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Paying Attention to Language, Replicas and the Role of the Artist in Janet Frame's *Living in the Maniototo*[1]

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Janet Frame's 1979 novel *Living in the Maniototo* features a ubiquitous narrator whose multiple personalities are linked by a common interest in creation. This choice of narrative perspective, coupled with the characters and events depicted in the book, provides the basis for an exploration of the related concepts of art, language and replicas. By establishing connections between these elements, this article attempts to unveil the dynamics at work in the novel's multi-layered structure and thus shed light on the role of the artist in the narrative and, by extension, on the author's metafictional strategy.

Keywords: Janet Frame; *Living in the Maniototo*; language; replicas; artist; metafiction

... the highest things are beyond words. (Ben Okri, *A Way of Being Free* 89)

Marc Delrez has claimed that the intricacy of *Living in the Maniototo* can at least partly be ascribed to the role played by the book's "evasive, elusive, schizophrenic narrator" (76). Rightly so, for Mavis Furness/Barwell/Halleton, Violet Pansy Proudlock, Alice Thumb, "whatever she calls herself (Frame, *Maniototo* 199), appears to encompass a continuum of entwined personalities, each of whom draws upon her own "variet[y] of truth" (219) to convey her version of events. Enigmatic as this narrator may seem, however, her three avatars, Mavis, Violet and Alice, are undoubtedly connected by a common interest in creation, since they all somehow engage in (re)creational activities. Similarly, the other protagonists' approach to writing or more generally to art plays a significant part in the narrative, whether their involvement is represented unambiguously or merely hinted at.

The fundamental role played by language in Frame's work has also been repeatedly commented on (e.g. Ross 320-26). Her writing has been hailed for its linguistic inventiveness but, paradoxically, Frame seems to be taking liberties with language only to expose its "imprisoning limitations" (Mercer 215). *Living in the Maniototo* reproduces this ambivalence. In this context, I shall argue that in this novel the narrator's and the characters' uses of and attitudes towards language crucially impact on their approach to art, whatever position they occupy in the reality-fiction continuum sketched in the novel. By establishing this link, I hope to demonstrate that the concepts of language and replicas (which, I will suggest, may in some respects be paralleled) can be used as methodological stepping-stones to shed light on the role of art in the framework of the novel's wider metafictional concerns.

Living in the Maniototo is not the only novel by Frame which features writers or would-be writers. *The Edge of the Alphabet* (1962), *The Adaptable Man* (1965), *Intensive*

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Care (1970), *Daughter Buffalo* (1972) and *The Carpathians* (1988) all include characters who are involved in, or aspire to, literary creation. That these novels take an extensive interest in artists is not their only common denominator for, as Marc Delrez has aptly demonstrated, they also seem to identify the "true" artist figure as a person who can retrieve experience "in acts of (re-)creation" (211). According to Delrez, Frame presents art not as an act of self-preservation but as a means of exploring dimensions which extend beyond the boundaries of the self. Thus, he argues, Frame appears to dismiss uninspired, mimetic writing ventures (embodied, for instance, in the journalistic work of Alwyn Maude in *The Adaptable Man*) and their inherent superficiality. Importantly, as Delrez also suggests, language plays an ambivalent role in this dichotomy, for it is an instrument which can encourage the urge either to delve into the unknown or, alternatively, to follow mainstream ideologies.[2]

In *Living in the Maniototo*, the continuum that ranges from creative to "sterile" writing includes the tendencies of "attending" to the world and searching for truths as opposed to "avoiding", turning away from the "original" to hide in a world of replicas. Although this pattern largely resembles that of the novels mentioned above, it acquires here a more problematic form, since the entire artistic spectrum is embraced by a ubiquitous narrator with an apparently three-facetted personality: the writer, Mavis, whose book, *The Green Fuse*, an insider's account of "life in a mental hospital" (217), seemingly endows her with the role of the true artist; Violet Pansy Proudlock, the ventriloquist "on the margin of creation and recreation" who "hope[s] to progress from stick to pocket head to person, real person" (13) and thus use her talent for impersonation to create replicas that might one day approach the "real thing"; and finally, Alice Thumb, the "eavesdropp[er] and gossip" (13) who, by definition, disseminates a superficial and distorted account of reality. These three personae are initially fused, as the narrator refers to them in the first person (see prologue 11-14). In the course of the novel, however, occasional shifts to the third person demonstrate that the autonomy of these different characters is subject to fluctuation (see, for example, 22). The narrator's multifarious personalities certainly serve to reject any sense of a monolithic identity in favour of a fluid, forever shifting alternative. The latter's variable nature is also rendered by the lack of differentiation between the intertwined facets, as suggested in one of the epigraphs, attributed to "Alice Thumb or Violet Pansy Proudlock or Mavis Halleton":

> One glance
> can annihilate the void dance.
> Looking away is the passion

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> day by day, year by year
> the imitative act hot from the mould of the original fact,
>
> until we can no longer contain the cry
> or live untouched in the house of replicas. (8)

The opening line of this poem prefigures the reference to Lot's wife (13-14), who "was turned into a pillar of salt, during her flight from Sodom, because she 'turned' around to look behind", thereby performing an "act of attention" (Delrez 77). The latter is opposed to the "void dance" which, as a pun on "avoidance" (Wilson, "Inner World" 649), can be equated with "[l]ooking away [...] the imitative act hot from the mould of original fact" (Frame, *Maniototo* 8). Unsurprisingly, this motif is found throughout the novel. However, the opposition between "looking at" and "looking away" is further complicated by the fact that the "transformation" brought about by imaginative literature "can only occur through imitating an original" (Wilson, "Inner World" 649). If one considers this contradiction from a formal perspective, it appears that both creative and mimetic writing indeed use the same replica of the imagined: language. Words, then, can be seen as double-edged swords that have the power both to redeem erased aspects of human experience and to wipe them off the record. In the course of the narrative, this idea takes a very literal turn:

> I [Mavis] bought from the bargain store down Monument Street, a tear gas *pen* in a small thin box [...].I called myself a writer and this special pen had been advertised as one with special cartridges that could disable an attacker, perhaps cause momentary blindness, yet, because it was still "only a pen" (it said so on the label, didn't it?) I bought it, and when I unwrapped it I was horrified to read the first sentence in the leaflet enclosed, Instructions for using your tear gas *gun.* (79)

However anecdotal, this incident highlights the inextricable link between writing and violence which is omnipresent in the novel, and it provides a context for analysing the paradoxical nature of this association. In this extract, Mavis is led to question the assumption that "language [...] never harmed anyone" (59). Indeed, the misleading denomination on the wrapping which suggests that the gun is "only a pen" (79) indicates that labels can surreptitiously erase underlying violence in a way that may bring to mind the streets of Blenheim, "named after battles with never a sign of who lost or who won or how many died, and certainly, though the generals were named, no names of any of the warriors" (41). While the pen may, on the surface at least, appear harmless, it is revealed as a weapon in disguise.

This association with violence is confirmed through the suggestion that writing may "disable an attacker" (79), and therefore perhaps aim at annihilating intruders who menace an individual's sense of barricaded identity. The literary counterpart of this attitude seems to consist in the imitative reproduction of a stereotypical sense of reality; in the narrative this approach is endorsed by Howard Conway, the author who teaches the creative writing class which Mavis attends. His own novels, *Seed on the Shore* and *Leaf in the Wind*, are full of clichés such as "women with streaming hair and eyes, horses with flowing manes, and trees and men with flowing seed, set in storm and hurricane country" (55). Conway's conventionality, combined with his rejection of first-person narratives ("Never use it" [61]), can be seen as a prescriptive attempt to exclude any alternative forms of art, and thus bring all kinds of self-examination to a standstill.

Importantly, however, another image which reunites language and violence seems to suggest the opposite of this superficial approach:

> I feel that language in its widest sense is the hawk suspended above eternity, feeding from it but not of its substance and not necessarily for its life and thus never able to be translated into it; only able by a wing movement, so to speak, a cry, a shadow, to hint at what lies beneath it on the untouched, undescribed almost unknown plain. (43)

The menace associated with the hawk hovering over the "undescribed almost unknown plain" (43) may lead one to link the expanse of land with "the Maniototo plain ... mania, a plain: toto, bloody" (8). Moreover, since, as Janet Wilson remarks, the "Maniototo [...] provides a metaphor for the artist's imagination" ("Fictive Strategies" 121-22), while the hawk is equated with language, it may be suggested that "[l]anguage [...] enables access to the other world", i.e. the imaginative realm, and "evokes destruction, danger and control" ("Inner World" 636). In this respect, the connection between language and violence ultimately acquires a more positive connotation, since the use of words can be seen as a painful, yet necessary stage in a process of discovery. So the violence and suffering suggested by the "momentary blindness" (79) induced by the tear gas might indicate not the intellectual apathy associated with immobility, but a capacity to go beyond the world of replicas in which our vision (taken in the literal sense of "sight", "the ability to see") entraps us. Consequently, it appears that the exploration of these alternative dimensions may be linked not to the observation and mimetic rendering of one's surroundings, but to the ability to supersede the constraints imposed by the physical world.[3] This idea finds echoes in other parts of the novel, e.g. *The Green Fuse* exemplifies Mavis's willingness to remember those who are usually forgotten, for it deals with

"life in a mental hospital" (217):

> Have you ever lived in a room [...] where the walls are stained and scarred, where they have been beaten and thumped and kicked by frightened people? They had left their fossilized screams and cries, like a mine, for me to explore, and in one corner, though you could not see it unless you found the right focus, there was a mountain of salt formed through the many seasons of many tears [...]. (224)

The artist's task could be likened to that of the archaeologist who discovers and examines the fossils inherited from the past. As stated previously, however, the evidence collected by the artist is not palpable, and he/she must "f[ind] the right focus" (224) to perceive the people and experiences that have "returned beneath the surface of apparent reality" (39), in order to retrieve the traces of their forgotten sufferings. In this respect, Mavis can be considered a fully-fledged artist: in contrast to Brian, for example, she has the ability to hear the wolves in Baltimore whose howling might evoke not only "the ghost in the form of a howling dog [...] which had been the inspiration for one of Edgar Allan Poe's stories" (30), but also the lycanthropic "wolf-children", i.e. Adelaide Garrett, whom Mavis never met, and the Martin twins. Significantly, Brian, an "accurate man" (30), tells Mavis that "it was [her] imagination" (29) that caused her to hear the wolves, thereby emphasizing her unconscious creative power as well as his own deficiencies in this regard.

Inevitably, this raises the question of whether artistic creation continues to reflect reality and to what degree it is, or indeed whether it ought to be, anchored in a sense of the world around us. In other words, is the imaginary world shaped by the artist a replica of the "real world" (which is itself a replica of an immaterial world of ideas, as in Plato's philosophy)[4] or, conversely, is fiction drawn directly from the manifold and therefore superior to the world in which we live? The novel provides at least a partial answer to this question: "The primary avoidance [...] is in not recognizing that in a world of replicas the original cannot be matched in value, and the real fact is often a copy of the unreal fiction [...]" (44-45). The "unreal fiction" (45) of which the "real fact" (45) is a copy seems to correspond to Plato's world of ideas, the world of absolute truth. However, unlike Plato, Frame does not place the writer or poet at the bottom of the ladder, so to speak, as someone who imitates a world which is itself a replica. On the contrary, the fiction created by Frame's true artist may be closer than the physical world to "an original, the sum of all equals and unequals and cubes and squares; the shaping inclusion; the hypotenuse of the entire manifold" (118). Mark Williams shares this position, stating:

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> All our mental activities and the whole visible world [...] are consigned to the realm of imitation. But the writer is not thereby condemned, following Plato who banished the poets from his republic, as an imitator of imitations. In fact, the writer *shapes* the manifold [...], pays it acts of attention, makes us see the light that surrounds objects when we attend to them reverently, and makes us aware of the nothingness against which all being is set. (48)

Surprisingly, perhaps, the Platonic notion of the poet as an imitator of imitations whose work is "thrice removed from the truth" (Plato np) reminds one of Alice Thumb, the "eavesdropper [...] twice removed from the real" (Frame, *Maniototo* 12), while Plato's philosopher who sees beyond the world of replicas seems to correspond to the Framean notion of the true artist. In this respect, Plato's and Frame's viewpoints are far from being contradictory, for they both condemn *mimetic* art, acknowledge (and indeed encourage) the possibility of striving for a kind of ultimate, immaterial truth, access to which is hindered by our allegiance to a one-dimensional reality.

In *Living in the Maniototo*, readers are thus confronted with at least three overlapping layers of reality and/or fiction: the world in which the author (Frame) writes her book, the world inhabited by Mavis, and, finally, the world of her four "guests". These dimensions can all be seen as replicas of each other, yet it is difficult to determine which one is to be considered closest to the "original", if only because the boundaries between Mavis's physical and fictional worlds are blurred. At the end of the novel, it clearly appears that Mavis has not only "edit[ed] and [...] embroider[ed]" (138) the stories of the guests, but that the visitors only ever existed in her imagination, leaving her seemingly confused when she finally emerges from her fictitious world. At this stage, it remains uncertain whether this imaginary universe has been Mavis's way of "turn[ing] away from, avoid[ing], the possibility and responsibility of feeling, by going at once to another, a private fictional world" (235), and thus ignoring Brian's death for example, or whether her fictional characters have allowed her to attend to the superior world of the imagination, and therefore pay indirect but undivided attention to the disappearance of her friend. Let us attempt to assess the guests' roles and influence, both in Mavis's fiction and in the world she physically inhabits, and determine whether they have helped or hampered the writer in her imaginative quest for the "original".

Each of the four guests is writing or planning to write a book, but literary enthusiasm may not in itself constitute sufficient proof of "attention"; indeed, "these days everyone [is] writing a book" (196). If anything, Theo and Zita, the couple who first reach the house on

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Grizzly Peak Road, seem to be engaged instead in the act of "avoidance": although they claim to have been "quite close" to the Garretts (126), neither of them is aware of the existence of their friends' daughter (see 128). This appears to indicate that the Carltons know the Garretts only through their replicas, which are material reproductions of their passion for art and Italy, while Irving's and Trinity's "real" personalities seem to elude all four guests.[5]

Theo, through the voice of Alice Thumb, describes himself as follows:

> I, Theo, am haunted by three things:
> my love for my wife, my past rescues and the rescued; and the erosion of the face of the earth.
> Not its movement, displacement, reforming, but its ulceration and destruction. (157)

Theo is conducting research on erosion, a phenomenon associated with destruction in this extract and explicitly linked to erasure and death in another passage ("Ironic, the Garretts' death by earthquake, / their erosion, their erasure from the earth" [157]). Theo's ambition to write a book on the subject can be seen as an attempt to circumscribe and therefore dominate the forces of nature since erosion, the gradual attrition of rock and soil, evokes the spatial or geographical dimensions of decay and the passage of time. Combined with his boast about rescuing innumerable people (including Zita), this obsession makes Theo a God-like figure[6] whose "talent for directing the lives of others" (145) suggests either divine powers or manipulative tendencies; in either case, he seems to want to deny the existence of death. Indeed, it could be argued that Theo's interest in erosion-erasure has made him aware of the inexorable fate of man, and that it is precisely this awareness which compels him to emphasize his ability to rescue others, in the hope, perhaps, of preventing his own still-to-come erasure. His attitude conceals a fear of being forgotten, hence his marriage to Zita, who is more than 30 years his junior and therefore likely to outlive him and remember him after his death. In fact, Theo and Zita keep joking about how she will take care of him when he gets old, and it eventually comes to this when Theo has a stroke. He then loses the power to use nouns:

> "Yes," Theo said again. "It's very kind of you. I do think they [the Garretts] would realize what it [giving us the house] means to us." He was outside the boundary: not a noun in sight. Pronouns, yes, but they are mere replicas, stand-ins, shadows. (217)

Although this incapacity to name might confine Theo more deeply in the world of replicas, his inability to "find words for his thoughts" (206) may also allow him to escape the

inadequacies of the oral code. Forced to find an alternative mode of communication, he invents "a kind of sign language" (211) which circumvents the deficiencies of human speech. Moreover, although the pronouns he uses are described as "replicas, stand-ins, shadows" (217), it could be suggested that Theo's use of "definitions rather than nouns or descriptions of actions rather than the name of the action" (211) initiates a reflection on the transposition of "scraps from the manifold" (134) into words.

On the other hand, his loss of "the God-power and poet-power" (211), the power to name, paradoxically seems to correspond to another shift: that from creator, rescuer, to the state of "scarecrow" (181), human replica, "mere talking stick or pocket head in the entertainment arranged by Reality" (158). His wife Zita undergoes the reverse process, since she eventually takes on the role of Theo's rescuer. Originally a Hungarian refugee, she and her "spotless" (147) family were approved by the New Zealand authorities and allowed to enter the country, while many were left behind in the camps:

> We did feel sorry for the poor old people, some of whom were deaf or blind and not wanting to wash because not washing kept you warm in winter, but we didn't have time to feel too sorry for them, we were so busy practicing to look adaptable and smiling and intelligent [...]. There were lessons in English and my brother Josef and I were soon speaking more English than Hungarian, and our father too, for it was his English that had helped him to be chosen. It would enable him to "fit in," they said. The New Zealand aim was to have people who would "fit in" readily and painlessly (painless for those already there). (147-48)

Like Botti Julio in *The Adaptable Man*, the refugees' ability to speak English is seen as a factor of so-called adaptability, i.e. of the ability to fit into society without disturbing it or questioning its values.[7] Zita's mother seems to have been acutely aware that this process was synonymous with cultural erasure and loss of identity, for her "fear of the language" (150) prevented her from learning English and integrating properly. Zita, although she "adapted" and, at first, failed to remember those who had been left behind, has retained a practical attitude towards the English language:

> In her learning of English she had never reached the stage of poetic rejoicing in names, almost as if, had she gone beyond the learning of essential names, she might have been taken over by the English language as surely as the nations in the Wall Chart of the Condensed History of the World had been conquered and their tiny column of red or grey or blue or green erased. This was one area where she clung to her Hungarian

> nationality; a small column within her that would not be erased. (200)

Over the years, Zita has used English as an instrument of social integration but has tried not to surrender to it completely for fear that her cultural identity, like that of the nations on the Wall Chart, would become "merge[d] into that of the conquering group" (200). Language thus emerges as a strong factor of identity and, if imposed in neo-colonial fashion, as a means of cultural assimilation which can sweep away entire civilizations, like the Blue Fury, the "powerful cleanser" (38) which in an earlier part of the narrative erased Brian's artist friend Tommy. Once "*filtered* (like pure drinking water)" (151) and allowed into New Zealand, Zita went from the status of chosen refugee to that of Theo's "chosen child" (152). However, she eventually breaks free from her object-like existence to become Theo's rescuer after his stroke. Taking care of her husband, "feeding him the lost language" (212), might be paralleled with the act of remembering those who stayed in the camps, for Theo, just like the refugees, is unable to speak the English language properly. On a larger scale, then, this act of attention could indicate convincing artistic potential. This is also apparent in Zita's concern with "placing" objects:

> She could never explain [...] the delight she felt in "placing" objects where she felt they would be most at home. She would stand seemingly for hours before a piece of furniture trying to decide where to set it to its own (and not her) advantage. She was forever arranging and rearranging [...] because she genuinely desired to see "everything in its place," not as an alphabetical catalogue or some superior "system" but in its place of beauty where the light could fall on it, creating patterns of shade [...]. (201)

Zita's difficulty in deciding how to place objects and her attempt to create "patterns of shade" (201) brings to mind the meticulous elaboration of a piece of visual art. Interestingly, her use of light may also be compared to the process of writing and shaping the characters of a book, for the link between light and words was established by Mavis earlier in the novel: "A sentence which stumbles on useless objects instead of on buried treasure is bad, and worse if it illuminates useless objects with artificial light, but good if it casts a unique radiance upon them" (50). While Zita may be attempting to "[cast] unique radiance" (50) upon her surroundings, her "domestic arranging" (201) is not entirely disinterested, for it gives her a "sense of power" (201) and allows her to take "control of the invasion of the sun and moon into the space occupied by her and Theo" (201). Once again, this seems to be suggestive of self-defence against the passing of time.

Consequently, it appears that both Theo and Zita are gifted with a certain degree of

metaphysical insight which they prefer to ignore because of its alarming nature. This act of repression translates into linguistic censorship: Theo's stroke is described euphemistically as a "dizzy ... turn" (204) by himself and a "vascular accident" (207) by Zita, though it can be assumed that deep down both are aware of the seriousness of Theo's condition. Importantly, the two guests' ambivalent relationship to creative processes seems to mirror the narrator's oscillation between creation and recreation. Since Theo and Zita originate from Mavis's imagination, their presence in the narrative may, at least partly, be a functional one, as if they were material to be "rehearsed" by Mavis, the creative writer in Frame's fiction, in her exploration of the imaginative world.

Roger and Doris Prestwick, the other couple invited to the Garretts' house, also seem to be instrumental in the examination of the relationship between reality and fiction. Roger, by his own admission, is an ordinary man who "suspect[s] that [his] given nature is empty as a ventriloquist's dummy" (139). This somewhat paradoxical statement suggests a certain level of awareness, just as Roger's consciousness of his conventionality and admission to being a replica, a "shadow person acting the prepared reality" (139), reflects developed analytical qualities.

Roger dreams of journeying through one of the earth's great deserts to find "a piece of reality that never had a shadow or a replica" (143). While he describes his fantasy as that of a "conventional eccentric" (140), the exploration of the desert, a place whose endless landscapes of sand dunes and unbearable heat bring to mind infinity and death, may also be associated with the crossing of finite boundaries and a face-to-face encounter with the harshness of reality. Like Violet Pansy Proudlock, however, who "hope[s] to progress from stick to pocket head to person" but currently practises by "entering] [...] the speech of a talking stick or a pocket head" (13), Roger feels the need for a rehearsal before undertaking the actual journey, hence his short, carefully planned visit to the Californian desert. The anticlimactic sign "DESERT" (171) which meets him upon his arrival reinforces the "almost farcical nature" (173) of his trial expedition, but also shows the discrepancy between romanticized imagined experiences and their "real" counterparts. In this example, language and labels once again act as agents of disillusionment. Yet it is worth noting that, in spite of Roger's evident lack of artistic talent (unsurprisingly, he is a journalist) and his staged mini-trip, he still aspires to access the "original" which he knows to be temporarily out of reach. Indeed, as Karin Hansson remarks, all the guests "share a yearning for authenticity and selfhood, often combined with a sense of creativity or even artistry" (27).

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This is also the case with Doris. Like Zita, she too is a refugee of sorts, since she and her family were forced to move from the country to Wellington during the Depression in the 1930s. This displacement was synonymous not only with geographical relocation but also with personal dislocation and some alteration of her lifestyle, as apparent in her parents' new professional status and the subsequent change in their personalities. Her father "changed from a farmer to a commercial traveler, so determined to keep the dignified self he had built as a farmer that he had inadvertently erased it in the clean sweep of becoming a commercial traveler" (179). Loss of identity is here associated with erasing and sweeping – once again, vocabulary from the semantic field of cleanliness. Furthermore, the act of "sweeping" brings to mind the movement of the wind which, like exile, evokes uprooting and displacement and perhaps echoes the "people [...] blown away in the Wellington wind, and when they were found, streets and *gorges* away, there'd be nothing but a heap of dry skin layered like dead leaves" (180). Like those surrendering to the movement of the wind, Doris's father yielded to the pressures of his new environment and, unlike Zita, being unable to cling on to fragments of identity, thereby caused his unintentional self-erasure. It is perhaps because of this early confrontation with exile that Doris "ha[s] always found change difficult" (179) and is "afraid that she [...] might change and not recognize herself (180). Doris seems to associate displacement with a double quality of alteration, from without and within. Consequently, her interest in geography, in the names of places and things, her "hobby of varnishing and preserving maps of countries of the world" (198) and her "household management" (198) may be seen as attempts to capture and control her physical environment in the hope of preventing any form of unwanted change. While these features arguably constitute a brake on her imagination, she is nonetheless gifted with a kind of intuitive knowledge: "'Light is everything,' she says with vague extravagance [...]. Doris, urged to identify her dream and unable to compete with those who grasp their dream with such certainty, is silent after murmuring that she can't describe it" (162). This reference to light seems to echo the earlier comments made in relation to Mavis and Zita. If this association is justified, Doris's remark endows her with a potential artistic talent which, nevertheless, remains unshaped and unexploited – perhaps until she "write[s] a book to tell [her] *complete* story" (138). While not strictly speaking an artist, then, she is still the "author" of an interesting observation:

> Roger laughs, pleased by Zita's concern. [He says:] "Save your sympathy for the *real* journey. Next year maybe." "But if we do that," Doris protests, "if we value only the *real* journey, what about all those others, journeys and suchlike, that never attain

> reality? Do we waste our time when they make us weep real tears?" (166)

Frame playfully puts a key metafictional comment in the mouth of a character who, far from possessing an author's overriding perspective, turns out to be fictitious even within the fiction. Doris's comment, which highlights the effect of imaginary tales, "journeys [...] that never attain reality" (166), on one's understanding of the "real" world, anticipates one of the final questions in the novel: have the guests in any way influenced Mavis's vision of the world? In other words, have they caused her to be deluded, to avoid Brian's death all along, or have they ultimately allowed her to explore a dimension beyond the world of replicas, and thus approach the reality of this death?

My impression is that, although Mavis has indulged in "eavesdropping", that is, she has let Alice Thumb collect and edit, somewhat impudently, Theo's, Zita's, Roger's and Doris's stories, these have broadened the scope of Mavis's artistic experience. Indeed, by listening to their stories, even Alice Thumb "[has delved] more deeply than [she has] known" (154) so that alien voices, particularly those of the wolf-children, begin to resound through her narrative:

> I felt her [Adelaide's] presence then, and that of the twins I had known; I have given up trying to escape from them. The Garrett child crouched in the corner of the sitting room where we'd gathered to discuss the choice of keepsakes. I could hear her whimpering and now and again she howled, like a wolf, and made the sounds but not the shape of human speech. (217)

Mavis serves as an interpreter for the wolf-children, who are denied an intelligible language, not by authoritatively speaking for them but by paying attention to them and perpetuating their ordeal through her imagination (albeit involuntarily), thus metaphorically unlocking the doors of the mental institutions in which they are confined. The narrator's evocation of the lycanthropic Adelaide may be seen to stamp Mavis with a certain brand of artistry, for her mental image of the Garretts' daughter does not replicate the physical reality, since she has never met the young girl, but is an imaginative recreation that allows the artist to step further towards a broader comprehension of the human condition.

Furthermore, while Mavis's fictional self clings obsessively to the Garretts' "golden blanket" (218), probably a metaphor for the "rich tapestry of language that could cover the whole earth like a feasting-cloth or a golden blanket" (26), she later understands that she does not need keepsakes to remember people and experiences. This is why she refuses to take any objects from Brian's house; keepsakes, like words, are mere replicas of memories. By

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extension, it could be suggested that she has realized that the essence of a novel does not lie in its words, which are mere reproductions, but in the reminiscence the narrative induces; for contrary to her earlier assumption, novels *do* "haunt" (59) people; this may even be their ultimate purpose.

In conclusion, a complex web of relationships between the various categories of artists and characters emerges from the novel's multi-layered structure. The multifarious narrator appears to engage in a dialectical relationship with her "guests" who in turn embody forms of more or less unexploited artistic potential. The same pattern could perhaps be extended to the author of *Living in the Maniototo* and her narrator, Mavis, thus creating a stratified structure of interdependent levels of reality and fiction. Accordingly, then, the blurred boundaries between these dimensions suggest that the artist at once fashions *and* is shaped by his/her imaginative work. Art therefore appears to be a two-way process in which the author is compulsively moved to transcend the boundaries of the physical world in order to pay attention to the whole of humanity. This also seems to be confirmed by the book's final statement, which could be read as a Framean manifesto in disguise: while confessing a tendency to let "Alice Thumb [...] take care of everything" (240), the narrator's final lines seem to reflect a willingness to transcend facades and work towards a more complete view of the world: "I, Violet Pansy Proudlock, Barwell, Halleton, Alice Thumb herself, w[ill] continue to live and work in the house of replicas, usefully, having all in mind – the original, the other, and the manifold" (240).

Notes

1 I would like to express my gratitude to Professors M. Delrez and B. Ledent for their valuable advice and encouragement.

2 Marc Delrez's significant contribution to Frame criticism has largely informed my own reading of *Living in the Maniototo.* While acknowledging this influence, I hope to contribute, however modestly, to the ongoing reflection upon the relationship between the thematic and structural aspects of Frame's metafictional strategy.

3 This is again in line with Delrez's view of the artist figure in Frame's fiction.

4 The link between Frame's *Living in the Maniototo* and Platonic philosophy is established and examined by Mark Williams in *Leaving the Highway* (47-48).

5 Roger and Doris do not seem to be any more aware than Theo and Zita that the Garretts had a daughter (see 217).

6 Interestingly, Judith Dell Panny highlights the etymological link between "Theo" and "God" on the one hand, and "Carl" (as in "Carlton") and "man" on the other, which indicates that "[h]e can be seen in the role of God, and, at the same time, as a credible human character" (197).

7 Dorothy Jones stresses the importance of conformity in the selection process, and adequately links it to cleanliness: "Throughout the novel obsessive demands for cleanliness symbolize society's attempts to impose universal conformity, as in the demand of the New Zealand town that the Hungarian family which settles there should be 'spotless'" (180).

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