

**METAPHOR IN THE WORK OF JANET FRAME:
AN ALTERNATIVE POSTCOLONIAL PERSPECTIVE**

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This project uses Janet Frame's fiction as a case study to examine how metaphor can play roles both in the marginalization and in the discursive emancipation of *Others*. In so doing, it challenges the structuralist polarization of metaphor and metonymy, and the poststructuralist valorization of metonymy: the notion that metaphoric activity characteristically functions as imperialist propaganda while metonymic activity alone expresses postcolonial concerns. In contrast, this project insists that language — as postulated by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in *Metaphors We Live By* — is fundamentally metaphoric, and that metaphoric events can be fully understood only in accordance with the sum of cultural assumptions that they entail. On these bases, it argues that metaphor is potentially polysemous, and can thus operate either as a totalizing imperialist tactic or as a postcolonial counter-discursive strategy.

In Frame's case, polysemy is facilitated by magic realism: a narrative strategy which frustrates totalization by foregrounding the tension between reality and fantasy. It is this incongruity between the real and the ideal — *this is that and this cannot be that* — that compels us to question cultural mores, encourages us to entertain new possibilities, and hence urges us to “reinvent” (Ricoeur) culture. This project claims that Frame exploits this incongruity to produce parodic and ironic metaphors which express pointed humanitarian concerns. Thus, it supposes that while she employs “postmodern” metafictional strategies, she retains a mimetic relationship with the world in the form of social commentary.

Finally, after demonstrating how metaphoric activity can either marginalize or emancipate *Others*, this investigation proposes that both imperialist and postcolonial strategies are metaphorically constrained by that which we absolutely do not know. For Frame, the “unfathomable Absolute” is epitomized jointly by death and love: the former, an extra-discursive material reality; the latter, an extra-discursive transcendent enigma. Thus, while meaning — in the form of metaphoric polysemy — is ever present for Frame, “truth” remains ever elusive.

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Postcolonial theory is predicated on the notion that language can facilitate imperial domination. This project is a model for postcolonial theory insofar as it uses the work of New Zealand author Janet Frame to examine the role that metaphor plays in the marginalization of *Others*¹ — that is, those who are characterized in negative relation to a “dominant subjectivity” or group (Boehmer 21). In so doing, it exemplifies how metaphoric events can function counter-discursively, specifically in the context of a settler culture wherein “literary resistances [are] necessarily *embedded* in the . . . referential codes they seek to oppose” (Slemon *Unsettling* 31).

1. 1. Discursive Emancipation in the Settler Colony

In English literature, the term *postcolonial* is used to refer to writing produced in the former colonies of Britain, as well as all culture affected by the imperial process (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 2), including neo-imperial processes at large. But while an “umbrella term” (Boehmer 4) is theoretically useful in comparing the global effects of colonization, it risks positing “one true post-colonial voice” (Prentice 55) that ignores historical specificity, elides “the complexity of subjectivity in settler post-colonial cultures” (55), and — of particular concern for Third and Fourth World literatures² — disregards notions

¹ *Othering* (Spivak) generally involves the “seizure and control of the means of interpretation and communication” (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 97), and is informed by such diverse attributes as “race, gender, psychological ‘normalcy’, geographical and social distance, [and] political exclusion” (104).

² Postcolonial literary classifications are defined as follows: *First World* refers to European

with the emancipatory project of a settler writer. Its main concern is how Frame molds her language so as to afford alter/natives to the “bland cultural compromises and conventionality” (Boehmer 214) that have characterized colonialist literature and influenced subsequent nationalist strains. Notably, it is precisely because white settlers have not been as materially oppressed as aboriginal subjects that decolonization in Second-World literatures — with the exception of feminist undertakings — can function primarily on a discursive level (Boehmer 213ff).

“Cultural compromise” in colonial writing reflects the settler colony’s ambivalent relation to Britain and its attempts to reconcile regional loyalties — based on local experience — with British traditions —perceived by colonialists as culturally superior (214). Whereas settler writers initially upheld the imperialist sentiment that “Anglo Saxondom, bearing the standard of the cross, lifts the whole earth and its nations towards knowledge, and peace, and happiness, and good” (*The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature* 118), they began — as early as 1852 in Canada³ — to perceive a disunion between local experience and

Literatures; *Second World* (attributable to Alan Lawson, and used by Stephen Slemon in “Unsettling the Empire: Resistance Theory for the Second World) refers to white settler writing; *Third World* refers to the subjects of invader colonies; and *Fourth World* (attributable to Colin Johnson, and used by Margery Fee in “Why C.K. Stead didn’t like Keri Hulme’s the bone people: Who Can Write As Other?”) refers to the aboriginal literatures of settler colonies.

³ Margaret Atwood notes such ambivalence in Susanna Moodie’s *Roughing It In The Bush*, 1852. (see her introduction to *Roughing it in the Bush*. London: Virago, 1986).

received culture. The dilemma of articulating between . . . guage, and the so-called exotic geography of the home country” (Boehmer 214) was felt by many non-aboriginal writers in New Zealand, Australia, and Canada through the 1960s: “the difficulties of naming which had been experienced by early travellers and colonists persisted. For writers, sensibility remained poised uneasily between aesthetic vocabularies imported from Europe and . . . an environment regarded as peripheral, strange, unknowable, or hostile” (214). The need for a vernacular that expressed local geography, climate, customs, and values was addressed as late as the 1970s by such writers as New Zealand's Frank Sargeson (*More Than Enough*, 1975), Australia's Patrick White (“Citizens for Democracy,” 1977) and Canada's Margaret Atwood (*Survival*, 1972).

Janet Frame's novels can be situated within this political milieu. Her most prolific stage, beginning with *Owls Do Cry* in 1960 and ending with *Daughter Buffalo* in 1972,⁵ straddles what *The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature* refers to as the Provincial period, from 1935 to 1964, and the post-Provincial period, from 1965. In the first, novelists were typically concerned

⁴ In *An Autobiography* Frame writes: “Few people spoke of [New Zealand literature], as if it were a shameful disease . . . But here, in the anthology of New Zealand verse [1945] (they were still not brave enough to call it *poetry*), I could read in Allen Curnow's poems about Canterbury and the plains, about ‘dust and distance’, about our land having its share of time and not having to borrow from a northern Shakespearian wallet. I could read, too, about the past, and absences, and objects which only we could experience, and substances haunting in their unique influence on our lives” (192).

⁵ Other novels of this period include: *Faces in the Water* (1961); *The Edge of the Alphabet* (1962); *Scented Gardens for the Blind* (1964); *The Adaptable Man* (1965); *A State of Siege* (1966); *The Rainbirds* (1968); *Yellow Flowers in the Antipodean Room* (1969); and *Intensive Care* (1970).

dull, conformist, philistine, puritanical, bourgeois, materialist, Anglo-Saxon, and hostile” (*The Oxford History* 146). In the second, they remained somewhat critical of bourgeois attitudes, but acknowledged that a monoculture no longer prevailed (170). A new diversity of literary themes hinged on “urbanization and suburbanization, the sexual revolution, the feminist revolution, the growth of racial and cultural consciousness, the emergence of a more distinctive youth subculture, and changes in family patterns” (170). Parallel to this growing diversity in themes were postcolonial developments in metafiction and magic realism⁶ (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 152-53). The majority of Frame's texts may be situated between Provincial and post-Provincial sensibilities in varying degrees. The novel *The Adaptable Man* (1965) epitomizes the concerns of both periods: it is at once a critique of the traditional monoculture — one that belies the myth of the pastoral English village — and a subversion of literary conventions such as the unified theme, linear plot, and authoritative narrative.

However, at the same time that Frame reveals — in typical settler fashion — “some of the most subtle examples” of the difficulties posed by an

⁶ Although *magic realism*, as a literary genre, has been most closely associated with Latin American (1940s) and Caribbean (1950s) writings, it has been treated recently as a postcolonial literary discourse applicable to Second-World literatures. Stephen Slemon argues that the “double vision” characteristic of magic realism — the coupling of representation and fantasy — mimics the ambivalence which marks settler writings, wherein the literary constraints imposed by mainstream tradition are often juxtaposed with fantastic, liberating responses to those constraints (“Magic Realism as Post-Colonial Discourse”). Critic Jeanne Delbaere refers to Frame's *The Carpathians* as *magic realism*. (*The Ring* 202).

of the most conventional examples of extra-discursive colonization that thrive within the parameters of a settler culture misperceived as homogeneous. These include the institutionalization of those deemed mentally or physically deviant — in particular women — the hospitalization of the sick and elderly, and the ghettoization of the poor.

In this sense, Frame's work is more closely aligned with the anti-bourgeois humanism characteristic of New Zealand's Provincial period. Indeed, she may be seen as modernist in that she poses narcissism as the universal impetus underlying colonization, emphasizes individual responsibility⁷ in the face of that narcissism, and valorizes the role that imagination plays in transforming individuals and their societies.⁸ Such tendencies may be seen as problematic because modernism grew out of “a liberal humanist tradition whose strategies fed on colonialism” (Maes-Jelinek 47). However, the assertion of individuality may also be seen as the most fundamental assertion of diversity. At the very least, it is the means by which colonists have realized their subjectivities, and cast aside the “bland cultural compromises and conventionality” once characteristic of settler writing.

⁷ Notably, Frame's emphasis on individuality does not, like many modernist texts, include prototypical notions of the “lone hero” or “self-made man.” At the same time that she emphasizes the power of the individual will, she presents interdependency as a natural and social imperative (egs. see *State of Seige*, 204)

⁸ For example, literature is a source of inspiration and a means of liberation for Istina Mavet in *Faces in the Water*.

Early criticism of Frame's work was most often centered on psychoanalytic and structuralist analyses. And more often than not, Frame was treated "as an untutored primitive, achieving depth in the reading effects of her work [only] through the mobilisations of a naive (feminine) intuition" (Ferrier 252). Fortunately, new approaches "by-pass this construction and engage with Frame as a conscious artist, *aware of her playing with language*" (252). Recent critiques such as Vincent O'Sullivan's "Exiles of the Mind: The Fictions of Janet Frame" (1988) are often blatantly poststructuralist, while others such as Judith Dell Panny's "Opposite and Adjacent to the Postmodern in *Living in the Maniototo*" (1992) search for ways that Frame can be situated in relation to both modernism and postmodernism. Still, there are few articles that focus on Frame's use of language, especially from a postcolonial perspective, and only a handful that refer to her use of metaphor.

Texts that examine Frame's use of language, and are therefore important to this project include Gina Mercer's *Subversive Fictions* and "Exploring 'The Secret Caves of Language': Janet Frame's Poetry," Susan Ash's "The Narrative Frame: 'Unleashing (Im)possibilities,'" and Graham Huggan's "Resisting the Map as Metaphor: A Comparison of Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* and Janet Frame's *Scented Gardens for the Blind*." In addition, Marc Delrez's "Love in a Post-Cultural Ditch: Janet Frame" and Jeanne Delbaere's "Death as the Gateway to Being in Janet Frame's Novels" have been instrumental in exploring Frame's metaphoric treatment of love and death.

inverts binary oppositions characteristic of “an earlier orthodoxy” of criticism (Ferrier 251), but how she resists the whole “tyranny of definition” (Huggan 11) while she reinscribes the value of meaning. That is, this thesis attempts to exemplify how, as Jeanne Delbaere explains, Frame puts “the resources of post-modernism at the service of a modernist quest for reconciliation” (Delbaere *The Ring* 10). In so doing, it seeks to determine not only what Frame says metaphorically about certain literary themes, but what she says theoretically about the power and limitations of language itself.

1. 3. Postcolonialism versus Postmodernism

This project, although postcolonial in focus, shares certain assumptions with postmodernism. First, it privileges discourse theory, which claims “that meaning is not simply given, but is socially constructed across a number of institutional sites and practices” (Best and Kellner 26). In particular, it analyzes metaphor on the level of discourse rather than on the level of the word or noun. In so doing, it emphasizes that metaphoric events are social constructs which are potentially polysemous.

Secondly, it makes limited use of Derridean deconstruction. Deconstruction, while reiterating the Saussurean claim that signification relies on difference, seemingly opposes structuralism by privileging the signifier over the signified. This strategy emphasizes that language is endlessly referential, and hence that it must be contextualized in order to be understood. For example,

conventional meaning. As a unit, the word *alternative* denotes a choice to be made between two things. At the same time, *alter* suggests *change* or *modification*, and *native* suggests a natural connection to a place or thing (*The Oxford English Dictionary*). Thus, the deconstruction of *alter/native* emphasizes that while we adhere to a natural process, we superimpose notions of binary logic upon that process. In addition, because *alter* refers to modification, it recognizes not only difference — that is, *the Other* — but an indeterminable number of differences — that is, others. In this case, it highlights the inclusion of the settler writer within the postcolonial paradigm.⁹

However, this project opposes theories of poststructuralism that posit a “linguistic idealism” (Best and Kellner) “whereby discourse constitutes all social phenomena, or is privileged over extra-discursive material conditions” (27). For, as Annamaria Carusi emphasizes, if “*différance* is to be followed through to its most radical conclusion, there is no possibility of marking a point in a signifying chain as just or unjust, no possibility of judging at all or even of deciding which is the ‘better’ of two alternatives: in the terms of *différance*,

⁹ According to Terry Goldie, whites in Canada, New Zealand, and Australia have appropriated the word *native* “in their need to become ‘native’, to belong here” (234). As part of the process of what he calls *indigenization*, the term *native* “suggests the impossible necessity of becoming indigenous” (234). While Goldie aptly reveals the discursive ambivalence of displaced colonizers in the nineteenth century, he neglects to distinguish between the contemporary notions of *native* as aboriginal — that is, the first inhabitants of a region — and *native* as a site of identification — that is, those who belong to a place either by association or by birth. Goldie’s argument begs the question: “at what point in the historical continuum, if ever, do descendants of colonizers ‘belong’ here?” The Maoris, who are considered “truly native” (234) by Goldie’s standards, conquered the original inhabitants of New Zealand between the 9th and 10th centuries. My deconstruction of *alter/native* should not be construed as an attempt to appropriate the notion of aboriginality. Rather, it is my intention to emphasize that there are many kinds of natives, and among these, the descendants of white settlers.

possible” (Carusi 101). Carusi claims that unlimited alternatives fail to locate the presence of *Others*, and only allude to *the Other* as “the lack” (102) or “the blank space” (102) that is constituted by, within, and on behalf of a dominant subjectivity. She insists that *Others* are not merely the byproducts of mainstream cultures, formed by the “unconscious processes set in place by the exigencies of the Symbolic” (105), but are also agents of social dissension and transformation. This premise is critical in postcolonial studies, for whenever the play of *différance* fails to affirm *the Other*, it reaffirms the status quo that marginalizes *Others*. As Stephen Slemon asserts:

Whereas a post-modernist criticism would want to argue that literary practices such as these expose the constructedness of *all* textuality and thus call down “the claim to unequivocal domination of one mode of signifying over another” (Johnson 5), an *interested* post-colonial critical practice would want to allow for the positive production of oppositional truth-claims in these texts. It would retain for post-colonial writing, that is, a mimetic or referential purchase to textuality, and it would recognize in this referential drive the operations of a crucial strategy for survival in marginalized social groups. (Slemon, “Modernism’s Last Post” 5)

Thus, it is imperative that postcolonial theory refuse to dogmatize the primacy of difference over identity. For while the production of meaning relies on notions of difference, so too do notions of difference rely on the cultural affirmation of meaning. If the principle of identity — self and sameness — is

ly no basis for either human empathy or social coalition. As Gayatri Spivak comments: “[post-structuralism suggests that] you cannot consider all other subjects and should look [rather] at your own subjective investment in the narrative that is being produced. You see, that is something that I will continue to repeat, it is not an invitation to be benevolent towards others” (Spivak 29). In light of this interpretation, Frame's work is better viewed from a postcolonial perspective. For it is my contention that she uses metaphor in a way that discloses radical difference at the same time that she imaginatively unites that difference, not by the erasure of identity, nor by the insistence of uniformity, but by benevolence — the notion that all possess “a prized humanity” (Frame, *Faces* 112).

1. 4. Metaphor as an Imperialist Strategy

Certain postcolonial theorists have observed that metaphoric activity, because it readily characterizes *Others* — for example, by equating aborigines with *savages*, or civilization with *the white man's burden* — can be used as a powerful means of propaganda. In contrast, metonymic activity, because it functions relationally, can be used to nullify dominant stereotypes. While acknowledging these claims as valid and important, this thesis seeks to clarify that the opposition between metaphor and metonymy is not essential. Moreover, it attempts to demonstrate how metaphoric events can problematize the totalization of identity.¹⁰

¹⁰ Totalization is “the homogenizing process by which a dominant ideology is imposed on any text . . . thereby eliding its diverse elements” (*Encyclopedia of Contemporary Literary*

tional distinctions between figurative and referential language. In order to understand the significance of this opposition for postcolonial studies, it is necessary to outline a brief history of metaphor. Generally, metaphor has been seen as either an entity or an activity which enables us to understand one concept in terms of another. In this sense, much of language is metaphoric in that it names our experiences and organizes the conceptual systems by which we live (Lakoff and Johnson). Still, throughout time writers and theorists have treated metaphor principally as a poetic device, wholly distinct from rational discourse and practical affairs. For the classical writer, poetry was a language of passion (Barthes 90) or an "ornamental expression of general ideas" (Thompson, *Russian Formalism* 50); for the anti-rational Romantic, it was a medium for direct emotion (50); and for the hyper-rational New Critic I. A. Richards, who coined the metaphoric terms *tenor* and *vehicle*, poetry had no cognitive value at all (44).

The notion that poetic metaphor is characteristically unpragmatic can be traced back to Aristotle's premise that metaphor has two distinct *functions* (Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor* 13): one rhetorical, the other poetic. While the aim of rhetoric was persuasion in the event of logical argument (*Rhetoric* 1354^a1) such as was suitable to courts of judicature, the aim of poetics was the engrainment of human action in epic and tragic poetry (*Poetics* 1449^b 9-11). In the

Theory). In this case, totalization refers specifically to how metaphoric concepts are extracted from their context and treated as self-contained units.

second, it was used to arouse and purge feelings of pity and fear (1449^b 24-29). As a result, the use of metaphor as a persuasive strategy has long been considered the purview of logical argument alone while its implications within the realm of aesthetics have been neglected.

Moreover, Aristotle's "virtues of lexis" (*The Rule 32*) limited the use of poetic metaphor within rhetoric, further stratifying the two disciplines. Among these virtues, Aristotle emphasized *clarity*, *naturalness*, and *appropriateness*. *Clarity* referred to the use of ordinary words as opposed to strange terms and "barbarisms." Poetic metaphors employed *recherché* words, thereby abandoning clarity (32). *Naturalism* meant that metaphors must not be inflated or theatrical, but must avoid poetical effects (*Rhetoric* 1406^b 8-11). *Appropriateness* meant that metaphors must "fairly correspond to the thing signified" (1405^a) keeping in mind "that which is appropriate for prose is not appropriate for poetry" (*The Rule 33*) because "poetry . . . is an inspired thing" (*Rhetoric* 1408^b 18). Generally, poetical utterances risked weakening an argument (*The Rule 32-34*). Therefore, in the division between rhetoric and poetics, only rhetoric could adequately convey ideological concerns.

But although Aristotle considered the function of metaphor to be split between rhetoric and poetics, his definition of metaphor was shared by both domains (12).¹¹ Thus, one can see common denominators between these divided

¹¹ "Metaphor consists in giving the thing a name that belongs to something else; the transference being either from genus to species, or from species to genus, or from species to species, or on grounds of analogy" (*Poetics* 1457^b 6-9).

metaphor's characteristic "liveliness of expression" — that which delights the hearer by its novelty. And since rhetoric is persuasion, and by Aristotle's virtue of *elegance* "a poetical process extended to prose" (35), it follows that poetics, to be of value to rhetoric, is able to function persuasively. At the same time, poetics is evocative rather than predicative; it persuades us through a "soft-sell" rather than a "hard-sell" approach. In order to maximize *the power of suggestion*, metaphor's revelatory capacities (Ricoeur) must be capitalized upon, which entails — contrary to the current notion that metonymy alone characterizes multiplicity — its polysemy, and hence its indeterminacy. Ideally, metaphor delights us with a wealth of imaginative possibilities, lures us into examining any number of them, thereby persuading us, at least momentarily, to revise our conceptions about the world.

Although rhetoric has been severed historically from Aristotelian *Dialectic*¹² and reduced to a theory of tropes,¹³ the basic oppositions between figurative and referential language remain embedded in modern theory.¹⁴ Roman

¹² The "art of logical discussion" as trans. by W. Rhys Roberts.

¹³ Ricoeur outlines how rhetoric was gradually reduced from the effective presentation of logical discourse to a theory of style, then to a classification of figures of speech, and then to a theory of tropes (*The Rule 9ff*) that "now paid attention only to the complex made up of metaphor and metonymy, at the price of reducing the first to resemblance and the second to contiguity" (45). Because the Greeks defined metaphor on the level of the word — that is, as a substitution of a deviant term for a proper one — the function of metaphor became strictly ornamental when the function of rhetoric became strictly classificatory.

¹⁴ Although Aristotle did not split metonymy and metaphor (he considered the former to be a subcategory of the latter), he maintained a distinction between referential and figurative language by curtailing the use of poetic metaphor in rhetoric.

claiming that the former was marked by the symbolic function of metaphor, while the latter was characterized by the referential function of metonymy (Jakobson 113f). Likewise, I. A. Richards separated human speech into two categories: emotive and referential. The first was the prerogative of poetry — the second, of science: language could be used either to express the emotions and attitudes which objects and situations afford, or to refer to things themselves (Richards 267). A similar, albeit subtler, division is espoused by Northrop Frye, who claimed that poetic metaphor referred to a transcendent collection of “symbolic units” (Eagleton, *Literary Theory* 92f) rather than historical or cultural phenomena: “a philosophical poet, as compared with a philosopher, is less interested in a system of the relating of ideas, and more in elaborating the metaphorical pictures or diagrams out of which the system comes” (Frye 126). For Frye, literature was “pure *mythos*” (126) — grand, but in the end unworldly, and hence non-political.

The exclusion of creative writing from the referential, ideological domain necessitated that it be governed by an autonomous set of aesthetic principles. In order to explain the origins of such a system, modern theorists such as Frye — and those associated with structuralism¹⁵ and New Criticism¹⁶ — linked language and literature to what was apparently fixed and essential about humanity.

¹⁵ For example, Claude Levi-Strauss. See Terry Eagleton's *Literary Theory*, 109.

¹⁶ For example, Cleanth Brooks. See Thompson's *Russian Formalism and Anglo-American New Criticism*, 38.

Thus, if texts did not address “everyman,” it was not because they were entering into dialogue with another, but rather that their authors *as Other* had failed to master the “universal” aesthetic code.¹⁷ This objectivist “myth” (Lakoff and Johnson 195ff) — the notion that literary value can be determined according to absolute criteria — has been a persistent marginalizing force within literary studies.¹⁸

1. 5. Metonymy as a Postcolonial Strategy

Postcolonial theory, having grown out of concern for marginalized literatures, has a vested interest in examining the ideological function of language. According to this position, postcolonial/poststructuralist theorists Robert Kroetsch and Homi Bhabha have proposed that metaphor is aligned with imperialist notions of totality and singularity, while metonymy is aligned with postcolonial demands for cultural specificity and multiplicity.

¹⁷ Harold Bloom is currently one of the most outspoken advocates of this position. He claims that “the movement from within the [literary] tradition cannot be ideological or place itself in the service of any social aims, however morally admirable. One breaks into the canon only by aesthetic strength, which is constituted primarily of an amalgam: mastery of figurative language, originality, cognitive power, knowledge, exuberance of diction” (Bloom, *The Western Canon* 27-28).

¹⁸ New Criticism was particularly influential in this regard. Although the “close reading” of texts was largely an Anglo-American means of circumventing British criteria (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 160f), it became “the critical practice imposed by a British education system throughout the colonial world” (161). Such aesthetic absolutism impeded the development of regional writing, and undermined the value of alter/native literatures such as aboriginal literatures and women's writing.

Kroetsch valorizes metonymy. To go from metaphor to metonymy is to go from the temptation of the single to the allure of multiplicity. Instead of the temptations of 'origin' [as per monomyths] we have genealogies that multiply our connections into the past, into the world" (Kroetsch 117).¹⁹ This polarized view is reminiscent of Jakobson's claim that metonymy, as opposed to metaphor, is characteristically referential. It also echoes Frye's notion that metaphor is pure *mythos*. Yet, it is unreasonable to fault metaphor for its role in totalizing imperial ideologies while at the same time characterizing it as "unworldly" or non-referential. This attempt to divide language into ideological and mimetic camps is not unlike Helen Tiffin's self-defeating proposition that "metaphoric activity in post-colonial writing is . . . likely to be more culturally functional than poetically decorative [vis a vis the forms and institutions of the Old World]" (15). If the metaphoric activity of the "Old World" has been merely decorative, one must wonder what all the postcolonial "fuss" has been about.

Similarly, Bhabha devalues metaphoric reading strategies:

To metaphorize the production of meaning is to introduce a principle of equivalence whereby the work of the narrative . . . is concealed within a set of categories and closure and resolutions, such as 'character' or 'mimetic irony'. That these are also substitutions which introduce a specific cultural cohesiveness is clear: behind 'character' stands the Western liberal humanist individual; behind

¹⁹ Robert Kroetsch continually modifies his theoretical position in an attempt to reconcile postcolonial concerns with structuralist and poststructuralist tendencies (Creelman).

For Bhabha, metaphoric readings make “no concessions to the cultural specificity of texts” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 52), while metonymic readings nullify dominant monads, and focus rather on the “uncanny” (Bhabha 115) series of gains and losses which best reflect worldly experience.

This project, however, will argue against the polarization of metaphor and metonymy, and the subsequent valorization of metonymy. As Lakoff and Johnson convincingly demonstrate, language is fundamentally metaphoric. Therefore, metonymies must — at some point in the chain of deferred meaning — suggest identity. In addition, the concept of cohesion — in this case, what is actually only partial cohesion — is not experientially inaccessible to other cultures, nor is it a prerogative of “Western” imperial discourse. By devaluing metaphoric totalization *in toto*, Bhabha curtails “the positive production of oppositional truth-claims” (Slemon 5). A more productive postcolonial strategy would focus on the specific ways that metaphors have been used, and continue to be used, to foster imperialism.

1. 6. Metaphor as a Discursive Event

On the surface, metaphor indeed totalizes concepts via the verb *to be*. Still, metaphoric appearances are deceiving; paradoxically, this cohesion is effected only as metaphor highlights certain features of reality while camouflaging others (Lakoff and Johnson 163). For example, the Lacanian metaphor that

nization of certain groups of females since the inception of state-level societies — while downplaying its historical particulars. Since the verb *to be* connotes non-activity in “Western” culture, the *phallic order* is all too easily viewed as a universal stasis, concealing two facts: first, that societies function processional — hence change, for better or worse, is inevitable — and secondly, that many different kinds of social orders, exemplifying different statuses and roles with respect to gender, have existed throughout time. I would argue that metaphors that employ false analogies in our culture (false insofar as they apply to social realities) are commonly those that confuse *becoming* with *being* or treat *phenomena* as if they were *objects*. It is often in this way that metaphoric activity transforms “history into nature” (Barthes 129), making complicated, unappealing or political abstractions seem “innocent” or “natural” (MacDonald 5).

Because metaphor necessarily highlights certain features of reality to the exclusion of others, it only partially constructs the concepts by which we live (Lakoff and Johnson 52ff). To be fully understood, metaphoric activity must be culturally contextualized. For example, the early imperialist text *How Canada Was Won: For School and Country* can be read “meaningfully” — that is, in terms of the prevailing monoculture (Crowley 49) — only in accordance with the sum of metaphoric assumptions that it entails. The verb *to win*, which is used metaphorically in this instance, presupposes that a nation is an object, in particular a trophy, and war, a game or sport (MacDonald 30). It conceals the historical fact that the losers of this “match” — such as the indigenous peoples

entire way of life. In order to accept certain definitions of reality, we must cognitively accept a network of cultural associations. Thus, metaphors should not be seen as conceptual or ideological containers, but rather as discursive “events” (*Ricoeur*). When metaphoric activity totalizes imperialist ideology, “in most cases, what is at issue is not the truth or falsity of a metaphor [itself] but the perceptions and inferences that follow from it, and the actions that are sanctioned by it” (Lakoff and Johnson 158).

1. 7. Metaphor as a Counter-Discursive Strategy

Once metaphor is recognized as a discursive *event* that only partially constructs ideological concepts, a space is freed for counter-discursive strategy. This is not to suggest that metaphor is at best counter-totalizing. Marginalized cultures, lacking social influence, are less able to conventionalize metaphoric activity. But there is an alter/native metaphoric “game” in which, according to postcolonial author Wilson Harris, “a caveat or paradox replaces ideology” (Harris 3). Because metaphor is in fact an “asymmetric infinity,” the imperial values which totalize metaphor are necessarily “partial and therefore ultimately ineffectual” (3). In other words, while an imperial approach to metaphor has profited from the illusion of symmetry — *this is that* — a postcolonial strategy would benefit from realizing the whole metaphoric structure — *this is that* and *this cannot be that*.

I am not suggesting that metaphor as a counter-discursive strategy ends

paradox. Meaning may be construed as a quest — or a question — rather than a statement: *this is that* may now be understood as *what if this becomes that?* This approach would entail that structuralist tendencies need not be abandoned altogether, but rather that meaning must be recognized as socially-constructed, and hence temporary. Moreover, it would put the ideological onus on ourselves, as participants in discursive events, rather than on the structure of language proper; as Janet Frame once said: “it’s not that the words are failing us but we fail them” (Alley 165).

The metaphoric activity that appears in Frame’s novels lends itself to an alter/native reading — one that problematizes totalization in a number of specific ways: by equating obscure concepts, thereby increasing multivalence; by refusing to clarify either tenor or vehicle; by using metaphors to qualify similes, thereby undermining the certainty implied by the verb *to be*; and by blatantly exposing cultural entailments. In addition, she emphasizes that our ability to understand important metaphorical concepts — such as *death* and *love* — is necessarily limited (Lakoff and Turner 69f). In so doing, she exposes the deceitful role that conventional language, in the face of such enigmas, plays in the production of meaning.

1. 8. The Magic of Metaphor

This project equates metaphoric events with magical tricks in two ways. First, metaphor is presented as a “formulaic incantation” (Covino 92) that is

general. Secondly, it is presented as an imaginative invocation that is practiced by postcolonial poets and storytellers, and liberationists at large. This duality corresponds to Kenneth Burke's notion in *A Grammar of Motives* that language functions in terms of *false magic* and *true magic*. The former refers to rhetoric that "attempts to suspend or control 'the laws of motion'" (Covino 92) — that which *arrests* discourse (93), while the latter refers to language that enters into the "laws of motion." Accordingly, conventional metaphors can be seen as *false magic*, for the assertion that *this is that* attempts to suspend or control the process of questioning. In contrast, poetic metaphors can be seen, potentially at least, as *true magic*, for the assertion that *this is that and this cannot be that* moves within the broadest possible field of inquiry. *True magic* is "the practice of disrupting and recreating articulate power: a (re)sorcery of spells for generating multiple perspectives" (Covino 9) — that which transforms society (Burke xix).

The distinctions between false and true magic, as well as conventional and poetic metaphors, are not intended to posit opposites as essential. Language, as an event, often involves mixed motives and functions. Rather, it is intended to balance the notion that metaphoric activity is a propagandist, totalizing strategy. For while the partial structure of metaphor allows for an element of deceit — as evidenced by the exploits of the imperialist magus — the whole structure allows for a measure of alchemy — as evidenced by the truly magical work of Janet Frame.

Postcolonial theory concerns not only the cultural effects of British expansion from the sixteenth century to the present, but also the social dynamics that perpetuate the fabrication of *Others* (Ashcroft *et al.* 94ff). Metaphoric events in particular, because they readily totalize *Others* — for example, by equating aborigines with *savages*, or civilization with *the white man's burden* — can be used propagandistically. This quality renders them comparable to magical tricks. Insofar as they can “conjure up” identities “out of thin air,” they can make political abstractions appear innocent or natural (MacDonald 5). However, acts of naming are not solely magical events. Because our common conceptual systems are fundamentally metaphoric (Lakoff and Johnson 3), naming is also a means of establishing ourselves substantively in accordance with others and in opposition to *Others*. Thus, metaphoric events are potential acts of colonization.

Janet Frame foregrounds the relationship between colonization, identity and metaphoric activity. While she acknowledges that underprivileged groups are treated nominally, and at the same time deterred from acts of naming, she emphasizes our generic capacity to metaphorize disparagingly: “much of living,” she claims, “is an attempt to preserve oneself by annexing and occupying others” (*Faces* 217). She substantiates this view by exposing the cultural assumptions that underlie conventional metaphoric events. In so doing, she reveals that the appropriation of *Others* cannot be ascribed to the trick

of totalization per se, but to innocent, self-serving totalization, which culminates in collective moral inertia: a spellbinding “network of deceit” (*Scented Gardens* 147).

Metaphoric activity is easily conventionalized because it is fundamentally pragmatic: when certain ideas lack signs, we produce metaphors to fill the gaps in language¹ (Ricoeur, *The Rule* 62). Once ingrained, these metaphors provide the bases for additional entailments. This is epitomized by *orientational metaphors* — such as up/down, in/out, front/back, and centre/periphery — which organize entire networks of concepts (Lakoff and Johnson 14). For example, the cultural premise² that *high status is up* and *low status is down* is extended to such metaphors as *he’s at the peak of his career* and *she’s down in the dumps* (16). Most of us take these semantic underpinnings for granted. Yet, Frame accentuates that language is metaphorically structured, culturally constrained, and hence necessarily beguiling.

I find myself looking back into life when my intention is to look forward into death, yet even the words I use to write this are part of the great deceit and confusion: I imply that we move from

¹ Also known as *catachresis* (Aristotle), *lexical lacunae*, and *forced metaphors*.

² Lakoff and Johnson claim that our most “fundamental concepts are organized in terms of one or more spatialization metaphors”(17) which “have a basis in [both] our physical and cultural experience” (14). While the polar oppositions up-down, in-out, etc., are physical in nature, the orientational metaphors based on them can vary from culture to culture. For example, “in some cultures the future is in front of us, whereas in others it is in back” (14). Thus, while our language is organized metaphorically, *specific* metaphoric events are not integral to any given system of language.

the future, but I could just as easily say, convincing myself, that we move round and round the source and the fountain. How we suffer from Language! (*Daughter Buffalo* 91)

Although the narrator, Turnlung, might convince himself of an alter/native perspective, he recognizes that new concepts are limited by old metaphoric entailments: any words he uses are necessarily “part of the great deceit and confusion” of “Language.” Frame suggests that we are always compelled, to some degree, to circle the fountain of culture, paying tribute to those dominant monads — “the topsy-turvey . . . lies” (*Yellow Flowers* 145) — that structure our basic common experiences.

Later, Frame reinforces this notion: “words are a risk,” Turnlung says, because “their very birth is a tampering”³ (*Daughter* 119). The metaphor *words are live offspring* — in this case, an unconventional concept — is further extended:

I thought of the newborn, how their organs, especially the vital organs — the heart, the lungs, the brain — are unfinished at birth, and yet having accepted life even they in their unfinished state must begin at once to struggle against death and secretly to complete their own birth — they, like the *works of art* [italics mine] (86-87).

³ As in a middle state between two extremes; to mediate or mix (*Webster's*).

dictable; only those that have singular vitality will grow from conceptus to concept. And if words are “born,” they must be nurtured accordingly, so inevitably, like the parents of the “sexually unfinished” children in *Daughter Buffalo*, “we have to do the finishing” (84). Likewise, metaphors are both culturally pre-constructed and socially reproduced; they refer to given realities and “re-describe” those realities (Ricoeur, *The Rule* 6). And although we cannot pre/scribe the identities of either our children or our words, we can intervene at various points in their development. It is in this sense that Frame claims “it’s not that the words are failing us but we fail them” (Alley 165). Thus, she stresses that language is not static and absolute, beyond social intervention.

When we fail to scrutinize the cultural assumptions that underlie metaphoric events, we are like “newlyborn” who refuse to complete the “impenetrable kernel” (*The Edge* 28) of our own identities. Frame implicates narcissism as the corollary of this failure, as allegorized by the dying child in *Daughter Buffalo*:

A six-year-old child was dying of nephritis and as soon as we examined him we knew there was little we could do . . . The child clutched a small doll, *mimicking upon it his own many catheterizations*, talking to it now and again to reassure it. Then suddenly he kissed the doll, closed its eyes and lay it beside him with its head on the pillow. Then he died. (18) [italics mine]

Significantly, *catheterizations* keep body cavities open, permitting the withdrawal of fluids and the injection of foreign substances. The unidentified child,

a comforting doll. Similarly, on a collective level, we superimpose our mutually-invasive mimics onto a “security blanket” of convention: “between the entire human race there was this constant invisible exchanging and bargaining, transmitting of smiles and whims and gestures, in an attempt to efface all individual identity, to escape from the responsibility of owning unique essence and a name” (*Scented* 147). It is this cross-appropriation of insecure identities that binds us to the spell of metaphoric deceit.

Frame demystifies a variety of conventional metaphoric tricks, all used to annex and occupy *Others*. The remainder of this chapter will explore these mis/conceptions, beginning with the common denominator *identity has objective value*.

2. 1. The Value of Identity: The Reappearing Coin

Frame exemplifies how metaphoric events commonly presuppose that *people are commodities*. In *Daughter Buffalo*, Talbot's fiancée is described in terms of a financial acquisition:

She'll be a real asset to the family [my father said]. I noted . . . the tendency to make a material judgement of her as if she were a gilt-edged share in which I was about to invest my emotional fortune and of which the dividends were anticipated happily by every member of my family. Her undoubted value locked her within the business world of my family with the marriage contract lega-

Frame qualifies the conventional metaphor *she is an asset* with an extended simile that describes the family as an imperial center, and marriage as a form of annexation that expands its empire. The parallel between *family* and *business world*, as well as the metaphoric use of the verb *locked*, further suggests that transactions of this kind are ill-conceived, unfeeling traps. Talbot admits, using the metaphoric concept *relationships are a packaged deal*, that “[Lenore] gave her feeling to me as one gives a package which is accepted and, with an absence of mind, signed for” (16).

The notion that *people are commodities* also involves the idea that *people are transferable*. In the following passage, Frame uses the verb *delivered* conventionally, but immediately discloses its underlying assumption with the simile *like a parcel*: “[Talbot] found a cab for Turnlung, put him in it, paid the driver, and asked that [he] be delivered, like a parcel, to the exact address, right inside the door of his apartment house” (148). Turnlung — a man past his *prime* — is not as valuable to Talbot as Lenore; consequently, whereas she is received via *registered* mail, Turnlung is sent *general* delivery.

The metaphoric concept that *people are commodities* further entails the idea that *life is a series of capital gains and expenditures*:

Sometimes as a child in our clean home I would dream of what I heard of the concentration camps, the . . . studies put into effect to enable an inmate to go from one place fully clothed, and, divesting himself of everything without and much within, arrive at the end-

and I felt *the strange parallel* of the supermarkets where instead of divesting ourselves of goods we collect them, [and] arrive laden at the exits. [italics mine] (127)

Talbot's metaphor nostalgically extends from his clean childhood home, to the conceptually sterilized image of Nazi concentration camps, to that of a lifeless supermarket. His metaphorization does not describe the suffering of inmates, but merely appropriates the *Other's* narrative in a way that validates his own materialistic perspective. Clearly, this passage is not about concentration camps, but about Talbot. Frame alerts us to the narcissism underlying this metaphoric deceit when she labels the parallel *strange*: that is, his assumptions are unfamiliar — not native — to the realities of persecution.

The concept that *people are commodities* also suggests that *words are a currency in the human commodity exchange*. For example, in *The Adaptable Man*, Alwyn's fiancée and mother verbally compete to see who has a greater stake in his *future*: “While Jenny and Greta spilled sentences beginning ‘He is’ . . . Alwyn drank his tea in the silent amusement and slight annoyance of one who is suddenly an item of property, a possession to be described, valued, bought, sold. The more Jenny and Greta talked, [he] noticed with satisfaction, the more the price went up” (49). In this instance, Alwyn allows others to establish his self-worth. Yet, Frame cautions that objectification is so conventionally encoded that it can occur spontaneously without our permission: “Unity realized suddenly that she was tired, and leaning on her typewriter, she dozed a few

moved the typewriter cover: bbbbbb,,787654 [\$\$\$\$]; the [\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$] marks were prominent” (46). In this passage, Unity — a writer — is branded by arbitrary signifiers when she “falls asleep on the job.” The most “prominent” of these is the dollar sign, suggesting that when we treat language indolently, we risk becoming impressed — and perhaps oppressed — by superficial evaluators.

2. 2. The Transmutation of Identity

Since, as Frame suggests, *words are a currency in the human commodity exchange*, then they are likewise denominational in value. Thus, she emphasizes that some words bear a “privileged metaphoric status” (*Daughter Buffalo* 92). For example, she locates *jewel* in “the aristocracy of language” (92). At the same time, she stresses that it is there only “because we have chosen to put it there . . . the word becoming its meaning. Precious, a treasure, a glittering gem” (92).⁴ Accordingly, she ridicules the notion that lexemes are absolute in worth. In *Daughter Buffalo*, Talbot humorously reconceptualizes *treasure*: “the dog’s mess gave off a small spiral of steam. The man retrieved the treasure, replaced his scoop, tugged at the dog’s leash, and hurried away” (81). Likewise, in *Scented Gardens for the Blind*, the “literary” Albert Dungbeetle equates sheep excrement with “the Treasure of All Time [that] falls from God” (176), while in *The Edge of the Alphabet* “decay glitters with diamonds” (8). Because metaphors only

⁴ Frame alludes to such conventional metaphors as *he’s treasured by his family and she’s a real gem*.

partially construct the concepts by which we live (Lacan and Johnson 2011), the values of semantic denominations are transmutable.

Frame also transmutes identity by reversing the metaphoric spell *people are commodities* to read *commodities are people*.

She recalled someone pointing to a corner of the 'section' describing what she hoped to plant there, as if the corner were an individual to be dressed; even the fence posts, the patio, the barbecue were spoken of as living things. "See, there's the barbecue," they said as if they named a new grandchild, their son's best friend, their daughter. "That's our barbecue." (*The Carpathians* 155)

Similarly, after Sally dies in *Daughter Buffalo*, Talbot feels "free to make the telephone the only other living being in the apartment" (133). Here, Frame parodies conventional metaphoric activity. In addition, she exemplifies how the possession of *Others* — in this case, objects — can be extraordinarily preoccupying.

Frame further transmutes identity by strategically turning "the lining of words" (*Yellow Flowers* 159) inside out. Thus, *The Wonderful Star* becomes *The Wonderful Rats* (159), *God* becomes *Dog* (159) and *The Lord's Prayer* becomes *the Drol's Pryer*:

Our after which rat in heaven; hollowed be thy mane; thy
dingkum come; thy will be done on thear as it is in heaven; give us
this day our daily dread and frogview us pour press-stares as we
frog-view those who press-stare against us; and deal us not into
tame pitton but relived us from veil for thine is the dingkom, the

In this passage, words and letters are rearranged to expose a “network of deceit” (*Scented Gardens* 147) — the conventional pattern of narcissism — that underlies religious poetics: *daily bread* becomes *dread*, implying that our faith in God is consumed by fear; *trespass* becomes *press-stares*, suggesting that our prayers are directed at making impressions rather than amending wrongs; while *deliver us from evil* becomes a plea for the *veil* of narcissism — in this case, metaphoric deceit — to be *relived* rather than lifted. Words are indeed shapeshifters, but they are “given a shape, an identity, relevan[t] to human desire” (*The Edge* 57). In accordance with this claim, Frame challenges: “can [we] not . . . exercise our will as a living hammer to force the shape of change?” (*Faces* 244). By foregrounding the malleability of language, she stresses that the impetus underlying metaphoric totalization is more ideological than logical (Jameson 254),⁵ more culturally motivated than structurally determined.

Therefore, although metaphorization, as Homi Bhabha claims, introduces a “specific cultural cohesiveness” (115) — namely that of Western liberal humanism (115) — the imperialist use of metaphor cannot be attributed to its *unique totalizing structure* (Ricoeur), but rather to its malleable ideological function. Because metaphor is only partially pre-constructed, it is also inconsistently rendered (Lakoff and Johnson 44ff). Bhabha’s denunciation of metaphoric

⁵ Metaphoric inconsistencies are common throughout history. For example, in Victorian England and America, an imperialist could be admired as a “white savage, the most terrible of men” (MacDonald 42) at the same time that a ‘savage’ native was praised for having “a white man’s heart” (39).

of the way people understand and use language” (196). Ironically, this assumption, according to Lakoff and Johnson, is in keeping with the “myth of objectivism” (195) that “has dominated Western culture, and in particular Western philosophy, from the Pre-socratics to the present day” (195ff).

In contrast, Frame does not denounce metaphoric activity per se, but rather the narcissistic ways that metaphors are used to identify *Others*. While Graham Huggan claims that Frame “actively resists the notion of identity by associating it with stasis, reduction, and inflexibility” (5), I would argue that she actively disputes the notion that identity is static, reducible, and inflexible. While Frame exposes various strategems behind acts of naming, she also accentuates the pliancy of language; in so doing, she stresses that we are not compelled to adhere to conventional characterizations, but are free to invent and accept alter/natives.

2. 3. The Idealization of Identity: Contagious Charms

Frame repeatedly emphasizes how metaphoric totalization can pre/scribe social status. Most often, rank is designated by *title*. For instance, in *The Edge of the Alphabet*, Ma Crane deprecates a pedophilic lodger who was compelled to assume a false name (260). In response, Pat elevates his own identity as a lodger by associating it with a prestigious title: “my brother is a District Attorney in the United States [he] reminded Ma as testimony that he was not likely to entice little boys off the street” (262). The narrator mocks the fallacious premise that

authority is synonymous with virtuousness by calling it testimony : a declaration of fact. In addition, she reveals how easily entity can be displaced by identity; in this case, Pat gleans status from a second-hand appellation.

Frame also accentuates the power of the name in *Daughter Buffalo*. In the following passage, Talbot comments on his sister's vocational prospects: "Joy . . . was thinking of applying to the Town Council for a job as a clerk which none of us had dreamed of being, as our lives were controlled not only by the literary death but by the literary life. Clerks, according to the poets we read (starting with Chaucer), were poor, pale, often tubercular" (66-67). Here, the title of *poet* conjures up greater authority than that of *clerk*, for the former is a kind of mesmerist who controls lives by metaphorically reiterating the inferior status of the *Other*. However, Frame undermines the authority of the metaphor — *clerks are poor, pale and tubercular* — by referencing its source: *according to the poets*, demonstrating how specificity breaks the spell of totalization.⁶

In addition, Frame derides the conceit that often accompanies acts of naming. For example, in *The Edge of the Alphabet*, Toby — alone in London for the first time — buys a newspaper to familiarize himself with cosmopolitan living:

He read that someone who signed himself Dorian could now reveal
in confidence that Lady Craig from Kensington would shortly

⁶ This also exemplifies that in the re-evaluation of meaning, metaphor need not be rejected in favour of metonymy, but may be qualified by it.

directors of a well-known firm. He read of parties; the important people were named in heavy type — Freddie Collins, Nigel Wallace, Lady Julia Wedgewood-Norton; Nubia Fenton; Peregrine Holman . . . All the names so cosily together it made Toby's heart beat faster and gave him a feeling of gratitude and importance that Dorian should thus confide in him. (179)

The narrator introduces London society by suggesting that the confidant *Dorian* is a pseudonym, and hence a sham. She trivializes imperial appellations by treating them generically, as in *Hon. Somebody* and *well-known firm*. In addition, she parodies the metaphoric arrogance of the “rich and famous”: for example, *Collins* is a tall iced cocktail; *Wedgewood* alludes to *Wedgwood*, a trademark for expensive china; *Nubian* refers to a powerful, elite Ethiopian tribe; while *Peregrine* is a female hawk trained for use in falconry: a nobleman's sport. In addition, Frame suggests that appearances are deceiving: the boyish nickname *Freddie* might be seen to reduce the stature of *Collins*; the prefix *nor* — as in *Norton* — is a negation; *fen* — from *Fenton* — is Old English for *lowland*; and similarly *holm* — as in *Holman* — means *bottom*. Here, Frame accentuates that the prestige that accompanies acts of naming is indeed mere artifice.

This passage also exemplifies — despite Bhabha's claim that metaphor alone introduces “a specific cultural cohesiveness” (115) — that identification relies on both metaphoric and metonymic concepts. For instance, *Wedgewood*, as a surname, metonymically stands for a person at the same time that it meta-

onymically stands for tableware made from bone china: *she has a lot of Wedgwood* entails the concept *producer for product* (Lakoff and Johnson 39). Finally, *Wedgwood* as a symbolic metonymy is “a critical link between everyday experience and the coherent metaphorical systems that characterize . . . culture” (40). Because social events commonly include eating and drinking, and because this brand of china is in reality so costly, the trademark suggests a class-conscious affair. If *Wedgwood* did not stand for *class*, Frame could not use it to totalize and parody elite identities.

In addition, although Bhabha aptly identifies characterization as a “category of closure and resolution” that conceals ideological codes (115), categories alone do not pre/scribe ideologies. Furthermore, the simplest acts of naming can effectively debunk conventional metaphoric activity. For example, in *Daughter Buffalo*, Talbot's neighborhood is “tolerant” (5); his home is “pleasant . . . furnished in a pleasant manner” (6); his family is “smooth, rich and clean” (5); their appearances, “beautiful and handsome” (6); in short, they are “an ideal family” (6). But ironically, the name *Talbot* signifies both “a Norman family in England” — descendants of conquerors — as well as “a large heavy mostly white hound with pendulous ears and drooping flews held to be ancestral to the bloodhound” (*Webster's*). Indeed, as the novel progresses, Talbot is exposed as an unconscion-

⁷ Frame also points to how metonymy can totalize identity. For example, in *Intensive Care*, “Tom rebelled against being classified as a ‘scrambled egg’ patient” (22). In this case, the metonymy *object used for user* (Lakoff and Johnson 38) is seen as dehumanizing.

dous predatory cur.

2. 4. Idealization and Devaluation: Halving Women

Frame repeatedly demonstrates how idealization and devaluation metaphorically collude. For example, in *Intensive Care* Tom admits that Cecily Everest was a “shrine where [both] his praise and his blame could be set” (18); she is at once the dark-haired violet-eyed “Miss War of Nineteen-Seventeen” (7) who inspired his routine existence for “years with love and longing,” and the bald opaque-eyed “Cancer Doll” (24) who “sucked up his life” (18).⁹ When she is no longer angelic, she remains blameworthy; thus, she is metaphorized according to his perpetual need for an-*Other*. This scenario is replayed when he meets a stereotypical golddigger known as “Furcoat Peg.” At first glance, he considers her “nothing but an old tart” (34); after she propositions him, he reidentifies her: “Peggy Warren? I'd be careful what I say. She's a clean-living decent woman” (38). In this way, seemingly ambiguous metaphoric activity coheres on the basis of narcissism.

Likewise, in *The Adaptable Man*, Vic simultaneously romanticizes and disparages women: “[they] could make so much of everything; they could en-

⁸ Talbot is a type of colonizer. As a ‘Doctor of Death’, he seizes control over the living body, invades its territories and explores its functions. In the process, he imposes a new paradigm of operation on its constituent parts: i.e., Sally “had not been able to walk quickly or to run since [he] broke and reset her two hind legs” (82).

⁹ Frame is alluding to such conventional metaphors as *she's a real doll* and *she bled him dry*, as well as parodying beauty-pageant titles — e.g. *Miss War*.

was that all this elaboration, decoration only served to make the thing decorated more mysterious and exciting. *Women were wraithlike* [italics mine]" (163). But while apparitions may be seen as mysterious and exciting, they may also, by their lack of substance, be seen as ineffectual and marginal. Vic's depiction of women is not unlike Aisley's description of hurricanes: those with "women's names, that rage across seas to doomed prepared cities, and then lie down, quiet as drowsy kittens, to sleep outside the walls" (98). Frame uses psycho-narration to expose the narcissism on which the metaphor is based: "a more accurate description of lovemaking, from Vic's point of view, *was that of a desperate male who grabbed* at the mists of a wraithlike female in order to make reassuring substance of shadow" [italics mine] (163).

Similarly, in *Daughter Buffalo* Talbot both idealizes and debases motherhood. He metaphorically equates pregnancy with *fulfillment* — in this case, a euphemism for *occupation* — and then links it to *loss of dignity*. These assumptions form the basis of a syllogism that seeks to rationalize the invasive treatment of women: *pregnancy is naturally fulfilling; giving birth is necessarily dehumanizing; therefore, it is natural for women to be dehumanized*:

[Lenore] lacked my mother's intensity and maturity of feeling, the kind that develops perhaps through the fulfillment of maternal desires, and is assisted by the experience of the physical abandonment of sex and giving birth . . . Time and again in the O. and G. clinic, a woman, stirruped and exposed for examination

light, has confessed, This is the end; and when the child is born, doctor, goodbye dignity forever.

. . . I regretted that I would not be able to observe the blossoming of Lenore. I would have enjoyed seeing the components of her personality acted upon by sex and childbirth, their changing, strengthening, weakening, with I, as the chemist in the laboratory, taking an occasional sip of the woman-brew, not as part of its mixture, but as the chemist only . . . it then occurred to me that a rat or white mouse could be substituted for Lenore, without much loss to her or to myself. (126)

These passages maintain an ironic stance.¹⁰ In the first paragraph, the word *perhaps* conspicuously qualifies the inference that *maturity of feeling* is a result of *maternal desires*, rather than the postulate that maternity itself is desirable. Ironically, Talbot's mother does not have *intensity and maturity of feeling*; indeed, "the garbage disposal unit had been her only baby" (155). Nor does Talbot have the sensitivity and empathy stereotypically attributed to medical doctors; the terms *exploratory*, *interrogatory*, *searchlight* and *confession* imply that his procedures constitute an imperialist inquisition.

In the second paragraph, the notion that *a rat or white mouse could be*

¹⁰ Although Bhabha rightly asserts that "Western" ideologies are "concealed within a set of categories of closure and resolution, such as . . . 'mimetic irony'" (115), irony can be used to undermine — if not "Western culture" per se — at least imperialist literary approaches.

identity — can rationalize new types of occupation.¹¹ In this case, both Lenore and the mouse are metaphorically categorized as specimens. But the fact that one can stand for the other paradoxically suggests a metonymic relationship between metaphors.¹² Both concepts undermine Lenore as a distinct entity; the first totalizes her identity — *Lenore is a specimen; a woman-brew*; the latter metonymically objectifies her via metaphoric default — *Lenore is generic, and hence replaceable*. In this event, the poststructuralist boundaries between metaphor and metonymy collapse. Clearly, it is not a particular linguistic technique that totalizes Lenore, but rather the narcissistic refusal to see *Her* as both whole and distinctive.

2. 5. The Execration of Identity: Pre/cursory Curses

Frame emphasizes that we identify ourselves as “normal” by metaphorically classifying *Others* as “deviant.” In *Owls Do Cry*, a solitary brick house holds “the idiots and maimed and the dwarves with their crepe faces and parch-

¹¹ If an animal can replace Lenore, then conceivably, Lenore can replace an animal. Numerous times in *Daughter Buffalo*, Frame uses anthropomorphism to warn against treating others as “stand-ins”:

“I decided to keep Sally [the dog] as I had made her — with human status.”
... “And supposing you are giving Sally human status, have you thought what your own status might become?” [Lenore asked]
“I suppose you mean inhuman,” I said, not caring. (128ff)

¹² Note: Talbot does not suggest that Lenore *is* a white mouse; she is not given mouse-like qualities (nor is the mouse given Lenore-like qualities). It is only after both are independently established as specimens that they share a metonymic relationship.

ing, so they must work; and off they skip and limp and crawl . . . returning, shuffling, whimpering, like dogs to their kennel” (158-9). Here, *understanding* implies that they comprehend the significance of their lower stature. That their eyes are *parchment* — paper made from the skin of sheep or goats — suggests that they are treated as blank sheets of identity, generic social scapegoats. Similarly, in *The Adaptable Man*, Muriel applauds the harassment of a visiting Mormon on the basis that he audaciously “refused *tea*” — a sign of normalcy in the English village (120). Greta colludes by totalizing Mormons: “[They] are useful scapegoat[s]. They spring up everywhere — so naturally and opportunely, it makes one wonder why a goat was ever used in the first place” (120). Here, Frame accentuates that the pre/scription of deviancy is a social convention that allows us to glean identity *opportunely* at the expense of *Others*.

Significantly, many of Frame’s characters, as well as many of her protagonists, are themselves “deviants”: epileptics, illiterates, paranoid loners, the deranged, “retired prostitutes, the obsessed, the ‘mentally backward,’ the widows, the separated; and those who have been kissed [only] once in their life” such as Zoe Bryce (*The Edge* 202). Thus, at the same time that Frame foregrounds our generic *capacity* to metaphorize disparagingly, she clearly distinguishes those who identify from those who are conventionally identified: the privileged others from those who are commonly held as *Others*. In so doing, she stresses that metaphoric activity is not wholly a semantic strategy, but one that corresponds to issues of power.

Frame focuses on conventional metaphoric activity as a form of imperialist discourse. She is able to do so, not because metaphor — as a technique — is characteristically imperialist, but because the ways in which we think and act are both fundamentally metaphoric (Lakoff and Johnson 3ff) and ordinarily narcissistic. Since we continually *experience* one kind of thing in terms of another (5), metaphor cannot be reduced to a single totalizing function.¹⁴ Nor can it be reduced to the antithesis of metonymy and its corollary, colonial mimetism.¹⁵ Only if metaphor is seen merely as a literary or rhetorical device, rather than a discursive event, can it be faulted for the ethnocentric interpretation of colonialist texts.

Frame implicates narcissism as the common denominator underlying metaphoric deceit. In so doing, she suggests that we have the capacity — if not always the choice — to practice “magic” responsibly. For metaphors are magical not only because they “conjure up” identities out of thin air, but because they are as inconsistent, transmutable, and even volatile, as the people and situations that produce them.¹⁶ Although “the old [metaphoric] mixture remains:

¹⁴ As per Kroetsch's supposition that metaphor is mythic, while metonymy alone “multiplies our connections . . . into the world” (117).

¹⁵ Bhabha sees the “Great Tradition of Literary Realism” as an imperialist guise for metaphoric totalization. I would suggest that Bhabha's quarrel is with the genre itself. The problem is more ideological than structural; the question need not be “how can we fracture Reality metonymically?” but rather “whose reality, or realities, will be cohesively presented?”

¹⁶ This results from the fact that metaphoric activity — as previously exemplified — highlights certain features of reality to the exclusion of others, and therefore has to be contextualized in order to be understood.

entrails, toads got from beneath stone, fashionable racial scapegoats (Shakespeare has 'blaspheming Jews,' 'nose of Turk,' Tartar's lips')” (*The Adapt* 3), there is an alter/native solution brewing in the “caldron world of the witch-novelist” (3) — conjurer or magician — and it is this we will examine next.

3. 1. The Mimetic and Revelatory Functions of Metaphor

This chapter will argue that metaphoric activity, by virtue of its polysemy, can function as a counter-discursive postcolonial strategy. However, because some postcolonial theorists see the reproduction of meaning as “a struggle for power over truth” which “‘mimics’ the metropolitan impulse of dominance” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 168), it is first necessary to address how metaphor can be seen as a revelatory trope that retains for postcolonial writing a “mimetic or referential purchase to textuality” (Slemon 5).

In keeping with postmodern tendencies, Homi Bhabha questions the value of *mimesis*. Accordingly, he claims that “Universalist criticism” (Bhabha 106) is based on “the mimeticism of image-analysis” (113) — that is, how effectively a text mimics the “*given* pre-constituted reality” (99) incorporated by the “Great Tradition of literary Realism.” In order to prevent the appropriation of postcolonial texts into this imperialist genre, Bhabha proposes a break with discursive coherence (106), and thus with metaphoric reading strategies. In their stead, he advocates metonymic reading strategies which focus on the “repetition of failure and the deferral of desire” (117f). For Bhabha, metonymic readings function, contradictorily, as a referential touchstone for postcolonial texts — in the sense that they seemingly preserve cultural specificity — but as an anti-referential counter-discursive tactic insofar as the “Great Tradition” is concerned.

But while deconstructive strategies are an effective means of nullifying

important concepts, they fail to acknowledge that cultural specificity is not a generic classification that is best represented, necessarily, by “the chaos and cacophony of words” (116). Such strategies, as Stephen Slemon suggests, valorize the notion of difference, but deny the value of polysemy:

Western post-modernist readings can so overvalue the anti-referential or deconstructive energetics of postcolonial texts that they efface the important recuperative work that is also going on within them . . . post-colonial cultures have a long history of working towards ‘realism’ within an awareness of referential slippage, and they have developed a number of strategies for signifying through literature an ‘order of mimesis’ [whereby] this reach for a positive (post-colonial) referentiality operates alongside a counter-discursive parodic energy (7).

Slemon claims that postcolonial texts are characteristically mimetic in that they reinvent — through a variety of means such as allegory, parody, and fantasy — the reality of the struggle between the colonizer and colonized (6f). In so doing, they reveal “how a ‘history’ of the colonized past might come to be rewritten in the future” (7).

Thus, Slemon suggests that the concept of mimesis need not be associated with dictatorial assertions of what constitutes reality or truth. Paul Ricoeur concurs, and exemplifies this notion by revisiting the idea of *mimesis* in classical poetics. Although Aristotle considered poetic metaphor to be unpragmatic in comparison to *rhetoric* and its corelation *dialectic*, this trait did not isolate poet-

as many modern critiques of aesthetics have assumed.² *Mimesis* was a complex poetic process comprising *fable, characters, diction, thought, spectacle, and melody* (Aristotle, *Poetics* 1450^a 7-9) that imitated human actions “either as they were or are, or as they are said or thought to be or to have been, or as they ought to be” (1460^b 7-11). It was characteristically tensive: “at once a portrayal of human reality and an original creation . . . faithful to things as they are and [depicting] them as higher and greater than they are” (Ricoeur 40). Because metaphoric events foreground the ambiguous relationship between language and materiality, Ricoeur considers them mimetic in the Aristotelian sense.

Notably, only poetic metaphors — what Ricoeur calls *live* metaphors — are tensive. For while conventional totalization depends on the facile notion of metaphor as symmetrical — *this is that* — poetic revelation relies on a sophisticated understanding of metaphor as paradoxical — *this is that* and *this cannot*

¹ Aristotle saw the “making” of an imitative act as distinctly creative; therefore, a work of art could be judged (*contra* Plato) on “intrinsic criteria, without any interference from moral or political considerations” (Ricoeur, *The Rule* 42) while it retained a mimetic relationship with the world.

² Ricoeur claims that most modern critiques “see in this concept the original sin of Aristotelian aesthetics, perhaps of all Greek aesthetics” (37). While the translators Richard McKeon, Leon Golden and O. B. Hardison “tried to clear up the misunderstandings obscuring the interpretation of the Aristotelian concept, [they] were hasty in choosing as the equivalent” (37) the term *imitation* “which turns out to be easily accused of a naturalistic tendency” (37). Ricoeur claims that the philosophical “case against reference” (226) — e.g. the logical positivism which separates meaning into the binary categories “verifiable” vs. “unverifiable” — was imported into literary criticism. This philosophy is so deeply ingrained that even “the authors who are most hostile to logical positivism often fortify it while fighting it” (227). Ricoeur cites such critics as Northrop Frye and Suzanne Langer as examples.

to the polysemy of lexical entities” (99) in a given linguistic community — we cease to glean new knowledge from it, and no longer find it paradoxical. While *dead* metaphors are the substance of convention — the clichés and stereotypes that Frame sees as failed language events — *live* metaphors are the prerogative of imagination. And whereas the former, for better or worse, reinforce the dominant value system within a given culture, the latter potentially reinvent culture.³

Accordingly, *poetic* metaphor can be an excellent means of expressing the various ambivalences that characterize postcolonial literatures. For not only does it recreate the tension between signification and phenomenal reality, it is unable, without exhausting its own power, to resolve that tension. At the point that metaphoric paradox is conventionally resolved, it ceases to be revelatory. Similarly, the viability of postcolonial texts is diminished when the complex

³ The terms *alive* and *dead* may suggest that metaphors have a natural lifespan. But this distinction is not essential. It is not so much that dead metaphors cease to produce knowledge, but that we cease to glean new knowledge from them. This is implicit in Ricoeur's insistence that metaphorical utterances exist at the level of discourse. They are nurtured or neglected according to an indeterminate host of environmental and cultural factors (Lakoff & Johnson). Metaphoric meaning is, in and of itself, potentially inexhaustible:

Contextual action creates a new meaning . . . At the same time, however, it can be reidentified as the same, since its construction can be repeated. In this way, the innovation of the emergent meaning can be taken as a linguistic creation. And if it is adopted by a significant part of the linguistic community, it in turn can become a common meaning and added to the polysemy of lexical entities, thus contributing to the history of the language as code or system. But at this final stage, where the meaning-effect we call metaphor has become this shift of meaning that increases polysemy, the metaphor is no longer living, but a dead metaphor. Only authentic metaphors, that is living metaphors, are at once meaning and event. (Ricoeur, *The Rule* 99)

Structuralist paradigms — the valorization of presence, voice, and logical symbolism — and the inversion of those paradigms via poststructuralism — the valorization of absence, silence, and chaos — are means of simplifying heterogeneous realities. Both function within the same framework: while the former is totalitarian in its approach, the latter is anarchistic. Still, the erasure of meaning⁴ is no more representative of postcolonial experience than is the centralization of meaning. The alter/native is to maximize metaphor's revelatory capacity — to push its necessary ambivalence towards multivalence — and hence to erase, not meaning itself, but conventional strictures.⁵

⁴ Susan Ash emphasizes that Frame's conception of truth deviates from Derrida's poststructuralist conception:

Perhaps Frame agrees with Derrida when he says that it may not be possible to 'lay bare the simple kernel which supposedly lies hidden behind the multiplicity' [*The Truth in Painting* 21]. I would argue, however, that they part company regarding this 'simple kernel' of truth. For Derrida its 'supposed' existence is a fabrication. Frame, however, does not unequivocally deny the existence of 'truth.' Rather, she questions the possibility for adequately expressing these 'kernels' with language: we are too often 'seduced' by an habitual arrangement of words into believing that a truth ha[s] been 'discovered'(12).

⁵ Slemon argues that whereas a poststructuralist approach to meaning is fundamentally deconstructive, a postcolonial approach is necessarily reconstructive ("Modernism's Last Post"). In addition, he claims that *magic realism* — a Framian genre — is a postcolonial reconstructive strategy which mimics the cultural clash that exists between received "codes of recognition" (Slemon *Magic* 12) and local codes that express the "utopian or future-oriented" (12) imaginings of colonized subjects:

Magic realism can be seen to provide a positive and liberating response to [both] the codes of imperial history and its legacy of fragmentation and discontinuity . . . This process . . . can transmute the "shreds and fragments" of colonial violence and otherness into new "codes of recognition" in which the dispossessed, the silenced, and the marginalized of our own dominating systems can again find voice, and enter into the dialectic of on-going community (21).

The concept of polysemy corresponds to the realities of multicultural experience. It is significant to postcolonial theory because it dissipates the imperialist notion of “hegemonic centrality” (Ashcroft *et al.* 37) that marginalizes *Others*. As Frame accentuates, there are “alternative ways of telling one truth” (*Daughter Buffalo* 153). And because imagining alternatives — asking “what if?” — is the first step towards implementing social change, polysemy is potentially disruptive to any given status quo. At the same time, its variability camouflages the extent of this potential; it presents new possibilities without offering any direct challenges to the dominant system of power. In short, it is not confrontational, but contractual. Linguistic events that maximize polysemy compel us to explore their myriad revelations. They persuade us, at least momentarily, that meaning lies — not in the attainment of a single interpretation or “truth” — but in the endless search for understanding.

Since poetic metaphors are revelatory, and only partially construct the concepts by which we live (Lakoff and Johnson 52ff), they are also potentially polysemous. Postcolonial author Wilson Harris terms the combination of these characteristics an *assymetric infinity*. Using the metaphoric concept *the sun is a rose*, he asserts that we complete the partial structure of metaphor by intuitively fixing the identities of both “ego-sun” and “ego-rose” (3).⁶ That is, we

⁶ Harris finds value in metaphoric totalization by exploring indigenous creation myths — the “games of genesis” — that are too often cast aside as “elaborate conceits” (1). At the same time, he cautions against the dangers that myth poses in establishing the world:

that because in reality the sun and the rose are not fixed, they can be identified at any point in a cycle or stage of development. To further Harris's analogy, even before we compound interpretive possibilities by seeing one concept in terms of the other, the sun must be conceptualized as eclipsed, let us say, and the rose as withered. Thus, the question is "how many ways can we merge two indeterminate concepts?" It is in this sense that meaning is inexhaustible and potentially polysemous.

3. 3. Metaphor and Metonymy: A Mixed Brew

Kroetsch's insistence that metonymy alone expresses multiplicity stems from Jakobsonian theory. Jakobson posed metaphor and metonymy as polar opposites that correspond to two types of aphasic disturbances: the *similarity disorder* and the *contiguity disorder*. The first — an extreme case of metonymy — is marked by the inability to conceive of the subject apart from context (101). The second — an extreme case of metaphor — is marked by the ability to identify the subject, but the inability to contextualize it: "word order becomes chaotic; the ties of grammatical coordination and subordi-

admittedly, metaphoric activity "can upgrade an order of things rooted in local phenomena into a universal code or a compulsion upon others" (2).

⁷ Conceivably, the more poetic a metaphor, the less structured or preconceived its meaning. For example, the specificity of the imperialist concept *natives are savages* need not be interpreted on an individual level, for its meaning has already been established and enforced by a dominant social order. In contrast, a metaphor such as *the sun is a rose* does not carry the same political weight. Consequently, it is more open to interpretation.

matical functions, like conjunctions, prepositions, pronouns, and articles, disappear first” (106). Likewise, Kroetsch treats similarity and contiguity as autonomous functions. “I have the absurd hope that if I provide twenty [metonymic] names, then somewhere I will reach a point where they all connect and become more realized and identifiable . . . [but] one just moves on and around, and there are further namings and renamings” (93). Later, he concludes that metonymy, in direct opposition to metaphor, “multiplies our connections into the past, into the world” (117).

But even if we accept Jakobson's hypothesis that all discourse, including literature, manifests a preference for one of two polar types, neither is exemplary of communication as such but rather of the radical *breakdown* of communication (Jakobson 95). Even Jakobson concedes that “in normal verbal behavior both processes are continually operative” (110). Neither metaphors nor metonymies are “arbitrary occurrences, to be treated as isolated instances” (Lakoff and Johnson 37). And since both poles are equally disruptive of ordinary discourse, it is futile to valorize either.

In *The Adaptable Man*, Frame uses the principle of collage to exemplify how metaphoric and metonymic extremes disable communication. In the following, Alwyn remembers his childhood compulsion to compile images:

I came to the last of the pictures that it would make sense to use, I would be so angry, I wanted to keep on cutting out pictures and pieces of words. Everything had to be made into a

collect an attractive page of nasal tubes, seaside homes for elderly gentlefolk, operating tables, enemas, and vacancies, and once, I remember, there was a little boy with a monstrous head and tiny wasted hands and feet; my mother snatched the picture away from me . . .

I remember I cut out a blue sky, from the geographical. You couldn't have known it was a sky, because it was all blue. I showed it to my mother: she was very keen in 'interesting herself' in my progress. She didn't approve of the sky because she didn't know how to name it, she couldn't identify it. "Very nice, very nice," she said, but she looked afraid, with the same fear she had of the boy with the monstrous head (75).

In the first passage, Alwyn extracts images from the magazine *Nursing Mirror* and classifies them metaphorically. In the process, he finds a picture of a small boy with a monstrous head. Although Alwyn's mother — once a nurse — could define this abnormality in medical terms, she is still horrified by *identifiable difference*: the *Other* as "defect."⁸ In the second passage, Alwyn focuses on an instance of metonymy from the "Geographical": a piece of blue paper which, unbeknownst to his mother, stands for a sky. Conversely, his mother is horrified by the *absence of identity*. The first event, reminiscent of Jakobson's *contiguity*

⁸ Frame continually foregrounds how difference is perceived as menacing; e.g. "The news that Erlene was unable to speak seemed a threat, as the disabilities of others often do" (*Scented Gardens* 9).

reminiscent of his *similarity disorder*, foregrounds a cubistic point of view — an instance of unidentifiable context. Both threaten conventional conceptualizations: the former signifies difference via abnormality, the latter via the absence of identity. Here, we see that metonymy alone is no more representative of our “worldly connections” than metaphor. If we are to organize our thoughts and actions, these seemingly oppositional tropes must co-exist (Lakoff and Johnson 39f).

In addition, Frame highlights how metonymic extremes — following Jakobson's criteria — can be particularly problematic. In *Scented Gardens for the Blind*, Edward reads a series of metonymic fragments from the book *Practical Speech Training*:

Shape pleases; sob bitterly; rattrap; made dull; vague guess;
tough feeling; five voices; this season; those zebras; eighth theme;
wreathe them; fish shop; pull lightly; calm moments; soapbox; mob
pressure; must do; did take; duke goes; vague kind; enough vases;
love fully; this zoo; those seats; both those; breathe through; oasis;
opera arrangements; the hour; the apple; two ears; I saw an open-
ing; how awful. (104)

The narrator then interrupts: “it is a treacherous path from incoherence to

⁹ Jakobson hypothesized that surrealism is predominantly metaphoric in orientation, while cubism is predominantly metonymic (111).

voices, wreath them, shape please, to the clear wonder of His glory” (104). Here, contiguous references are “meaningless useless obstacles” to lucidity. They are barriers — not so much to conventional totalization — but to the “unnamable . . . coherence beyond commonsense exactitude” (Harris 2) characteristic of live metaphors. In this case, the paradoxical “clear wonder”¹⁰ of God. Admittedly, the path from fragmentation to coherence is “treacherous” — either dangerous or deceitful. But if we refuse to navigate its obstacles, we will be utterly ineffectual. This is exemplified in the same text by the half-witted Mrs. Strang, who fails to unify concepts:

“Grass is for growing, windows are for cleaning, and murderers are for hanging,” she almost shouted, at the same time seeming surprised at her outburst and frowning as if she could not understand the significance of it and the connection which had sprung suddenly in her mind between grass, windows, and murderers.

(*Scented Gardens* 134)

In both of these passages, conceptual relationships are restricted — like Edward's inane genealogies (*Scented*) — to a metonymic “follow-my-leader of chains” (105). Clearly, if contiguous references to entities — such as “grass, windows, and murderers” — are to be understood, they must cohere on the basis of shared metaphoric properties.

¹⁰ “Wonder” denotes both a feeling of doubt and a state of admiration. Hence, “clear wonder” is metaphorically paradoxical insofar as it suggests clear uncertainty.

At best, what postcolonial theory grants non-*Western* . . .

not that metaphor and metonymy are tropes which *function* as binary opposites, but that they are an integrated discursive process that *ceases to function* when polarized. Indeed, at the same time that Jakobson considers patients with *similarity disorders* unable to understand the “metaphoric character” (105) of words, he quickly qualifies: it would be “an unwarranted generalization to assume that figurative speech is altogether incomprehensible to them” (105). This qualification is necessary in light of Lakoff and Johnson's contemporary postulate that our most fundamental concepts are organized metaphorically. If metonymies are chiefly referential in function, then they must — at some point in the chain of deferred meaning — suggest identity. We can, as Bhabha urges, read “the tropes of the text as metonymy and repetition instead of metaphor” (115). We can foreground the “chaos and cacophony” of words “sliding, shifting, terrorizing . . . a disjunction . . . so complete [as to say] ‘I am not whole’” (116). But we cannot find meaning in this utterance unless we can *imagine* — at least momentarily — “who is the ‘I’ that is not whole?”

3. 4. Self/sameness: An Alchemical Compound

The question of identity, then, might well vacillate between structuralist and poststructuralist extremes in conjunction with Jakobson's metaphoric and metonymic poles. But an alter/native to this binary opposition lies in the transmutation of identity. Identity may be seen as an atomistic process comprising

relationships that are unstable, but nonetheless coherent. This perspective is comparable to the Zen-Buddhist concept of inter-origination — *paratantra* — which is used to collapse boundaries between self and *Others*, thereby eradicating — not the whole notion of identity — but notions of *independent* and *permanent* identity. It is paradoxical in that it suggests “neither form nor emptiness” (Thich 88). It does not erase unity in favor of chaos, nor presence in favor of absence, but seeks identification with the multiple perspectives composing human experience.¹² In this way, it is used to transcend the “small” narcissistic self and embrace a larger empathetic self — one which recognizes the interdependence of all beings (121).

Zen koans — such as *who were you before you were born?* or *what is the sound of one hand clapping?* — frustrate binary thinking by posing myriad, inexplicable alter/natives. Similarly, Frame relies on metaphoric riddles to challenge facile notions of identity. For instance, in *Scented Gardens for the*

¹¹ Interestingly, Gina Mercer describes Frame's writing in precisely these terms: “[her work is] structured like a ‘small but dazzling’ solar system — a series of constantly moving, orbiting circles or ellipses, related to one another but not tangibly connected, unless the reader supplies the force of mind/gravity to create connections of her/his own” (163).

¹² The idea of inter-origination can be expressed thus:

To envision the interwoven nature of relationships, which illustrate the character of inter-being and interpenetration, we can picture a sphere which is composed of all the points on its surface and all the points within its volume. There are extremely many points, yet without each of them the sphere does not exist. Now let us imagine connecting each point with all the other points. First we connect point A to each of the other points. Then we connect point B with each of the others, including A, and so on until all the points are connected. As you can see we have woven an extremely dense net intertwining all the points . . . The universe is a dynamic fabric of interdependent events in which none is the fundamental entity. (Thich 69-70)

dark-rimmed spectacles” (39) and “a balding man wearing rimless mirror-like spectacles” (39). The narrator stresses that “both are true” (39). Likewise, in *Daughter Buffalo* the narrator — in apparent contradiction — states: “I did not think of you once today / You did not occupy my mind” (168).¹³ Similarly, in *The Adaptable Man*, Greta thinks “I’m forty-seven. It’s not unknown for a woman of my age [to become pregnant]” (88). She then adds “I can’t face it . . . It is *not unknown*. The double-negative gave her a feeling of security, as if the fact itself could thus be canceled” (89). Like *koans*, these riddles are thought-provoking but unresolvable, leading to alter/natives but not definitives. Ideally, they compel us to abandon our blind dependence on logic, opening our minds to the spontaneous, revelatory world of imagination.

Frame further confounds the totalization of identity by using multiple unreliable narrators. In *Scented Gardens for the Blind*, we are led to believe that there are three main narratives which correspond to three protagonists: Vera Glace, her husband Edward, and her daughter Erlene. Near the end, we discover that Vera is a mute sixty-year-old spinster who resides in a mental institution. In “reality,” she has no biological family, but rather three selves that represent “three time periods: Edward as the past; Vera as the present; and Erlene as the

¹³ The contradiction results from the qualifier *today*. Clearly, since it is still *today*, the speaker, Turnlung, must be thinking about the unnamed person of this passage. In addition, it is contextually uncertain to whom Turnlung is referring. It could be either Talbot or Daughter Buffalo. If one follows the previous stanza of this prose-poem, it could be either his mother or father: the former who has “gone from [his] range of vision” (168), and the latter who “has gone from the room” (168). Here, we have a very enigmatic passage, with all reference to identity obscured.

Clara Strang — a former subject of “Edward’s” now-fictional genealogical study. Vera and Clara, although not tangibly linked, are mysteriously related: “two torn people grafted together in secret life and growth” (250). Here, Frame suggests that Edward’s patriarchal family “line” is in fact an arbitrary system of establishing relationships. Identities are not fixed according to name or birthright, but are formed unpredictably in imaginative relation with myriad others.¹⁴

Frame also bewilders our facile notions of others/*Others* by emphasizing that identity is a process. In *Intensive Care*, Tom Livingstone visits his “long lost love” in hospital:

He watched Ciss Everest’s face. She did not recognize him. He saw that the clear violet eyes had grown an opaque film, like pondweed. She must be seventy now, he thought. *She was an old woman* and he was an old man. And as he stared at her *she became an old woman he had never known*, and he almost believed that her name and the repeating of it by the patients and the nurses and his own mind was a trick he was playing upon himself, for when he glanced away from her and turned quickly back, almost before he himself

¹⁴ Frame characteristically uses multiple narrative perspectives. In *Daughter Buffalo*, we are uncertain if the narrator Talbot is a fiction of the author Turnlung or vice versa; or if the novel’s reality is signified by a painting which comprises both Turnlung and Talbot; or if the entire novel is a meditation on this painting by either Talbot or Turnlung (Mercer 197). Likewise, in *The Carpathians* the implied author is John Henry Brecon, but his narrative merges with the consciousness of his mother Mattina, and is usurped at various times by the “imposter novelist” Dinny Wheatstone.

Naomi. Now how could that have been? And then once again *she became the Ciss Everest [with whom] he had agreed to share a meal*. [italics mine] (21)

In this passage, Tom metaphorically describes both the process of aging and Ciss herself: *she became an old woman he had never known*, and then again *she became the Ciss Everest with whom he had agreed to share a meal*. Notably, these variations on the verb *to be* remain unqualified: process is seen as definite. But when he equates Ciss to Naomi in definite terms — *she was Naomi* — the equation is immediately disavowed by the interrogative clause *now how could that have been?* Here, Frame calls into question the notion of static identity.

Similarly, Leonard Livingstone, in an alcoholic stupor, metaphorically reprocesses the identity of an old schoolteacher:

Livingstone, I've come to apologize. I know it's too late.
We're both old men and dying. I should never have sent you from
your books into the garden to work. You were a child for books and
I denied you them . . .

The schoolmaster bowed his head and Leonard saw with
some indifference that *he had changed to a withered chrysanthe-*
*mum*¹⁵ on a thin brown stalk propped on the chair beside Leonard.

¹⁵ This passage alludes to the Greek myth of Narcissus and Echo. The seer Tiresias predicted that Narcissus, having incurred the wrath of the the gods for spurning Echo, would live only until he saw himself. Upon seeing his reflection in a pool of water, Narcissus became so enamoured by his image that he refused to leave. Eventually, he wasted away and turned into a flower. Here, Frame suggests that it is narcissism that Leonard must learn to forgive.

For Leonard, this process proves redemptive. While the image of his schoolmaster was formerly as vivid as a live *chrysanthemum*, it is now *withered* and *dying*; the notion of fixed identity is replaced by the acceptance of a temporal continuum. As he changes his outmoded perspective, Leonard is released from the painful memories of a past injustice: “[he] made arrangements for [the schoolmaster] to be buried with the eggshells, the tea leaves, the pear and apple peelings, and the sour contents of the chamberpot sitting like a bowl of cider under the bed” (68).

3. 5. Dispelling Authority

In addition to challenging facile notions of identity, Frame uses a variety of techniques that maximize multivalence. Although specificity, as noted in Chapter One, can break the spell of totalization, lack of specificity can equally problematize an authoritative reading:

Edward could not understand why he who had so much power . . . should be forced to endure the petty *mutilations of time and light*, should have no defense against the perpetual assault, the stones thrown, the axes striking, day after day, and the secret traps and covered pits laid maliciously in his path, and the trip wires to death which gradually surrounded him and which one day would make him afraid to move. [italics mine] (*Scented* 108)

Here, Frame declines to specify the noun phrase — in this case, the metaphoric tenor — *mutilations of time and light*. What *are* these mutilations? The refer-

of verbal vehicles — stones *thrown*, axes *striking*, pits *laid* — compound, rather than clarify, the enigma of the unspecified tenor. Are these mutilations of the mind and soul, or merely the body? Since time and light are not explicitly personified, are they directly responsible for these mutilations? Perhaps they are implicitly managed by Nature or God. But since they are enacted *maliciously*, their force may indeed be more “devilish.” In addition, we are told that they are *petty*. But how can mutilations tantamount to *axes striking* and *trip wires to death* be petty? Does the passage suggest an ironic stance, then? In this event, the mutilations might refer to Edward's self-loathing: his adversarial disposition toward the natural processes which mark his own humanity. This passage, characteristic of Frame's thought-provoking disclosures, maximizes meaning.

Frame further problematizes metaphoric totalization in *Scented Gardens for the Blind*:

Words in a language, nouns, verbs, adverbs, *sentences clipped* like hedges and lawns into strange shapes that surprise you in the dark? Sentences with the growth cut back; *or like wild bush* where there's a struggle among the plants to get first to the sun? Words which climb other words and feed upon them or blossom on them, *like clematis*? Dim green sentences with yellow shadows? Sentences like greenhouses where the words wither at the first entry of a wind from the snow, but the flowers inside, pampered, never

Blackbeetle? *Like lighthouses?* Words with their beacons roaming the seas to rescue the thoughts or warn them against perilous tides, cross-currents, approaching storms? (180-81)

This passage begins with the verbal metaphor *sentences are clipped*. This is qualified by two similes: *like hedges and lawns*. But in what sense are sentences *clipped*? The metaphor is further mediated by an alternative simile *or like* the “struggle among the plants to get first to the sun.” It is followed by a string of similes — explicit and implicit — in the form of interrogatives, further confounding an authoritative reading. It ends with the poetic notion that *words are beacons that rescue thoughts*, but does not tell us why thoughts need rescuing. Seemingly, they are potential victims on figurative high seas. Then, are *sentences* equivalent to *thoughts*, and also *clipped like sails*? And is the relationship between *sentences clipped like hedges* and those *clipped like sails* conceptual or merely homophonous? In this highly metalinguistic¹⁶ passage, we know that *words are warning signals*, and *sentences — or thoughts — are free-floating vessels* subject to *perilous tides, cross-currents, and storms*. But what do these phenomena represent? And what does the sea itself represent? Fate? God? Humanity? Nature? Brainwaves?

¹⁶ Isabel Carrera Suarez writes: “metalinguistic comment is often a feature of innovative literature, or of periods of discontent with convention and traditional writing. It is closely connected with the idea of a language in need of renovation, whether for purely communicative purposes or for ideological reasons, and therefore often appears in marginal literatures or writers” (159).

viding metaphoric alter/natives to her narratives. For example, at the end of the *The Carpathians*, the adverb *perhaps* emphasizes — not necessarily the “unreliability” of John Henry Brecon — but his reluctance to impose a particular perspective on the reader. Moreover, it stresses the role that memory and imagination play in the metaphorization of “reality”: “And what I have just written is the novel he spoke of; or perhaps it is merely notes for a novel? And perhaps the town of Puamahara, which I in my turn visited, never existed? . . . What exists, though, is the memory of events known and imagined” (196). Similarly, in *Faces in the Water*, Istina Mavet suggests that Sister Bridge was head of Ward Two at Cliffhaven mental hospital: “I was marched back by the Matron herself who reiterated, when handing me over to Sister Bridge . . . ‘She needs to be taught a lesson’” (136). Yet, in the chapter that follows, Istina begins by challenging her own narrative authority: “*But who am I* to say that Sister Bridge was in charge of Ward Two, when the real commanders were of course Mary-Margaret and Alice? [italics mine]” (141).

Frame also uses synesthetic “potions,” thereby maximizing the potential for multiple interpretations. In *Scented Gardens for the Blind*, Vera describes *blindness* in terms of *sound*: “The light, like the new Diesel, is content to shriek, Who cares, Who cares” (23). A similar passage from the same text reads:

The vaped color breathed from the skin of every shape. But I remembered more often the sound of color, the surface of it, oranges tar-sealed with golden tar, steamrolled under the sun

light steam-powered, then the rush of thought past one's ears, trying to catch the traveler who is invisible, riding the metaphor of its own speed, leaving only a taste of time — sweet, sour (22).

This passage is synesthetically alive. Its many metaphoric concepts include: *shapes are living organisms; breath is color; color is sound; sound is texture; texture is hot; heat is sound; the sun is a loud machine; thought is speed; thought is an unseen traveller; metaphors are trains of thoughts; and time is a taste — that is, a bittersweet sample of life's multivalent continuum.*

3. 6. Conclusion

Unlike *conventional* metaphoric events, which reinforce — for better or worse — the dominant value system within a given culture, poetic events redescribe reality (Ricoeur) and potentially reinvent culture. Since they are revelatory, and only partially construct the concepts by which we live, their meaning is truly inexhaustible. And because they are connotative rather than denotative, they can — as events — be understood differently by various people and peoples, cultures and subcultures, in various contexts and subtexts; at the same time they can entertain a host of resonances peculiar to the mind of an individual reader. Polysemy, then, has the capacity to “nudge” or “jolt” its “readers out of their complacency about language, and their assuredness that there is a fixed relation between language and reality, and that they can effortlessly extract the meaning” (Bishop 584).

quality of metaphor. But polysemy need not advocate, as poststructuralism suggests, either autistic or nihilistic tendencies — or as Bhabha describes, the “chaos and cacophony of words” (116). On the contrary, Frame writes, “madness comes, not from the overwhelming complexities and possibilities of youth, but from the drying up of tributaries, the narrowing of the main stream to a single obsession of age” (*The Adaptable Man* 66). As such, meaning — like Thich Nhat Hanh’s description of *paratantra* — may be seen as a network of interdependent concepts, none which needs to be singled out as a fundamental entity or what Derrida would call the “transcendental signified.”

By emphasizing polysemy, we undermine — like Sister Bridge in *Faces in the Water* — dictatorial “centers” of authority:

[Sister Bridge] had known many of the patients for years and was loved and trusted by them and her attitude was usually one of happy sarcasm where words which came from her as sarcasm and mockery, a habit which she had perhaps acquired when learning to impress and obey the dictatorial matron of years ago, seemed in the air to undergo a transformation, to be fused with her abundance of vitality and sympathy so that they arrived without seeming to hurt. *She was like a conjuror who, in mid-air, changes the fire he has breathed to wine.* The patients would smile delightedly at whatever Sister Bridge said to them. Sometimes I wondered if perhaps she had not actually discarded words as a means of com-

[italics mine] (140).

Frame suggests that conjuring a “new language of humanity” (*Scented Gardens*) need not involve the erasure of meaning, but rather the transformation of meaning: that which *changes the fire he has breathed to wine*.¹⁷ Here, metaphoric polysemy moves beyond mere “words” to an enigmatic level of discourse — one which magically transmutes *sarcasm and mockery* into *vitality and sympathy*.¹⁸ In the next chapter, we will explore this “other way” of communicating, whereby the magician “tips her hat” to the mystery of love, and its organic counterpart death.

¹⁷ This passage also suggests a relationship between fire and the “new language of humanity” in *Scented Gardens for the Blind*. Erlene narrates: “the Scholar Gipsy could wait forever now. No fire would fall from the sky; no God would descend to comfort his silent people. Only day and night the ideas were falling in drifts of sound, words, human cries, shrouding the whole world in silence; there was no reason to speak anymore, there was no power to speak” (236-37). Here, fire — an essential element — is the power that sparks the production of meaning. But fire ceases to be transformative when the atom bomb is dropped, and organicism itself is vanquished. No longer can it be changed into the “wine” of *vitality and sympathy*: “all the world knew it was too late for fire” (236). Thus, the erasure of meaning — characteristic of poststructuralism — suggests hopelessness in this instance.

¹⁸ In *Faces in the Water*, the institutionalization of mental patients is a form of colonization. The narrator’s emphasis on transformation in this passage exemplifies Slemon’s claim that postcolonial mimesis attempts to reconfigure the struggle between the colonizer and colonized (Slemon 7).

As we have seen, *dead* metaphors are the substance of convention — the clichés and stereotypes that Frame sees as failed language events — while *live* metaphors are the prerogative of imagination. And whereas the former, for better or worse, reinforce the dominant value system within a given culture, the latter potentially reinvent culture. But not all poetic metaphors are magical antidotes to metaphoric totalization. Indeed, Frame emphasizes that the conventional treatment of literature often produces comparable stereotypes. She highlights this phenomenon in two of her major themes — that of death and that of love. In so doing, she stresses that poetic metaphors — like conventional ones — are used to deny the reality of death and to escape the work of love. At the same time, she emphasizes that such poetic totalizations are in one sense ineffectual, for death epitomizes the physical realities that are unaffected by language, while love epitomizes the spiritual mysteries that are conceptually, and thus metaphorically, unfathomable. By magnifying the ambiguity of metaphor, Frame liberates poetic clichés. In addition, by insisting that the realities of death and the mysteries of love are beyond the magician's realm, she challenges the perception that canonical approaches to such themes are necessarily superior in value.

4. 1. The Domestication of Death

Frame foregrounds how ordinary metaphoric entailments deny the existence of death. Most often, death is seen in terms of household grime, common

nation of bothersome thoughts.

Such metaphors are exemplified in *The Edge of the Alphabet*, when the passengers of the Matua — the ship that transports Toby from New Zealand to Britain — are devoured by “maggot-thoughts of death” (164): Will the ship sink? they ask themselves. What calamities will occur before we reach harbor?

Quickly, they deny all troubling possibilities:

No, no, the ship will not sink, the devoured passengers tell one another . . . We are civilized, modern, we have all amenities. The Captain was decorated during the War. He has medals, and letters after his name. Everything is calm, people are clothed and fed and employed, governments sit in leather chairs and carry briefcases to and from tall buildings. We are safe. How safe we are! There is no war . . .

There is no death by drowning or suffocation or disease. There is no pain. There is only the near sea washing the sides of our newly painted ship. (165)

For the passengers, death is not an intimate physical reality, but rather a dissociant “maggot-thought” (164). Notably, maggots are both voracious grubs that consume diseased flesh and hence must be exterminated, and “fantastic or eccentric ideas” (*Webster's*) that feed on “the flesh of thought” (*The Edge* 164) and hence must be erased. Here, Frame criticizes our tendencies to “whitewash” death: the sea does not drown people, it only *washes* the sides of the *newly painted ship*. The Captain is ironically perceived as infallible because he has been *decorated* — a word which refers to beauty rather than usefulness — and

in Chapter Two. In addition, the passengers mentally displace disturbing possibilities by focusing on *safe* bourgeois images — of the *clothed and fed and employed*, who *sit* comfortably in government offices and maintain the status quo by *carrying briefcases to and fro*. Here, Frame presents us with a complacent, middle-class ship of fools who use the discourse of modernity to deny their own mortality.

The tendency to “whitewash” death is parodied in *Living in the Maniototo*, where the conventional metaphoric concept *death is a cleaning agent* is taken to an extreme. Tommy — a creative “near genius” (33) — is haunted by apparitions of a *Blue Fury*:

“It’s from a TV advertisement,” Tommy said. “For bleach or some detergent. You clean the john with it, or the bath, and it pops out of the container every time you use it. There’s this woman who sees it outside the window, just dancing around in the air, then it comes in the door toward her. It comes at me, too, though I never use the stuff . . .”

With a fearful look in his eyes he turned toward some apparition beside him. . . . There was a flash of light, a smell of laundry and the penetrating fumes of a powerful cleanser, then a neutral nothing-smell, not even the usual substituted forest glade or field of lavender or carnation, and all that remained of Tommy were two faded footprints on the floor. (37f)

In Greek mythology, furies are avenging spirits who harass criminals and inflict

destroys dirt. But in this case, the Fury manifests itself paradoxically as a plague of purification, indiscriminately removing all traces of human imperfection. This includes Tommy himself — a poor sculptor living in an inner-city apartment “littered with tools and materials and scraps” (35) — who is readily dispensible in a world that valorizes appearances. His death signifies “another brilliant career gone, another mark on the world bleached out in the wash” (37) of conformity. Violet's description of *Blue Fury* is reminiscent of Aisley's notion of modernity in *The Adaptable Man*: “an age which can be symbolized by an immense sewer where the dead are drained discreetly away, vanishing in turquoise transparent seas where the population is encouraged to bathe in cleanliness and safety” (54). Ironically, shortly before Tommy is vaporized, he queries: “Where do you put dead bodies when there's no earth [read *dirt*] left to bury them in?” (36). Here, Frame mocks the quest for a state of perfection in which there are no remnants of humanity, and hence no human remains — only the efficient extermination of the impure.

Likewise, in *Daughter Buffalo*, *death is a clean sweep*, thus entailing that *the dead are household dust*. This metaphor is perhaps a domestic version of the biblical idea that “God formed humanity of dust from the ground” (Genesis 2:7), and an allusion to God's admonishment “You are dust, And to dust you shall return” (Genesis 3:19). Death is, once again, reduced to a cleaning agent — in this case, a broom — that sweeps away bothersome traces of humanity. Talbot reveals:

All I seemed to be able to learn from the dying was the confirmation of

viewed the families and cynically noted that the feelings they claimed to have were often presented on demand to fit the conventional pattern. Under stress, however, the truth often came out, *the truth being the relief* that those whose death had been longed for had died at last. *'It's like a clean sweep doctor'*, one man told me on the death of his parents, a week apart. [italics mine] (82)

Moreover, *truth* is conventionally equated, not with the acceptance of impurity and dis/ease as necessary, inexplicable conditions of humanity, but rather with the temporary *relief* of these phenomena.

This passage is reminiscent of the biblical story *Job* wherein Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar attempt to “explain away” Job's suffering. They advise Job to adhere to conventional wisdom, to confess his sins so that he may experience restoration — that is, *a clean sweep*. But as Job admonishes his false friends, “memorable sayings are [themselves] proverbs of ashes” (Job 13:12). Human rationale is, as Turnlung reveals in *Daughter Buffalo*, a discursive “maze” (29) that we must navigate in order to reach “the original Word as monster or angel . . . the mournful place where we may meet Job and hear his cry, *How long will you vex my soul / and break me in pieces with words?*” (29). However, Frame suggests that unlike Job, who wholeheartedly protests his suffering before God, we lazily rely on conventional concepts to sweep pain and loss “under the rug.”

4. 2. Metaphoric Idolatry: The Literary Death

Frame emphasizes that literary themes often collude with ordinary attempts to deny death. Moreover, she stresses that the grandiose image of the

Edge of the Alphabet, is a mere “prop” (260) — one that supports conventional attempts to “clean” or refine such harsh realities:

[Rupert] was such a clean poet walking among the words. He always wore gumboots and a mackintosh when he crossed the marshes of the drowned, treading carefully on the overgrowth of bitter blossom-words, so that when he arrived at the other side he was clean and unharmed and he always took care to remove the reminding layers of squalor from his smart ebony boots. (260-61)

Though critic Janet Wilson claims that Frame “challenges perceived social norms by valorising the life of the sensitive artist, the socially and economically disadvantaged figure” (Wilson 115), I would suggest that Frame challenges the status quo by parodying all clichés, including those of the “sensitive, starving artist.” For while characters such as the sculptor Tommy (*Living in the Maniototo*) and the aspiring writer Toby (*The Edge of the Alphabet*) seemingly fit Wilson's paradigm, those such as the wealthy writer Mattina (*The Carpathians*) and the sociopathic novelist Alwyn (*The Adaptable Man*) clearly do not. In addition, while Frame proposes that literary figures and their works are sources of inspiration — as is Shakespeare for Istina in *Faces in the Water* — she ridicules the notion that they are sources of truth: “the literate wind was distributing near and far its own cultured manures” (*Faces* 131). Paramount among these literary “cultured manures” are metaphoric events that romanticize death.

In *Daughter Buffalo*, Talbot explains “the effect which a literary upbringing may have upon death and bereavement” (62):

one had “died young,” a “*blossom plucked before her time*,” a life full of promise “cut off tragically.” These clichés guarded the entrance to the literary nature of my sister's death. In the midst of the confusion of loss and grief and change of status (my sister was raised from a laughing devil who could lie and cheat, torture with pinches and back thumps, to a heavenly angel who could have harmed no one), of *departures without return*, I took *the path of escape* already well-worn in my life – *the path to the literary death*, my swift transport being a poetry anthology . . .

I discovered that by reading the poems I could put my dead sister where she belonged, that is, wherever I and the poets chose to put her, that I need not find words for her death, as others had found the words for me, *to feed and expand my rather thin dull grief to an impressive maturity*. [italics mine] (63)

Here, Talbot emphasizes that because *the literary death* “has no silence in which to become real” (*Daughter 42*), it is a *path of escape*. Moreover, he relates conventional metaphors to literary ones: conventional metaphors are the unrefined surface of poetic sentiment — that which guards “the entrance to the literary nature of . . . death.” According to George Lakoff and Mark Turner, clichés such as *a blossom plucked before her time* and *the dearly departed* extend from two of the most prevalent metaphoric concepts in “Western” poetry (8): *human death is the death of a plant* and *death is a departure*. Among the numerous examples cited by Lakoff and Turner are the biblical “As for man, his days are as grass”

and snicker” (“The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”). Although such metaphoric expressions are novel, the underlying concepts are “not the unique creation of individual poets” (Lakoff and Turner 9), but rather are ways that members of a given culture conceptualize experience.¹ Poets, as cultural participants, use ordinary metaphoric concepts to communicate with their audience (9). Thus, poetic metaphors function more or less idiosyncratically in relation to conventional ones. The least idiosyncratic are those that engrandize clichés, that *feed and expand . . . thin dull grief to an impressive maturity*. The most idiosyncratic are those that destabilize conventional modes of thought. To be appreciated and understood in English, poetic metaphors must generally be neither trite by their conventionality nor unintelligible by their solipsism (51ff).

Upon his sister's death, Talbot feigns sorrow by using cliché metaphors prevalent in such canonical poetry as Browning's “Evelyn Hope,” Poe's “Annabel Lee,” and Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* (*Daughter Buffalo* 63ff). These poems describe death in terms of “romantic sepulchres,” mermaids, “pieces of geranium flower dying in a glass,” “envying angels,” and the “grief of the mockingbird”

¹ Lakoff and Turner clarify: “Basic conceptual metaphors are part of the common conceptual apparatus shared by members of a culture. They are systematic in that there is a fixed correspondence between the structure of the domain to be understood (e.g., death) and the structure of the domain in terms of which we are understanding it (e.g., departure). We usually understand them in terms of common experiences. They are largely unconscious, though attention may be drawn to them. Their operation in cognition is mostly automatic. They are widely conventionalized in language, that is, there are a great number of words and idiomatic expressions in our language whose interpretations depend upon those conceptual metaphors. But there are no words or idiomatic expressions in our language whose meanings depend upon a conceptual connection between [for instance] death and a banana” (51).

[The poets] had made a paradise, a literary haven of that early death [but]. . . my mother and my dead sister were parodying the story. My sister would be traveling in a lead coffin in the goods van of the train, with the mail bags, the holiday suitcases, cages of squawking hens and, perhaps, a sheep dog.

“She’s coming in a lead coffin to stop her from smelling,” Helen said, in a kind of nursery-rhyme rhythm which recalled the end of the *Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe*.

She went to the village to buy them a coffin

And when she came back she found them a coffin’. (72)

Unlike the poetic euphemisms cultivated by Browning, Poe, and Whitman, these colloquial rhymes foreground the physicality of death. By contrasting the two, Frame leaves us all “aloffin” at the thought that “romantic sepulchres” might indeed stop anyone “from smelling.”

According to Gina Mercer, such literary sentiments conceal “that which the dominant culture distinctly desires *not* to know” (*Subversive* 91). This form of denial is no more apparent, Mercer claims, than in *The Adaptable Man*, which parodies the “Olde Englande” genre — especially its portrayal of a warm “knowable community” (91) — at the same time that it undertakes a “sacrilegious exhumation” (89) of that genre:

[Frame] sets the novel in the rustic village of Little Burgelstat-ham: as one character helpfully informs another early in the novel, “a *burgel* was originally a burial place of the heathen” (p. 12)

analysis of the genre of the “Olde Englande” novel. She sees it as a genre whose function is to facilitate burial and avoidance, not as an innocent source of nostalgia. (89)

In this novel, what the villagers desire “*not to know*” are the facts behind the local murder of Botti Julio — a poor Italian farm worker who travelled to Burgelstatham to help with the black-currant harvest. During his three-month visit, Julio hoped to marry an English woman, stay in England, and benefit, ironically, from its generous social security plan (*The Adapt* 17). But upon his first night in the “Charming Village of Little Burgelstatham” (45) where “conservative ladies pursue their habits of roses and honeysuckle” (45) and “the peacetime mapping of cloud reveals no sinister shape” (45), Julio is drowned by Alwyn, a “hostile villager” (246) who despises foreigners. Here, Frame suggests that literary conventions — as symbolized by the “Old Englande” genre — can be both a means of fostering the cultural exclusion of *Others*, and a means of concealing their persecution.

In *Yellow Flowers in the Antipodean Room*, Frame parodies the arrogance with which Britain deems itself a cultural authority in relation to its former colonies. In the following passages, the metaphoric concept *death is a ceremony* entails that Britain — perceived as the source of all colonial tradition — understands death best. Godfrey's elder sister from England, Lynley, allegorizes Britain's desire to play the role of the valorized mother-country. As a childless spinster, she regretted that Godfrey's New Zealander wife had not died in his stead, enabling her to take “over, with sisterly propriety, most of the duties of wife and

wherewithal to arrange Godfrey's funeral: "These New Zealanders, she thought. Surely they know nothing about death!" (76). Shortly after, the narrator adds: "[Lynley] had heard that New Zealand was not the wilderness she had imagined it to be . . . it had a dead writer who had written about a Garden Party, so perhaps it had garden parties?" (78). Here, the identity of the dead writer Katherine Mansfield is deemed unimportant, suggesting that Britain is dismissive of colonial and postcolonial literatures. In addition, the fact that New Zealand has a "literary death" does not lead Lynley to conclude that the "colonial" culture "knows something about death." Rather, she deduces that New Zealand must be "civilized" because an anonymous author has taken pains to write about the traditional English garden party. In this case, the realities of death are subsumed by British notions of gentility.

Frame also parodies the Academy — another "cultural authority" — and the role that it plays in the romanticization of death. In *Scented Gardens for the Blind*:

[Erlene] was going to be a student . . . far removed from the ordinary concerns of the World. And in the University city 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. She was going to be a Buddhist, she was going to believe in free love, she was going to be an atheist, writing pamphlets which would cause her to be dismissed from the University; and perhaps in the end, not under-

alone on the beach, she would be drowned, yet not in New Zealand, not in any of the bays there — Waipapa, Moeraki, The Picton sounds — but somewhere in the Mediterranean, off the coast of Florence while sailing alone or with a love who said . . .

“Emily, no, Erlene, a ship is floating in the harbor now,
A wind is hovering o'er the mountain's brow. . . .” (231-32)

In this passage, Death is personified as a dear friend who walks with Erlene “hand in hand” through the corridors of philosophical inquiry, greeted by such canonical figures as Plato and Socrates, and informed by such esteemed writings as Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* and Shelley's *The Necessity of Atheism*. Erlene — who sees herself as a Romantic “misunderstood artist” — imagines drowning, not in a local bay, but off the coast of Florence as did Shelley from his boat the *Ariel*. In the final lines of the quotation, Erlene sees herself as the beautiful Emilia Viviani featured in Shelley's *Epipsychidion*. Here, Frame suggests that canonical idealizations of death are little more than a means of escaping the realities of everyday life in such seemingly inferior “colonial” locales as Waipapa, Moeraki, and The Picton sounds. As Alwyn reveals in *The Adaptable Man*, it is more important “to write a novel, to write it, not to live it. If you lived experience you were too easily drowned in it” (62).

4. 3. The Conventional Reduction of Love

While Frame foregrounds that ordinary metaphoric entailments are used to deny the reality of death, she also emphasizes that they are used to avoid the work of love. Love is made easier when it is seen simply in terms of cathexis, affinity, or sexual satisfaction.

with attachment. The narrator Talbot describes an afternoon of “concentrated adhesiveness” (57): two dogs had been copulating in the street and were unable to separate from one another; at the same time, a linesman across the road was unable to release his grip from live electrical wires. Talbot absurdly refers to the former incident as a “loving connection” (58), and the latter as “the embrace” of death (58). In these instances, Frame parodically emphasizes how we fail to make distinctions between simple cathexis and the complex commitment of love.

The lack of distinction between attachment and love is also apparent in the conventional metaphoric concept *love is an alliance*. In the following passage, Talbot cathects with Turnlung as a means of fostering both a romantic image of himself, and a nostalgic view of male friendship:

He embraced me and kissed me, on the cheek this time, like a brother — the word *comrade* came to mind, so clearly describing friendship and love between men: a warm encompassing word. Comrades, in one's imagination, wore heavy overcoats to keep out the cold world of snow and ice, and their faces glowed with love for each other as their bodies hurried to distribute the restless blood where it was most needed, all in a warm protective transport beyond the intrusion of harsh outward weather with its shrillness, in its unforeseen arrivals and departures and its imposition of differences: the comrades in their greatcoats, in their one greatcoat, together, were a mirror image of each other, affirming each other, a perfect exchange of shadow and substance. (140-41)

In this passage, the “love” between Talbot and Turnlung is actually a military-style alliance formed in opposition to *Others*. Mercer claims that these men

(*Subversive* 186) which “prevents them from realising the wide spectrum of maleness and male love available” (186). This narcissistic “greatcoat” masks Talbot’s homosexual desires, which are based not on a genuine love for Turnlung, but on the fear of women — the “intrusion” of “shrillness.”

While homosexual alliance is seen in terms of a mirror-image in *Daughter Buffalo*, heterosexual affinity is seen in terms of a “close-up” in *The Adaptable Man*:

Jenny found herself playing the game of references and resemblances. Though she was as much in love as to want Alwyn not to resemble “a lot of the chaps,” it was really of no consequence if he did resemble them, for the reward of loving was enjoyment of a *special view* of the beloved, the view extending from *intimate close-ups* to *privileged poses* against a *background* of commonplace other people in a commonplace world. [italics mine] (73-4)

In this passage, *love is a role* that can be critically observed. Intimacy has become a *view*, and closeness has become a *close-up*. These metaphors, along with *poses* and *background*, reduce love to a series of cinematic images. As lovers, Jenny and Alwyn are *special* and *privileged* posers: Hollywood-style stars among commonplace extras. This objectification of intimacy is similar to Talbot’s description of lovemaking in *Daughter Buffalo*:

I called Mother . . . My usual paralysis of will prevented me from telling her at once that Lenore and I had separated. I had no intention of talking to her about my sexual preferences, by way of expla-

ered to be satisfying, like a brand of toothpaste or a size of shirt. In my work I'd met a variety of attitudes and philosophies and I knew that at least one of my colleagues had begun a practical exploration of rape as the only form of sex to give satisfaction to both participants. Others indulged in spectator sex. (152)

Here, *lovmaking is a product* — a chosen *style* or *brand* — evaluated in terms of consumer satisfaction. Seeing the physical expression of love in terms of a sexual product allows Talbot to rationalize human degradation. Rape, which necessarily involves the violation of an-*Other*, is presumed to be mutually satisfying. In addition, Talbot's nonchalant acceptance of *spectator sex* — reminiscent of highly-eroticized commercial images — emphasizes that we are more interested in sexual images than we are in sexual intimacy.²

4. 4. Metaphoric Idolatry: Literary Love

Frame emphasizes that literary themes often collude with ordinary attempts to reduce the work of love. In *Intensive Care*, Colin uses the poetic equivalent of the conventional concept *love is cathexis* to justify having a love affair with a nineteen-year-old “girl” (170). In the following passage, Colin reflects on the impact that young Lorna has had on his life:

² Narcissistic personalities are overinvolved both with their own images and with the images of the “objects” that they desire (see A. Lowen *Narcissism*). The more that narcissists focus on bodily images, including sexual images, the more that they are deprived of feelings within the body. Sexual imagery, then, becomes a way of avoiding the emotional difficulties, anxieties, and challenges associated with sexual *feeling* (as distinct from genital *excitation*). Lowen claims that American culture (as in *Daughter Buffalo*) is characteristically narcissistic.

Knight at Arms alone and palely loitering. He felt now if he did not take some action he might shrink and disappear, Lorna had such power to annihilate him. Unless her love continued to bear witness to him, what existence had he? (174)

Here, Colin sees his relationship with Lorna in terms of the one between the forlorn Knight at Arms³ and the bewitching Lady in the Meads in Keats's "La Belle Dame Sans Merci"— that is, effortless in its passion, endlessly enthralling, and hopelessly romantic. But this version of "love" is parodied when Colin — the spurned knight — does not purge his feelings of abandonment by sojourning alone on a cold winter's day. Rather, he eliminates his grief by shooting and killing Lorna, Mr. and Mrs. Kimberley, and himself one warm summer night. Frame illustrates how the poetic notion that *love is cathexis* can have devastating consequences in everyday life. Moreover, she emphasizes that such poetic idealism is a means of avoiding love when it proves unattractive, difficult, or painful. In *Faces in the Water*, the psychiatric patient Istina explains:

There is an aspect of madness which is seldom mentioned in fiction because it would damage the romantic popular idea of the insane as a person whose speech appeals as immediately poetic; but it is seldom the easy Opheliana recited like the pages of a seed catalog or the outpourings of Crazy Janes who provide, in fiction, an outlet for poetic abandon. Few of the people who roamed the dayroom

³ Similarly, in *The Adaptable Man* Jenny sees Alwyn in terms of "the Golden Knight of Happiness and Love" (72).

were charmingly uninhibited eccentrics. . . . Their behavior affronted, caused uneasiness; they wept and moaned; they quarreled and complained. They were a nuisance and were treated as such. It was forgotten that they too possessed a prized humanity which needed care and love, that a tiny poetic essence could be distilled from their overflowing squalid truth. (112)

Here, Frame stresses that love is not marked by *poetic outpourings*, but is experienced rather amidst *overflowing squalid truth*. In short, love is not easy.

In *Owls Do Cry*, Teresa — a sheltered, insecure housewife — derives her ideas about love from Victorian literature. When Teresa decides to keep a diary, she records, not her own thoughts and feelings, but what her life would be like if it were a romantic novel. She writes about her first party in high school: “when the dances were announced my heart beat so fast I was afraid it would choke me, like in a novel, and I would fall swooning to the ground ” (124). She remembers grabbing a dance partner and pushing him onto the floor: “I could not keep in time, and trod on his toes, and said Sorry sorry, all the time, though I learned afterwards that a woman never says sorry — it is always the man's fault” (124). Teresa discovers that men are always at fault by reading novels which consistently equate women with hapless victims. In her diary, she cites the cover of Anne Bronte's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, revealing her naive reliance on the facile blurbs of literary experts: “It is the story of a woman and her drunkard husband, her suffering and terror in a world of squalor — that is what it says on the cover” (120-21). She identifies with the emotionally victimized Helen: “What

and suspense” (121). She adds:

What a brute of a man to so treat a woman's love. The scene where Huntingdon has a rendezvous in the shrubbery with his current mistress, and his wife, taking a solitary walk in the same area at nightfall, is mistaken by Huntingdon for the woman he has promised to meet, and therefore greeted passionately and fondled, until he discovers his error and exclaims in disgust and fear — My wife! Helen! that scene abhors and disgusts me. I have read it carefully three times. (122)

Frame parodies the melodramatic allure of the gothic romance: although this section of the book “abhors” Teresa, she nonetheless reads it *carefully* three times. In addition, Teresa describes Beatrix Potter's *Jemima Puddleduck* in terms similar to *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*: “What a cunning swindler was the foxy gentleman, and how gullible poor Jemima Puddleduck. It was almost like real life with its intrigue and near-murder” (122). This passage highlights that if *women are hapless victims* then *men are sexual predators* or “wolves” — in this case, “foxy gentlemen.” By comparing the canonical romance to a children's story, Frame suggests that such romantic notions of love and lovers are naive.

However, Frame also emphasizes that it is not literature per se that is responsible for such facile notions of love, but it is rather our indolent treatment of language — including poetic metaphor — that is responsible. In *The Adaptable Man*, Murial, remembering an occasion when she drank wine with a poet, quotes lines from Keats's “Ode to a Nightingale”:

O for a beaker full of the warm South,

*With beaded bubbles winking at the brim,
And purple-stained mouth.*

She had never forgotten the words quoted to her by the poet on the lawn. She remembered them because she liked to remember the time with the poet, not because she liked the words quoted; they did not appeal to her; she thought them extravagant; a purple-stained mouth implied an impending heart attack rather than the pleasure of wine. (172)

Although she dislikes the poem, Murial nonetheless uses it as a sentimental substitute for genuine feeling. Similarly, when Greta is dismayed by Russell's desire to live in the past — his “after-marriage metamorphosis” (58) — she attempts to excuse his stoicism with lines from Keats's “Ode On a Grecian Urn.” However, the narrator stresses that she has willfully forgotten key passages: “‘Bold lover never never canst thou kiss, nor she be fair. Nor she be fair’ — Greta preferred to ignore this part of the poem” (84). Here, Greta fails to realize that all language — including that of love — deals solely with images. Poetic love is, in Keats's own words, a “Cold Pastoral” (Noyes 1193) lacking the warmth of human touch.

4. 5. The Mystery of Love and Death: Gesturing Beyond Words

For Frame, death and love are jointly expressed as the unfathomable Absolute — enigmas that inevitably elude even polysemous strategies of interpretation. But while they are unsignifiable, they are paradoxically full of signi-

potentiality of man” (“Death as the Gateway” 147).

Accordingly, Frame emphasizes that death can never in fact be domesticated — that is, reduced to *a clean sweep* or, as the passage below reads, *a perfect solver* [read *solvent*] *of problems*:

The most appalling piece of reasoning that man has ever concluded, against all evidence, is that death is a prime, convenient, *perfect solver of problems*. If ever there was a need for the human race to be proved insane, this piece of reasoning would provide all proof. Death solves nothing. An exterminated race is not a vanished race; an assassinated ruler does not cease to exercise power. These are commonplaces, yet men everywhere continue to equate killing with getting rid of. It works with flies, vermin, weeds; how inconvenient that people who swarm, breed, suck, prey on others, strangle their blossoming neighbors, are yet not flies, vermin, and weeds, but remain people! People persist! [Italics mine] (*The Adapt* 149)

Why are people not the same as *flies, vermin, and weeds*? Frame does not venture to say. Here, it is “the unknown” itself that defies “man's” metaphoric reduction of death — *People persist!* Unlike theories of linguistic idealism which suggest that language is our only access to reality,⁴ Frame insists that life and

⁴ For example, in volume six of *The Collected Papers* — Charles Peirce's extensive work on semiotics — the American philosopher claims:

“But what” some listener . . . may say, “are we not to occupy ourselves at all with

Likewise, she stresses that love can never be conceptually captured — that is, reduced to appearances, as in the following notion of *Goodness*:

The visits of Greta and Russell to the church in Murston seemed, to Aisley, to be social occasions rather than acts of worship. Russell returned from church in high spirits, like one who has wined and dined at a party . . . [he had] the self-confidence brought about by his noticing the approval of patients visiting the same church, rather than the approval of God. It was possible, Aisley thought, that the Maude family and the young Jenny lived in the place inhabited by most people — *the cloud of general belief called Goodness*, the outside of a prison, gazing cautiously through the bars at the chained “committed,” not realizing that one wall of the prison was open to the sky. [italics mine] (*The Adapt* 53)

Here, *committed* suggests that we commonly see the spiritually devout in terms of those who are *chained* or institutionalized. Frame emphasizes that *most people*, fearing the work that love demands, equate devotion with enslavement. Thus, they dedicate themselves not to what Aisley terms the *approval of God*, but to the conventional concept of *Goodness*, a philosophical *cloud of belief* which prevents them from “realizing that one wall of the prison” is “open to the sky.”

earthquakes, droughts and pestilence?” To which I reply, if those earthquakes, droughts and pestilences are subject to *laws*, those laws being of the nature of signs, then, no doubt being arbitrary brute interruptions of our course of life, let us wrap our cloaks about us, and endure them as we may; for they cannot injure us, though they may strike us down.” (VI. 235)

either case, Frame suggests that many of us disregard the Absolute presence of mystery.⁵ For her, love is an enigma that gestures beyond the poststructuralist “prisonhouse of language.”

According to Mercer, Frame focuses on the notion that experience can be linguistically divided “into exclusive and opposite halves: rational vs irrational; sane vs insane; novelist vs poet” (“Exploring” 386). By way of explanation, Mercer cites a passage from *Intensive Care*:

In the dream in the dream
the child played a poem
protected by mild adjectives
gentle verbs and the two
pronouns teaching the
division of earth and sky
night and day
object and show; and the separating
personal eye. (1)

⁵ According to Marc Delrez, the mystery of love is manifest in Frame's notion of community. He observes in *Owls Do Cry* that Daphne “explores a dimension of outcast dilapidated humanity which is found to hold a mysterious promise of sprout or fertility, despite the blight of unprepossessing appearance” (Delrez 115):

So passed one morning and every morning and day but the people growing gentle and together, like old bulbs without promise of bloom, thrown to the rubbish heap and sinking in the filth and blindness to sprout a separate community of dark, touching tendril and root to yet invisible colour of maimed flowers, narcissus, daffodil, tulip, and crocus-leaf stained with blade of snow. (*Owls* 137)

I would add that such mysterious loving connections are also witnessed in the relationships between Vera and Clara in *Scented Gardens for the Blind*, between Sister Bridge and her many patients in *Faces in the Water*, and between the members of the Hanuere family and the Maori community in *The Carpathians*.

power. The language of the ‘poem’ described is ‘gentle’ and protective, but at the same time it is ‘teaching the division” (386). I have claimed that Frame circumvents this divisiveness by pushing metaphor beyond convention — *this is that*; from metaphoric ambivalence — *this is that and this cannot be that*; to multivalence — *this is that ad infinitum*; and finally towards the recognition that language is inadequate in the face of life’s mysteries — *death and love are inconceivable*. Such inadequacy is highlighted in *Daughter Buffalo* when Turnlung observes “*death was the meeting of its presence and its absence, where before I had known each only separately*” [italics mine] (36). This metaphor defies totalization. For what is the outcome when presence and absence meet? Likewise, in *The Adaptable Man* Frame preserves the mysterious “essence of God” — that is, the loving impetus behind creation:

Aisley had told himself that when the green and white mist of leaves and blossom had gone from the fields and lanes of Little Burgelstatham and the merciless winter came to take away all pretense of decorative beauty and glory from the earth, then he would look out with a camera eye onto the essence of God. He realized, however, as soon as the time came, and he looked down on the bare fields, that he had been deceived again by the old fallacy that meaning lies more in the framework than in the cluttered picture, more in the symbol than in the complexity it stands for; he knew that his dream had been only another example of the human cunning that tries to bring God or not-God within its own limits. (235)

Here, it is merely *human cunning* — trickery — which reduces complexities and

represented by the struggle to reconcile such opposites as God and not-God, presence and absence, metaphor and metonymy, poetry and prose, structuralism and poststructuralism. Insofar as the transformation of culture is concerned, Frame emphasizes that all magi are potentially powerful —although some are politically more advantaged than others. But insofar as the production of truth is concerned, she reveals that all magicians indeed work only with smoke and mirrors.

This project has used Frame's work as a case study to examine how metaphoric activity can play roles both in the marginalization and in the discursive emancipation of *Others*. In so doing, it has argued that metaphor can be fully understood only in accordance with the sum of metaphoric assumptions that it entails (Lakoff and Johnson 7ff). Therefore, in order to evaluate metaphoric "tricks" in terms of either ingenuity or deceit, or a mixture thereof, we must see them as culturally specific events. We must determine which metaphors, in given situations, arrest the process of questioning (Covino 92) and thereby totalize *Others*, and which encourage the exchange of ideas and thereby reinvent culture. Metaphoric activity — as exemplified by the magic realism of Janet Frame — is not simply potentially oppressive, but potentially transformative. Thus, the fact that metaphoric "tricks" are characteristically beguiling should not deter us from performing magic.

To criticize the metaphoric reading of texts, as do Bhabha and Kroetsch, is to suggest that it is the structure of metaphor which is partly responsible for the totalization of *Others*. But, as this project has argued, meaning is as inconstant, transmutable, and volatile as the people and situations that produce it. Since metaphor is a discursive event, it can never be permanently "cleaned up" or wholly "sanitized." As Gayatri Spivak analogizes, the "political practice" of metaphor is "like housework" (41); it is "not like writing books. You don't do these things once and for all. That's why [the responsible use of language] should be persistent" (41). Therefore, we need only to keep "our house" in order,

Recognizing metaphor as a discursive event may be one way of reconciling structuralist and poststructuralist concerns. Structuralism relies on the principle of objectivism — the notion that the world comprises objects that “have well-defined inherent properties” (Lakoff and Johnson 202) and that there are absolute constraints upon meaning and truth. In contrast, poststructuralism relies on the principle of subjectivism — the notion that “experience has no natural structure and that [there are] no natural external constraints upon meaning and truth” (224). As Lakoff and Johnson assert, both extremes are partially valid. We all impose meaning — points of view — on our universe. Juxtaposed, these points appear irreconcilable, like the perspectives of a cubist painting. At the same time, we are all subject to certain phenomenological and physiological constraints such as gravity and body temperature. In this sense, the production of meaning is not merely a private endeavour. Objectivist and subjectivist concerns, as Lakoff and Johnson posit, can be reconciled by recognizing that meaning — as distinct from either “truth” or cognition — is neither absolute nor arbitrary, but experientially based and culturally structured. So, while there are many ways of metaphorically skinning a cat, a butter knife still won't “do the trick.”

The idea that language is both polysemous and culturally limited is an important consideration for postcolonial studies. For while metaphoric activity need not result in the imperialist totalization of meaning, unlimited metonymic deferral cannot result in the cultural specification of meaning. Indeed, Bhabha

ing pot,” wherein all cultural difference is subsumed by a generic “chaos and cacophony of words” (Bhabha 116). But when meaning becomes so metonymically fractured, at what point can it be referential? And upon losing its referentiality, how can it benefit *Others* who wish to assert the value of alter/native forms of representation? This project, in stressing the malleability of language, has argued against the structuralist polarization of metaphor and metonymy, and the subsequent poststructuralist valorization of metonymy. It has claimed, rather, that metaphoric polysemy can represent difference as a postcolonial mosaic instead of as a poststructuralist “melting pot.”

In Frame's case, metaphoric polysemy is facilitated by magic realism, a narrative strategy which defies totalization by foregrounding the unresolved tension between reality and fantasy. It is this incongruity between the real and the ideal — *this is that and this cannot be that* — that compels us to question cultural mores, encourages us to entertain new possibilities, and hence urges us to reinvent culture. Frame heightens metaphoric tension, foregrounds polysemy, and thereby maximizes meaning. However, this should not suggest that, insofar as reading strategies are concerned, “anything goes.” For Frame, metaphoric ambiguity expresses — via parody and irony — specific humanitarian concerns. We witness this in her criticism of social systems which divide people into either subjects or *Others*, as exemplified by such metaphoric concepts as “The Human Delineation Act” in *Intensive Care* (303), reminiscent of Nazi Germany's genocidal projects; the “Ward system” in *Faces in the Water*, overseen by “The DIRECTOR-GENERAL of Mental Hygiene” (120); and the “social net” in *The*

classes. In addition, she scrutinizes the social complacency of the middle classes — “the living dead” (*Daughter Buffalo* 153) who mistake “their embalmed state as happiness” (*The Adapt* 58) and greedily support a “government by *Things*” (11). For Frame, metaphoric multivalence retains a mimetic relationship with the world in the form of social commentary.

After demonstrating how metaphoric activity can either marginalize or emancipate *Others*, this project has tried to level the aesthetic “playing field” by claiming that — insofar as the production of “truth” is concerned — all magicians are equally inadequate. Both imperialists and liberationists are constrained by that which we absolutely do not know, that which inevitably eludes even polysemous counter-discursive strategies. For Frame, the “unfathomable Absolute” is epitomized jointly by death and love: the former, an extra-discursive material reality; the latter, an extra-discursive transcendent enigma.

Thus, Frame “puts the resources of postmodernism at the service of a modernist quest for reconciliation” (Delbaere *The Ring* 10). In so doing, she demonstrates that while “truth” is ever elusive, meaning — and polysemy — is ever present. Moreover, she reminds us that when polysemy is reduced to postmodern chaos, and writing is diminished to “spider blots, nothing but blots of ink” (Frame *The Edge* 74), difference can always be reconciled, and meaning always be restored, by the notion that Absolutely all “possess a prized humanity” (*Faces* 112).

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