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Kristeva's *The Old Man and the Wolves***

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# **Theoretical Allegory / Allegorical Theory: (Post-)Colonial Spatializations in Janet Frame's *The Carpathians* and Julia Kristeva's *The Old Man and the Wolves***

**Patrick West**

'The allegorical spirit is profoundly discontinuous,  
a matter of breaks and heterogeneities'.

Fredric Jameson<sup>1</sup>

A large slice of the critical reception of Janet Frame is occupied by post-colonial readings,<sup>2</sup> while a smaller but still significant constituency has deployed certain psychoanalytic concepts of Julia Kristeva's to interpret Frame's texts.<sup>3</sup> An even smaller number of scholars have combined these approaches.<sup>4</sup> Albeit numerically limited, this particular intersection of Frame criticism—what might be called the Kristevan psychoanalytic post-colonialist nexus—raises a number of issues, related to theory and allegory (a mode currently witnessing a renaissance of interest amongst various groups),<sup>5</sup> that have implications for Frame literary studies far more generally.

Leaving aside my own contribution to this sub-set of Frame criticism, Janet Wilson's article 'The Abject and the Sublime: Enabling Conditions of New Zealand's Postcolonial Identity' sandwiches her literary analysis of Frame (and of Allen Curnow and Keri Hulme) between Kristevan-influenced Oedipalism and the incipiently post-colonial circumstances of New Zealand's history. For example: 'New Zealand's colonisation, like that of Australia and Canada and perhaps Singapore, can be described in

terms of parent-child relations'; 'all the white settler colonies born out of the crucible of the parent, in this case the Maternal British Empire, it can be argued, emerge into postcolonial subjectivity through a difficult *rite de passage*'<sup>6</sup>; and, 'nationhood [can be imaged as] a child gradually differentiating itself from the Maternal Empire in order to acquire subjectivity—*conflated with the narrative of psychological identity* [emphasis added]'.<sup>7</sup> The compression of psychoanalysis and history admitted to in these passages, more particularly the sense that psychoanalysis and history are being related one to one, exposes Wilson's article to the charge of forcing post-colonial New Zealand-ness to conform to a procrustean bed of theory.

By slightly resituating the investments of such a critique of Wilson, the argument of the present article may be stated thus: the spatiality of Kristevan psychoanalytic theory does violence to the post-colonial spatiality contained in Janet Frame's last novel, *The Carpathians* (first published in 1988); furthermore, both these spatialities are expressed via allegorical manoeuvres and recur upon the operations of (literary) theory.<sup>8</sup> The oblique methodology that enables this argument constitutes the first occasion (to the author's knowledge) that Kristeva's practice as a novelist has been actively used to reconceptualize her theory. That is, how space operates in Kristeva's allegory *The Old Man and the Wolves* (first published in 1991 in French and in 1994 in English)<sup>9</sup> prompts both a reconsideration of her theory's spatiality and a more general revision of the relations of allegory, theory and spatiality that can be usefully drafted into the service of an interpretation of Frame's *The Carpathians*. (Allegory itself, therefore, is not the theme of this article, so much as the mutual implications of allegory with notions of spatiality, theory and fiction). Comparison of Kristeva's and Frame's novels—a comparison made piquant by their shared preoccupation with the Eastern European mountain range, the Carpathians—suggests that Kristeva's novel involves theory territorializing fiction, while Frame's novel is an instance of fiction

territorializing theory. This article argues that spatiality subtends the operations of both theory and allegory, and also that allegory has always already slipped inside the sleeve of theory, where it inhabits theory in degrees latent or manifest as circumstances determine. As for fiction, depending on how it is situated in relation to theory—whether territorializing it or being territorialized by it—fiction can be either the site of theoretical allegory (as in Frame’s novel) or of allegorical theory (as in Kristeva’s novel). On this basis, the Carpathian mountains stratify sharply opposed novelistic configurations of colonial and post-colonial spatialities.

Where Kristeva’s novel *The Old Man and the Wolves* incorporates its references to the Carpathians into a version of universalizing and—by extension—colonizing space, Frame’s eponymously titled *The Carpathians* figures the mountain range of that name in terms equivalent to the notion that Elizabeth M. DeLoughrey, borrowing from Kamau Brathwaite, has recently referred to as tidalectics. By tidalectics, DeLoughrey means ‘a dynamic and shifting relationship between land and sea that allows island literatures to be engaged in their spatial and historical complexity’.<sup>10</sup> It is this that makes tidalectics so usefully available to post-colonial projects intent on subverting those colonial hegemonies which depend on a notion of universalizing spatiality.

Frame’s novel initially encourages a tidalectic reception because its narrative traverses widely dispersed island, partial-island and island-like sites (examples include the North and South Islands of Aotearoa/New Zealand; Cloud Cay off Nassau in the Bahamas; New York’s Manhattan Island; Long Island; ‘the Hawaiian islands’ and even sea-surrounded Nova Scotia (p.21)). More generally though, tidalectics is ‘a dynamic model of geography,’ one open to the full range of complexities of the exchange between diaspora and indigeneity.<sup>11</sup> In the paradoxical way in which Frame’s novel treats the topic of its title—one might say that it de-continentalizes the mountain—we encounter

precisely such a 'tidal dialectic [tidalectics] that engages multiple temporalities [and] complex and dynamic space'.<sup>12</sup> That is, being that the Carpathians are, of course, mountains (the very opposite of an island), Frame's text both strips from tidalectics any residual essentialism of islands and maximizes the impact of the concept.

Indeed, the very plot of *The Carpathians* contains something of the mercurial quality of tidalectics. Penelope Ingram calls it 'a magical-realist, apocalyptic novel that, with its multilayered frame and unreliable "imposter" narratives, actively resists summary'.<sup>13</sup> Nancy Wartik agrees: '[*The Carpathians* is] fascinating, frustrating, obscure, complex, with a deceptively haphazard plot and confoundingly shifting points of view'.<sup>14</sup> Necessarily simplifying therefore, one could summarize Frame's text thus: Mattina Brecon is a hugely wealthy New Yorker, with both writerly connections and pretensions, who travels the world collecting information about so-called native populations to augment the stock of her own cultural capital. Her character combines a benevolent colonial streak with amateur anthropological tendencies. Mattina's latest trip finds her in small-town New Zealand, a destination chosen on the strength of the legend of the Memory Flower, which the local tourism board has resurrected to drum up business. The Memory Flower denotes both an actual site (a sculpture in the orchards just outside the town of Puamahara) and also the narrative of the indigenous Maori culture's version of time: through the lived experience of the land, the Memory Flower allows one to '[taste] the yesterday within the tomorrow' (p. 11).

Time, in other words, is spatialized by the Memory Flower, and this seems to be allied to the irruption within *The Carpathians* of an equally mysterious entity: the Gravity Star. The Gravity Star (which has a slightly more insistent presence in the novel than the Memory Flower) complements the Memory Flower's spatialization of time through the unleashing of the chronologization of space. That is, it destroys quotidian

perceptions of distance, of near and far—in fine, of spatiality, but necessarily also of chronology, to the extent that the operations of time can never be disimplicated from those of space. The Note in the front matter of Frame's novel—a passage from 'a Press Association Report'—explains the Gravity Star in this way:

'A survey of distances to galaxies has revealed something that at first seemed implausible: a galaxy that appears to be both relatively close and seven billion light years away. [...] [T]he paradox is interpreted as being caused by the focusing of light from a distant quasar (starlike object) by the gravity of an intervening galaxy' (p. 7).

What the Gravity Star initiates, in other words, is a concept of tidalectics on a cosmic scale, but in order to fill in this summary of *The Carpathians* one must first register the novel's treatment, not of spatiality, but of language. Mattina's getting-to-know-you exercise in New Zealand culminates with an apocalyptic event in Kowhai Street, where she has rented a house, in which the destruction of her neighbours (more precisely, their inexplicable disappearance) gathers its energy from a linguistic catastrophe allied, in particular, to the Gravity Star. One night, 'as the Gravity Star shines beside the Memory Flower' (p. 128), it literally rains 'punctuation and language—apostrophes, notes of music, letters of the alphabets of all languages' (p. 127)—what one might call, in jest, the degree zero of the Comp. Lit. discipline. Meanwhile, Mattina's neighbours, emitting a 'chorus of screams, shrieks, wailings' as accompaniment to 'the demolition of their minds and their words' (p. 125) comprehensively vanish from existence.

Certain elements of these pages of *The Carpathians* suggest Walter Benjamin's notion of allegory as linked to 'an experience of the world [...] [ceasing] to be purely physical and [becoming] an aggregation of signs' and also hint at Benjamin's extension of this idea: 'Transforming things into signs is both what allegory

does—its technique—and what it is about—its content'.<sup>15</sup> The extent to which *The Carpathians* produces the world as a set of signs, while also becoming preoccupied with the consequences of this mode of production (for example, in the blurring of the borders between fiction and science, or in the novel's infinite onion of authorship), confirms the multi-leveled link to Benjamin's theory of allegory. (Interlinking technique with content like this is one of Frame's most notable hallmarks as a writer, as in the writing about writing of the late novel *Living in the Maniototo* (1979) or the early novella *Towards Another Summer* (1963; first published 2007)).

The uncanny tendency Frame's fictions possess to parallel developments in linguistics (the science of language) is also powerfully apparent in this section of *The Carpathians*. As if echoing post-Saussurean theories of the sign (as it happens, an intellectual movement that strongly informs the work of Kristeva) Frame's discourse—in the midst of the horror of this night on Kowhai Street—coolly provides separate considerations of the oral (speech-based) and graphic (writing-based) dimensions of the signifier: respectively, her neighbours' vocalizations, the graphic incarnations of the rain, and of a curious growth attached to Mattina's hand. Here, the oral significations are isolated:

Listening, Mattina realised that no part of the chorus had words of any recognisable language. The sounds were primitive, like the first cries of those who had never known or spoken words but whose urgency to communicate becomes a mixture of isolated syllables, vowels, consonants; yet within and beyond the chorus, recognisable as long as the human brain held some stem (of crystal, bone, iron, stone, gossamer), there came a hint, an inkling of order (p. 126).

As will be demonstrated shortly, this final 'inkling of order', which presents as a hypostasis of the 'urgency to communicate',



establishes a beachhead for Kristevan theory deep within Frame's novelistic linguistics. More generally though, this passage populates the territory of the oral dimension of the signifier.

On the following page, Frame underscores the discreteness of the graphic instantiation of the signifier, explicitly disimplicating it from the ongoing vocalizations assaulting Mattina. *The Carpathians* modifies realist convention (that rain is not soundless), with the effect of replicating the division of the signifier within linguistics: 'The rain was at once alive in its falling and flowing; and dead, for it was voiceless, completely without sound. The only sound was the continuing rage from the people of Kowhai Street' (p. 127).

The other graphic form of the signifier is the peculiar swelling (prolepsis of the cancer that would eventually take her life) on Mattina's body:

She noticed a small cluster like a healed sore on the back of her left hand. She picked at it. The scab crumbled between her fingers and fell on the table into a heap the size of a twenty-cent coin. Examining it, she discovered it to be a pile of minute letters of the alphabet, some forming minute words, some as punctuation marks; and not all were English letters—there were Arabic, Russian, Chinese and Greek symbols (p. 129).

As was the case with the soundless rain, these graphic elements of the signifier are substantially de-vocalized: Mattina has just 'switched off the radio' and 'her sobbing [is] over' (p.129). Orality is vacuumed out of the scene. All the same, a higher level of analysis of these various passages from Chapter 22 of *The Carpathians* is able to encompass the double operation by which Frame splits and combines the signifier across the dimensions of speech and writing. Enacting such an analysis, one notices how Frame's text plays up to an interpretation that draws equally from Kristeva's linguistic project—expanded into a

semiotics—and Elizabeth M. DeLoughrey’s notion of tidalectics. In this way, linguistic potentiality connects with post-colonial anticipations, in a synthesis efficiently captured by the neologism ‘semiotic tidalectics’:

Mattina wondered what might happen if by morning all the world’s words had fallen upon every corner of the world, if everyone had been transformed to a similar state of unbeing and unknowing, if a universal process of new knowing, new thinking and feeling, and a new language might then fall, transforming life on earth to a new stage, unknowable yet, until the influence of the discovery of the Gravity Star had touched first one, then another, then many areas of the earth most receptive at that moment to geological and spiritual explosions and earthquakes (p. 129).

This passage, in its final section, captures the para-geography of tidalectics while, in its first half, also reads like a fictional paraphrase of Kristeva’s theorization of the semiotic in *Revolution in Poetic Language*: ‘In “artistic” practices the semiotic—the precondition of the symbolic—is revealed as that which also destroys the symbolic, and this revelation allows us to presume something about its functioning’.<sup>16</sup> The destruction of the symbolic here establishes a continuity with the construction of the symbolic. Frame and Kristeva concur on at least one thing: that linguistic order comes about via linguistic disorder (‘a hint, an inkling of order’ is the operator of this); furthermore, that each subsequent renewal of language has social effects (p. 126). But the extent to which Frame’s position exceeds Kristeva’s theory on this second point is made apparent in Toril Moi’s critique of the argument of *Revolution in Poetic Language*:

[Kristeva] seems essentially to argue that the disruption of the subject, the  *sujet en procès* displayed in these texts, prefigures or parallels revolutionary disruptions of

society. But her only argument in support of this contention is the rather lame one of comparison or homology. Nowhere are we given a specific analysis of the actual social or political structures that would produce such a homologous relationship between the subjective and the social.<sup>17</sup>

Frame's text enters at this point precisely, linking Kristevan linguistic upheaval to the post-colonial advantages of revolutionary tidalectics. That is, *The Carpathians* comes at the question of social and political change from the angle of radical geography, which it explicitly links to the (un-)making of the means of its own construction (language). Where Kristeva's theory peters out on the brink of the social and the political, Frame's text insinuates 'geological and spiritual explosions and earthquakes' (p. 129) into the interstices of a language in the process of re-forming itself.

Perhaps the most significant of these spiritual/geographical irruptions is Mattina's death. She succumbs to cancer, 'on a day of blizzards' (p. 170), after returning to New York, and her dying wish is for her husband, Jake Brecon, to visit Puamahara. When he arrives in New Zealand, Jake spends most of his time visiting Mattina's property purchases, in the company of the land agent, Albion Cook. Suggesting as it does both the ancient toponym for Great Britain and the explorer Captain Cook, this name traverses the professional interest of its bearer, for *real estate* (real property as opposed to personal property) is, in *The Carpathians*, precisely equivalent to what might be called the post-colonial earth. That is, it is the very site of Frame's tidalectics, where the spiritual and geological engage, and where geography is folded into semiotic space. Thus, space in Frame's text persistently occupies the level of the anarchic *precondition* (jumbling together Albion and Cook) of homogeneous and cartographic space: the latter being the desired spatiality, to anchor this reading, of colonialist endeavour.

Kristeva's novel is one example of this desired spatiality. *The Old Man and the Wolves* is predominantly set in a mythical *every place* (the theoretical space of psychoanalysis) and—as theoretically territorialized fiction that overwhelms the discrete characterizations it contains—it over-invests, as will be demonstrated, in Kristeva's thesis that the Society of the Spectacle destroys our psychic capacity to produce those personal confrontations of images that rescue us from the abyss of identity stasis. In an interview with John Lechte, Kristeva damns televisual culture as an instrument of passivity and “‘soft’ totalitarianism’ that ‘manages humans through a bombardment of stereotypical images’.<sup>18</sup> As will become clear, however, in its straitened fictional form Kristeva's thesis effectively turns on itself.

The wolves of the title signal Kristeva's choice of allegory for her novel: they allegorize the seduced victims of the Society of the Spectacle, devouring each other via disseminations of mediocrity. A further titular coordinate of the allegory is the old man who, as a Professor of Latin, operates as a code for high cultural ideals. Part one of the novel emphatically establishes the allegorical tone through a description of the rise of the wolves; part two, a detective story, relates the search by a French journalist and ex-student of the old man, Stephanie Delacour, for the causes of the lupine invasion; and part three relays Stephanie's remembrances of the converging figures of the old man (now deceased) and her own dead father. For a text so replete with Kristeva's theoretical preoccupations, it is highly curious that *The Old Man and the Wolves* is straitjacketed by allegory (the cover, using the appellation ‘critical’ very loosely, brands it a ‘critical allegory’).<sup>19</sup>

In her article ‘Julia Kristeva: A Politics of the Inner Life?’ Joan Kirkby bemoans the ‘didactic’<sup>20</sup> form of *The Old Man and the Wolves* because allegory—with its ‘one-to-one correspondence’<sup>21</sup> of narrative elements and meaning—collides head-on with the heterogeneity and dialogism—the free play of the signifier as

expression of the drives—of Kristeva's theory-as-theory. Kirkby's rather lame explanation is that this choice of allegory is linked to 'Kristeva's sense of the urgency of [her] message'.<sup>22</sup> The problem here is that the medium (allegory) must dominate Kristeva's (theoretical) message because the former is, on Angus Fletcher's provocative but illuminating terms, 'patterned according to absolutely rigid habits from which [it] never allow[s] [it]self to vary. It would seem that [it is] driven by some hidden, private force'.<sup>23</sup>

To go looking for this so-called force in *The Old Man and the Wolves* is to initiate an encounter with the abasing investment that theory has in allegory and the toll, in consequence, exacted on post-colonial spatiality. Rejecting the Intentional Fallacy Kirkby's comment betrays, interest may then turn to the way in which Kristeva's novel—treated here as a laboratory for essaying the qualities of theory—is an instance of the conditions of fiction exposing the allegory of theory even as theory territorializes that selfsame fiction. Fiction shows up the latent allegorical aspect of theory, and what theory allegorizes in the present case—most saliently for post-colonial politics—is spatiality. Tellingly, this activity of theory is formulated within Kristeva's novel as an observation on the pattern of its own allegorization: 'And the form of the narrative, the twists and turns of the plot, the changes of genre, will depend on choices made by the narrator himself in terms of space, distance, and psychological geometry' (p.63). In this way, fiction reveals theory's collusion with allegorical 'one-to-one correspondence[s]' generated out of a psychologization (the happenstance version of theory Kristeva introduces in this passage) of various coefficients of spatiality.<sup>24</sup>

Theory and allegory are both spatialized discourses (explanations of circumstances along the route between signifier and signified) in a relationship of mutually reinforcing territorialization. With reference to how theory fixates allegorically on space, it is striking that James Clifford, in the article 'Notes on Travel and Theory,' locates the Greek root of

theory in *theorin*, meaning ‘a practice of travel’. For Clifford, theory is inherently ‘a product of displacement, comparison, a certain distance’—what fiction brings to attention between the term and its definition as spatiality is the connective of allegory.<sup>25</sup> Allegory binds signifier to signified, thereby making this linkage, as Kristeva herself comments in her introduction to linguistics *Language: The Unknown*, ‘normative, absolute, valid, and obligatory’—anything, that is, but arbitrary, which points up how *The Old Man and the Wolves* is a primer of Kristevan theory only in its most structuralist, normative, even dogmatic incarnation.<sup>26</sup>

To say that Kristeva’s psychoanalytic theory allegorizes space is to say that theory binds space within the allegorical framework of ‘one-to-one correspondence’.<sup>27</sup> This reveals something about theory itself that rebounds on its deployment in post-colonial contexts such as the version of New Zealand portrayed in texts like Frame’s novel. Drawing on certain concepts from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, what we might call molecular (micrological, intra-discursive) colonialism impacts on molar (aggregated, historical) colonialism because the former prepares for our engagement with the latter.<sup>28</sup> Allegory is unfortunate, on this account, because it stifles spatial complexity, as in this example from *The Old Man and the Wolves*, in which space is represented/allegorized in relationship to theory (here called, by Kristeva, reason):

Where are we, then? In a forest in the state of New York, near the Canadian frontier? In some wild spot in the Carpathians? In the mountains of northern Greece. [...] The Old Man hadn’t forgotten that he was in Santa Varvara; at home. He also knew that reason had *the mysterious power of letting anyone be anywhere* [emphasis added] (p. 14).

The last sentence of this passage is crucial. In it, space is figured—via theory operating as allegory within the unmasking conditions of fiction—as universalizing and homogeneous

(denying the complexities of post-colonial spatiality). Distributed elsewhere in Kristeva's novel, we read of 'one continuous Santa Varvara' (p. 68), that 'in Santa Varvara, as everywhere else, people attached great importance to centers' (p. 160) and that 'Santa Varvara is everywhere' (p. 183). Similarly, the back flap of the book suggests that it '[evokes] a mythical world that readers could locate anywhere'. *Every* where and *any* where are everywhere in Kristeva's novel, and as for the Carpathians, they are that aspect of the spatial allegorization, which theory initiates, that throws into sharp relief the comparison with Janet Frame's novel. While, in one sense, Kristeva appears to be urging her readers to fight against this universalizing tendency—the way things are swallowed up by corrupt and de-historicizing Santa Varvaran discourse—the all-too-successful description of this cultural affliction has always already aborted the possibility of resistant struggle.

Certainly careful readers might also identify in *The Old Man and the Wolves* instances of polytopical space—of psychic spatiality as Kristeva's theory often constructs it (that is, as paradoxical space)—but crucially, in the extrapolation of these psychic spatialities to geographical, cultural and historical domains—that is, as the molecular becomes molar—space inverts itself and presents as universalizing and homogeneous. It is as if Kristeva's *fiction*—in this extrapolation to the molar level of society and history—operates in concert with the spatiality of the Society of the Spectacle that her *theory* rails against at the molecular level of psychic interiority. This extract suggests precisely such a double move: 'For in Santa Varvara the beams of people's eyes never met except in a screen, which thus took the place of infinity in the old geometry...' (p. 60). Unique psychic functions are transformed by a universalizing and homogenizing operation performed on spatiality in general, which underpins certain violences: 'the idea of people dominating and killing one another as they all stared in the same direction, pretending to be interested in images, comic strips,

films, and television' (pp. 59-60). This perversion of space is, it is being suggested, due to the transformation of theory into allegory, which the fictional laboratory that is *The Old Man and the Wolves* reveals. Psychic space thus colonizes in its pure form rather than in its content; a theory of space becomes an (allegorical) space of theory. This is why one needs to exercise caution in deploying psychoanalytic theory (if not theory per se) in post-colonial molar and molecular circumstances of paradoxical spatiality. Even as it is territorialized by theory, fiction exposes the camouflaged tendency of Kristevan theory to become an allegory of space.

Conversely, as fiction territorializing theory (creating theoretical allegory) rather than theory territorializing fiction (creating allegorical theory), Frame's fictionalization of space (from which allegory is in the process of being jettisoned) stands in sharp contrast to Kristeva's spatiality. Foregrounded in Frame's title, the Carpathians are, puzzlingly at first, barely mentioned in the novel itself, as if even the act of substantial thematization might prove a (spatially) colonizing one. *The Carpathians* severs allegory from the dogmatic equivalence of sign to concept, and shifts it into the field of a more complex symbolization (Frame is in some ways a more Kristevan novelist than Kristeva herself). In this regard, one may notice Puamahara's aforementioned peculiar linguistic precipitation: a rainy space, where nothing in particular signifies anything in particular. The jarring disconnection between Frame's title and the novel's content (the eponymous central European mountain chain barely inflects the island-focused preoccupations of *The Carpathians*) thus exemplifies a more general reworking of allegory on Frame's part.

As opposed to the utter obliteration of distance in Kristeva's predominantly visually-organized novel, Frame's more tactile text—in the mode of a tidalectics—proposes that 'distance is near' (p. 194). One of Mattina's neighbours, musing on the breakdown of time and distance in a society moonstruck by the



Gravity Star, has this to say: “You’d have the *Carpathians*, the *Carpathians* in your garden. The *Carpathians*?” [...] He smiled again. “Yes,” he said, “We could touch the *Carpathians*” (p. 66). By way of effectively exposing the complexities of space that subtend any progressive politics of post-colonialism, Frame makes a mountain into an island, and this formulation is constructed on the basis of defused or deconstructed allegory.

The illogical spatial correspondence between things suggested by the Gravity Star is consequent on an exchange of pure difference within a crucible of light and gravity: one recalls that “the paradox is interpreted as being caused by the focusing of light from a distant quasar (starlike object) by the gravity of an intervening galaxy” (p. 7). Frame recreates this effect, in linguistic terms, in such a way that allegorical correspondence in *The Carpathians* is simultaneously a distance and a nearness. Frame’s allegory slyly turns the tables on this most traditional of tropes by retaining the notion of a correspondence (even that of a ‘one-to-one correspondence’) while simultaneously undoing this notion: correspondence is complicated to the precise degree that its spatiality is made illogical, that is, in the way that distance and nearness are married together.<sup>29</sup> To this extent, Frame’s approach can be compared to the method of the allegorical filmmaker Hans Jürgen Syberberg, of whom Eric L. Santner—while he is foregrounding ‘the allegorist’s freedom’—comments that ‘[b]y juxtaposing anachronistically objects and texts [...] the filmmaker-allegorist may suggest correspondences between otherwise radically dispersed texts, images and practices’.<sup>30</sup> Frame’s distance-nearness linkage is the essential, reconciling instrument of the filmmaker’s alien correspondences: that is, the novelist reveals with extreme clarity the allegorical mechanism that informs Syberberg’s cinema.

From a more theoretical perspective, Frederic Jameson also has something to offer on this question of how the allegorical notion of exact correspondence or equivalence might be thought otherwise:

Our traditional conception of allegory—based, for instance, on stereotypes of Bunyan—is that of an elaborate set of figures and personifications to be read against some one-to-one table of equivalences: this is, so to speak, a one-dimensional view of this signifying process, which might only be set in motion and complexified were we willing to entertain *the more alarming notion that such equivalences are themselves in constant change and transformation at each perpetual present of the text* [emphasis added].<sup>31</sup>

Seen in this light, Frame is an alarmist who raises the alarm from inside allegory itself. For despite the deconstructive operations that it performs on this trope, *The Carpathians* maintains the integrity of allegory to the extent that the ‘horizontal semantic differentiation’ characteristic of such figures of speech as metaphor (whereby the metaphor irrupts from the literal) does not dominate in Frame’s novel. That is to say, where metaphor differentially abuts the literal material of the text (in reception terms, the reader notices the difference between metaphor and the surrounding textuality), allegory traverses a text wholesale, sweeping through it vertically towards the plane upon which the code of the allegory meets its meaning. One might say that allegory is metaphor maximized, with no margins of the literal—nothing non-metaphoric alongside. (The way it takes up the entire space of a text—the omnipresence of allegory—explains why its activity in any given piece of writing can sometimes fail to register on the reader). There is every probability that we are not dealing, in *The Carpathians*, with limited figures of speech such as metaphor, so much as with a mutation of allegory: the Gravity Star exerts its influence over all of the tropic elements of Frame’s novel.

‘Anomalous propinquity’ is how Nicholas Birns describes the spatiality of *The Carpathians* and his phrase is also an apt description of the allegory of Frame’s text.<sup>32</sup> Throughout *The*

*Carpathians*, allegorical correspondences are established between textual inversions. Amidst the ruins of allegory, this circumstance is one in which code and meaning are no longer clearly distinguishable. Distance combining with nearness, the timeless Memory Flower, for example, corresponds—in an odd, undoing mode of correspondence—to the time-straitened example of flora that once existed in Mattina's family's New York apartment. Mattina's encounter with the Memory Flower segues, in the very same paragraph, into this remembrance of the domestic plant:

They'd had, once, a night-blooming plant, a wedding gift supposedly blooming once every twenty-four years but two years ago when it and the marriage were twenty-two and young John Henry had his eighteenth birthday, someone poured detergent or drain-cleaning fluid over the plant and killed it, bringing grief to Jake, Mattina, and John Henry who'd become linked to the plant and its and their future blooming, and almost every day someone would study the plant, inquire about its health and look forward to its flower (p. 37).

Corresponding in allegory form, the Memory Flower is simultaneously near to and distant from this plant, on the logic that they approach the thematic of time from opposing perspectives. They are each other's corresponding antithesis: time sutures and separates. The time-warping chronologization of the Memory Flower (by which one can '[taste] the yesterday within the tomorrow') exists in strange counterpoint to the more conventionally chronological existence—in time-line lockstep—of the fated wedding gift (p.11). Similarly, the usurping authorial capacity of Mattina's neighbour in Puamahara, Dinny Wheatstone, is simultaneously near to and distant from the figure of Mattina's sad-sack husband Jake, an author enduring a life-long case of writer's block. Jake is Dinny's corresponding antithesis: authorship sutures and separates.

Thus, the undoing of space is also the undoing of allegory, and theory—which is to say, theory in the far looser form that it adopts in Frame’s novel—brings undone space and undone allegory into a clinch. Birns’s suggestion that ‘under [the Gravity Star’s] aura, everything still exists yet always can be something else’ captures a preferred notion of theory as resistance to the tendency to force circumstances to fit a rigid framework of thought.<sup>33</sup> This resistance can be seen in the novel’s proposition that ‘[Mattina] and the people of Kowhai Street [...] had absorbed *and explored* the principles of the Gravity Star [emphasis added]’ (p. 131). Here theory is in its turn theorized, made tidalectic. In this way, as a quasi- or ficto-theoretical construction—indigenous to Frame’s islomanic novel—the Gravity Star disintegrates the dogmatic allegorization of theory that fiction exposes and, through its spatial elasticity, it powerfully repeats the model of a tidalectics as a post-allegorical theorization of post-colonial politics.

As the signified of the signifier theory, space links theory to both the paradoxical spatiality of the Gravity Star and the reworking of allegorical correspondence in *The Carpathians*. Frame’s concept of the Gravity Star effectively introduces into theory the mercurial spatial element that is suppressed in Kristeva’s novelistic version of theory (the theory-space relation is a two-way street: theory affects space, equally space affects theory). ‘More portable’, as David Odell observes, ‘than philosophy’,<sup>34</sup> theory (for Frame at least) reacts against allegory—becomes almost anti-allegorical—by drawing on its own portability so to overcome its tendency, which *The Old Man and the Wolves* exposes, to default to the traditional mode of allegory (of ‘one-to-one correspondence’)<sup>35</sup> consistent with universalizing and homogeneous space (that is, space lacking the element of portability that Odell points towards). Theory, space and allegory present very differently in Frame’s novel and in Kristeva’s: *The Carpathians* may be credited with a post-colonial auto-theorization—deploying post-allegorical spatial

correspondences—created from the tidalectic theorization of allegory.

The politics of post-colonialism strains at the frame of Frame's text, for as Bainard Cowan notes, 'The obscurity, fragmentariness, and arbitrariness of allegory all signify the absence of a fulfilling event; this absence, in turn, serves to invoke that event with a greater urgency and a desperate faith'.<sup>36</sup> Where Kristeva's novel wears its politics, quite literally, on its sleeve ('a critical allegory'),<sup>37</sup> Frame holds in abeyance the post-colonial post-textual event that her politics presses towards 'with a greater urgency and a desperate faith'. If *The Old Man and the Wolves* falls flat on the face of its own earnestness, the allegorical absence of the politics of *The Carpathians* empowers it.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Fredric Jameson, 'Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism', *Social Text*, 15 (Autumn, 1986), 65-88 (p. 73).
- <sup>2</sup> Marc Delrez, *Manifold Utopia: The Novels of Janet Frame* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002); Renata Casertano, 'Falling Away from the Centre: Centrifugal and Centripetal Dynamics in Janet Frame's Short Fiction' in *Telling Stories: Postcolonial Short Fiction in English*, ed. by Jacqueline Bardolph (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001), pp. 349-356; Penelope Ingram, 'Can the Settler Speak? Appropriating Subaltern Silence in Janet Frame's *The Carpathians*', *Cultural Critique*, 41 (Winter, 1999), 79-107; Phillip Raymond O'Neill, 'Unsettling the Empire: Postcolonialism and the Troubled Identities of Settler Nations'. Unpublished PhD thesis, New York University (1993);

- Janet Wilson, 'Post-Modernism or Post-Colonialism? Fictive Strategies in *Living in the Maniototo* and *The Carpathians*', *Journal of New Zealand Literature*, 11 (1993), 114-131.
- <sup>3</sup> Howard McNaughton, 'Abjection, Melancholy, and the End Note: The Epilogue to *Owls Do Cry*', *Journal of New Zealand Literature*, 11 (1993), 89-105; Howard McNaughton, 'Fraying the Edge of an Alphabet', *SPAN*, 36 (1993), 145-162.
- <sup>4</sup> Patrick West, 'Abjection as "Singular Politics" in Janet Frame's *The Carpathians*', *M/C Journal*, 9:5 (2006), <<http://journal.media-culture.org.au/0610/05-west.php>> [accessed 27 September 2008]; Janet Wilson, 'The Abject and the Sublime: Enabling Conditions of New Zealand's Postcolonial Identity' in *Postcolonial Cultures and Literatures: Modernity and the (Un)Commonwealth*, ed. by Andrew Benjamin, Tony Davies and Robbie B. H. Goh (New York: Peter Lang, 2002), pp. 300-319.
- <sup>5</sup> Eric S. Downing, 'Paint it Black: Politics and Allegory in Gotthelf's *Die Schwarze Spinne* and Stifter's *Brigitta*', The European Novel Between Reaction and Revolution, 1815-1848 Seminar: American Comparative Literature Association Annual Meeting, Long Beach, CA, 25 April 2008; Kevin Murray, 'Of Minks and Men: Mbulelo Mzamane's Allegory for Post-Apartheid South Africa', Aesopics in Africa Session: Aesopic Voices: Reframing Truth in Twentieth-Century Folklore, Fairy Tales and Fables, Melbourne, 21 February 2008.
- <sup>6</sup> Wilson, 'Abject', p. 300.
- <sup>7</sup> Wilson, p. 315.
- <sup>8</sup> Janet Frame, *The Carpathians* (London: Pandora, 1989). Further references are to this edition and appear in brackets in the text.
- <sup>9</sup> Julia Kristeva, *The Old Man and the Wolves: A Novel*, trans. by Barbara Bray (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994). Further references appear in brackets in the text.

- 10 Elizabeth M. DeLoughrey, *Routes and Roots: Navigating Caribbean and Pacific Island Literatures* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007), pp. 2-3.
- 11 DeLoughrey, p. 2.
- 12 DeLoughrey, p. 17.
- 13 Ingram, p. 94.
- 14 Nancy Wartik, Review of *The Carpathians*, In Short; Fiction, *New York Times* Book Review, 22 January 1989, <<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=950DE7DC113EF931A15752C0A96F948260>> [accessed 27 September 2008].
- 15 Bainard Cowan, 'Walter Benjamin's Theory of Allegory', *New German Critique*, 22 (Winter, 1981), 109-122 (p. 110).
- 16 Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. 50.
- 17 Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (London: Routledge, 1985), p. 171.
- 18 'Interview: Sharing Singularity', An Interview with Julia Kristeva Conducted by John Lechte in *Julia Kristeva: Live Theory*, by John Lechte and Maria Margaroni (London: Continuum, 2004), pp. 143-163 (p. 154).
- 19 Kristeva, *The Old Man and the Wolves*, cover.
- 20 Joan Kirkby, 'Julia Kristeva: A Politics of the Inner Life?' in *After the Revolution: On Kristeva*, ed. by John Lechte and Mary Zournazi (Sydney: Artspace, 1998), pp. 109-123 (p. 115).
- 21 Kirkby, n. 2, p. 123.
- 22 Kirkby, p. 115.
- 23 Angus Fletcher, *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1964), p. 40.
- 24 Kirkby, n. 2, p. 123.
- 25 James Clifford, 'Notes on Travel and Theory', *Traveling Theories, Traveling Theorists, Inscriptions*, 5 (1989), <[http://humanities.ucsc.edu/CultStudies/PUBS/Inscriptions/vol\\_5/clifford.html](http://humanities.ucsc.edu/CultStudies/PUBS/Inscriptions/vol_5/clifford.html)> [accessed 27 September 2008].

- <sup>26</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Language: The Unknown: An Initiation into Linguistics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), p. 14.
- <sup>27</sup> Kirkby, n. 2, p. 123.
- <sup>28</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983).
- <sup>29</sup> Kirkby, n. 2, p. 123.
- <sup>30</sup> Eric L. Santner, *Stranded Objects: Mourning, Memory, and Film in Postwar Germany* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 133.
- <sup>31</sup> Jameson, p. 73.
- <sup>32</sup> Nicholas Birns, 'Gravity Star and Memory Flower: Space, Time and Language in *The Carpathians*', *Australian and New Zealand Studies in Canada*, 5 (1991), 16-28 (p. 23).
- <sup>33</sup> Birns, p. 22.
- <sup>34</sup> David Odell, 'The Uses of Recent French Theory', 'Part IV A Symposium' in *The Judgment of Paris: Recent French Theory in a Local Context*, ed. by Kevin D. S. Murray (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1992), pp. 145-161 (p. 150).
- <sup>35</sup> Kirkby, n. 2, p. 123.
- <sup>36</sup> Cowan, p. 119.
- <sup>37</sup> Kristeva, *The Old Man and the Wolves*, cover.