the Lord dreams of his beloved whose bed is ‘full o’ bluid’. Colin dreams of his colleague, Lorna, whose image haunts him. In spite of his marriage to May, his three

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33 Frame, *Intensive Care*, p. 207; Child Ballads N\textsuperscript{os} 7& 262.
children, and his respectable social standing, Colin embarks on an affair with Lorna which leads to their dismissal from work for adultery, and a decision to live together in Australia.

As in many of the ballads, a mother sounds a discordant note – Lorna’s mother in this case – and sets in train events leading to a final catastrophe. Colin feels betrayed, and finds he can begin to understand his grandfather Tom’s obsessions with Cissy, and later with Peggy Warren, casting himself in the role of the traditional victim: ‘the settler robbed of his land by lovelight, he was the drowning sailor without a sea to drown in, the underprivileged beyond the castle gates’. 34 As Colin arrives back in New Zealand from Australia in a state of frantic inarticulacy, Frame quotes the stabbing and suicide with which ‘Lord Tamas and fair Annet’ ends. Colin cannot accept the end of his affair with Lorna, and like Lord Tamas again – who originally hunted Annie like a deer in one version of this ballad – Colin goes in pursuit of her. He finds the house on a day when the family is out, and his phone calls fail to persuade her to return to him. He hallucinates a meeting with Lorna in which they talk about the death of Colin’s wife May and their children, and the new life which Colin and Lorna will enjoy together, until Colin emerges from his dream. In another version of the ballad Lord Thomas’s life ends when he stabs himself after killing his unloved ‘nut-brown bride’ while trying to save his true love, Annie, and Frame makes use of all these threads. After some years of obsessively but fruitlessly pacing Lorna’s street, Colin buys a hunting rifle, and the story ends as sparingly as any ballad, as he returns to Lorna’s house, shoots her mother, her father and then Lorna, embracing her before turning his rifle on himself in a tale of betrayed, thwarted and unrequited love, violently avenged:

Now stay for me dear Ennet he said
Now stay my dear he cryd
Then strake the dagger into his heart,
And fell deid by her side. (219)

34 Frame, Intensive Care, p. 212.
The use of these ballad references gives the story its awful inevitability; a link with ancient stories; and provides Frame with a protagonist’s surname, Livingstone, and part of her plot. She also draws partly on the story of her cousin Bill, who in February 1962 had shot his lover in Christchurch before turning his rifle on himself. Frame wrote a poem of her own about ‘Big Bill’ whose early life had seemed full of promise:

What happened between then and now, Big Bill,  
To bring madness, murder, suicide your way,  
Riding with us in triple nightmare to your funeral  
At St. Kilda on this cold dark winter’s day?  

The elements of ballad form in the poem suggest the connection Frame made between the family tragedy and the ballad tradition – and as elsewhere in Frame’s novels, as I demonstrate – the ballads articulate emotions which the characters cannot express, a mixture of obsession, despair and revenge.

7.5 Myth and Survival

In her early novella, Towards Another Summer, Frame makes a clear statement of the importance of myth when Grace Cleave, asserts that ‘we must tend the myths […] only in that way shall we survive’. Frame emphasises this point again, twenty years later, in the opening of her autobiography, linking mythology with familial and cultural memory in her suggestive interplay of Maori and Christian myth:

From the first place of liquid darkness, within the second place of air and light, I set down the following record with its mixture of fact and truths and memories of truths and its direction toward the Third Place, where the starting point is myth.

Frame is fascinated by both the workings of the human memory, and by the relationship of memory with mythology, and between memory and art. The role of the writer is to preserve the continuity of that memory, walking like Theseus, using Ariadne’s thread to find his way

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35 Frame, ‘Big Bill’, Pocket Mirror, p. 5.  
36 Frame, Towards Another Summer, p. 98.  
37 Frame, Complete Autobiography, p. 7.
out of the Minosaur’s labyrinth, with ‘our memories unwound on threads of silk or fire’.  

Even Colin Monk, the mathematician and ‘not a literary man’, narrating Part Three of *Intensive Care*, and aiming to make a factual account of the workings of the Human Delineation Act, which will obliterate memory, asserts that ‘I write to seize a place for myself and my memory in the folklore that will take root’. Monk has qualms about the morality of what he is required to carry out, in part because of the erasure of memory. ‘Time’, he says ‘is glacier-long fire deep sun-high’ and asks himself ‘do a few weeks of lost memory matter?’

An answer to Monk’s question comes in a letter that Frame wrote to her friend Sheila Natusch from hospital, in which Frame laments the effects of ECT shock treatment she has received, as it ‘sneaked away, thieved, my memory of the things I wanted most to remember’. A few years earlier, Frame had written about the importance of memory to the poet James K. Baxter, in a letter to convey her admiration for his writing, saying ‘how can I express myself except by saying that poetry is in memory [...] you can annihilate time if you have enough power in you’. Memory was an abiding concern for Frame. Years later, she wrote to her former school-teacher, Janet Gibson, to thank her for her ‘illuminating’ article in the school’s anniversary publication; and in a letter to another former pupil Gibson quotes Frame as saying: ‘it is always fascinating [...] to see what comes out of our memory machine which operates by its own rules & makes its own choices of material & will not be blackmailed or cajoled’. Memory can also be traumatic, as the narrator of *The Edge of the Alphabet* remarks in relation to the discomfort of Zoe Bryce, a lonely failed school-teacher sailing from New Zealand to England, who was not so much disturbed by sea-sickness as ambushed by

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38 Frame, *Owls Do Cry*, p. 52.  
41 Frame, letter to Sheila Natusch, 26 October 1952, MS-2544, Hocken Collections.  
42 Frame, letter to James K. Baxter, undated but probably 1947, MS-0975/177, Hocken Collections.  
43 Letter from Janet Gibson, former teacher at Waitaki Girls High School to Jean Smith, former pupil, 17 December 1978, Misc-MS-1851, Hocken Collections.
thoughts, sadness, regrets [...] For memory is so often a single explosion, like a firework in the face. One is blinded. One scrabbles about with damp matches trying to ignite an empty blackened little column of cardboard.\textsuperscript{44}

Frame’s sense of the ‘mixture of facts and truth and memories of truth’ from her autobiography cited above is apparent in her 1963 novella \textit{Towards Another Summer}. Hilary Mantel notes in her review of the early novella that this is where ‘her great work of memory began to take shape,’ referring to themes that Frame would later develop in her autobiography. Mantel also notes the connection with myth in her comments on Frame’s use of language: ‘Intensely personal, her writing is always spiralling in on itself, towards the condition of myth, and yet it nails the moment, pins down experiences so fleeting that others would never grasp them’.\textsuperscript{45}

Characters in Frame’s novels struggle with the partly formed notion of what lies, in Malfred Signal’s expression, beyond ‘the object, beyond its shadow to the ring of fire, the corona at its circumference’.\textsuperscript{46} As Frame discusses her ideas with Elizabeth Alley, the New Zealand literary critic and broadcaster, she endeavours to explain her interest in ‘what is beyond the real, the invisible beyond the real’. She comments on our fear of using our imagination, asserting that ‘the proper use of imagination is a form of courage, daring to explore beyond the horizons’.\textsuperscript{47}

In \textit{The Edge of the Alphabet}, Toby dreams of writing about his ‘Lost Tribe’, a dream undermined by magpies singing, in nursery rhyme fashion, ‘A Wimbledon a Wombledon a fourteen miles’.\textsuperscript{48} Asked where this tribe is to be found, he replies ‘behind a mountain approached through a secret pass’.\textsuperscript{49} Toby cannot match his insights with his limited powers of language, but the novel’s other protagonist, Zoe, expresses a sense of another world when

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\textsuperscript{44} Frame, \textit{The Edge of the Alphabet}, p. 90.
\textsuperscript{45} Hilary Mantel, review of \textit{Towards Another Summer}, \textit{The Guardian}, 12 July 2008.
\textsuperscript{46} Frame, \textit{A State of Siege}, p. 239.
\textsuperscript{47} Alley, \textit{In the Same Room}, p. 54.
\textsuperscript{48} Frame, \textit{The Edge of the Alphabet}, p. 4. The novel predates Elizabeth Beresford’s ‘Womble’ stories for children.
\textsuperscript{49} Frame, \textit{The Edge of the Alphabet}, p. 216.
\end{flushright}
she meets a smiling man who introduces himself as Lawrence, in a bar in Soho, London, which she visits with her friend Peter. Lawrence invites them to come with him to the Serpentine, and Zoe says to herself, linking dream and myth with the world of folklore:

Of course I have met you in dreams and myths [...]. You appear at crossroads, at the entrance to mazes, on the outskirts of cities, at the edge of the alphabet. It is you who give warnings to the lost children and the eldest son to seek out his fortune.⁵⁰

In her letter to James K. Baxter, quoted earlier, Frame also comments on fruitless memory as well as Baxter’s ‘true way of remembering’. She writes that

You can walk a hundred years in time picking and pressing and saving the daffodils and buttercups and daisies that you find there till you have a mind full, and then you can sit down to fondle your treasure [...] But what a dead smell your flowers have and the daisies will have fallen to pieces, petal by petal.⁵¹

In Scented Gardens for the Blind, such a collector is Edward Strang, an obsessive amateur genealogist, who ‘was concerned that the human race should continue, that the generations should follow each other like the flowers which open at morning’. His was ‘an ordinary family, in the chain gang of the human race’, but Edward preferred to live and to exert power, ‘by remote control’.⁵² Edward’s ancestors form an orderly list, with as much life to them as his collection of toy soldiers, or the disintegrating daisies of Frame’s image.

Edward’s lack of awareness contrasts with the envious yearning of Malfred Signal in A State of Siege, who bitterly resents the gift of imagination her pupil Lettice Bradley reveals in her painting of Maui, the hero from Maori mythology. The girl seemed to have ‘been able to absorb, as a mindless sponge absorbs food from the sea, the myths and legends of her own country’.⁵³ Frame displays an increasing awareness of Maori myth and culture in her later novels, and in her penultimate novel she takes the Maori name of a real place, the Maniototo, a wild upland plateau of moorland on South Island.

⁵⁰ Frame, The Edge of the Alphabet, p. 266.
⁵¹ Frame, letter to James K. Baxter, undated but probably 1947, MS-0975/177, Hocken Collections.
⁵² Frame, Scented Gardens for the Blind, pp. 60-61.
⁵³ Frame, A State of Siege, p. 136.
Frame’s increasing awareness of Maori culture comes both through her reading and through friendships, for example with the Maori writer, Jacquie Sturm. Frame had been reading Patricia Grace’s short stories – Frame chaired the PEN jury which awarded Grace’s Waiariki the PEN/Hubert Church award for first fiction in 1975 – and had developed a friendship with the Maori writer, Jacquie Sturm and her husband, James K. Baxter, the poet whose work Frame had so admired in her letter of 1947. Baxter held the Burns Fellowship at the University of Otago in 1966, the year after Frame. Frame had applied for a second year of the Fellowship, and when Baxter was selected she was invited to be ‘a guest of the university’ in 1966, with an office and a cash grant to complete the work she was engaged in, so that their time there overlapped.\(^{54}\) Baxter’s book of essays from that time is ‘dedicated to Janet Clutha’.\(^{55}\)

Baxter attempted to establish a commune at a Maori settlement at Hiruharama (Jerusalem) in 1968 and took the Maori form of his name, Hemi. In The Man on the Horse he expresses a view of ancestry and timelessness which chimes with both a Maori view of the world and with Frame’s, writing that he is ‘concerned perhaps chiefly with the search for the tree of Jesse, the sense of ancestral continuity, which the modern way of life tends to cut down and destroy’.\(^{56}\) At his death in 1972, he received the rare honour for a Pakeha of a tangi, a full Maori funeral.

Patricia Grace’s Waiariki was the first published collection of stories by a Maori woman writer. Frame recommended the PEN award for the book’s ‘loving comprehension of ownership’. Of Waiariki, Frame writes that

Patricia Grace has given us a complete clear picture of living people. “Waiariki” insists and moves, not only in its content and language but with the rhythmic quality that is an undercurrent of the writing, like a tide flowing.\(^{57}\)

\(^{54}\) Lawrence Jones, Nurse to the Imagination: 50 Years of the Robert Burns Fellowship (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 2008).


\(^{56}\) Baxter, Foreword to The Man on the Horse, p. 9.

\(^{57}\) Grateful thanks to Patricia Grace for sharing this recommendation with me.
Frame’s emphasis on rhythm and the image of flowing water is characteristic of her commentary on the writing of others and her sense of the organic nature of story-telling – she used the image about West Indian writers she read in London; and Frame here affirms the value she places on indigenous forms of language. Discussing *The Carpathians* with Marion McLeod, Frame expressed her delight that Maori, ‘the people banished to sleep, to a silence that equates with death, are alive, speaking and writing their own language and sharing its riches.’

Grace’s stories tell of a variety of Maori people, their values, their consciousness, their traditional way of life, and their relationships with Pakeha New Zealanders, using both formal and colloquial styles of Maori English. The second story, ‘Toki’, contains English modified by Maori syntax and cadence in this expression of feeling: ‘And she came to my side once more, the girl, and it there still though old lady now, she.’ In their blend of distinctive Maori usage with the Pakeha English short-story form, these stories celebrate and affirm Maori cultural identity, *Maoritanga*; and family, *whanau*; its mythological context; and the Maori relationship with the land, the sea and the mountains, in life and in death: ‘Guardian hill you do not clutch my hand, you do not weep. You know that I must go and give me blessing. You guard with love this quiet place rocking at the edge of the sea.’

Pakeha attitudes are called into question. In ‘A Way of Talking’, Rose, back at home from school, is angered by the Pakeha dressmaker Jane’s demeaning reference to Maori labourers, and takes issue with her, speaking to her in standard English. Her sister is embarrassed by Rose’s assertiveness, ‘Rose, the stink thing, she was talking all Pakehafied’. Rose is as stern a critic of the abuse of language as Mavis in *Living in the Maniototo*, who protests: ‘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). In the final *Waiariki* story,

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60 Grace, ‘And So I Go’, *Waiariki*, p. 47.
‘Parade’, another Maori returns to her community, distressed by the patronising Pakeha reaction to Maori traditions. The story closes, however, with a confident reaffirmation of the value of Maori tradition and language, as ‘I took in a big breath, filling my lungs with sea and air and land and people. And with past and present and future, and felt a new strength course through me.’ 62 The people sing their canoe chant in confident harmony, in Maori, with no translation given, highlighting the sense of the importance of indigenous language which Grace shares with Frame, and to which Frame referred in her conversation with Marion McLeod, quoted earlier.

Frame’s interaction with Maori writing and culture is harder to pin down than her inspiration from American and European texts, as it involves a spiritual identification and shared values around the guardianship of the land and social justice as much as a regard for indigenous forms of language, rather than the allusion, direct quotation and pastiche of the earlier novels. Frame appears to have been emboldened by her reading of Grace’s stories and from the knowledge she gained from her friendship with Jacquie Sturm. This is especially evident in *The Carpathians*, with its Maori characters, fictionalised Maori legend and concern with the value of indigenous language.

Frame and Grace both express a sense of the importance of language and a spiritual sense of timelessness. Grace expresses her way of thinking in an interview in 1998, when she says ‘I think that we are our ancestors. We are here now because of our ancestors [...] Past and future are part of the present’. 63 Although Frame makes mention of Maori in her earliest stories and poems, it is clear that Grace’s stories made a strong and lasting impression on Frame, with a sense of recognition and affinity, culminating in an increasingly direct affirmation of Maori values of kinship, community and anti-materialism in *Living in the Maniototo* and in her final novel, *The Carpathians*. Frame’s intertextuality is underpinned by

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her imaginative cross-cultural connections of mythologies from different traditions, from northern Europe, classical Greece, biblical scriptures and Maori mythology, and encapsulated in the opening words of her autobiography, ‘where the starting point is myth’.  

In Living in the Maniototo, where New Zealand suburban streets are often named after British lords, country seats and battles, Mavis, from a Pakeha background, nevertheless comments on the use of more appropriate Maori place-names, which like ‘Burgelstham’ in The Adaptable Man, stress the importance of belonging and of a linguistic union with the land: ‘Wanganui, Waikato, Tuatapere, Taranaki ... more powerful because they were welded to the place by the first unifying act of poetry and not stuck on like a grocery label’ (96). At a conference in 1977, Frame bewails the tendency of publishers to change New Zealand English to something British or American, ‘often destroying both the meaning and the rhythm of the sentence [...] We want our words. If I write about a bach by the sea I do not want it turned into a bungalow or cottage or mansion. If we write of a tangi, we mean just that: a tangi’. In the novel the Maniototo becomes a metaphor for the artist’s imagination, the place where Peter Wallstead, historian, teacher and writer lived in contentment. As Janet Wilson remarks,

In establishing the Maniototo as the true home of the creative artist Frame makes a deserted unknown plain symbolise the elusive cultural treasure which is conspicuously lacking in the novel’s spiritual wastelands: the metropolitan centres of Blenheim, Berkeley and Baltimore.  

Mavis, born in a land of earthquakes, has a respectful sense of herself as ‘a guest, as all are who live there, of the Taranaki mountain’ (133), a feeling in keeping with the Maori concept of kaitiakitanga, guardianship of the land. This respect for the natural world is also seen in the choice of title for Mavis’s novel ‘The Green Fuse’, from Dylan Thomas’s ‘The force that

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64 Frame, Complete Autobiography, p. 7.
65 Frame ‘Departures and Returns’, a paper given at the East-West Centre, Honolulu, October 1977, Janet Frame: In Her Own Words, p. 64.
drives the green fuse’, in which nature is seen as both creator and destroyer, just as the Taranaki volcano is both a creator and destroyer.\textsuperscript{67} In the next section I will consider how Frame’s exploration of memory, myth, poetic imagination and language reach their apotheosis, as she draws together their labyrinthine connecting threads in her final novel, \textit{The Carpathians}.

7.6 Memory and Language

\textit{The Carpathians} (1988) is narrated by novelist John Henry Brecon, son of the novel’s protagonist, Mattina Brecon who creates a story which merges details from his mother’s notebooks and father’s published writings with his own creative imagination to make permanent the memory of the parents he hardly knew, Mattina and Jake Brecon, embodied in language. John Henry is one of the ‘Housekeepers of Ancient Springtime’\textsuperscript{68} who aims with ‘the use of words to continue the memory through centuries’ (278), as Frame further develops the theme of memory and its survival or its obliteration by ‘The Human Delineation Act’ in \textit{Intensive Care}, discussed earlier. Frame links her translation of Rilke’s phrase, \textit{printemps antique}, with the orchards around the fictional New Zealand town of Puamahara, a town named after the fictional legend of the Memory Flower and where its memorial is located. The town’s name is a compound of the Maori words \textit{pua}, a flower and \textit{mahara}, memory.

The Puamahara Maori myth of the memory flower is Frame’s invention, and reflects Frame’s increasing interest in Maori culture and language, as well as her love of fairy tale and folklore and her sense of their importance. The Memory Flower myth tells the story of a young woman, ‘chosen by the gods as a collector of the memory of her land’, who ‘journeys to a region between the mountains and the sea to search for the memory’ (29). Her quest, in


\textsuperscript{68} Janet Frame, \textit{The Carpathians} (Auckland: Random House, 2005), p. 278. Further references to \textit{The Carpathians} in section 7.6 are given parenthetically in the text.
true folk tale tradition is a journey of choices and judgements, and also mimics the Genesis myth of Eve tasting the fruit of the tree of knowledge so that ‘the woman of Maharawhenua tasted the yesterday within the tomorrow’ (29). Like Mona Minim in Frame’s fairy tale for children, she eventually had ‘no human function but that of a story-teller’ (29) until she vanishes and is replaced by a tree from which the Memory Flower blossoms. It is this legend which attracts Mattina Brecon, a wealthy Jamesian American who visits New Zealand and rents a house in Kowhai Street, Puamahara. The tourist board has promoted the legend because of its commercial value to tourism. Renée Shannon, a Kowhai Street resident planning to move to Auckland, is dismissive of it, telling Mattina that the Maori legends ‘don’t often break into our real life’, although she has a dawning awareness that ‘we’re only now beginning to look closely at the place we’re living in’ (163), sensing the economic value of Maori legend as a tourist attraction; and thus its commodification. Frame’s fictional legend embodies tenets of Maori culture – the essential link between past, present and future, and the importance of ancestral memory. This memory is an integral part of traditional Maori identity, illustrated in Patricia Grace’s 1991 novel *Dogside Story* when she describes the building of a new wharenui, a meeting house, whose structural parts are named after the bones of the human skeleton, designed to keep the old stories safe:

> The reason for the piece of tahuhu, or ancestral backbone, being kept from the old house to be put into the new one is because the wharenui is the repository of talk, and rafters are its storage space [...] It was a way of transferring the old stories into the new house for safe-keeping.\(^69\)

The older residents of Puamahara, settlers of European origin, are generally lost and lonely figures, deserted like Connie Grant by younger members of the family; or the ‘penultimate Madge’, one of the last generation with links to the Scottish settlers, unnerved by her great-niece learning Maori at school, who finds that language separates her from her grandchildren. ‘I speak the language of another age’ she bewails, conscious that her

memories and knowledge will die with her (56). Similar feelings are nursed by Hercus Millow, the retired sergeant-major, who enjoyed rereading the letters and children’s poems of the nineteenth-century Scottish writer Robert Louis Stevenson, and a book of poems written in ‘Scottish’ by his own ancestor, his great-grandfather. Now, as he merely dips into these books after his stroke, he feels as he reads ‘a sense of loss that a world still treasured had retreated from him’ (106-07). His small collection of sea-faring novels and stories of wartime disaster, heroism and survival are allied to the Pakeha myth of the heroic New Zealand settler and are part of his armoury of defence, just as his memories of New Zealand supported him while he was a prisoner-of-war in a German camp. He understood that especially in times of stress the mind creates its own myths, that as an earthquake or volcano alters the world we inhabit, ‘memories are formed that as the years pass have the capacity to spread under seismic impact of their own stress, causing other memories to disappear and new details of the time, new scapes, to reappear in the present’ (103).

Most of the Kowhai Street residents are Pakeha, except Hene Hanuere, from whom Mattina learns about the near loss of the Maori language. Hene tells Mattina about Maori who have been ‘brought up Pakeha’ (49), whose language and culture have been overwhelmed by the English-speaking majority. Hene explains that ‘it’s been lonely without our language’ (49) and that she’s returning to it and making plans to renew contact with her Maori community. She is voicing a widespread concern among Maori, identified by Tracey McIntosh in her 2005 article on Maori identity, when she argues that ‘a significant number of Maori struggle to identify their tribal links and are ignorant of their wakapapa [genealogy]. [...] It is painful for Maori to confront this reality’. 70 This theme of the deprivation of language and the reclaiming of it is a prominent one in Grace’s fiction. Hene’s second name,

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Hanuere, means ‘January’, and like ‘Mattina’ suggests a new beginning. In contrast with the people in Kowhai Street, are the urban Maoris:

who here are mostly poor in the material possessions that the country values highly, who live in the streets of the orphaned cars, who are often out of work, staying at home to repair or rebuild their cars and to cultivate their flower and vegetable gardens (34).

The images of cultivation, productive gardening, and re-creation, contrast with the fixation of most urban Pakeha New Zealanders in the novel with technology and commerce, for whom gardening is a leisure pursuit, and often a matter of mowing the lawn; not an essential part of domestic economy as it would have been for most rural New Zealanders, Maori and Pakeha. Frame links the Maori with Rilke’s ‘ancient springtime’, their traditional legends with the biblical myth and poetry of the timeless ‘flower of the field’ (37), which blooms, fades and blooms again, the biblical ‘lilies of the field,’ finer in their jewelled colours even than ‘Solomon in all his glory’.

On her visit to Hene’s marae, the Maori settlement, Mattina learns of her Maori neighbours’ plans to relearn their language in their kohanga reo, language nests; rescue disaffected youngsters – both Maori and Pakeha – from substance abuse and crime; and reconnect with their lands and crafts. Mattina meets Rua, a village matriarch, who talks about flax weaving, and her deeply-rooted knowledge of the craft: ‘I know flax and flax knows me’ (131). These women, in their quiet, compassionate and even-handed tones, acknowledge iniquity and deprivation nonetheless, and resemble voices in Grace’s short stories discussed in the previous section of this chapter. As Hene points out, ‘both us and the Pakehas are at the long end of a poking stick’ (128), sharing the critical but positive attitudes of a number of Grace’s strong female characters.

Mattina sees that language is society’s most precious asset and that words preserve the memory of the past; and the Kowhai Street residents who negate this truth through their

71 Matthew 5.28.
focus on materialistic acquisition and use of clichéd language are destroyed by the midnight storm of ‘shapes of the old punctuation and language – apostrophes, notes of music, letters of the alphabets of all languages’ (183). The devastation is wrought apparently by the Gravity Star, which brought ‘its overwhelming unacceptable fund of new knowledge from millions of light-years and centuries of springtime’ (180). Mattina’s awareness of the importance of language appears to save her from the fate of Kowhai Street’s other residents, who are all destroyed in the storm, evidenced from the scab she is left with after the night of the storm, which she picks at. The scab crumbles onto the table and reveals itself to be ‘a pile of minute letters of the alphabet’ from a variety of languages (185). She wonders if she has been saved by her retreat into memory and by her understanding of the inextricable link between memory and language; but the key to her survival lies in the fate of her neighbours, ‘now unintelligible creatures with all the spoken and written language of the world fallen around them’ (186), destroyed through their belief only in empirical knowledge. In the words of Dinny Wheatstone, the ‘graduate imposter’, they surround themselves with ‘imitations of truth’ (84). In her conversation with Hercus, Mattina feels a sense of anger at the seductive power of stale expression, commonplace phrasing and cliché, ‘the magnetic power that held words together so that few dared separate them or examine them, but used them, again and again’ (69).

The phenomenon of the letter-storm in the novel has been referred to as magical realism by, among others, Isabella Maria Zoppi, extending the term from its South American origins, to the literature of other cultures in which myth and ancestors are part of modern life, and in which surreal or anti-realist events occur without question or explanation. The relevance of the term ‘magical realism’ to Maori culture is discussed by Witi Ihimaera in an interview, asserting that

We are talking about a culture that has embraced Christianity, but a tangi will always farewell its dead to a place called Hawaiki. So we have lived in a magic realist area.
My mother’s people believe their ancestors came on the back of a whale. For those reasons, these magic realist elements are part of our history, and I cannot say they are folktales because I believe it too.  

Ihimaera, however, is arguably referring to a fusion of Maori mythology with present day realities rather than the ‘magic realism’ of the Latin American novelistic tradition, where anti-realist events are accepted without comment. The most notable exponent of magical realism, the Colombian novelist Gabriel García Márquez, published the definitive English translation of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* in early 1970, while Frame was staying in California, and the novel was enthusiastically reviewed in the *New York Times* by Robert Kiely, then Professor of English at Harvard. Kiely sums up his view of the novel as ‘a South American Genesis’, Marquez writing in ‘the language of a poet who knows the earth and does not fear it as the enemy of the dreamer,’ a comment which could apply equally well to Frame. Frame spent the first three months of 1970 and the whole of 1971 in the USA, spending October and November of that year at the writers’ colony, Yaddo. I have so far found no mention of Marquez’s novel in Frame’s correspondence or autobiography. It is difficult to imagine that this novel, which received a warm reception in the North American press, could have escaped her attention, and I conclude that ‘magical realism’ was not a genre or a term with which Frame identified. Zoppi, however, extends the term to Frame’s use of ‘dual realities’ in *The Carpathians*, and offers a definition of magical realism as an oxymoron which represents a binary opposition between reality and imagination, a permanent contradictory relation between two worlds, or apparently incompatible systems of signifiers and signifieds.

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Frame very much resisted the term ‘surreal’ in her discussions with Elizabeth Alley, as I have already noted earlier, preferring to suggest that her way of looking ‘becomes like staring at an x-ray of the real and visible’. In *The Carpathians* most of the inhabitants of Kowhai Street suffer a single apocalyptic event. J. H. B.’s preliminary note to the novel quotes from a Press Association Report on the phenomenon of the Gravity Star ‘a galaxy that appears to be both relatively close and seven billion light years away’. This note suggests a natural explanation beyond human vision or understanding, rather than something surreal.

Frame’s fusion of the real and the unreal, the empirical and the imagined is, I believe, entirely her own and allows her to present different kinds of reality, differing possibilities of equal value, at the same time. Frame makes connections between literatures and human experience over time, space and culture, creating an interconnected web, and these apparently magical elements in Frame’s novel owe as much to Shakespeare, as I argue in the previous chapter, and to European folklore, Maori mythology, classical and biblical mythology as they do to the twentieth-century novels with which the term ‘magical realism’ is most closely associated. The Gravity Star is an extraordinary phenomenon, but it does appear to have a scientific explanation, at least in part, which is only just beginning to be understood. In Kowhai Street, it could be said that ‘the time is out of joint’. The early reference to the phenomenon of the Gravity Star is a reminder of Hamlet’s view that

\[\text{There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,} \]
\[\text{Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.}\]

The unexplained effects of the Gravity Star storm are not accepted without comment. People are disturbed by the phenomenon: Albion Cook has an embarrassed concern with property sales and wishes to gloss over it; and Connie Grant assumes a mass murder. Frame uses her intertexts to suggest imaginative parallels and similarities between the apparently

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76 Alley, *In the Same Room*, p. 54.
78 *Hamlet*, 1.5.189.
79 *Hamlet*, 1.5.166-67.
quite dissimilar. To argue for the exclusive or labelling use of any particular form of literary terminology risks overlooking the breadth of Frame’s scope, and limits the exploration which is central to her fiction.

When Mattina’s husband Jake makes his visit to Puamahara after Mattina’s death he meets Connie Grant, the discarded grandmother, who makes him tea and urges him to be careful in the manner of a character from Grimms’ tales or classical mythology and ‘had the manner of one of the old women, who, with the old men of myth and legend, wait by the side of the road, by the river bank, the edge of the forest, to warn, advise and assist’ (275). In her discussion of *The Carpathians* with Elizabeth Alley, Frame comments on her linking of older forms of literature and present-day New Zealand writing in explaining why she created an American protagonist, namely that ‘the technique of the stranger’s point of view is an old tried technique going way back to fairy tales’, adding ‘especially in our literature, which is full of journeys’. 

Mattina is conscious of New Zealand’s earthquakes and volcanoes, ‘the almost sympathetic activity of the land itself’, and their capacity for ‘fostering myths and legends old and new and inspiring superstition and hysteria’ (152). As Mattina prepares to fly back to New York, she knew she would ‘like the witches and story-tellers of old tales, pour her memories, like a potion, in Jake’s ear’ (222).

As Jake prepares to honour Mattina’s dying wishes and visit Puamahara for himself, he ponders her repeated insistence on the importance of memory,

not as a comfortable parcel of episodes to carry in one’s mind, and taste now and then, but as a naked link, a point, diamond-size, seed-size, coded in a code of the world of the human race; a passionately retained deliberate focus on all creatures and their worlds to ensure their survival (244).

In order for memories to survive, there needs to be a retelling of the old story, and as Lawrence Jones remarks, ‘*The Carpathians* celebrates art as the child of memory and

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80 Alley, *In the Same Room*, p. 50.
language’. Mattina believes that ‘language reinforces memory, rebuilds its weakened foundations’ (174), and exhorts Jake to find his way like Theseus and in his turn to pass on the story of Puamahara: ‘When all threads are broken, either though carelessness or ignorance of use, your remembering will renew the thread’ (237).

In Puamahara, Jake muses on change and perception, and on the exultation of the first of Rilke’s Sonnets to Orpheus, where ‘the trees, as in Rilke’s poem, have their roots in the sky’ (276).

\[
\text{Da stieg ein Baum. O reine Überststeigung} \\
\text{O Orpheus singt!}^82
\]

A tree rose from the earth. O pure transcendence – Orpheus sings.\(^83\)

In Puamahara’s orchard, in spite of the ravages of man-made pollutants which threaten to destroy the natural treasures of the environment,

the blossoms had survived one more year. The acres of rows of glorious white and pink were no more nor less than a plan of time and space recorded by memory, the Housekeeper of Ancient Springtime, and reinforced by human memory using words, spoken and written language (277-78).

These words, referring to Rilke’s French poem, ‘Vergers’ (‘Orchards’), encapsulate Frame’s belief in the power of language above all things, a belief she manifests in her character Jake, whose life ‘from its beginning had been accompanied by the works of Chaucer, Shakespeare, Spenser, Milton’ (238) as well as great modern writers and for whom ‘words were his only valued property’ (276).

Frame references literature from contemporary poets and novelists back to a time of predominantly oral culture and discusses her use of language, as Bakhtin does, drawing a musical analogy. She explains to Elizabeth Alley that ‘the words are the instrument; I mean


\(^{82}\) Rilke, Sonnets to Orpheus, ed. by Leishman, p. 35.

you are playing a musical instrument’. 84 In earlier chapters, I demonstrate how vitally important music was to Frame, one of the joys of the writers’ colony at Yaddo being ‘the richness of the music I’ve had here’. 85 Her friendship with Bill Brown began when she listened to his playing of Schubert and Beethoven. Frame notes that musical language, like written literature, is constantly being reworked and reinvented. The dying Mattina repeatedly asks to hear the Beatles’ song, ‘Hey Jude’, ‘the reconstituted Bach, the fresh youngsters from Liverpool allying themselves to the grand old cathedral master’ (241), suggesting a parallel between the re-imaginings and re-workings of both music and literature, over hundreds of years.

In The Carpathians, Frame draws particularly on folklore and folk tale, from which she takes metaphor, elements of plot and characterisation, merging these with references to Rilke, Shakespeare and twentieth-century poets and novelists. Frame uses the word ‘whirlpool’ several times in her conversation with Elizabeth Alley to describe what she was striving for, the imaginative exploration of ‘the beyond’ – and beyond folklore – saying that she was ‘in a whirlpool’ while she was writing The Carpathians and that she wanted her readers to feel ‘within this whirlpool’, too, sliding downwards in confusion, as Mattina does. 86 Mattina recalls Dante’s journey into hell as she contemplates ‘the invisible gap in the fabric of space and time’ she, wondering if the Antipodes had been the entry to Hell or its exit (135).

From her first novel, Owls Do Cry, Janet Frame has drawn on the voices of writers – and chiefly the poets – who inspired her; and with increasing complexity over the course of her subsequent novels has shown her readers ‘the evanescent nature of the arbitrary

84 Alley, In the Same Room, p. 52.
85 Frame, letter to Charles Brasch, 17 November 1969, MS-0996-003/062, Hocken Collections.
86 Alley, In the Same Room, pp. 48-49.
boundaries between knowledge and imagination, and art and science’. She has drawn on a variety of literary traditions, old and new, from New Zealand, Europe and America as if there were no spatial or temporal frontiers, drawing on the multiplicity of her reading and inspiration.

In all her novels, Frame writes as one of a communion, a community, a family of writers. She takes from a life-time’s reading the gifts of anonymous poets and story-tellers; of canonical writers of the past; and from present-day authors and poets; and in a life devoted to the written word she transforms and orchestrates these gifts into a seamless woven fabric of her own.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

A number of new insights and findings have emerged from this study into Janet Frame’s reading and its relationship to her writing practices. In her novels, Janet Frame avails herself of the treasure house of anglophone literature from her extensive personal reading, which began with her childhood love of books and poetry-writing. Frame’s lifetime reading was exhaustive and eclectic and included a range of poetry and narrative from antiquity, French and German poets and novelists, contemporary writing and the canonical texts of the English language. She perceives the essential interconnectedness of literature, folklore and mythology across ages and cultures and in her writing brings together her European, American and New Zealand heritages creating a dense literary web. Frame challenges conventional boundaries of perception and understanding in her use of densely metaphorical and allusive language; in her innovative and sometimes perplexing use of narrative; and in her fusion of poetry and prose. My critical readings and analysis have revealed an even more intertextual writer than has been appreciated so far.

In my study of Frame’s novels I have been much influenced by the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, who saw that Dostoevsky was reworking an inherent aspect of novelistic language by aiming to remove his authorial voice as far as possible. I have shown how Frame exemplifies Bakhtin’s basic premise in her mixing of genres and blending of voices, particularly with her innovative use of poetic allusion and her introduction of sections of verse into the novels. In doing so, she creates a distinctive personal style in which she segues seamlessly from one voice to another and in which the reader cannot always be certain whose voice is being heard, where Frame merges her own authorial identity with those of her characters and her fellow writers. Frame’s novels exemplify Bakhtin’s insistence on the

1 Bakhtin, ‘Discourse in Dostoevsky’, Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics.
plasticity of the novel form and his view that the orchestrations of different voices and allusions display the innovation and creative power of the author.

In this thesis I have focussed on Frame’s use of her extensive personal reading, drawing on her autobiography, the personal testimony of people who knew her and a body of under-explored archival material. I have also applied Mikhail Bakhtin’s arguments about the polyphonic novel to illuminate Frame’s use of reference and allusion to a wide body of literature from the English-speaking world and elsewhere. Bakhtin came to believe that such literary interplay was an inherent part of the novel as a genre, and I have argued that Frame exploited this inherent intertextual tendency quite consciously, in the course of her dozen novels developing a unique personal style derived from her inner vision. In doing so she creates a conversation with other writers and between different kinds of writing as a way of creating meaning, pattern and form, and a more richly imagined reading experience.

Frame’s extensive use of intertexts enables her to develop a distinctly individual sense of form and time, in novels she referred to as ‘explorations’, in which she ‘is seeing what pattern emerges’. Her sense of style is far removed from traditionally linear and realistic narrative style of New Zealand fiction which prevailed at the beginning of her writing career in the 1950s, and Frame shows a noticeably greater interest in ideas and the human psyche than in realistic plotting or conventional characterisation. In *Intensive Care*, for example, the verse chapters invite the reader to reconsider the prose narrative in a startlingly different light; and Frame uses the Livingstone pear tree as a poetic symbol of continuity and re-creation to link a narrative of the past with one of an imagined future in a work which was originally conceived as two separate novels.

Frame was well acquainted not only with her anglophone inheritance but also with a considerable body of French literature. In my account of the critical context, I identified

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2 Janet Frame, interview with Elizabeth Alley, *In the Same Room*, p. 46.
aspects of Frame’s personal reading which had so far received little attention, including her exposure to a wide range of French literature both during her time at the University of Otago studying on a traditional and conservative syllabus and at the writers’ colonies in the USA. Evidence from people who knew her, and from her own correspondence, shows that Frame enjoyed reading a wide variety of nineteenth- and twentieth-century French poetry and prose and all these writers, as I have argued, leave their mark in Frame’s fiction. The significance of this interest in French literature has been underestimated in the past, and my thesis reveals how an analysis of Frame’s French reading creates new perspectives on the novels, in particular The Rainbirds, A State of Siege, The Adaptable Man and Living in the Maniototo.

My investigation into the reading culture of Otago South Islanders during Frame’s childhood through research in the Otago Daily Times, the Oamaru Mail, The New Zealand Railways Magazine (1926-1948) and other New Zealand newspapers and periodicals reveals the level of importance that these newspapers attached to the literary inheritance which the Presbyterian Scottish settlers to New Zealand’s South Island had brought with them, and the value they attached to education and the written word. The children’s page of the Otago Witness and the Otago Daily Times – ‘Dot’s Little Folk’ (1886-1941) – was a challenging and supportive vehicle for the development of children’s literacy, helping to create and sustain a reading community among South Island children; and was an essential part of Frame’s childhood. The poems Frame submitted to ‘Dot’s Little Folk’ in her adolescence show her increasing feeling for poetic form, her increasing interest in other poets, notably Yeats’s early poems, and early developments in finding her own voice in her poetry writing, departing from the conventionally ‘charming’ style of verse encouraged by ‘Dot’. Her early reading and her interaction with ‘Dot’s Little Folk’ shaped Frame’s imaginative view of the world and her place within it.
The poets Frame read at school, at the University of Otago, and in later life would later leave their imprint in her mature fiction. Frame felt that poets were addressing her directly, and through them she developed a view of herself as part of a family of writers, identifying with others solely through their work. My researches have also uncovered a more prolific and wider-ranging nature of Frame’s reading, particularly of European, American and New Zealand poets, whose voices are woven into her novels. Her inclusion of her reading of Rilke and the English Romantics has been widely noted in previous critical commentaries published in the 1970s to 1990s by Jeanne Delbaere, Marc Delrez, Patrick Evans and others. Her reading of Walt Whitman, however, so clear from her recently published correspondence with Bill Brown has had less attention, and as I have demonstrated is an essential part of the development of Daughter Buffalo.

Frame’s engagement with the poetry of Sylvia Plath has been similarly under-examined. She felt a personal sense of bereavement at the death of Sylvia Plath which is apparent in Towards Another Summer, the novella which she began writing a few days after Plath died. I contend, however, that Frame drew more inspiration from Plath than has been recognised, in particular from Plath’s late poems which made a marked and considered contribution to the character of Naomi in Intensive Care, and to the verse sections of that novel, which are so suggestive of the reader’s need to look beneath the surface. Until now Naomi’s verse letters have received less attention than they merit, and my critical reading aimed to shed more light in particular on Parts I and II of Intensive Care. I believe there is a good deal more to discover about Frame’s interaction with Plath’s poetry, and with the poetry of other American poets, Anne Sexton, for example; and Emily Dickinson, who was so much admired by Frame. Frame met a number of American writers while she was in the USA, at writers’ colonies and through friends, and corresponded with the American poet and novelist Jeanne Delbaere, Marc Delrez, Patrick Evans and others.

May Sarton. It would be good to see this area explored in more depth, perhaps in conjunction with a further study of Frame’s published poetry. Access to Janet Frame’s correspondence, which could shed more light on her literary connections is mostly restricted until January 2019, requiring the permission of the Janet Frame Trust. The Bill Brown correspondence in the Pennsylvania State University library is unrestricted from that date. The material in the Hocken Collections which requires the permission of the Janet Frame Trust until 2019 will still, in most cases, require the permission of the Hocken librarian until 2034. Among Frame’s papers in the Hocken Collections, are further correspondence and early drafts of novels which should provide insights into Frame’s approach to the novel as an art form.

The two major canonical texts in the English language and the most pervasive intertexts of western culture – the King James Bible and Shakespeare’s plays – have left an indelible mark in the English language, their phrasing and stories firmly embedded in our modes of expression, thinking, ethics and cultural life. In addition, the King James Bible and Shakespeare’s plays, in English and in translation, are known throughout the world, and have a global readership. Frame’s close familiarity with the Bible shows that it was entrenched in her imagination and biblical poetic forms of expression make a major contribution to her novels. Earlier studies, especially those of Gina Mercer (1994), and more recently Jan Cronin (2011), have shed light on the narratological use of the Bible, particularly in A State of Siege. My research, however, highlights the greater significance of Frame’s use of the Bible’s poetic language, particularly from Genesis, Revelation and the Psalms. In this, Frame follows earlier poets, Shakespeare, Blake, Rilke, Yeats and Whitman in her use of biblical rhythms and cadence, as well as in her close reference to biblical phrases. She links her own prose and

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4 King, Wrestling with the Angel, p. 346.
verse with past poets and suggests parallels between biblical creation stories and classical mythology and in her later novels with Maori creation myths.

The opening of Frame’s autobiography, ‘From the first place of liquid darkness’, written between her penultimate and final novels, makes clear Frame’s perception of parallels between creation stories from different cultures, as does her reference to Maori myth alongside Genesis in A State of Siege.5 Aware of this cross-cultural sensitivity, Patricia Grace made a very appropriate and intuitively perceptive gift of her story ‘Sun’s Marbles’ to celebrate Frame’s 70th birthday in 1994, a creation story retelling the time ‘when Maui booby-trapped Sun’.6 I have suggested that Frame makes greater use of Maori writing – Grace’s stories in particular – than has hitherto been appreciated, finding in them a kindred spirit, a shared spiritual sense of timelessness. Frame developed an increasing interest in the language and stories of Maori culture, and she appears to maintain an empathetic but respectful distance in her inclusion of Maori characters and concepts. Although there has been some examination of Frame’s inclusion of Maori characters, I believe there is scope here for further exploration and analysis, in particular from a Maori perspective.

From her schoolroom study of Macbeth, Frame began her exploration of Shakespeare’s profound understanding of the human psyche, of fears, repressed desires, self-delusion and guilt which haunt through dreams and hallucination in times of extreme distress, as they do for Chicks, Daphne’s sister, in Owls Do Cry, and later for Malfred Signal in A State of Siege. Frame refers to the sufferings of King Lear and the play’s painful poetic description of the extremes of human suffering, invoked by Istina in Faces in the Water as she observes the depths of human degradation, and Godfrey Rainbird in his lowest moments of despair.

5 Frame, Complete Autobiography, p. 7.
6 Patricia Grace, ‘A Sun’s Marbles’, The Inward Sun, ed. by Elizabeth Alley, pp. 99-104.
Macbeth and King Lear are invoked repeatedly, and Frame segues deftly from one to another, although it is the magic of Prospero in The Tempest which I have argued chiefly pervades the novels. Frame identifies with the spirit of Prospero, the artist-magician, and draws on the imagery of storm and shipwreck, and Prospero’s magical interference in the lives of the other characters. Prospero epitomises above all the transcendental power of the imagination. The wild seas and shipwreck of this play are a constant source of imagery suggestive of mental tumult and inner turmoil, and I have argued that it is The Tempest which is the chief source and inspiration for the catastrophic events in Kowhai Street in The Carpathians.

The elements of dream and magic which Frame found in Shakespeare’s plays are also a feature of folklore, mythology and the fairy tales which played such an important role in her childhood reading. Frame had a lifelong sense of the value of fairy tales, with their often dark insights, stark simplicity, and their connection to folklore and mythology from different cultures. She uses imagery from these tales with their inherent sense of threat to express the experiences and underlying feelings of entrapment of Daphne and Istina, and through the tales’ sense of the dangers of self-delusion and the risks of enchantment Frame identifies the sense of guilt felt by women suffering for their past actions, like Greta and Malfred. Frame uses texts that originate from oral cultures to speak of the depths of human suffering in ways that her characters cannot.

Frame shows that all this traditional material transcends cultural borders and connects to the most ancient of oral and written narratives – just as Bakhtin demonstrates in his analyses – in her constant exploration of what lies beyond immediate perception, beyond the visible horizon. I have argued that in Frame’s reworking and layering of narratives and poetry, and in her sense of cultural interconnectivity, she shows how her art has its origins in
a fusion of memory and imagination, and through her intertextual writing she creates pattern, meaning and permanence.

There is a wealth of currently restricted material for future researchers, suggested by the archives I have been able to draw on, and from which I have gained insights; and evidenced by the invaluable non-fiction already published by the Janet Frame Trust. A study of further material as it becomes available should shed greater light on Frame’s working methods and literary interests. The recent publication of the early letters has been hugely enlightening, and as Frame and Brown maintained their friendship for the rest of Frame’s life, their further communications should also be of considerable literary interest.

That such a fine writer should be so little known outside her homeland is remarkable, and a matter of considerable regret. *Owls Do Cry* was a profoundly and strikingly innovative first novel; Frame’s penultimate novel, *Living in the Maniototo* and her final novel *The Carpathians* – which had a varied critical reception on first publication – are, I contend, among the most powerful and original novels of the twentieth century. In spite of the patchiness of publication in the UK and whilst there is more archive material to draw on in the future, my research for this study has significantly enhanced my understanding and appreciation of Frame’s art as a novelist. I hope that my thesis might illuminate hitherto unconsidered aspects of Frame’s oeuvre; contribute to the promotion of further study of Frame’s achievements as a novelist; and be a celebration of her art.
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