Returned Soldiers in *Owls Do Cry, A State of Siege,* and *The Carpathians:* Janet Frame’s Subversive Representations

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Yet from the way people talked I knew the War wasn’t a place like San Francisco or Honolulu, it was something which moved like an iceberg or a cloud; it was invisible, not moving in the same direction, like a river or keeping the same shape like a train on the railway line, but always changing, perhaps growing arms and legs and a face then losing them or having them blotted out; perhaps putting down a root into the garden or the road or into water—the seas, rivers, and staying there, growing tall, blossoming, then withering; blown here and there by the wind; entering people, becoming people, stealing from them, adding to them, changing the shape of their lives: that was the War. (Frame, Towards 76)

Returned soldiers and victims of war appear in all of Janet Frame’s longer fictional works. War, and themes relating to war in Frame’s fiction, has been discussed by several critics, including Patrick Evans (see, for example, “‘They Kill on Wednesdays’: Janet Frame, Modernity and the Holocaust”); however, the pervasiveness of soldier characters in Frame’s fiction has not previously been addressed. Frame’s writing is haunted by the emotional debris of war, often personified by a character whose postwar life is an epilogue to his war past—and in writing her soldier characters in such a fashion, Frame is, at some points tacitly, at others overtly, writing against the glorification of war and its associated mix of sentimental and heroic masculinity. In a reading of three of these novels, this article discusses some of Frame’s returned soldier characters, explores how these soldiers are represented, and addresses their significance in her writing. *Owls Do Cry* (1957), *A State of Siege* (1966), and *The Carpathians* (1988) present the stories of soldiers who have experienced combat in either the First or the Second World War. Unlike in some of Frame’s other novels, which have the returned soldier as a central character (see, for example, *Intensive Care* [1970]), the soldiers I discuss in this article are comparatively minor characters; my contention is, however, that the presence of the soldiers highlights Frame’s ongoing, underlying concern to problematize the role of war in New Zealand’s public memory and private lives. In the novels addressed, particularly *The Carpathians,* the soldier character is situated in the position of victim, even outcast,
a position typically occupied in Frame’s fiction by characters who live liminal existences that challenge dominant gender roles and class expectations. Such positioning of these characters suggests that Frame regards the experience of combat as one that isolates the soldier when he returns, rather than one that inspires in him a sense of comradeship and national pride.

My epigraph, from Frame’s novella *Towards Another Summer* (written in 1963, but published posthumously in 2007), expresses how Grace, the protagonist, perceived “the War” (the First World War) as a child and suggests the great resonance of the experience of that war in New Zealand national and cultural identity. Jock Phillips writes that in the decades following the First World War,

people continued to regard their soldiers as heroes, whose triumphant manhood was seen as proving New Zealand’s very nationhood. Instead of undermining the role of war in defining male achievement, the Great War established the soldier as the shining personification of the New Zealand male, and indeed of New Zealand itself. (A Man’s Country 163)

The Second World War served to perpetuate this mythology; once again, men drew from the image of the soldier “a definition of the New Zealand male” (198). The mythologizing of the soldier’s experience of the mystique and excitation of war is a common theme in Frame’s fiction; her representations, however, ambivalent in their almost invariably ironic representation of the ceremony of war commemoration, problematize this dominant ideology.

Phillips suggests elsewhere that while the story of the First World War and its strong resonance in many nations’ public memories “is now a much-trod, if contested, territory,” in his view, “the application of these issues to New Zealand” is new (“The Quiet” 231). He contends that, although in Britain the war’s enduring legacy was one of “[m]ud, blood and horror,” as depicted in the antiwar literature that emerged in the late 1920s, in New Zealand, by contrast, “the horrors of the Great War were for a long time obscured in public memory” (231). This was not because the New Zealand soldiers’ war experiences were any less horrific, or because the nation’s involvement in the war was comparatively less; on the contrary, approximately 124,000 New Zealand soldiers served, a figure that equates to roughly fifty-one percent of the men of military age (both Maori and Pakeha) (Phillips, A Man’s Country 159). Rather, Phillips partly attributes the lack of public hostility to the war in 1920s and 1930s New Zealand to the fact that neither the digger’s cynical voice, nor his experience, were represented in literature, in the memorials erected, or in the official histories published (“The Quiet” 235–41). He notes that, unlike England’s literary response, in New Zealand, published memoirs of the soldier’s experience of the First World War did not appear until the late 1930s, and these
were few. By contrast, the Second World War saw “a flood of reminiscences and novels by ex-soldiers” (241). Instead, the nation’s experience at war was documented in the 1920s and 1930s as a pro-British imperialist adventure, told from officers’ perspectives (241), and “European-style ornamental memorials expressing spiritual values and language came to capture the public memory of the Great War” (236). Frame’s character of Toby Withers, who appears in her first novel, *Owls Do Cry*, and her third novel, *The Edge of the Alphabet* (1962), draws attention to the banality of such imperialist memorialization when he notes, “in the park there is a statue of a soldier from the First World War; he is turning green; when royalty came the mayor had the soldier cleaned and polished with Brasso; like a tea-urn; or fire-tongs” (*The Edge* 130).

Another possible reason Phillips suggests for the lack of public negative sentiment regarding the war experience in the 1920s and 1930s was the New Zealand people’s “desire to forget and move on” (“The Quiet” 241)—an impossible desire given the horrific number of First World War casualties and the looming darkness of the Second World War. “Dad said they all got medals to keep them quiet” (*The Edge* 129–30), claims Toby Withers, as he recalls the soldiers who would assemble in front of the Hall of Memories in Waimaru. Toby’s father suggests that the prestige of a medal is appeasement for the horror of a soldier’s sacrifice, and a soldier’s silence, a necessity when upholding the myth of the glory of war. Those soldiers who returned, many of whom were cynical about the mythologies of war and traumatized by their experience, (re)assumed roles of husband and father, yet struggled to maintain the composed and stoic silence that was publicly expected.

The enduring legacy of the brutality of war experience in the lives of traumatized or shell-shocked returned soldiers has been well documented, particularly since post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) was officially recognized in 1980 in the third edition of the American Psychiatric Association’s *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. John Weaver and David Wright claim that, although measures were taken by the New Zealand government to treat the most severe cases of shell shock after the First World War, “there was wider and deeper trauma than any government could help heal. Men could not find or hold jobs; families could not understand their sons, brothers, husbands, or fathers” (33).

Frame was born in 1924, five years after her father, George Frame, sailed home from the First World War. His simultaneous infatuation with and fear of the harsh conditions of war, of which Frame wrote in her three-part autobiography (published in one volume as *Janet Frame: An Autobiography*), was undeniably influential on Frame’s fiction, as was spending the early years of her adolescence amidst the growing patriotic fervor of the late 1930s and the onset of the Second World War. Her twelve novels are pervaded by war imagery and references to war, and the figure of
the returned soldier is a recurring, troubling character. My opening quotation sug-
gests that, as a child, Grace imagined war to be both metamorphic and anthropo-
morphic; it could ominously and unpredictably shape-shift, “perhaps growing arms
and legs and a face then losing them,” and it irrevocably altered its hosts, “entering
people, becoming people, stealing from them, adding to them.” War, Grace muses,
pursued forever, while people tried to escape from it; they sang
Pack up your Troubles and Oh My I don’t want to die,
I want to go
home.
But was there anywhere to go? How could you go home if you
were already home?
Or was home some place out of the world? (76)
The question is eerie in that Grace is questioning if home is a place ever to be found
again after the experience of war, as if to imply that, despite having returned, the
soldiers are already living some kind of afterlife, doomed to be haunted by the hor-
or of their war experience for what remains of their postwar lives. That war is an
indelible, inescapable experience is a subtheme in all Frame’s novels, seen in the
bitterness of the returned soldier characters, including Owl’s Do Cry’s Bob Withers
and The Carpathians’ Hercus Millow, and in the speculation of those like Malfred
Signal, the protagonist in A State of Siege, who witnessed the return of soldiers.
Frame’s metonymic narrative dissolves the boundaries separating the private expe-
rience of war from the public, to the point where the war is a domestic reality in her
fiction, a haunting backdrop substantially materialized in the presence of returned
soldier characters. In her allusions to their traumatic pasts, her wry critiques of the
sentimental memorialization of military feats and acts of bravery, and her creation of
narratives in which reality “functions as an amputated remnant of a violent history that
has always already happened” (Cronin and Drichel xxii), Frame subtly addresses the de-
structive legacy of war. Marc Delrez claims that, in Intensive Care, Frame “universalizes
the theme of war, assessing its relevance in domestic circumstances where it assumes
the status of a metaphysical disposition. In times of peace, war-like attitudes stand for
the deadening of the imagination” (139). I suggest, however, that Frame’s universal-
izing and domestication of war is not limited to Intensive Care, but is true, to varying
extents, of all her novels. War is an undercurrent in Frame’s writing, a constant. Its
ominous presence resonates in the dynamic of each of the families in her novels.
Frame’s working-class childhood was difficult; her father was resentful and emo-
tionally abusive and, “on occasions, [he] threatened bankruptcy and suicide” (King
34); her mother was consistently apologetic and accepting of any fault, and her
siblings were hit by such a barrage of unfortunate events and accidents that Michael
King, Frame’s biographer, referred to her family as “an anvil on which disasters fell” (9). George Frame’s reticence about his participation in the War, his “soldierly silence,” and the emotional strain it caused him, are hinted at in Frame’s autobiography, where she writes, with reference to the declaration of the Second World War,

> there was a flurry of anticipation in our home as both my father and my brother thought of being soldiers. Dad searched out the “puttees” which he’d brought home from his war and which had lain untouched in an old suitcase. “My puttees,” he said with a new affection, demonstrating how they were used by winding them over his trouser legs. “Keep out the mud of the trenches,” he said knowledgeably. He’d seldom talked of the trenches before. The word was only used by Mum to explain why Dad was so often either sad or angry, “Your father fought in the trenches, kiddies,” and by us at primary school in scoring points of prestige, “My father fought in the trenches.” (Janet Frame 122)

That George Frame seems to regard his puttees with “a new affection” is a telling phrase: the affection he shows for his puttees is unfamiliar to his children and is provoked not by them, but by the spirit and prospect of war. The puttees are a war souvenir and carry for their owner a special significance. “Souvenirs authenticate the past; they trigger memories and connect them indexically [. . .] to a particular place and time” (Hirsch and Spitzer 367). But for those who do not have a direct connection with the souvenir, its significance can be opaque, and the souvenir becomes what Hirsch and Spitzer term a testimonial object, a remnant that carries “memory traces from the past” (355). Frame’s returned soldier characters often possess physical material souvenirs from their time at war, and for the reader and Frame’s other characters, these mysterious objects speak their secrets in tongues.

Approaching the returned soldier characters from different perspectives, Frame’s novels encode new understandings of the domestic effects of war and expose the dissolve between the man and the mythology, and the contrast between the plaques and memorials, the statues and the war songs, and the men who returned, broken in body or spirit, often pathetic in their transparent stoicism. Bob Withers is Frame’s first returned soldier character, and he is the patriarch of the Withers family in both Owls Do Cry and The Edge of the Alphabet. Gina Mercer suggests that Frame chose the surname Withers for the family in Owls Do Cry as a reference to the Withers family in Greville Texidor’s story “Anyone Home?” (1945). Interestingly, Texidor’s story is about a soldier who, after returning from war, visits his “pre-war fiancée” and her family and struggles to relate to them (32). Frame’s Bob Withers is a miserable, angry, and helpless man, described in her diary by his youngest daughter as “the little hopping man of cruelty, tyranny, and child-like dependence” (Owls...
Everything in the room was quiet when Mr. Withers spoke. The kettle was knocking and panting but Mrs. Withers didn’t dare get up and see to it, or put a new shovel of dull coal on the fire. The children . . . sat still, looking at their father and his shadow that was cut in two, lying across the edge of the table and then sitting up against the wall and across the calendar that told the day of the month and when the bills were due and the rent and the electric light; and lying across the table, his shadow had the shape of a fern, like the one he wore in his coat for he was a returned soldier and had been gassed in the war, the First War, there are too many wars. (32)

What is seemingly a passing mention of Mr. Withers’s war participation is very pointed, for his tyrannical behavior and his demands for obedience and admiration from his unruly children and cowed wife are emblematic of Frame’s perception and metaphorization of the effect of war on each family member. Jennifer Lawn suggests that the narrator’s voice in Owls Do Cry “is itself a ‘mosaic’ of other voices” (88). In this passage, the voices of Mrs. Withers and her children are clearly identifiable, but Mr. Withers’ voice is unheard. The image of his shadow “cut in two,” one part “against the wall and across the calendar that told the day of the month and when the bills were due and the rent and the electric light” and the other “the shape of a fern, like the one he wore in his coat for he was a returned soldier” (New Zealand soldiers wore fern leaf badges in the First World War), reveals a fracture in his character—or a divided self. The dogmatic patriarch lording his power over his family is both distinct from, and a creation of, the soldier who is consumed by his past and free from the confines of domesticity. Simultaneously, the image of the split shadow links Frame’s portrayal of the returned soldier with the depiction of the working class in her fiction. After lamenting that “there are too many wars,” the narrator continues, “it is all money and putting things down on the bill and making your way in the world” (32), as if the plight of the returned soldier is not only the burden of memories but his entrapment in a maelstrom of working-class domesticity.

Mr. Withers is a simultaneously terrifying and pathetic man, struggling to wield power over his family and helpless to prevent the stream of disasters that befalls them. He lives through the death of his eldest daughter, Francie, in a fire; his eldest son Toby’s debilitating epilepsy and his wife’s constant and fruitless search for a cure; his daughter Daphne’s committal to an asylum, where she eventually undergoes a leucotomy; his wife’s death from heart failure; and, as revealed in the epilogue, his daughter Teresa’s murder.⁴ And yet, in Daphne’s view, her father thrives on conflict and misfortune because he carefully guards his own misery and fears the
implications of peace. For Bob, peace represents submission, a means of allowing others to assume control in his domain. Only through conflict can Bob garner his strength and further assure himself of his domestic authority. In the asylum, prior to her leucotomy and awaiting her father and brother’s visit, Daphne thinks, “[m]y father is disappointed whether he sees me or not, because he is sitting in his hut on the swamp, with a licence to die held in his hand and his gun ready to fire at the first sign of peace” (166). The soldier becomes, for his daughter, an image of violence in the domestic sphere, inhabiting his own place, shut off from his family, “in his hut on the swamp.” He is, for Daphne, a loaded gun, poised and ready, threatening to fire, if anyone in their unhappy family attempts to rock the boat of drudgery and forbearance he tenuously but belligerently steers.

In *A State of Siege*, Malfred Signal, the protagonist, is a retired art teacher who, after her mother’s death, moves from the South Island to a holiday house or _bach_ on the North Island. Malfred’s desire to explore “the room two inches behind the eyes” (6) is disturbed by a haunting she experiences, a knocking on the door of her new, precious place. While attempting to identify the perpetrator, Malfred “invokes memories and manifestations of the significant individuals in her life” (Cronin, *The Frame Function* 39), and, among these ghostly figures, the soldier is found. Of the soldier characters that return to haunt Malfred, the most significant is Wilfred Anderson, her “lost lover” (35) “who had been killed [. . .] in North Africa” (53) during the Second World War. Malfred becomes “one of the many schoolteachers, unmarried, who throughout their career attract the rumour, fantasy or fact, that their ‘boys’ died in the war” (52). We are first introduced to Wilfred when Malfred is deciding which photographs to hang on the wall of her new _bach_. She admits to herself that she had kept the photograph of Wilfred only “to aid her memory when she felt in a sentimental mood,” and realizes that “when people die, even those one has loved dearly, their image fades in time” (35). Their “teasing friendship where both surveyed the darker undercurrent with pleasure and fear but made no move to plunge into it” (107) is propelled into a sexual encounter a month before Wilfred sails to war; the imminence of his departure, the possibility of his not returning intensifying Malfred’s first, and only, sexual experience. But the presence of the prowler leads Malfred to recall Wilfred, frightening herself with the thought that he is the knocker “returned from the dead” (101). Her fright is, however, mingled with surprise, as she acknowledges that “however hard he knocked at the door, and however long he stayed, she would never let him in” (101).

This returned soldier character in *A State of Siege* is unlike most of the soldiers in Frame’s fiction, for Wilfred’s return from war is undertaken through a kind of haunting. Avery Gordon explains haunting as “how that which appears to be not there is often a seething presence, acting on and often meddling with taken-for-
granted realities [. . .] the ghost is not simply a dead or a missing person, but a social figure, and investigating it can lead to that dense site where history and subjectivity make social life” (8). For Malfred, who meets Wilfred in New Zealand two years before the outbreak of war (102), he is a symbol of the war: their relationship (however uncertain Malfred’s interest) progresses as the Nazis advance through Western Europe. Malfred realizes that in her memory she has “nothing of Wilfred alone, of his ‘essence’” and wonders, “[i]f he knew, would he protest at my inability to isolate him, to give him his lonely place on a dais, throne, scaffold, or anywhere that man may stand alone in glory or guilt?” (166). Wilfred does not stand alone for Malfred because he becomes invisible to her, shrouded in mythology. His anonymous presence is to be found in many households—simply another soldier lost in the wars—a presence she does not welcome in her bach. If the intruder is her lost love, Malfred is unwilling to open the door to him; she does not wish to see him—he is, like the war, finished and forgotten, “part of the desert” (53) and a part of her life with which she does not wish to re-engage.

A soldier appears in Malfred’s room and she acknowledges that, though he resembles Wilfred, he is not Wilfred: “[i]t is another Wilfred, in another place, a snapshot I do not keep; it is Wilfred and the war” (168). Derrida asks, in his discussion of specters, “What is a ghost? [. . .] is there, between the thing itself and its simulacrum, an opposition that holds up?” (10) Here Malfred identifies one opposition between the Wilfred she once knew and his simulacrum: his experience at war. Expressed in Malfred’s words is a sense of how unavailable the experience of war is to her, the isolating experience of being a woman, in a country far from the battle fronts, as well as her resignation that because of these factors she was in most cases considered unable to grasp the physicality, the brutality, the nightmare of war.

Malfred encloses the image of the soldier who has appeared in parenthesis: “(sand in his uniform, blood over his heart, his face scarred and burned, his lips swollen, suffering the cliché indignities in a way that distracts attention from the invisible unremarkable horror)” (168). The parenthesis implies a redundancy in the description, as if merely by saying the word “soldier” this image of “cliché indignities” that masks the “invisible unremarkable horror” is readily evoked, utterly predictable, and subsequently deemed unworthy of normal discourse. That Malfred describes such horror as unremarkable suggests it is a mark borne almost uniformly by those who return from war: the absence of this mark would be remarkable. But, as the soldier begins to talk to her, spilling platitudes (169), Malfred muses “[o]ne of the crimes of war is that the macabre shocking experiences it brings will shrivel the seed of originality until the withering shows itself even in a man’s language” (168). Wilfred is what Malfred describes as the “old soldier home from the wars” (119), nondescript, almost faceless, and lost to what defined him as unique before
the war. For Malfred, the horrific experience of war, and the mythologizing of the soldier into the “shining personification of the New Zealand male” (Phillips, A Man’s Country 163), strips of their individual essence those who return, whether corporeally or spiritually.

In The Carpathians, the “retired sergeant-major” (64) Hercus Millow, one of the protagonist Mattina’s new neighbors on Kowhai street, explains to her that, though he had not been to Mattina’s city, New York, he had been to other places “during the war” (41):

[talking about the war, Hercus Millow showed his excitement. His eyes gleamed, he leaned forward: the war, the old fire, yesterday’s fire warmed him through his lonely widowhood, his lameness, the constant pain in his leg, the prescribed pills that fuddled his mind and caused him to walk sideways, now and then, like a crab; walking towards the war. (41)

As is the case for many of Frame’s soldier characters, Hercus is captivated by war; it was the most memorable experience of his life. Like George Frame’s puttees and Bob Withers’ coins, the binoculars Hercus treasures are war souvenirs, “one of his relics” (64), and, although they are not powerful enough to “see into the real distance” (64), they are more than adequate for staring into other people’s houses on Kowhai street.

Hercus is a lonely soul, a widower, and most of his friends have died in the War Veterans’ Home. Those who are alive tell him, “Hercus [. . .] you’ve too much time on your hands” (67). But his time is occupied: listening to the news captures Hercus’s “full attention” as it “retained for him its wartime urgency [. . .] listening closely, he identified enemy and ally and marvelled that although the Second World War had finished forty years earlier, the announcers, while not identifying ‘the enemy,’ still used the language of war” (68). And, for “several hours of each day and night” he was being “the commander and the prisoner in the German camp” (65), “back in World War Two territory” (99), “languishing with his platoon” (121). Interestingly, Hercus is the first character in The Carpathians to mention the Carpathians, when he recalls a discussion that took place among the interned officers in the German prison camp about the nature of time and distance, which is one of the central themes in the novel. One of the officers, responding to another officer’s desire to abolish distance, claims, “You’d interfere with time. You’d have yesterday and tomorrow breathing down your bloody necks [. . .] And you’d find yourself in ancient cities [. . .] You’d have cities and rivers of today in your backyard; and you’d have the Carpathians, the Carpathians in your garden!” (66). For Hercus, who lives in the past and views the world through his binoculars, constantly “changing unattainable distance to palpable closeness” (64), the shifting nature of time and space is a given.
Traumatic memory, in Hayden White’s analysis, has the capacity to overshadow and shape “any other facts” rendering one incapable of processing new events “except through the coloration that the set of events in question gives to his [one’s] perception of the world” (White 284). This describes Hercus’s experience, living as he does in a kind of half-present, in which his absorption in his past is so consuming that snippets of his past, “new details” of his time at war come to exist in his present world. In the trajectory of his life, Hercus has, to use White’s term, “overemplotted” his years at war, “has charged them with a meaning so intense that, whether real or merely imagined, they continue to shape both his perceptions and his responses to the world long after they should have become ‘past history’” (284). His insular world of memory, battle, and internment positions Hercus as an outcast on Kowhai street, or a “quintessential alien of the Framean world” (Evans, “Alienation” 297). Rather than espousing the values of masculine military virtue, Hercus has become one to be avoided on the street, one who resents his service to his country but doesn’t know a life beyond the chasm of his past. In writing her returned soldiers as misfits, Frame is challenging a patriarchal system that commemorates the heroism of warfare as it denies its psychological casualties.

Despite his obsession with reliving his war experience, and his vehement assertions that he is not a pacifist, Hercus would often “contradict himself by acknowledging that anyone who declares or fights war is mad. Plain mad” (68). He is aware of his fixation with war but feels that his age at the time of his war participation (he was in his thirties) placed him in better stead than “the youngsters of nineteen and twenty” who were “starry-eyed” and “wrapped up in whatever patriotic garb (and garbage) was tossed to them to keep out their fear” (69):

[they’d all seen too much in the war, but Hercus, being older than the men he commanded, had been able to withstand the mask of glory, the imposter war, while the younger men, transformed into imposter soldiers, came home full of anger and hate not at the declared enemy but at their own country and themselves. (69)

Here, Hercus excludes himself from those youthful soldiers who returned “full of anger and hate,” and believes he withstood “the mask of glory” that the younger soldiers could not; yet the passion of this tirade suggests that Hercus was not unaffected by the disillusionment, resentment, guilt, and horrific memories others faced on return. To “keep guard over what they felt they had won in the war,” thus maintaining a sense of justification for the brutality of their actions, was essential to each soldier’s own sanity. But Hercus is not immune to his own diagnosis and his suffering is apparent in his daily reliving of the war. He feels that he, and all the young naïve soldiers, were duped by those in charge into believing they were putting an end to “evil ideologies,” only to discover that they were defending and
maintaining those same ideologies. For Hercus, the enemy is not other soldiers but rather the permanent arms economy. Hercus’s analysis of his younger fellow soldiers’ acrimony, and his own implicit sense that he was wronged, is reminiscent of Bob Withers’s wariness regarding commemorative practices. But both men also share an excitement at the thought of war, as if among the blood and horror there lies something headily intoxicating that ordinary life falls short of providing.

Frame repeatedly explored the permeable border between the brave and noble soldier celebrated in public memory and the conflicted and haunted soldier, represented as a harbinger of dis-ease in the domestic setting. Derrida asks, “What does it mean to follow a ghost? And what if this came down to being followed by it, always, persecuted perhaps by the very chase we are leading?” (10) The presence of the returned soldier trope in Frame’s fiction is symbolic of the author’s pursuit of a war story that pursued her. For Frame, war continually intrudes and insinuates itself into the present, and those who return from war are “pursued forever” (Towards 76), doomed to seek a home that exists only in their prewar past, or perhaps never existed at all. The significance of the soldiers in Frame’s stories lies as much in their presence as in their role of foreshadowing and perpetuating a violent future.

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Notes

1 Carol MacLennan notes that Frame’s novels are typically populated with “eccentrics, aliens, outcasts, or mad people” (179).

2 The recognition and diagnosis of PTSD emerged as a result of the large number of soldiers and civilians who experienced psychological trauma during and after the Vietnam War. While it is likely that many of those who suffered from what was previously diagnosed as shell shock or combat neurosis might today be diagnosed as suffering from PTSD, shell shock is a historical disorder, the aetiology and diagnosis of which represents early twentieth-century understandings of psychological illness. As Tracey Loughran notes, suffering in wars “has manifested itself differently in different individuals and in different conflicts” at different points in history, and as a consequence, we should not believe in “a timeless core of traumatic experience” (103).

3 Frame’s father, George Samuel Frame, married her mother, Lottie Clarice Godfrey, on 25 March 1916, just one week before he sailed to Egypt for military training. In early 1917, he was sent to the Western Front with the New Zealand Engineers Corps to work on the construction and maintenance of trenches (King 15–16). A month before the Armistice, George contracted pneumonia and was invalided out of the army and sent to England, where he met a nurse with whom he fell in love. George wrote to Lottie, who had been waiting for him for almost three years, telling her of his desire to remain in England and asking to be freed from their marriage. But Lottie refused (King 16); and, much like Tom Livingstone, the returned soldier character in Intensive Care, George did not pursue his relationship with his nurse and returned to New Zealand and his wife.
4 It is open to interpretation whether Teresa is literally murdered by her husband, as implied in the epilogue to Owls Do Cry. The passage reads, “And their names were Teresa and Timothy Harlow, though the paper said other names” (172).

Works Cited


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