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Self-narrative and National Story

The Search for New Zealand Identity in Janet Frame's Autobiography

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

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INTRODUCTION

This four-part thesis is a study on the relations between Janet Frame's autobiography and New Zealand's discovery of its national identity within the context of the post-colonial process.

It will follow Janet Frame through various stages of her life, from her poetry-filled albeit poverty-stricken childhood, through adolescence marked by grief and an intense desire to belong within a conformist society, to an adulthood scarred by a mental illness diagnosis that led to a journey to reclaim a lost identity and to shape her writing career.

The first part of this paper will focus on the theoretical aspects and factors that characterise the formation of national identity in settler nation. It will show how indigenous presence in New Zealand contributed to the discourse on identity by creating a necessary tension with the imperial ideology of colonisation, and how a minority turned into the focal point of a major transition in New Zealand's societal panorama by the adoption of inclusive strategies in culture and politics.

The second part centres on the analysis of the autobiography as genre, the conflicting role of the author and the debate on truth, reality and fact, as well as its contrasts and similarities with fiction. Autobiography forces the reader to connect the world of the author and protagonist, before, during and after the writing of the final text in order to question the referentiality and accuracy of the source. It will show how a close study of literary texts could provide a satisfactory approach to position a text within a historical and social context so as to understand the role of these issues in the formation of a national literary identity. It will move on to an overview of Janet Frame's life before moving on to the analysis of the three-volume autobiography, the crucial role memory played in it and how reality and fiction blend in Frame's recount of her life to create a coherent selfhood that draws together multiple subject positions.

The third part will delve deeper into the autobiography's three books. It will describe how New Zealand's marginal geographical position influenced not only the country's relations with Britain, but also specific sectors of society, such as the school system and down to the personal sphere. These aspects influenced Janet Frame's character and personal journey to self-awareness, so much so that her home country continued to be a central element of her literary works.

At the time they were published, that is the mid-1980s, Frame was renowned for her literary work as much as for her personal life story; she was therefore aware of matters such as representation in textuality and narrative, and the dichotomy of the author as both writer and protagonist.

By writing her autobiography Frame meant to have ‘her say’ on her life, after so many critics and intellectuals wrote inaccurate versions of her story. The interest around her increased so much, especially after director Jane Campion produced in 1990 an adaptation of her autobiography, *An Angel at My Table*, that the public response was to question to what extent her psychiatric experience informed her writing, and indeed if her genius derived from a presumably distorted mind. Most importantly, she was instrumental in the beginning of the academic analysis of autobiography as genre and the extent to which these texts are used as instruments to conceal more that what they reveal. The study of autobiography brings this type of literary creation in close comparison to fiction, to the extent of questioning the real nature of both genres. Autobiography may share form and, in many aspects, content with fiction, while fiction might be partly based on autobiographical facts. These elements are particularly evident in Janet Frame’s autobiography, as the reader might be tempted to recognise certain features of her previous fiction in the recount of her life, as well as wonder whether some details or passages of the books are authentic and reliable.

Finally, this paper will draw a parallel between the author’s life and New Zealand’s transition from a colonial nation heavily dependent of the motherland to a culturally diverse country that improved the social inclusion of minorities to create one of the most democratic countries in the world.

PART ONE: NEW ZEALAND IN A POSTCOLONIAL CONTEXT

1.1 Identity in settler nations

Often described as 'the most British colony', New Zealand is now a bicultural nation with a key role in the Pacific region. In popular imagination, it is the land of the Māori, of volcanoes and earthquakes, of "*The Lord of the Rings*"; a country almost at the world's end from a Eurocentric point of view. The expression 'most British' refers mainly to the provenance of early settlers, who came from Scotland and England between the end of the 18th century and throughout the 19th, but also to the preserved customs and institutions that governed it throughout much of its history.

When discussing identity, New Zealand appears to be divided between a strong identification with Britain and the affirmation of an independent national self, combined with the confrontation with the native. Settlers did not possess a direct access to European identity, nor did they claim the authenticity of belonging in their country. Therefore they sought to control indigenous knowledge so as to render their identity true, as pertaining to the land.

To begin with the aspects that characterise the making of identity, the nation as primary narrative relies on the creation or appropriation of symbols through arts and literature. Local activities were perceived as partly engaged in the creation of a national identity. When British sovereignty was officially established in New Zealand, with the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840, immigrants were settling in an already inhabited territory, thus taking possession of both the country's wealth and the land from the indigenous people. Relations between the local population and white immigrants (called *pakeha*) can be generally described as fluctuating, although the Māori did not object render service and keenly became "agrarian entrepreneurs, supplying much of the food for the local white settlers and the convict colonies of Australia".[1] Controversies on the validly of the treaty reemerge from time to time, although it is usually regarded as the basis for the sense of belonging that the Māori

[1] Murray S. Martin, *Who is the Colonist? Writing in New Zealand and the South Pacific*, World Literature Today, Vol. 68, No. 3 (1994) 488-492, (p. 488).

and *pakeha* share and for New Zealand's policy of biculturalism.[2] This internal co-existence between white settlers and the indigenous population has been much the site of conflict and antagonism in the wider discourse on identity in settler societies, as well as in its contrast with nationalism and how settler countries represent themselves.

The arts and literature were crucial instruments that helped spread knowledge among *pakeha* on the country they lived in. First-generation migrants attempted to incorporate the society they left into the new one, for example by importing familiar names to replace unpronounceable indigenous ones.[3] Later generations, those born or brought up in New Zealand, had no direct or very little experience of the old world, they saw no need to tame the wilderness they recognised as their own, like the first settlers did. This process, which might be called as nativisation, could not be performed without the presence of Māori culture, because early *pakeha* had little, if any, cultural items or artifacts of their own. Becoming native and belonging to the place implied the acquisition of indigenous knowledge from the Māori, either in person or made available through printed material. From Rev. James Buller's recount in the 19th century to the *New Zealand School Journal* in the 20th, a considerable amount of information about the country was made available to the literate settlers. Many of the books, newspapers, guidebooks, and textbooks contained photographs or drawings of the unspoiled, unpopulated landscape, some included poems or tales written by colonists[4]. Commodifying these materials and their content appeared to have transformed settlers from spectators to participants. Despite the curiosity and desire to assimilate native culture via the Māori themselves, settlers were dissuaded from having too much contact with the indigenes, for fear of endangering the community; in some cases legal penalties were applied and mixed marriage was strictly forbidden.

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[2] Jonathan Paquette, *From Decolonisation to Postcolonial Management: Challenging Heritage Administration and Governance in New Zealand*, Public Organisation Review, Vol. 12 (2011) 127-138, (p. 132).

[3] The city of Dunedin, where Frame was born and died, owns its name to *Dùn Èidean*, the Scottish Gaelic name of Edinburgh; the name of the River Clutha that runs through the province of Otago comes from *Cluaidh*, the Scottish Gaelic name of the River Clyde in Scotland.

[4] Peter Gibbons, *Cultural Colonisation and National Identity*. New Zealand Journal of History, Vol. 36, No. 1 (2002) 5-17 (p. 11).

It is worth mentioning that the Māori had filled the landscape and its innumerable features with meanings, “they have a name for everything that grows in the soil, that flies in the air, or that swims in the water”.[5] They *possessed* knowledge. In order to gain the same understanding as the natives, in many ways to become ‘native’ themselves, the *pakeha* acquired those names as their own; they also gave new names to rivers, hills, mountains and valleys, to the extent of inventing Māori names to use for new railway stations, post offices, or city suburbs. Such appropriation was applied to historical accounts put together by *pakeha*, where Māori would describe the circumstances that led to colonisation and how settlers came to be dominant; these accounts present the formation of national identity as an organic growth rather than an ideological construction. It shows colonisation through a number of cultural practises rather than the colonisation of culture. This process of appropriation has nonetheless its limitations.

Firstly, it has a negative impact on indigenous people. The deployment of reductive strategies to what might be seen as a way to popularised them, potentially enforces the de-authentication of the natives.[6] The Māori were textualised and made picturesque, their myths and legends converted into fairytales and their culture specifically constructed according to their difference with the conventional society culture. Secondly, the assertion of hybridity by the settlers suggests their marginality and their uniqueness, but it does not eliminate the distinction between *pakeha* and indigenous identity. Their coexistence may be better facilitated via the recognition of difference. Based on the assumption that there is actually something authentic about these differences, that they are not distinct or opposed, then they may be worthy of acceptance and respect, to the point of being acknowledged as the basis of mutual tolerance and biculturalism.

The concept of authenticity, or the creation of the human self/selves, is defined by two main concepts. Self identities are either given or developed. In the former case they could be described as static, immutable: authenticity is therefore determined by already-present distinctiveness. In the latter, if they are constructed or produced, they

[5] James Buller, *New Zealand: Past and Present* (Hodder & Stroughton, 1880), p. 38.

[6] Avril Bell, *Authenticity and the Project of Settler Identity in New Zealand*. The International Journal of Anthropology, Vol. 43, No. 3 (1999) 122-143 (p. 123).

are also inclined and likely to change, so their discovery comes through a process of self-realisation. This idea finds its best explanation in the dynamism of modernity, where fixed, stable and predefined categories do not adjust *a priori*. The responsiveness to external influences of the receiving party destabilises the notion that culture is a marble-like inherited good. That being the case, it can be asserted that identity, and the desire of achieve authenticity, is an evolving process that can be potentially problematic also.

Fractures emerge when analysing three branches strictly linked to that of identity. Genealogical identity, in its more reductive sense, might be viewed in terms of biology as a connection through blood. However, the European and Māori definitions of biological descent do not have much in common. Assertion on blood purity is often associated to its historically most extreme forms (to cite one such example, Nazi Aryanism); contamination and mixture simplify the logic of exclusion of an individual from the collectivity, as they are viewed as a threat to collective identity. The Māori, by contrast, utilise the concept of biological descent to build connections between people who share a common ancestor, so as to maximise inclusiveness. Shared essence establishes boundaries around a collectivity, but such essence has different meanings and different effects[7]. Should the discourse on identity be centered on claims of original belonging to the territory, then the debate favours the indigene as the pure 'first people'. Considering this, it could be suggested that settlers can merely claim of being 'second natives'. That being said, attempts have been made to discredit the Māori as early inhabitants, by affirming that they too were immigrants in the first place. Moreover, this issue has been used to suppress Māori political claims in the wider question of colonial injustices. Such practice could be seen as a way to equalise both *pakeha* and Māori in their search for 'authenticity' rather than resolving the ongoing debate on their status and their rights over genuine New Zealand identity. Regarding cultural identity, colonisation could potentially be considered as a chapter of the book on this subject. Cultural identity "is the result of interaction between coloniser and colonised (…)"[8]. Cultural hegemony in New Zealand, in a predominantly

[7] Bell, p. 126.

[8] Philip R. O'Neill, *Unsettling the Empire: Postcolonialism and troubled identities of settler nations*, (doctoral thesis, New York University, 1993), p. 54.

white-*pakeha*, egalitarian and democratic society, found in the presence of the indigenous minority its most important and intricate challenge.

Theories of un-homeliness seem to be intrinsic in the formation of settler subjectivity, and indeed of the (post)colonial condition. Settler societies occupy a delicate position among the world of colonisation as they are regarded as both 'imperialised' and 'colonising', caught between the Euro-centric 'first' world and the 'third' world of ethnic and cultural minorities. In order to counterbalance the attempts of hegemony, the attention should be placed on the constant critical assessment of past colonial practices and their influence on the political and social everyday life. While colonialism is a political act to impose control over people, settler colonialism seeks to displace people. Settlers are displaced, out-of-place. They occupy an ambivalent position: they are oppressed and oppressors, complicit and oppositional. Because of this hybridity, the settler is perceived as a mimic of the authority exerted by the imperial structure and the indigene at the same time, the former as the set of moral codes to which the latter, the minority, duly conforms.

Nationalism tends to enforce a unitary notion of identity, one in which there is little space for minorities in a majority culture; the hegemonisation of identity conflicts with the representational need of minority groups, as it fails to include their interests in the notion of a whole national character. Franco Moretti contends that a periphery culture is 'intersected and altered by another culture (from the core) that "completely ignores it"'[9]. Identity politics in settler nation seek to recognise the influence of Western modernity within the national formation and incorporate new representations on the meaning of settler, while at the same time striving for cultural independence.

While discussing nationalism in New Zealand, Philip O'Neill concentrates on subjectivity within the debate on settler theory through the ideology of egalitarianism, which he describes as "a regulatory operation for the support of homogenizing and exclusionary practices, whether racist or sexist"[10] Egalitarianism attempts to establish a stable identity in settlers countries while incorporated into imperial ideology, by marginalising the indigenous, the ethnic minorities and women often associated with a difference from the dominant identity. Settler theory and the discourse on settler

[9] Franco Moretti, *Conjectures on World Literature*. New Left Review, 1 (2000) 54-68 (p. 56).

[10] O'Neill, p. 25.

identity are influenced by, and in many ways are caught between, imperialism and minorities studies without necessarily being a byproduct or a version of the two. Rather, settler subjectivity could be seen "as a product of numerous cultural codes that are local and historically based"[11]. The three above-mentioned categories of subject, which could be regrouped in the term 'subaltern', can also reshape settler identity, as the main concern with white hegemony is its contradictions and gaps. The more a social system is fragmented on the inside, the greater its need to supplement with influences from the outside.

The growing impact of socio-economic dynamics in a globalised world is a key factor in the search for external influences other than the traditional ones. What might be fair to say is that settler nations struggle with the westernisation of their socio-political institutions, in particular in countries that are more economically dependent on Europe and the west. Referring to settler approach to post-colonialism, O'Neill argues that in order to achieve real post-coloniality, any settler nation has to lose all ties with the former mother country and establish other ties somewhere else[12]. Such consideration conveys the impression that settler societies resist both internal and external forces. On one side the features of a colonised nation implemented on political and economical institutions; on the other, the co-existence of indigenous minorities and the white majority original immigrants. The idea of a collective identity and national wholeness is often disrupted by other identities.

Subjectivity functions to reinforce the concept of 'other' without claiming hegemony; through the 'other', white settlers question their nationalist tradition in favour of a dislocated identification away from Britain. Settler nations generally develop cultural westernisation within a society integrated with indigenous minorities. In order to hegemonise identity, the 'subaltern' suffers attempts of marginalisation by the majority, who at the same time strive to achieve freedom from the colonised-style public institution. Non-conformity, one of the intrinsic characteristics of the 'excluded', is perceived as a challenge to the stability of the system; minorities thus become targets of corrective actions. They might have been promoted as separate from

[11] O'Neill, p. 31.
[12] Ibid, p. 36.

imperial identity but were subtly incorporated the imperial ideology of (white) cultural superiority over them. Colonialism is a relationship of domination and displacement. New Zealand's endeavor to include Māori knowledge in society and the public sphere can be seen as a step forward in the process of post-colonisation; notwithstanding this unique development, literature remains closely related to a colonial attitude despite the attempts of globalisation made since the turn of the millennium.

1.2 Cultural dualism

Since the 1950s former British colonies have been making significant improving changes in cultural governance and heritage management. In past decades, public institutions such as museums were perceived as instruments of colonialism, intent on reinforcing the supremacy of the imperial power in order to legitimise the colonial social order. In terms of policy and administration, combined with the increasing need to protect cultural heritage, UNESCO has been an instrumental player in intercultural mediation, protecting the cultural heritage of the world through a number of conventions. Up until the 1970s, cultural differences between minorities and the purported majority in New Zealand were largely kept in the private sphere. It was a crucial moment in the country's history.

Economically distressed due, in large part, to the United Kingdom joining the European Economic Council, not to mention the strict protection of national industries to the detriment of imported goods, New Zealand was falling behind in the race for prosperity. The advancing decolonisation of administrative structures during the 1990s led to the rediscovery of the importance of minorities' inclusiveness for a more equitable governance. Up until the early 2000s, the knowledge of exclusiveness attained to a portion of the population who, due to poverty, illiteracy, unemployment or crime-related issues, did not participate in societal development. Then, the implementation of a number of policy initiatives improved social well-being while expanding the human resources necessary to the development of a competitive national economy.

The global resurgence of cultural organisations and indigenous activism questioned the administration and public service in multicultural societies, by demanding more inclusive indigenous knowledge in administrative practiced and re-definition of symbols in the public sphere. Influential museums, most notably the national museum of New Zealand Te Papa, established a system of co-administration under the supervision of the Ministry for Culture and Heritage, for a greater participation of the Māori in the management of their artifacts based on the respect of their practices and spiritual authority. In the same way, conservation works at ancestral sites must now integrate professional knowledge and the ethics that govern cultural goods. This inclusive system, unique in its procedures, reflects the complexity of a bicultural society and allows the reach of a direct consensus in decision-making acts.[13]

Culture is often described as a unifying factor, the powerful enemy of anarchy; its maintenance and definition are essential components in the makeup of any nation aspiring to statehood. National culture is not a static construct, but an evolving set of recollections and interpretations. Building a nation through a narration means telling a story that will become culture, and culture ultimately builds the country.

New Zealand literature appears to be engulfed in similar debates discussed so far; in particular, it is the tensions between local and national production and the requirements of the global market that best reflect the overall discussion. The attention is brought to the definition of 'world literature' in contrast with, and as a challenge to, national literature, above all local literature. A shift in New Zealand literature seemed to have begun at the turn of the millennium; the tendency has been to dismiss former constraints in order to answer global requests and achieve market value. While such a choice may be considered understandable for writers seeking visibility in the Amazon-dominated world of literary trade, it also challenges the past principles of a national literary field characterised by the friction of biculturalism and a distinctive colonial history. While predominantly male and *pakeha* in the first half of the 20th century, it incorporated more voices, chiefly women and Māori, from the 1950s onwards. The continuing globalisation has been met not without resistance. The Māori, whose efforts to obtain political attention find in writing one of their most effective channels, manage to offer a convincing explanation as to the dynamics between global forces and local culture and identity[14]. Commonwealth literature and the perspective of the colonised have been much neglected in the discourse, despite the attempts to resist the 'marginalised' label put on them. Notwithstanding, in recent years the revaluation of the voice from the margins as the new source of authority has stressed the controversy on this concept even further, for it would imply an acceptance of the definition itself.

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[13] Paquette, p. 136.

[14] Paloma Fresno-Calleja, Janet Wilson, *New Zealand literature and global marketplace*. (2020) 147-156 (p. 152), online publication, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17449855.2020.1734338>

For Moretti, the modern novel compromises the mechanisms of both the global influences and the local traditions[15]. The increasing international setting of New Zealand literature does not necessarily imply the relinquishing of the connection to the country, principally because of the diverse composition of contemporary New Zealand society and its colonial past.

[15] Moretti, p. 67.

PART TWO: AUTOBIOGRAPHY AS GENRE

2.1 Autobiography and fiction

Autobiography and fiction have often been considered mutually-exclusive genres. Autobiography as based on facts, as an attempt to describe the life of the author; fiction as based on imagination, introducing a moderate representation of that author's self but with no direct correspondence with his or her life. Autobiography has mainly to do with an individual life and the origin of a personality. Basically, fact and life are one. What autobiography does is to retell one or multiple stories that already exist about the author. According to Philippe Lejeune, for there to be an autobiography, author, narrator and protagonist must be identical.[16] In general, the identity of the narrator and the protagonist, or principal character, is mostly recognisable by the use of the 'first-person'. In this case, narrator and protagonist being the same the narration is defined 'autodiegetic', to use Gérard Genette's term. There can also be a case of first-person narrative without the narrator and protagonist being the same person, meaning the narrator is not the principal character, but *a* character in the story. Narration is therefore called 'homodiegetic'. Unlike fiction, autobiography brings to light another form that may seem almost paradoxical, that is an autobiography written in a third-person narrative. Such an exceptional situation happens when the author *appears* to speak of him or herself as if of someone else, perhaps by inventing a fictive narrator in order to describe his or her life's story. Only within the framework of the autobiographical pact and through the reading contract can this contradictory situation be explained.

The 'first person' is articulated on two levels: reference and utterance. In utterance, which is produced by the act of enunciation, the *I/you* pronoun mark the identity of both the subject of utterance and the subject of enunciation. Enunciation converts language into discourse, but the conversion is made possible by the location 'here and now' of the speaker. The *I/you* pronoun only have real reference in the act of enunciation and in the person who is speaking, identified by the very act itself. The *I/you* therefore does not exist outside the linguistic utterance of speech where the

[16] Philippe Lejeune, *On Autobiography*. Theory of History and Literature, Vol. 52 (1989), edited by Wlad Godzich and Jochen Schulte-Sasse, translated by Katherine Leary, 1-29 (p. 5).

pronoun is used. The designated *I* is the utterer of the enunciation, the designated *you* is the addressee of the utterance. They are both inside the enunciation but with different capacity. Reference may be understood in relation to intersubjectivity, which Émile Benveniste categorised as the second aspect of enunciation. A specific part of dialog or reality the enunciation refers to has to be agreed on by two speakers, creating a mutual consensus which transforms both into interlocutors.[17] On the other hand, subjectivity involves the capacity of the speaker to assume the position of subject. The contrast between the speaking *I* and the addressed *you* creates a consciousness of self, along with the magnetic contraposition fundamental to language. Appropriating language can be seen as the first aspect of enunciation. The two figures necessary to the structure of dialogue, positioned as alternated protagonists of enunciation, are the source and the goal of enunciation[18]. When defining the 'I' as the expression of subjectivity, Benveniste states that the use of a different identifying 'signal' for each speaker implies the (impossible) existence of as many languages as individuals. Lejeune finds the identifying 'signal' does indeed exist in the category of proper names. Proper names operate from within the narrative by gaining the reader's confidence; they defuse and convey the belief of truth. The proper name links the individual to the discourse before being joined in the first person. In this sense, Lejeune contends, the proper name is the deep subject of autobiography.

Returning to the autobiographical pact, the main difference between autobiography and fiction is the correspondence of the author and the subject described in the author's writing. The transfer of the focus from the content of the text to the intention of the author is the key of the contract between reader and writer, confirmed then by the author's signature. What is paradoxically interesting is that the reader may be tempted to find autobiographical resemblances in works fiction and vice versa, whatever the will of the author might be. Unlike fiction, autobiography and biography are submitted to verification of resemblance to the truth by virtue of their claim to give information about facts outside the written text. Identity may be broadly defined as the searching process for a point of reference via the acceptance and rejection of certain ideas, values, opinions and norms. Narrative can be associated with identity in

[17] Stéphane Mosès, *Émile Benveniste and the Linguistics of Dialogue*. Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale, Vol. 32, No. 4 (2001) 509-525 (p. 516).

[18] Ibid, p. 517.

autobiography as either a research of one subject's story or as a metaphor for the formation of identity itself. The development within a narrative of the identity is considered through its temporality: the continuity of an identity is a key characteristic in its construction within a narrative[19]. As mentioned in the previous chapters, identity can be a stable, primeval concept, or a work in progress. In the former case, cognitive construction of identity assumes the marginal role played by the social context in one's identity formation; in the latter, the social role implies the multiplicity of narratives. Time is *per se* a tool for development; the perception human beings have of themselves is shaped, altered, remodeled and deconstructed with the passing of time. Time allows individuals to fortify "the sense of identity with, on the one hand, that which ensures its durability and stability, and on the other, that which fortifies the feeling of fortuity and infrequency (…)"[20]. Time is both that which makes or undoes identity. Past and present are joined in the form of a history which is inseparably intertwined to the individual and together they shape a narrative.

The idea of identity being the starting point of autobiography, as promoted by Lejeune, has been criticised over the years. Carole Allamand is among those who claim identity in autobiography is in fact its "unreachable horizon"[21]. Lejeune himself reassessed his own definition of the genre.

Autobiography could be perceived as an act of remembering and a reconstruction of event at the same time. It is not necessarily a work of imagination, or a distortion of reality. Truth should be an important aspect in autobiography, no matter how problematic this question might be. It is a creative narrative process that leads to the building of an individual's sense of self and personal continuity. Since the 1970s theorists of literature have increasingly attributed certain relevance in literary studies of social and historical contexts, and consequently the role of history and social issues in the formation of literary self identity in the large.

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[19] Luba Jakubowska, *Identity as a narrative of autobiography*. Journal of Education, Culture and Society, Vol. 1, No. 2 (2010) 51-66 (p. 61).

[20] Ibid, p. 61.

[21] Carole Allamand, *The Autobiographical Pact, Forty-Five Years Later*. The European Journal of Life Writing, Vol. 7 (2018) 51-56 (p.52).

Many critics maintain that autobiography is in and of itself a hybrid genre, containing traces of other forms. If the assumption that autobiography is the hybrid product, then it is also possible to say its borders are blurred and melt in other literary genres. The fact that readers tend to look for elements of the author's life in works of fiction by the same author may confirm this theory. An autobiographical text might include the presence of a true, yet not always accurate, representation of the author's life. Lejeune acknowledged that the presence of biographical facts and the autodiegetic narration, among other textual features, are essential for the autobiographical pact to function. In addition, the referential pact in autobiography has to be drawn up and be kept[22]. Ironically, once the intention of the author is declared, the reader may be inclined to read against the author's declaration. The contract puts the attitude of the reader to the test, so much so that a sort of double inversion may happen: the affirmation of identity, in autobiography, could lead the reader to look for differences; in fiction, the non-affirmation of identity may tempt the reader to find resemblances[23]. However readers also insist on separating fiction in self-writing and reality, based on the fact that all human beings have a life story and knowledge of selfhood. Despite the problematic issues caused by the reconstruction of the past based on memory, the survival of autobiography as genre indicates the debate is still open around it. Autobiographical studies on whether an autobiographical text can express the reality of the author's life experiences have seen the emergence of two opposite sides among critics. Those who assert that language cannot express 'accurate' reality and those who believe it can, even though truth and fact do not always coincide. Memory and imagination combine so that the author can deliver an account, real or delusive, of the self. Memories can be inconsistent, unreliable, deceiving; the self, much like memory, is an act, it can be constructed, and it may alter the man or woman, leaving them different.

When discussing what stands at the centre of the autobiographical act, the self has to occupy a special place in the debate. Tonya Blowers suggests that neither the self nor the story are there from the beginning as a whole entity, but are formed

[22] Lejeune, p. 22.

[23]Tonya Blowers, *Locating the Self: Re-reading Autobiography as Theory and Practise, with particular reference to the writings of Janet Frame*. Doctoral thesis, University of Warwick (1998), p. 67.

through writing and are inextricably interlaced[24]. Autobiographies provide the impression of a direct access to the author's intimate thoughts and feelings and since the self is created through writing, the reader could not just be a mere spectator, but a participant in the process. Subject and object have different yet co-dependent functions within a text; the subject may be a person or indeed the story itself, while the object is the telling of that story or the process of coming to terms with the subject. The reader is able to recognise the referential act in the text and he or she may separate parts of the text made in imagination from those deemed (likely) loyal to reality. Thus memory and self are at the centre of autobiographical writing. Individuals have to constantly represent themselves through the means of story-telling, so in many ways each human being is a story, a singular narrative, made of feelings, perceptions, interpretations, thoughts, actions, and spoken narration. If, as has been previously suggested, writing produces the self and the self is made of intangibles, then the self shows every sign of an illusion. It is elusive, but it is also essential for the human mind to preserve its functioning. The sense of self is also linked to the body. The body individuals inhabit is a crucial part in their life-journey and it is also the ultimate proof of someone's existence. Is it not?

The referential act autobiography claims to perform can also be associated with photography. Since photographs are, in a way, traces of actual objects, they seem to be more referential than words, an emanation of the referent. Ivane Mortelette, when discussing the connection between Janet Frame and photography, states: "Photography is often linked to the question of identity because it has the power to give evidence of people's existence"[25]. Pictures allow a person to look at her/himself from an external point of view. They link the thing or person they portray to the real world. Timothy Dow Adams suggests the connection autobiography shares with photography is precluded to fiction since in fictional literary works, actual photographs are not present:

[24]Blowers, p. 76.

[25]Ivane Mortelette, *"A Proof I Did Exist": Janet Frame and Photography*. Journal of New Zealand Literature, No. 24, Part 1 (2006) 94-114 (p. 99).

> Because photography within narrative seems to operate on a different plane from other forms of narration, a consideration of photography within lifewriting would seem to be a uniquely valuable way to look at the referential dilemma from another point of view[26].

This statement might explain the presence of about seventy photographs in the complete version of the autobiography, twenty or so for each of the three books, capturing moments related to narrated episodes within that specific book section.

Yet photography has been subjected to an equally troubled debate on referentiality as autobiography. For the contemporary earth-dweller, and indeed some critics, the deceiving nature of photographs, often considered a natural process to reproduce reality, is a familiar concept. Through a number of high-tech procedures, they can be enlarged, reduced, hand-coloured, retouched in general. They therefore become artificially-made products: they show and disguise at the same time, tell a story that can be equally misleading as well as plausible, not only between the photographer and photographed, but also between subject and interlocutor, in a way similar to autobiography. As well as affirming the self, photographs may become a tool for the negation of the self and, ultimately, become associated with death. Many people can relate when someone says they do not like the idea of being photographed, nor want their pictures shared or shown. The camera might be seen as a weapon exerting some type of violence over individuals. The appropriation of an image transforms the subject into object, so much so that in the end pictures are all that remain of a person. Mortelette explains that: "The wish to symbolically immortalise an ephemeral being is linked to the instinctive desire to escape death"[27]. Photography is used to keep the past, as well as memory, alive. But photos are not immune from deterioration; in a similar way to memories, they have limitations. Adding to the former statement in order to understand autobiography, Adams concludes: "The literal death of the author is not possible in autobiography, though it is often the concluding event in biography"[28].

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[26] Timothy Dow Adams, *Introducing Life Writing and Light Writing: Autobiography and Photography*. Modern Fiction Studies, Vol. 40, No. 3 (1994) 459-477, 479-492 (p.464).

[27] Mortelette, p. 108.

[28] Adams, p. 486.

In this respect, in his much innovative and controversial article ‘The Death of the Author’, Roland Barthes argues it is writing who ‘speaks’; it is a special voice and:

> (…) literature is precisely the invention of this voice, to which we cannot assign a specific origin: literature is that neuter, that composite, that oblique into which every subject escapes, the trap where all identity is lost, beginning with the very identity of the body that writes[29].

Here Barthes concurs with Mallarmé; they see the need to replace the author with language in order to restore the reader’s status. The reader, and language itself, are caught in the tension caused by the dichotomy of objective and subjective truth, history and memory and so forth. The reader is the only one who can see beyond the duplicity of words and gather “into a single field all the paths of which the text is constituted”[30]. The author is nothing more than a presence, a fantasy or a desire, the reader would not want to relinquish.

As previously mentioned, autobiography in the third person represents a unique self-narrative technique. The person mentioned is the author of the text and the referent of the enunciation, what is said about him or her is accurate so as to be taken literally. But the statements made about the subject are in third person; while the reader may be continue to read the text as a first person discourse. The use of several figures and the mingling of perspectives set in a distanced narration and a tension between identity and difference. The author writes about him or herself by silencing his/her own voice; the third person narrative permits to speak about someone who is neither the recipient nor the transmitter of the discourse, but rather creates a kind of doubling showing the multiplicity of the grammatical *I*[31]. Splitting the *I* means confronting the problem of identity. Linguistically, this problem is evident on a lexical level and on the level of enunciation. Lexically, the solution lies in the category of proper names, which as been previously discussed. The proper name stabilises the subject of the enunciation and that of the statement in one ‘figure’, because they share the same

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[29] Roland Barthes, *The Death of the Author* (1968) <https://writing.upenn.edu/~taransky/Barthes.pdf> [accessed 29 September 2021].

[30] Ibid, p. 6.

[31] Philippe Lejeune, Annette Tomarken, Edward Tomarken, *Autobiography in the Third Person*. New Literary History, Vol. 9, No. 1 (1977) 27-50 (p. 30).

name. However, the *I* also conceals the natural perspective gap between the narrator and the hero; the explicit use of the third person causes the eclipsing of the real narrator. This figure remains largely a formal presence, distancing him/herself from the discourse so as to produce a difference between perspective and enunciation, a distinction similar to the first person autobiography in which a generally older subject remembers and speaks of his/her younger self. On the level of enunciation, it may be fair to revert to what Benveniste stated, that each speaker can be both sender and receiver and these roles exist through every use of language individuals make.

Crucial in the discussion of autobiographies in the third-person is the question of the points of view. Communicating this point of view in autobiography is the narrator's privilege; the point of view carries the narrator's mark for it is virtually impossible to escape his/her own perspective and subjectivity. Articulating two different points of view concerning a single individual seems to be unobtainable in autobiography[32]. One such attempt consist in bringing another point of view into the autobiography by creating a character in the story for the purpose of conveying to the reader the idea this character has of the autobiographer. The attempt is to imagine the type of discourse others could make of him/her – in other words, as if someone else were telling his/her story – by imprinting the image he/her believes to be true upon them[33]. Such rare construction is both autobiographical and novelistic. The creation of a witness character and the invention of another perspective are part of the novelistic game, although the witness point of view might bears traces of a forgiving and condescending style.

To continue further in the exploration, autobiographical fiction might be defined in its content as being based on fact but not bound by fact. It may contain characters inspired by existing people within a fictional context; the author him/herself may appear as character in the story or could put their life experiences directly into the plot while making subtle changes such as names or dates. The autobiographer is supposed to invent nothing and maintain the line of truth; the novelist has no such requirement, they should be inventive. Autobiographies, in spite of their inherited intention, are selective works. The author may choose to omit or adjust some parts of his/her life, or

[32]Lejeune, Tomarken, Tomarken, p. 41.
[33] Ibid, p. 42.

choose specific episodes or life moments significant to his/her perspective and the image they want to leave of themselves. Memory, as earlier discussed, is selective and unstable. Novelists do not feel obliged tell the story as it happened.

2.2 Reviews of 'The Complete Autobiography'

There are many ways to interpret and interact with Janet Frame's autobiographies. As a whole it is presumably fair to state her autobiographies are a bold, brutally honest, and in some ways magical recount of a childhood marked by poverty, imagination, and freedom, and an adult life stigmatised by the experience in mental hospitals, a deep desire to fit in society yet at the same time a boundless need to live through and for poetry. Gina Mercer affirms:

> There is no point in denying that these autobiographies are highly sophisticated constructions from a highly accomplished writer. They are the work of a woman who is very much in control of her craft, that is, the making of stories[34].

In all three books, about 140 pages-long each, Frame was able to produce something very fluid and readable, simple and delicate in style, reflecting much of the author's own personality. The meaning of Frame's life-story was her special ability to turn her own experience to literature. *A posteriori*, the autobiographies in many ways encapsulate and connect her entire literary production (her novels, poems, short stories and children's book) into an organic and satisfying whole. Vanessa Finney explains: "Through her autobiographies, Frame has created a new context for the reading of *all* her text"[35]. As expected, her autobiographical subject came to be through memory, centered on what the reader can only assume to be real. For Frame the self lies in the ability to create the world of her Imagination, which is the 'other' world, as opposed to the world of the living where her body is. Imagination is what permitted Frame to inhabit that 'other' world while still being part of the human world, much like a light that shines and seeps through darkness.

It was her best opportunity to set the record straight and draw the line between what the public and critics knew, or thought they knew, about her and what she wanted to leave as a recount of her life, "(…) she is drawn to the opportunity that autobiography

[34] Gina Mercer, "*A Simple Everyday Glass": The Autobiographies of Janet Frame*. Journal of New Zealand Literature. Vol. 11 (1993) 41-48 (p. 42).

[35] Vanessa Finney, *What Does "Janet Frame" Mean?*. Journal of New Zealand Literature, No. 11 (1993) 193-205 (p. 194). Italics in the original.

offers to seal the narration of her history, and thus to close her public memory"[36]. After the publication of the collected edition of the autobiography and her last novel *The Carpathians* (both in 1989), Frame largely withdrew from public life and was rarely seen. In one of her few interviews, given in 1988, she called for the writer's need of isolation in order to complete their work. The interviewer, Elizabeth Alley, suggested the purpose of the autobiography was mainly to "correct some of the myths that surround you"[37], to which Frame replied that it was possible indeed to correct some things, but also that her stories so far had been invented though mixed with episodes of her life (she referred in particular to children stories in *The Lagoon* and *Faces in the Water*). Most importantly she described her "desire to make myself a first person. For many years I was a third person (…)"[38], something which is underlined in the last volume of autobiography, *The Envoy from Mirror City*:

> I found myself assuming my most accustomed role, that of the passive person whose life is being planned for her while she dare not, for fear of punishment or provocation, refuse"[39].

The referential project of autobiography emerged in her intention to write "my story, whatever comes out is ordinary me without fiction"[40], yet the interview underlined many aspects of the contradictory nature surrounding Frame and her work. For instance, when asked if she had had any problem turning back to fiction (meaning *The Carpathians*) after writing the autobiography, she seemed to contradict her previous statement by saying: "Well, I am always in the fictional mode, and autobiography is found fiction. I look at everything from the point of view of fiction"[41]. This could be explained in the fact that while she claimed her autobiography to be based on fact, it is impossible to ignore its construction has much in common with the writing techniques of fiction, in the way it relinquished or failed to claim a total, authoritative voice. Susan

[36] Andrew Dean, *Reading "An Autobiography": Michael King, Patrick Evans and Janet Frame*. Journal of New Zealand Literature, No. 29, Part 1 (2011) 46-65 (p. 47).
[37] Elizabeth Alley, Interview with Janet Frame. Radio New Zealand, Wellington (1988), published in *Landfall*, Vol. 45 (1991). Retreived at <https://www.slaphappylarry.com/rare-interview-with-the-late-great-janet-frame/> [accessed 2 November, 2021].
[38] Ibid.
[39] Janet Frame, *Janet Frame: The Complete Autobiography*. The Women's Press Ltd, 1999 (p. 361).
[40] Alley, interview with Janet Frame.
[41] Ibid.

Ash found Frame's statement "(...) disconcerting. I don't know how to read a text in which Frame claims she represents herself as ordinary and without invention"[42]. Mercer was equally disappointed with the autobiography and claimed Frame was not 'noisy enough"[43].

This apparent feeble willingness to be the main authority in her life could be explained in several ways. The nature of the genre itself implies the splitting of the subject; Frame seemed to be interested in the act of telling the truth in response to those who stole her subject position before she could have her say. Then, her aforementioned passiveness which combined with her inherent shyness might have played a role. Decisions were largely made for her for much of her life, from the clothes she had to wear in school to the people she could not be friends with (she described how was ordered to give up her friendship with Poppy in *To the Is-Land*); from the decision to send her to hospital to the multiple suggestions of having her frizzy hair straitened. "I had a sense of being borne along on the wishes of others; but that was not unusual in my life"[44]. Moreover, it could have been a strategy to avoid too much criticism. In the 1988 interview she stressed the importance of her readership but at the same time felt no obligation toward them or their expectations. She wrote *for* herself. Interestingly enough, early criticism may also have been a contributing factor to her increasing withdrawal from public life, particularly after Patrick Evans published his short biography of her in 1977[45]. She wrote to "mend or repair the damage done by those who spoke before her and about her"[46]. Tessa Barringer argues that the purpose of the act of 'fixing' is stabilising the text's intention, and providing a stable identity in order to separate what is real to what is not[47]. Furthermore, her attention is focused on what eludes the conclusiveness the text portends. Here Barringer agrees with Ash

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[42] Susan Ash, "*The Absolute, Distanced Image": Janet Frame's Autobiographies*. Journal of New Zealand Literature, No. 11 (1993) 21-40 (p. 22).
[43] Mercer, p. 43.
[44] Frame, p. 271.
[45] The book, *Janet Frame*, accompanied a survey Evans made of her fiction to date; Frame wrote Evans a letter of complaint, in which she described him as 'one of the Porlock people'. She may have seen it as yet another privacy intrusion attempt, but it could also have prompted her to start writing her autobiography.
[46] Ash, p. 27.
[47] Tessa Barringer, *Frame[d]: The Autobiographies*. Journal of New Zealand Literature, No. 14 (1996) 90-106 (p. 93).

when she says the text lacks "that wonder-ful, richly imagistic and unstable lyric language"[48]. In addition, her fictional novels and the writing process of her previous works are hardly ever mentioned in the autobiography as well, let alone described. And finally, it is presumably due to the selectiveness of human memory. Memory constructs subjectivity: if memory is unreliable yet retrievable, so subjectivity can be remodelled. "You are what you remember, and because you remember, you are". Frame's memory may also have been damaged by the numerous electroshock treatments she received while a patient in mental hospitals. In the 1988 interview she declared one of the reasons why she wrote the first volume of autobiography, was to "get rid of the memories of the past up to a certain stage, to the time I was 40. Then I was really freeing myself from memories"[49]. This statement might find an explanation in the final lines of *The Envoy from Mirror City*:

> I stare more closely at the city in my mind. And why, it *is* Mirror City, it's not Dunedin or London or Ibiza of Auckland or any other cities I have known. It is Mirror City before my own eyes. And the Envoy waits[50].

The conclusive end leaves little if any space for uncertainty, although it could be said to allow the protagonist Janet subject to exploration, and also leaves the reader with the promise and expectation of more. In fact, the three volumes were written in the mid-1980s but the story they tell ends in 1963, after her return to New Zealand. Inherently, autobiographies are not finished works: the gap between the writing *I* and the written *I* remain unfilled. Frame's purpose as underlined in her interview, to end any speculation and permit no space for confrontation is, in several ways, obstructed and rendered invalid by the very nature of the genre. A formula that finds its ultimate explanation in Frame's later statement:

> Undoubtedly I have mixed myself with other character who themselves are a product of known and unknown, real and imagined; I have created 'selves' but I have never written of 'me'[51].

[48] Barringer, p. 96.
[49] Alley, interview with Janet Frame.
[50] Frame, p. 435.
[51]Ibid, p. 405.

Such a reconstruction of the self testifies the functioning of the circular dialectic relationship which shapes and constitutes an individual's identity. The act of writing is in itself an exploration, a journey, although the entirety of the novel may be already defined in the author's head. However, readers do not all interpret a text in the same way. The autobiographies allow a certain freedom by relying on the assumption the reader recognises Frame herself as the site of knowledge. The desire to establish a fixed identity of the subject contrasts with the essential gaps that circle around the formation of the subject itself. In autobiography the gaps are found between the time of experience and the time of writing, and between self and other. Filling these gaps shows the impossibility of fixing the identity of the speaking subject. Frame appeared to be caught between her wish to communicate her truth to the outside world and her desire to speak to the self in order to secure her self-identity. The explanation may lie, in part, in the period of time that expired between the aforementioned time of experience and the time of narration. The voice of the retrospective *I* prevails and experience is viewed in retrospection from the narrator's point of time. What might be also considered as a consequence of the time break is the number of gaps in the autobiography's narration. Frame selected certain elements, specific memories, while leaving others (most evidently, her stay in mental institutions) only superficially narrated. These bibliographical *lacunae* could be explained in the intrinsic selectiveness of memory itself, to begin with. They are qualities found in the construction of the autobiographies too. But they might also be considered a strategy of deception or to distance herself further from those experiences; or perhaps she wanted to avoid contradictory statements regarding her mental sanity. The confinement she endured in mental hospital throughout her 20s, the ECT treatments, the abdication of the role of first person to become 'one of them', 'her' or 'they' are perhaps too painful memories to put again to the written text, after they were fictionally described in her second novel, *Faces in the Water*, published in 1961. This might be one of the reasons for their omission in the autobiography: there is no need to remember again.

Time and memory are key elements in the structural narrative of the autobiography; it is by the invention of historical time that Frame, like all human beings, is able to place herself in a continuum. It allows her to compare her life to those who came before her on one hand and keep the eyesight on the future on the other. This concept seems very clear in the first self-contained chapter of the text.

> From the first place of liquid darkness, within the second place of air and light, I set down the following record with its mixture of fact and truths and memories of truths and its direction always towards the Third Place, where the starting point is myth[52].

The cyclical nature of Universal time emerges from this incipit. The 'first place of liquid darkness' could refer to the womb before birth; the 'second place' constitutes life in the living present. And the 'Third place' is posterity, the afterlife. Before birth and after death it is all darkness, but the continuum of history makes sense of who we are.

In Janet Frame's case, subjectivity as a received and expressed position depends on both the interlocutor's reception of self and the author's construction and perception of self. Identity for Frame is relational, a product of an 'other'. The opposition and coexistence of 'self' and 'other' is of particular interest when it comes to explaining the 'self' in relation to the 'other'. When could be fair to suggest is that understanding self-consciousness begins from the knowledge that the self originates outside of the self. Locating the 'self' outside the 'self' is a process best explained in the dialogic tension created when the 'other' is recognised as a messenger carrying an independent perspective, equally rational yet not reducible to the self's. This discursive configuration between subjects is likely to be another active position in conversation with the 'self'. Susan Ash finds the reverse position of the writing Frame as 'other' and the written Frame as 'subject' to better exemplify the authoritative voice the text seems to miss. The writing *I* as an omniscient narrator claims knowledge of the self that it creates. In autobiography the written *I* is, to a certain extent, made less accessible to the reader than the subjects of Frame's fiction[53].

The conflation of elements of autobiography in her fiction and the presence of fictional elements in her autobiography could help explain her puzzling yet admirable ability to mix fact and fiction, imagination and reality, so as to keep the readers constantly on their toes, waiting anxiously for more detail. Frame herself explained that the starting

[52] Frame, p. 7.
[53] Ash, p. 34.

point of her imagination lied in characters from her own familiar surroundings which she then transformed to create totally different figures. According to Patrick Evans:

> (…) not only that 'the autobiographical' had an unusually intimate relationship with her fiction, but that the two were interchangeable (…)[54].

And, in addition:

> (…) it is as if she felt able to deal with painful or unpleasant realities through the convention that things in fiction never really happen[55].

Fiction occupies a crucial place in Janet Frame's autobiographies, and indeed her own life. The constant company of books, poems and songs is given a special place throughout the three-volume work, something which stems from childhood into her adult life. The confusion that the reader might encounter when reading the autobiography has mainly to do with the echoing of personal details found in Frame's works of fiction; works which were published before the autobiography. Vice versa, fictional strategies are used to divert the attention or destabilise the reader. Tonya Blowers compares two passages, one from *Scented Gardens for the Blind* and the other from *To the Is-Land*, both describing a childhood friendship with a girl named Poppy, whose real name was Marjorie. The detail of the girl's real name resembles the passage from the novel where it is said she was *called* Poppy. Might the real name of the girl in *Scented Gardens for the Blind* also have been Marjorie? In the first volume of autobiography the girl is whipped with a narrow machine belt by her father. In the novel, Poppy is described as 'velvet', which may refer to the fact that her skin was very soft and smooth, despite perhaps the marks left on her by her father's violence. These two situations are visually linked in the film adaptation of the autobiography, *An Angel at My Table*, when young Janet and Poppy sit in an abandoned bathtub and Poppy invites Janet to touch the scars left on her leg by the belt's strapping. Poppy comments on her scars: "They feel funny, don't they?"[56]. The different phrasing in fiction and autobiography could be perceived as an example of Frame's intention to separate

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[54] Patrick Evans, *Dr. Clutha's Book of the World: Janet Paterson Frame, 1924-2004*. Journal of New Zealand Literature, No. 22 (2004) 15-30 (p. 20).
[55] Ibid, p. 21.
[56] *An Angel at My Table*, dir. by Jane Campion (Sharmill Films, 1990).

fiction and real life, despite the similarities she (intentionally or not) put in her works. Barringer denotes the confusion that generates when the autobiography encounters descriptions and cross-references to her fiction, especially that which deals with mental illness. In particular, she points at the association made between Frame as (declared) mentally ill and her ignorance of New Zealand literature. Or rather, "I chose to ignore it, and indeed was scarcely aware of it"[57]. Interestingly enough, it happens at a crucial chapter in the autobiography, when Frame glided over the years of mental incarceration. Janet Frame seems to suggest that the stigma of mis-diagnosis and the shame of being labeled 'mentally disturbed' attach both to individuals as patients and society in a wider sense. Her criticism might be viewed as a condemnation of the conditions suffered by those identified as 'others' in conformist New Zealand society in the 1940s and 1950s. It is as if, through her own experience, Janet Frame were speaking for all who could not speak, implying perhaps that the dehumanised in mental institutions are not the patients, but representatives of the established social order who allow the perpetuation of abuses and injustices. All of her books depict a society deprived of wholeness by its refusal to accept and acknowledge madness, disorder and any form of difference.

Other episodes contain honest details about issues women in particular can easily relate to. She was not afraid to sacrifice her own vanity, albeit she never renounced her femininity. She represented the taboo of menstruation without hiding from the shame and stigma society in mid-twentieth century imposed upon this subject. The vivid image of her first menstrual period finding its way out of her tight school uniform and staining her chair at school reflected the anxiety of having to conceal a biological, primordial part of women's bodies. She also told of how her extreme shyness prevented her from disposing of her sanitary towels while living with her aunt during training college[58]. Women have been largely responsible for reviewing Frame's fiction, but more so when it comes to the autobiography. Finney suggests it may have something to do with the fact that "women have special access to the meaning of each others' lives which men presumably do not have"[59]. Not surprisingly, a female director and a female screenwriter turned the autobiography into a film. There is no doubt her

[57] Frame, p. 192.
[58] Ibid, p. 156.
[59] Finney, p. 196.

life recounts are for a large part relatable and her texts have provided exemplary documents of women's lives. That being said, not all her private experiences are made public, since Frame resisted the temptation to disclose too much, by virtue of the innate 'female' instinct of protectiveness of the personal conflicts, and the pressure to reveal. This inverse tendency of surrendering authority endangering the power of authority itself is counterbalanced by Frame's narrative strategies of distancing and unifying her image.

One such example is perhaps the build-up and her reaction to her schizophrenia diagnosis. Frame repeatedly presented her "new status" as a mental patient as an opportunity to improve her inner poetic life. Moreover, what transpires from her recount is that her condition was somewhat achieved, making her an accomplice in the process.

> If the world of the mad were the world where I know officially belonged then I would use it to survive, I would excel in it[60].

Psychologist John Forrest (an invented surname for the real John Money), who took charge of Frame's case and on whom she had a crush, appeared to have been tricked by his patient as well. It is as if Frame were using therapy sessions with him to practice what she calls her "formidable schizophrenic repertoire". She went on to say:

> I was playing a game, half in earnest, to win the attention of a likeable young man whose interest was psychology and art; (…) I was never withdrawn from the 'real' world, however, although I was convincingly able to 'use' this symptom when the occasion required[61].

When John Forrest compared her with great artists like Van Gogh and Hugo Wolf, the written Frame came to the conclusion that in order to be a genius she had to play the role of the insane and learn how to use it when necessary.

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[60] Frame, p. 198.

[61]Ibid, p. 201-202.

> My place was set, then, at the terrible feast. I had no illusions about 'greatness' but at least I could endow my work and – when necessary – my life with the mark of my schizophrenia[62].

In particular she decided to keep "'pure schizophrenia' for the poems where it was most at home". It is hard to conceive the reasons why she helped along with the diagnosis, especially because it led to years of confinement in an out of mental hospitals, and gruesome treatments. But what some may believe to be an end, it was actually a new beginning for Frame. It demonstrated the utmost importance of adaptability, in order to survive in a dehumanising and narrow-minded society, lacking and, to some extent fearing, imagination. It also emphasised the universal redeeming power of words. Words are witnesses of the human existence. After all, it was writing that saved her from lobotomy; and later, living at Frank Sargeson's hut focused on her writing, sealed the return of the light of poetry after the darkness experienced in hospitals. She celebrated and mourned her mother's death by writing a handful of poems and it was with the contribution of the State Literary Fund that she was able to travel to Europe, not only to broaden her experience and "to undertake creative work on approved projects", but also to escape the restrictive New Zealand environment. "Words are literally what saved her from 'being swept away by the tide or sinking in the quaking earth' in that New Zealand asylum"[63].

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[62] Frame, p. 201.

[63] Aaron Hamburger, *The Mentor I Never Met: Janet Frame*. Who's Yer Daddy?, edited by Jim Elledge and David Groff, University of Wisconsin Press (2012) 170-177 (p. 175).

PART THREE: JANET FRAME'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY

3:1 Introduction on the author

Janet Paterson Frame was born on the 28th of August 1924 in Dunedin (Ōtepoti in Māori), the second largest city in New Zealand's South Island and the principal city of the Otago region. She was her parents' third child and second daughter, named after her father's sister, who died in infancy, and her paternal grandmother, Mary Paterson Frame. She was delivered by Dr. Emily Hancock Siedeberg (later McKinnon), at the time medical superintendent at St Helens Hospital in Dunedin and New Zealand's first female medical graduate. Her father was of Scottish ancestry, while her mother's ancestors were from Oxfordshire and Jersey Island. Her mother Lottie Clarice Godfrey, originally from Picton, served as housemaid to the family of Katherine Mansfield, the Beauchamps, and came from a literate family; her maternal grandmother had published a book of poems in the mid-nineteenth century. George Samuel Frame, Frame's father, fought in the First World War and later became a railway worker. Due to their father's job the family led a nomadic life before settling in Oamaru in 1930, where Frame attended Waitaki Girls School.

Janet Frame's love of poetry and literature ran in the family, as her mother wrote poems and songs, and all the Frame children regularly sent their compositions to the *Otago Daily Times* for publication. Her father was a crossword puzzle enthusiast and Janet enjoyed helping him find missing words. She was a good student, excelling in sports and science subjects. Her childhood and early adolescence were marred by her brother's epileptic fits and her sister Myrtle's death by drowning. A decade later, another sister, Isabel, would drown in circumstances similar to Myrtle's.

In 1943 Frame began training at Dunedin College of Education while attending classes at the University of Otago. A year of practical placement at Arthur Street School was abruptly interrupted when she refused to submit to a teaching inspection and walked out of the class. Following a suicide attempt she was admitted to hospital for a brief stay, but having refused to go home she was transferred to Seacliff Lunatic Asylum. She spent the next eight years entering and exiting mental hospitals, as she was diagnosed with schizophrenia, and received over two hundred electroshock treatments and multiple insulin injections. In 1951 she won the Hubert Church

Memorial Award for *The Lagoon and other stories*, a collection of short stories written while a psychiatric patient and published by Caxton Press. The prize secured her removal from the list of those scheduled for a leucotomy, after a doctor spotted the article about the prize in a newspaper. Released from hospital in 1954, she moved to writer Frank Sargeson's property near Auckland; during this time she wrote *Owls Do Cry*, her first novel, published in 1957.

She left New Zealand and travelled to Europe to broaden her experience, spending a few months in Ibiza and Andorra before settling in London, where she lived from 1957 to 1963. While in the English capital, her schizophrenia diagnosis was reversed by a team of doctors at the Maudsley hospital. At the suggestion of Dr Cawley, her therapist, she started writing about her experience in mental asylums, which resulted in her second novel, *Faces in the Water*. After her father's death she returned to New Zealand in 1963 and accepted the Burns Fellowship of the University of Otago in 1965. The 1960s and 1970s were the most prolific in Frame's career; she published nine out of her eleven novels, her second collection of short stories (*The Reservoir*), a poetry book (*The Pocket Mirror*), several articles and essays (the best known is 'Beginnings', published in *Landfall* in 1965), over twenty short stories and poems published separately and her only children's book, *Mona Minim and the Smell of the Sun*. Throughout that time she travelled extensively, particularly in the United States, where she accepted residencies at MacDowell and Yaddo artists' communities. In the early 1980s Frame authored three volumes of autobiography, *To the Is-Land* in 1982, *An Angel at My Table* and *The Envoy from Mirror City* both in 1984. In 1989 a collected edition of the three books was published under the title *An Autobiography*, posthumously reprinted as *An Angel at My Table*. In 1990 director Jane Campion and screenwriter Laura Jones adapted Frame's autobiography for television broadcast, but it was later released as a feature film.

Janet Frame received numerous awards and honours in her lifetime. For her contribution to literature she was appointed a Commander of the Order of the British Empire in 1983 and Honorary Foreign Member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1984. Her final novel, *The Carpathians*, won the Commonwealth Writers' Prize for Best Book in 1989 and the following year Frame was appointed Member of the Order of New Zealand, the nation's highest civilian honour. In 1998 and 2003 she was among the nominees for the Nobel Prize in literature. In 1999 Frame established the Janet Frame Literary Trust, a charitable trust that supports New Zealand writers of poetry and prose.

Janet Frame died in Dunedin in January 2004 of acute myeloid leukaemia. New Zealand's Prime Minister, Helen Clark, attended her funeral and praised her humility, generosity and sense of humour[64]. Her niece Pamela Gordon (Frame's youngest sister June's daughter) was named as one of the executors of her will and appointed a founding trustee of her charitable trust. Under the trust's supervision, two more autobiographical novels, *Toward Another Summer* (2007) and *In the Memorial Room* (2013) and a collection of poetry works titled *The Goose Bath*, were published posthumously. The poetry book won the Montana New Zealand Book Award in 2007.[65]

[64] Sharon Verghis, *Reclusive writer Janet Frame dead*. Sydney Morning Herald, 30 January 2004 <https://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/books/reclusive-writer-janet-frame-dead-20040130-gdi98k.html> [accessed 13 February 2022].

[65] Begun in 1996 as the merger of the New Zealand Book Awards (1976-1995) and the Goodman Fielder Wattie Book Awards (1968-1995), the name of the awards changed several times depending on sponsorship. They are currently known as the Ockham Awards.

3.2 To the Is-Land: the making of the child-prodigy

The first book of autobiography was published in 1982 and won the prestigious Wattie Book of the Year Award in 1983. It chronicles the life of the author and her family through the 1920s and 1930s within an imagery-dense book. Of all the three books, it is perhaps the one that deals more extensively with death, grief and separation. Frame's life began with the death of her twin in the womb; her paternal grandmother's death led her to question the meaning of death as eternal separation. The book narrates of the healing, yet deceiving, power of words and the redeeming force of literature. Frame's sister Myrtle's death reverberated in poems of celebrated – dead – poets and in Walter De La Mare's *I Met at Eve*, which she used to recite over the wireless. Janet and her friend Poppy bonded over the reading of *Grimm's Fairy Tales*, only to be separated by Frame's startling announcement of Myrtle's first sexual intercourse. Frame's childhood and early adolescence were characterised by poverty and social isolation: her physical appearance, her clothes, even her brother's illness were elements that contributed to her loneliness, compensated in part by her love of literature. *To the Is-Land* gives an insight into the journey Janet Frame will make.
The Is-Land is the land of the 'is', the place of the 'being'. Island is where:

> Identity ('I'), place ('island'), and being in time ('is') coincide. The is-land is a space which confers belonging, where the wandering 'I' finally comes to rest 'at home'.[66]

The 'I' of the autobiographical writing is at the same time the describer, the subject of the narration (the enunciation), and the described, the subject whose history is being narrated (the enunciated). The 'I' as first-person pronoun is an indicator of authority and identity, while simultaneously being created at the moment of writing. Identity is affirmed in the present state of being. Is-Land is therefore certainty and identity finally realised. It is also the journey ('To the'), the moving toward; for Frame it is a perpetual moving to the place of the imagination, to find her true self. The island could refer to either New Zealand or Britain, the birthplace and the home of the ancestors. While it is easy to recognise the pivotal influence of New Zealand in Frame's writing, it can also be fairly easy to acknowledge that to some extent it is Frame's stay in Britain between 1956 and 1963 that shapes her sense of belonging in New Zealand. New Zealand's

[66] Blowers, p. 173.

geographical isolation and Frame's *pakeha* status (neither British nor Māori) highlight her marginality that is so relevant to her as a person and as a writer. The Is-Land is the symbol of Frame's isolation as well as the instrument through which she was able to write imaginatively. Moreover, New Zealand's myths – especially derived from the Māori – allowed Janet Frame to connect reality, at one point described as "sordid and wasteful"[67], with imagination.

In the context of New Zealand's island nation status, it might also worth paying attention to the region where Janet Frame came from, southern New Zealand or South Island. This part of New Zealand was chosen by Scottish settlers in particular because of the similarities to the Highlands and local agricultural conditions. Landscape is incredibly influential for Janet Frame. Her early years were marked by a tight bond with the landscape of the southern Island, the Outside.

> (...) the world being My Place by the fallen birch log, with the grass, the insects in the grass, the sky, the sheep and cows and rabbits, the wax-eyes and the hawks – everything Outside.[68]

It was precisely the outdoors that inspires her first story, 'Bird, Hawk, Bogie', at the age of three.

> Once upon a time there was a birdie. One day a hawt flew out of the sky and ate the birdie. (Oh poor little birdie.) The next day a bid bodie came out from behind the hill and ate up the hawt from eating up the little birdie.[69]

Other than the mispronunciation of certain words, which is expected and incredibly sweet, it is worth mentioning that the story has received critical attention over the years and many theories have developed around its meaning. Robert Robertson used the term 'regional' to describe any writer focused on the aspects of provincial life while being at the same time attuned with "the universal concerns of art"[70]. In a provincial society, the artist is much more aware of what happens outside that society

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[67] Frame, p. 99.
[68] Ibid, p. 14.
[69] Ibid, p. 15.
[70] Robert T. Robertson, *Bird, Hawk, Bogie: Janet Frame, 1952-62*. Studies in the Novel, Vol. 4, No. 2, John Hopkins University Press (1972) 186-199 (p. 188).

than his peers. Yet the regional novelist whose art originates in a provincial milieu, at some point must fight to escape the physical and mental restrictions of provinciality, so as to establish an imaginative continuum with other provincial artists who undertook similar journeys. Robertson adapts Frame's story to New Zealand society, in which:

> (...) in a colonial provincial society, the hawk is both the society and untamed nature; and the bogie is the art which eats up both for eating up the bird of inspiration or imagination in an unimaginative society[71].

The bogie (or bogey) could be seen as both the imagination which is able to enclose the reality of the present in the literary form, and the form itself, the words that like magic spells, in a colonial provincial society keep the hawks of the society at bay.

According to Jeanne Delbeare the bird is, all in the same, nature, sensibility and imagination which are repressed and haunted by predatory hawks. Judith Dell Panny sees Janet Frame herself in the bird and the hawk as those who attempt to silence the writer/bird, while James Bertram suggests Frame to be the bird who tames the hawks (predatory society) and the bogie (imagination?) with the power of words. Frame herself provided two analyses of the story, one which sees the three winged animals placed in a proper hierarchy. The other has to do with its language and the meaning it demonstrates, since its reception in the audience is unavoidably subjective. The bird, which could be the story and/or language, has a life of its own, acts according to rules that the hawk (the author) cannot entirely control. Language is unreliable and it can deceive; therefore the author's intentions and expectations will always be confronted in the reading process.

The myth of childhood is enclosed in the links and resemblances a little child finds in worldly things to the poetic world. Lidia Conetti compares Janet Frame to Italian poet Giovanni Pascoli as they both possess the gift "to use the power of words to lighten and, a sense, to exorcise the events of the so-called real world"[72] Frame saw connections between Edgar Allan Poe's 'Annabel Lee' and her sister Myrtle's recent death: "What marvellous knowledge of the poets who could see through my own

[71]Robertson, p. 192.

[72] Lidia Conetti, *The Little Child in Us*. Journal of New Zealand Literature, No. 11 (1993) 188-192 (p. 189).

life".[73] The analogy also concerns one of Pascoli's most well-known poems, 'The Tenth of August' in which he compares the death of his father to the death of a swallow.

> A swallow was returning to the roof:
> they killed her: she fell among thorns;
> she had an insect in her beak:
> the dinner of her little swallows.[74]

Not only do these verses echo the 'Bird, hawk, bogie' story, but also share similarities with a passage from the first book of the autobiography.

> That month of August there was a late, unexpected snowstorm, the kind that kills newborn lambs in the high country (...) The timing of the snowfall, following so closely my shock of being bathed in blood, had a literary perfection (...)[75]

The strong imagery – the contrast between the whiteness of the snow and the redness of blood (which may refer to both her first menstruation and, figuratively, to Myrtle's death) – the notion of landscape being a killer of innocent baby lambs, and how Frame depicted it all as to have a universal connection, mixing reality and imagination through the voice of poetry, are elements of poetic refinement. Myrtle's death celebrated by the poets, and the death of the family cat Winkles for whom Frame wrote an elegy, did not belong to the present, nor were to be relegated to the individual use like household items, but rather be preserved for future memory, "for common use within a stream which, I was beginning to sense, might be called history"[76].

Frame understood the deceiving nature of words from an early age. Throughout her life she seemed not to reconcile with the idea that words do not always mean what they are supposed to mean. She linked the end of her childhood with a visit to the dentist to extract a tooth. She was told to 'smell the pretty pink

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[73] Frame, p. 90.
[74]Giovanni Pascoli, *X Agosto* (1896), traslation retrived at https://theinkbrain.wordpress.com/2012/08/16/giovanni-pascoli-august-10th/ [accessed 28 November 2021].
[75] Frame, p. 118.
[76]Ibid, p. 129.

towel', unaware that it was dipped in chloroform in order to sedate her for the operation. The discovery of new words fascinated her at the same time. The child's vocabulary generally grows at a faster pace than an adult's, so for young Janet, "her first meeting with a word and its subsequent inclusion in her vocabulary corresponds to a new way of seeing, relating to and often bearing the world."[77] Every new discovery was like an epiphany.

In addition, each of her family's house moves in the early years of her life was associated with memories and feelings. Outram, with the feeding of the family cow, the clanging and rattling of the silver kerosene tin she used as a toy and the dusty road and swamp outside her house; Glenham, where she found her *place* in a moss-covered birch log by a tiny creek, her mother reciting her poems and the family trips to the Southland beaches in her father's Ford Model T (*tin Lizzie*). In Edendale, where she "knew unhappiness for the first time"[78], the family lived in separate railway huts during a particularly harsh winter; words provided consolation and helped "lighten our misery", while her mother sang playing the accordion and her father played the bagpipes. Wyndham:

> Was the time of cabbages in the garden, of pump water, of candles and kerosene lamps at night with 'real' darkness and night shadows, the people in the twilight seen as if striding across the surface of the world (...)[79].

Fifty-six Eden Street, in Oamaru, the kingdom by the sea, where the family lived for fourteen years, represented perhaps the most crucial turning point in Frame's life and her family. The house, which is now a museum, stood at the edge of the Glen Warren Reserve, which provided the Frame children with opportunities for experience and play games.

> We children began crawling and climbing everywhere, over every inch of the red-painted iron roof, along every earthy space between the piles under the house.[80]

[77] Blowers, p. 192.
[78] Frame, p. 16.
[79] Ibid, p. 22.
[80] Ibid, p. 31.

> We discovered every climbable place in the hedge and trees and the summerhouse, accumulating our treasure of new experiences (...)[81]

It is also the beginning of her self-discovery.

> I was now vividly aware of myself as a person on earth, feeling a kinship with other creatures and full of joy at the sights and sounds about me (...)[82]

Nevertheless her shyness and modesty prevented her from being an active participant, the major player, in her life. She identified with the solitary heroine of her readings, "a background person", a Jane Eyre or Charlotte Brönte in real life.

Due to her family's insufficient means she might have been forced to give up her higher education in order to start working at the town's woollen mills or take up a lesser course like 'commercial', an idea she vehemently resisted. Her dream of attending university was quickly replaced by the need to train as a teacher at college, "for teachers, unlike university students, were paid". Equally persuaded that "she is going to be a teacher like Cousin Peg, who emigrated to Canada", her parents and extended family appeared not to notice her aspirations led somewhere else. She confided in her diary: "Dear Mr Ardenue, *They* think I'm going to be a schoolteacher, but I'm going to be a *poet*"[83].

The connection between Frame and her aspirations was her mother. Earlier in the day, while at Wyndham, Janet's mother Lottie became a published poet in *The Wyndham Farmer*, a local newspaper[84]. Soon her children would follow her example and were regularly published in the pages of 'Dot's Little Folk' in the *Otago Daily Times*, New Zealand's oldest surviving newspaper. From 1886 until its last edition in 1941, this correspondence column forged generations of young children and it became the largest feature column in the history of New Zealand journalism. Janet Frame wrote to Dot under the pen name of *Amber Butterfly* and sent poems and letters since she was seven. Writing was encouraged as it was considered an entertaining but also didactic activity for children, especially because they received personal responses from Dot

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[81]Frame, p. 31.
[82]Ibid, p. 32.
[83]Ibid, p. 132.
[84] First established by Ewen Grevelle Macpherson in 1895, it continued through his son until its last edition in 1955.

with advice and corrections, and because they could aspire to publication[85]. Letters had to be written in a specific form and children had to formally request membership.

> Dear Dot, Please may I join you happy band of Little Folk. [...] Love to all the Little Folk and you own Dear Self[86].

What is important to underline is the crucial role editors had in shaping and teaching New Zealand children what and how to write, paying attention especially to their surroundings and everyday life. Frame's youngest sister June, for example, wrote a letter about her kitten when she was eight, to which she received a reply asking to know more about it. Her other sister Isabel also wrote several letters, describing her relationship with her sisters and the influence of her mother's own poetic nature in the form of stories set in the familiar outdoors around their Oamaru home. Janet Frame also practised her style, metre and grammar, which Dot at times corrected and at times praised. Shortly before her fifteenth birthday she had one of her poems, 'The Blackbird' made Poem of the Week by Dot; however, she was annoyed to find that Dot had changed the word 'gay' blackbird to 'blythe' blackbird, as she thought the latter "too clumsy". The episode is incredibly similar to two others, from a few years prior. The first, when she disagreed with her older sister Myrtle about changing a word in a poem Janet had written for Mr Gussy (Reuben) Dimmock's Standard Four class: 'When the sun goes down and the night draws nigh/ and the evening shadows touch the sky' (...) Myrtle insisted the correct expression was 'tint' the sky and Janet "in deference to her obvious wisdom and wider knowledge I changed the word to 'tint' when I took the poem to school"[87]. She quickly added though: "But later, when I wrote it in my notebook, I reverted to 'touch the sky', having my own way". The second, when Frame encountered the word *Island* for the first time during a silent reading class at school. Again it was Myrtle who tried to fix Janet's pronunciation of the word.

> "It's I-Land," Myrtle corrected.

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85 Dot's identity changed over the years. The first author was Louise Alice Baker (from 1886 to 1893), then William Fenwick until 1905. In 1924 Eileen Louise Service took over the column until the late Thirties. *Dot's Little Folk* ceased publication due to paper shortages, the growing popularity of radio and the wider distribution of books.

86 Frame, p. 78.

87 Ibid, p. 66.

> “It’s not,” I said. ‘It’s Is-Land.”
>
> [...]
>
> In the end, reluctantly, I had to accept the ruling, although within myself I still thought of it as the Is-Land[88].

Benevolent criticism potentially meant reaction to traditional canons for young Janet, who showed an inner propensity to rebellion from an early age. At fifteen she started keeping a diary addressed to ‘Dear Mr Ardenue’, instead of the conventional ‘Dear Diary’, which she found absurd. She depicted Mr Ardenue as a “kindly old man” and the ruler of the Land of Ardenue, and she populated this imaginary place with recognizable objects and landscape features from her own surroundings (kowhai blossoms and poplar trees from her garden, the moon she watched rising over the sea, etc) in order to give “a name and thus a certainty to a new inner ‘My Place’”[89], where she could escape whenever she needed to. Frame’s rebellion was always within and in text. She did not feel comfortable with intrusion of opinions and external judgement, since it underlined qualities or traits she might not have seen as belonging to her. It also deepened the tension between her intense desire to belong and be accepted, and her inability to conform to social rules. She longed for approval but found it impossible to the extent of repulsion, to fit in and comply with social standards. She compared her sisters Myrtle and Isabel’s defiant and fearless character in contrast with hers, shy and compliant, abiding by the rules and desperately wishing she could escape judgement and scrutiny within her imagination.

Plausibly, she associated conformity to the traditional roles of wife and mother reserved to a woman at that time with her mother’s sacrificing hew own poetic ambitions and desire to become a published author. Lottie had had a collection of poems accepted for publication in England but could not afford the sum required to publish them. Her unacknowledged poetic achievements meant she had to seek another purpose in her life, so the endured a daily existence “immersed in domesticity”. Despite their dire economic circumstances, Lottie saw no contradiction between being poor and loving and producing poetry, so she passed her talent and love for poetry to her daughters. What should be worthy of attention is how Frame’s

[88] Frame, p. 33.

[89] Ibid, p. 117.

relationship with her mother changed over time. It is evident that Janet's literary aspirations were inspired and shaped by her mother and by the constant presence of songs, poems and stories in their home. Lottie Frame was depicted as having a "voice of mystery and wonder" able to endow even the most insignificant common object with magic. She passed on to her daughter the belief that "an angel in disguise" might hide in a most unlikely person, social outcasts or victims of misfortune like beggars, robbers or gypsies. An 'angel' may be also the link between the inner world of her imagination and the 'outside' world.

Frame's brother Bruddie's illness was perhaps the pivotal moment that changed everything in the life of the family. Absorbed in her role as housewife and carer for her son, desperately trying to find a cure, Lottie turned away from her other children, so much so that in the immediate aftermath of her brother's epilepsy diagnosis, Janet developed tics and twitches, and a form of infantile anxiety which led to a temporary social isolation at school. Janet and her sisters grew to fear their brother as his fits, combined with heavy doses of bromide prescribed by the doctor, made him violent and prone to rage attacks against his family. Janet relied on poetry and her world of imagination for shelter, just like her mother had done, but became frustrated at her parents' ignorance on school subjects. In particular, she started to resent her mother's attitude "of waiting hand and foot, martyrlike, upon her family"[90], and almost bullied her in order to anger her.

Lottie's meek nature and quiet acceptance may find its roots in her Christadelphian faith. Established in the mid-nineteenth century, this sect base their teachings uniquely on the Bible and are radically Millenialist, preaching the coming of Christ on earth. Christadelphians do not distinguish between laity and clergy, and have no centralised organisation. Each congregation acts independently from the others; their meetings take place mostly in private homes or rented halls and they differ from mainstream Christianity in matters like the immortality of the soul, the baptism of infants and trinitarianism[91]. Lottie Frame explained to her children that the dead remained in their grave until Judgement Day. Janet again managed to discern aspects of her life from her mother's, imbued with religious philosophy, in a clever way. When she discovered

[90] Frame, p. 129.

[91] The Christadelphian Faith, *n.d.*, retreived at <http://www.christadelphia.org/> [accessed 3 December 2021].

there would be no place for their deceased cats and dogs in the coming Kingdom, as she took her mother's words seriously, she refused to adopt her mother's faith.

Nature, leisure, childhood, animals and love, are favoured themes in Georgian poetry. The attachment to the landscape, the intense interest in romanticism and dreams, and the little concern with the troubles of the industrial world are common elements of this poetic current, which also reflect not only in Frame's early poetic endeavours (and indeed shaped by her mother's own), but also in New Zealand's society at large. It was mirrored in the school curriculum, in the children's pages and the *School Journal*.

The *School Journal* was established in 1907, its use in state schools made compulsory in 1914 and it served several purposes. To begin with, it responded to what some believed to be lack of conformity in school textbooks. In addition, as families moved across the country (and the Frames could certainly relate) they were compelled to buy several textbooks. Moreover, up until the early Thirties, it provided imperialist propaganda. "It was a well matured doctrine of not only the relation of the individual to the State, but of the member nations of the Empire towards the 'Mother Country'"[92]. In the autobiography, Frame recalled:

> Much of the School Journal dealt with celebrations of the British Empire, with articles and photographs of the royal family, chiefly the two little princesses, Elizabeth and Margaret Rose. There was a description, too, of their life-size dolls' house, with photographs[93].

The content of the *Journal* changed throughout the following decades, as it shared more international and pacifist material in the Forties and has turned into a predominantly literary publication since the Fifties. Most of the early editions stressed the moral concepts which founded the Empire; wars were hardly ever mentioned before 1914. New Zealand's distance from the rest of the world was often reminded to school children, as if to project the image of an untainted paradise. However the

[92] E. P. Malone, *The New Zealand School Journal and the Imperial Ideology*. New Zealand Journal of History, No. 7 (1973) 12-27 (p. 12).
[93] Frame, p. 34.

echoes of Nazism and race ideology, or the idea that some races were superior to others, reverberated in school teachings and books.

> I had little historical or political awareness. [...] From time to time our history teacher had talked of the concept of 'purity of race' which, she said, was desirable[94]. [...] One chapter in our history books, 'The Yellow Peril', told of Eastern races and their evil designs on the West[95].

Frame recalled how intelligence tests were regularly submitted to children; such practice apparently increased the gap between those qualified for the "perfect race" and those who were not. "The competitive spirit flourished throughout the school, and if you were near the 'top' as I, to my surprise, found myself, you lived in glory and privilege (...)[96]. Frame's father was only formally interested in his daughters' achievements, repeatedly asking Janet which school rival she had 'beaten' and relishing her winning school prizes and competitions. George Frame's ambitions for his skilled daughter reflected his ambivalent and often bullying attitude toward his epileptic only son Bruddie. The notion that Bruddie could "grow out of it if he wanted to" frustrated him, and in many ways triggered the transfer of his disappointed hopes to his daughters, although he still performed the traditional role of a mid-twentieth century father by wielding authority through force and physical punishments. Mr Frame's attention to his daughter also began to change Frame's relationship with her mother. Lottie dedicated her time and efforts taking care of her sick son, leaving her daughters to "survive on our own with the occasional help of Dad"; for Janet, her mother's absorption in Bruddie's needs translated into lack of emotional support which forced the future writer to find consolation and solace in her inner world.

> I wanted an imagination that would inhabit a world of fact, descend like a shining light upon the ordinary life of Eden Street, and not force me to exist in an 'elsewhere'. I wanted my life to be the 'other world'[97].

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[94]Frame, p. 110.
[95] Ibid, p. 111.
[96] Ibid, p. 94.
[97]Ibid, p. 101.

Keeping the education system within the orbit of British-centred values seemed to contrast the New Education of the early twentieth century, which focused instead with a child's life and surroundings. The effort to bring pupils close to the environment they lived in clashed with the need to reinforce ties with the 'mother-country', to some extent deepening the ambivalence of New Zealanders about their national identity. In many ways, the *School Journal* helped foster a sense of national personal identity, authenticating local histories and providing Frame and many others alike with a consciousness that their country could only be described by those who lived in it and experienced it "as 'the world', the centre, rather than the periphery"[98]. Nevertheless, throughout much of Frame's early and adolescent life, New Zealand remained absent from Western literature, not to mention from the nation's school books.

Despite the freedom derived from a life lived for the large part outside, at some point the familiar features of home and landscape became somewhat limited for Janet Frame. Her estrangement mirrored her country's distance to the rest of the world. In her autobiography, the recurrent theme of restrictiveness was shown regularly through clothing imagery. Clothes function as a reflection of status and are a symbol of conformity. At a time where anything different in someone's appearance caused consternation, and in some cases ostracism, clothes act as a second skin. A hand-me-down tartan skirt was "almost stiff with constant wear" and her grey flannel school tunic sewn by her mother, who was not interested in sewing or knitting, turned out "neither tunic nor dress". The school was very meticulous about pupils having the right garments, so the passage between junior and senior high was met with feelings of anxiety and dread at the new school uniform required. By the end of high school it had been patched several times and it was so tight it almost did not fit her anymore. When she stopped wearing it after graduation she felt "naked like a skinned rabbit", a feeling she would experience later in different circumstances. In order to enter training college she was required yet another set of clothing, as if they were a symbol of this new phase of life. When her request for a new corset and brassiere was turned down by her parents, she realised she was merely being influenced by other girls rather than by the need of fashionable or practical clothing. She was reminded she should not put restrictions on her body, despite the opposite result caused by her school tunic, and

[98] Blowers, p. 206.

that she should not seek to emulate her peers. Frame's own personal characteristics (her frizzy red hair, freckles, decaying teeth, and the disarming shyness which prevented her from standing out) were somewhat perceived as prejudicial elements that clash with her imagination that in turn might enable her to open the door to her most cherished desire – to be a poet. Her childhood and early adolescence were a time of "memories being a true personal history known by dates and specific years".[99]

However, when she was finally told (by Dot) she had imagination, she believed she needed to have some tragedy in her life in order to deserve such a compliment. Her sister's death by drowning and her brother's epilepsy did not fit in as requirements; her parents were alive. The compliments she received from her teachers were welcomed with ambivalence at their intrusiveness, leading Frame to escape to her inner 'place' where "the praising, blaming scrutiny of others" was not welcomed.

To the Is-Land and her childhood come to an end when she leaves for collage, not before she burned her diaries and her notebook of poems, leaving her childhood nicknames, Nini, Topsy, Fuzzy, and Jean behind her. She practised her signature following the example of her father, who used to practise his. "Janet Paterson Frame, I wrote, looping carefully".

[99] Frame, p. 131.

3.3 *An Angel at My Table*: Finding light after darkness

The second book of autobiography was published in 1984 and won both The Wattie Book of the Year Award in 1984 and the New Zealand Book Award for Non-fiction in 1985. It deals with events in Frame's life from her university entrance in 1943 to her departure from New Zealand in 1956. The central chapters of the book, from no. 8 to no. 15, chronicle the time she spent in and out of various mental hospitals, sometimes on voluntary admission, after being diagnosed with schizophrenia. Although the autobiography does not contain a detailed recount of the eight years prior to her official discharge in 1954, they were fictionally described in her second novel, *Faces in the Water*. During her time in hospital Frame managed to write short stories; twenty-four of them were published in 1951 under the title *The Lagoon* through Frame's friend and psychiatrist John Money (John Forrest in the autobiography), who had shown them to Denis Glover at Caxton Press. It also narrates of Frame's friendship with novelist Frank Sargeson, one of the most influential writers in New Zealand literary history. Frame lived and worked in Sargeson's army hut from April 1955 until the summer of 1956, and during that time wrote her first novel, *Owls Do Cry*. He was instrumental in her development and growing confidence as a writer, providing support and mentorship and ultimately securing her literary grant to allow her to travel to Europe.

The title of the second book of autobiography appears to suggest a happy ending or some sort of spiritual content in Frame's life. The angel could be interpreted in many ways: as a personal guardian watching over her, as her muse or poetic inspiration in romantic terms. It is the embodiment of her artistic transformation, and perhaps of the transformation she wished to see happen to the decadent world; it is the signal of her presence, living and writing. Janet Frame's mother believed that 'angels in disguise' inhabit the world of the living.

The first lines of the book briefly introduce and support the coming account by focusing on the mechanisms of history, narrative, memory and truth.

> The future accumulated like a weight upon the future. [...] The years following childhood become welded to their future, massed like stone, and often the time beneath cannot spring back into growth life new grass (...)[100].

Here the present act of writing melts with the time of narrated events. Frame writes in her present about the past, but from a perspective on the future (which is her actual present). It is possible that Frame found her childhood self easier to relate to and see as 'other' than her present self, translating into a less difficult time to examine and reflect upon. Narrative mechanisms are crucial when it comes to telling stories and Frame explained her relationship between writing autobiography and historicising in the third-last chapter of the previous book. She described earlier years as being "a true personal history known by dates and specific years" in comparison to her adolescent time where memories "do not arrange themselves to be observed and written about, they whirl"[101], making it harder to create a 'pure' autobiography. The order imposed on lived time is given afterwards by the writer/storyteller so as to construct a narrative that can be recognised, in a circular shape that can be broken several times.

The book began with her journey to Dunedin. The prospect of living in a big city intimidated Janet Frame, who transitioned from the safety of her family home and her childhood to her aunt and uncle's house and a new life as a student at training college. All the relatives that came to welcome her held the same belief about her, that she was the one who was going to be a teacher. Faced with the reality of being alone in an alien environment, with no friends and afraid of the city and college, Janet reassured herself in order to survive. Confronted with her imperfections, she thought of herself as inadequately prepared for college. Her new abode at her aunt's was located in an 'unsavoury' area, as the school principal, Mr Patridge, pointed out when she met him to be interviewed. The newness of the college building intimidated her for she had "never occupied such a clean place". By contrast, she described the embarrassment at having to throw her soiled sanitary towels (or pads) in the incinerator placed in the college lavatory; instead, she hid them at home or disposed of them "among the tombstones in the Southern Cemetery at the top of the street, which had become my

[100] Frame, p. 149.
[101] Ibid, p. 131.

place to 'be', my Dunedin equivalent of the 'hill' at Oamaru"[102]. Critics have interpreted this practise as a way to conceal or suppress her femininity, as if she were a 'sexless' human being. She commented on the other girls at college, "finding their 'man', fulfilled not only their own expectations but those of their family and friends", while her only romance was with poetry and literature[103]. At the same time it is interesting to see how she chose as her 'place' in this phase of her life somewhere amongst the dead, or rather at the edge between the living and the dead. The expert Frame reader may contend that it might be an indicator of her forthcoming experience as a psychiatric patient; but there is perhaps a broader, more complex explanation. By describing the cemetery as her place to 'be', Frame could suggest her need to seek for somewhere quiet, where she could find solitude and contemplation. It might also be a metaphor alluding to a disintegrating body.

The body is the site for the self, a container and carrier; it is a transient dwelling-place considered a not so impassable barrier. The tangibility of the body juxtaposed with the immateriality of identity is of great relevance in Frame's writing. Frame utilised the body as a metaphor for the destructive decay of a culture unable to regenerate itself[104] as opposed to her growing into womanhood. She pointed especially at New Zealand's colonial experience and its conservative society. The extraction of her teeth in the last stages of decay was a normalising attempt as "the general opinion in New Zealand then was that natural teeth were best removed anyway"[105]. In the same way, early colonisers' appropriation of the land could be considered as a form of abuse toward the natives, resulting in the conflict, both physical and, more enduring, ideological, between imperialist forces and the uncontrollable other. Even her family might be viewed as a microcosm of New Zealand society, obedient to conventions, abhorrent of illness and difference. Frame's identification with New Zealand's landscape represented her unique way of escaping the traditional moral and cultural codes set to define and enclose identity. The body is also a site of conflict, for it often eludes institutional control. Her aunt and uncle died of cancer, her brother was unable to

[102] Frame, p. 156.
[103] Ibid, p. 157.
[104] Marc Delrez, *Forbidding Bodies: Avatars of the Physical in the Work of Janet Frame*. World Literature Written in English, Vol. 38, No. 2 (2000) 70-79 (p. 70).
[105] Frame, p. 202.

control his epilepsy and it was potentially a congenital heart defect that killed her sisters Myrtle and Isabel, ten years apart. Sickness was a taboo, which is why those who did not conform or who did not live up to preset standards were hidden away, ignored, as if they did not exist.

Janet Frame experienced the pressures put on her gender; firstly in the form of restrictive clothes 'containing' her developing body; secondly, when she symbolically tried to bury her femininity with her sanitary towels at the cemetery. She experienced disillusionment at the world around her. She grew detached from her family as she became more immersed in her student life, perfectly capable of recognising the invisible helplessness of her family against the all too evident cruelty of the world.

> I could see, too, an illumination produced by that same fire, the shadows emerging as recognised shapes of language full of meaning for me: the language of the love and loss and joy and torture of having a place fast within a family when all my awakening longing was directed towards being uprooted, quickly, without leaving behind a cluster of nerve endings, broken threads in danger of being renewed[106].

She appeared to have almost receded from her own self, neither an inclusive 'we' nor an 'I', but rather "a shadowy 'I', almost a nothingness, like a no-woman's land"[107].

The leading up to the moment that triggered 'the walkout' and its immediate aftermath occupy four chapters in the autobiography titled '1945', to stress the importance of that year not just in Frame's life but in the history of New Zealand and the world in general. Early in August the war came effectively to an end with the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki[108]. Although rarely mentioned in the autobiography, the war made a profound impact on Janet Frame, "as part of the development of my body and mind, almost an ingredient of my blood, leaving its trace everywhere (...)"[109]. That same month Frame turned twenty-one. Although she enjoyed her role as teacher and loved being around children, whom she

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[106] Frame, p. 186.
[107] Ibid, p. 161.
[108] New Zealand's Second Expeditionary Force contributed to the war in Europe, Northern Africa and the Pacific; under pressure from the Labour Government, in 1940 the Māori Battalion was raised as part of the 2nd New Zealand Division, an infantry division, and it became the most decorated New Zealand battalion during the war, gaining a formidable reputation among both German and Allied fighting forces.
[109] Frame, p. 187.

felt needed encouragement to develop their individual skills, her extreme shyness prevented her from mingling with other teachers. Dreading the prospect of the inspection (the assessment of her 'performance' as teacher) denoted her inability, or her refusal, to adapt to pre-fixed norms imposed by society. Inspections clearly imply the discovery of something 'wrong', a defect that will be exposed. As a child she was selected among the poor and dirty children by the lady doctor at school to be examined, and was found to have marks of dirt behind her knees and on her inner arms; the headmaster's deemed her living area 'unsavoury' without explaining the reason for his prejudice. Her brother Bruddie would be dismissed from his workplace as soon as his epilepsy was revealed, "they found out about me".

Faced with the unannounced inspection, unable to cope with judgemental, narrow-minded society, and in many ways confined in a role she did not really want, Janet Frame walked out of the class; that is to say, she declined conformity and protested against the regime of judgment and intrusion of others she was living in. The decision might seem an impromptu one, but perhaps was the culmination of years of psychological deterioration and the *spannung*[110] of a pre-existing pattern. Three weeks of "pure freedom" followed her departure, but as her leave came to an end she realised she had no means of escape; her only option was suicide. Her isolation and desperation were immense, her rage pointed at a society where wearing masks was normal, "until the wearer could not breathe and was eventually suffocated"[111]. As a consequence of her (vain) suicide attempt she was taken to hospital "just for a few days' 'rest'", but quickly realised to have been committed to the psychiatric ward. Once more she was exposed to the deceiving nature of words. Words never cease to deceive.

Suicide cannot be explained by any type of sociological, psychological or biological phenomena that may exclude others. Rather, they could all combine to clarify the mechanisms of mental illness. Anoop Gupta contends the psychological approach to suicide places its cause as direct consequence to a peculiar mental state, and that "suicide is a remedy to intolerable situation-existence or is the result of 'no

[110] German term used in narratology to indicate the highest stage of tension in storytelling.
[111] Frame, p. 188.

hope'"[112]. Suicide, as the ultimate assertion of the soul's independent reality, is largely triggered by despair.

The term 'schizophrenia' is of Greek origin and it means 'divided' or 'split' mind. Its primary characteristics are disturbance in relationships with the environment and other people, and spontaneous breaks in reality relationships; fragmentation of speech and thought; identity and personality disintegration. Finally, symptoms manifest then and now and are provoked by a specific episode. Symptoms can vary according to individual cases nonetheless. Biologically, schizophrenia might be described as:

> An extreme human response to environmental stress relating to other human beings, and occurs in persons with a special vulnerability, which is either genetic or acquired during childhood[113].

Schizophrenic patients often distrust psychiatrists and, generally speaking, the notion of a chronic disease is tantamount to social stigma for them. All these things considered, it is not the purpose of this thesis to determine whether Janet Frame was effectively suffering from schizophrenia or not. More likely, based on the fact that her diagnosis was later overturned, she might have experienced a severe nervous breakdown. What should be worth paying attention to is how her mental illness history informed her subsequent life, above all her writing career. As indicated by the frequent misconceptions and theories about her mental state that have surfaced over the years, it can be said that doubts were never fully eradicated; yet it was necessary for Frame to set the record straight and having her say on her own story, an attempt which resulted in the autobiography.

As her brief hospital stay came to an end, Frame refused the opportunity to go home to "the everlasting toil of my parents", incapable of finding her place in the world of poetry so as to escape to her inner world. The deception was made clear in the official note about her mother's visit, who had travelled to Dunedin in order to take her home. It read: 'Refused to leave hospital', whereas it should have more accurately been written: 'Refused to go home'. Ultimately she was admitted to Seacliff Asylum, the

[112] Anoop Gupta, *Suicide and Schizophrenia* in Kierkegaard's Romantic Legacy: Two Theories of the Self, University of Ottawa Press (Ottawa: 2005) 91-98 (p. 93).
[113] Barry L. Jacobs, quoted in Gupta, p. 95.

famed madhouse ‘where the loonies went’. In her typical way, leaving the reader wavering between fact and fiction, she mentioned the matron’s name as being ‘Miss Churchill’. Whether this was the lady’s real name or not, the reference to the British Prime Minister who led Britain and Europe through World War II is likely.

At Seacliff, the social division both inside and outside became blatantly clear. Patients have,

> (...) no name, only a nickname, no past, no future, only an imprisoned Now, an eternal Is-Land without its accompanying horizons, foot or handhold, and even without its ever changing sky[114].

Society separated ordinary people on the street from the loonies, the ‘secret’ people whom were to be feared and spoken of with derision. The community of the insane, ‘them’ or ‘they’, was an homogenous mass, an indistinct group of individuals with no personal identity. Frame became part of this group again. She chose to see herself through the eyes of others. Doctors and health inspectors decided who could be declared ‘sane’ and who could not, who would leave hospital or change ward, and who would not. An invisible wall was built to separate ‘us’ and ‘them’; the wall, normally a difficult obstacle to cross, could nonetheless be breached by the inappropriate use of the wrong word, not because of behavioural traits but rather how institutions chose to read those characteristics. Consequently, the border between sanity and insanity is very slippery and fluid.

Doctors concluded she had schizophrenia. The discovery was both of her illness and of a word she had never heard before. Searching her psychology book for a definition, it read “no cure”. Notwithstanding the hopelessness she may have felt, Frame was resolved to make good use of her illness.

> I built up a formidable schizophrenic repertoire: I’d lie on the couch, while the young handsome John Forrest, glistening with newly applied Freud, took note of what I said and did, (...). Usually I incorporated in the fantasy details of my reading on schizophrenia[115].

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[114]Frame, p. 194.

[115] Ibid, p. 201.

What is remarkable is that Frame, who always rejected labels and being called things by others, suddenly felt comfortable with this new condition. Moreover, she tricked John Forrest (whose real name was John Money) into believing she was indeed a schizophrenic. However, there is no evidence that her performance was an indication of a mistaken diagnosis, as one of the symptoms of schizophrenia is precisely the performance of the symptoms. What is more, she was playing a dangerous game, becoming the conforming, 'textbook' schizophrenic making a fool of her doctor. A game that spared her not from receiving over two hundred electroconvulsive treatments, insulin shock therapy and may culminate in a lobotomy as the final stage of annihilation. Performing madness could be viewed as a way, albeit a risky one, to belong again to a category or group, to desperately seeking an identity. Inside the hospital though, her identity was erased just like her natural teeth. In the midst of all her pain, she sought consolation in the therapy sessions with John Forrest (Money) and learned something about herself.

> I had gentleness and everlasting patience with the sick and the old. I enjoyed waiting on people (...) I had no impatience, irritation, anger, to subdue: I seemed to be a 'born' servant. [...] I could erase myself completely and live only through the feelings of others[116].

Although the greater part of her eight years spent in mental institutions is missing from the autobiography (described factually in her book *Faces in the Water*), the present commentary represented a reaction to New Zealand's mental illness approach and treatment at that time. Vulnerable individuals like Frame escaped the grip of a system that meant to control and restrain whilst challenging the cultural and social rules they were expected to comply with.

Words and nature are the most powerful link that connected Frame not only to reality, but the world of imagination as well. Words possess a distinct magic element; their use in everyday life can be contradictory. Upon the death of her younger sister Isabel, she felt betrayed by the conventional and banal use of words John Forrest made to extend his condolences.

[116]Frame, p. 200.

> What reached me was not a message of sympathy but language which I, harshly critical and making no allowance for the difficulty of writing such letters, condemned as the worst example of prose[117].

Bereft and isolated after the death of yet another beloved sister and about to lose her youngest, June, to marriage, her loneliness was profound; her schizophrenia became her escape route, like a piece of clothing she could wear whenever necessary. Her existence in the real world was in apparent contradiction with her desire to let literature seep in every aspect of her life. The process of the creation of her identity as a writer emerges in the autobiography as she persists in her goal to bring the 'other' world of imagination into her real life, without renouncing any of the two. The transformative quality of literature surfaced together with the discovery of the overcoming power of writing over limitations and restrictions. She survived by the redeeming magic of words; on the other hand she managed to maintain her inner world intact, not to mention her ability to face grief and death unambiguously. The shining light of imagination, the angel watching over her, was always present, keeping her safely anchored to the world she did not wish to abandon. After all, as she survived a suicide attempt, she declared she would never choose to kill herself again. Although she was able to overcome grief and loss, the destructiveness of those feeling cannot be entirely removed. Past and present are inseparable, and Frame distanced her author/narrator 'self' to the subject of the text 'self'. The self-consciousness of Frame's autobiography becomes a part of her experiential account.

In 1951, after winning the *Hubert Church Award* for *The Lagoon and Other Stories*, she was removed from the list of patients scheduled for a lobotomy by the doctor in charge of her case, Dr. Palmer, who read about the prize in a newspaper. "My writing saved me". Gradually she reintroduced to normal life, given menial tasks at the hospital and ultimately sent home. In order to produce physical proof of her return to real life, she had a picture taken at a studio, which is included in the complete version of the autobiography. "Well, I was alive again". She began a sort of pilgrimage in search of a safe place to belong and of a way to rebuild her relationship with other people. Such a search was rendered essential in part due to an already-mentioned

[117] Frame, p. 210.

ambivalent sense of identity that characterised New Zealanders and connected to the nation's insecurities as a British 'dominion' with a significant native presence and culture.

> Frame's pervading sense of exclusion from all the subject positions that might ordinarily be available to her, leads her on a search for a 'home' or a place to belong that will both centre her experience and acknowledge her difference[118].

After her discharge from hospital, novelist Frank Sargeson invited Janet to stay at his home in April 1955, in an army hut in his property near Auckland, and provided encouragement and support during the sixteen months she was there writing her first novel, *Owls Do Cry*. Despite the fact that several aspects of that time were not included in the autobiography Sargeson, a homosexual, poor and emotionally vulnerable, was passionately concerned for the future of New Zealand literature and took great time and effort to nurture and look after Janet, sensing her need for protection and guidance, not to mention that he recognised her talent and wanted to see it developed. Frame acknowledged and appreciated the support Sargeson offered her, but was determined not to be influenced by his advice. When he suggested substituting the word 'rose' with 'get up', she resolved never to show him any of her work again. Her refusal asserted her development into a mature and independent artist. Sargeson was instrumental in arranging the State Literary Fund's sum of three hundred pounds to assist in the publication of Frame's novel[119]. With time Frame became increasingly aware of Sargeson's tendency to denigrate women in general; from his correspondence with author and literary editor William Plomer it is clear that Sargeson feared "the schizophrenic girl living in my hut" and was terrified she might kill him. He appreciated her "brilliant verbal associations" and continued to encourage her even after she travelled to Europe, but with time grew more and more detached compared to the initial admiration, to the point of displaying a certain degree of jealousy as he perceived that his 'pupil' had surpassed the master.

[118] Blowers, p. 130.

[119] Peter Alexander, '*The Girl in My Garden': Frank Sargeson, William Plomer and Janet Frame*. Journal of New Zealand Literature, No. 25 (2007) 22-45 (p. 33).

It was at this time that she received news of her mother's death due to a stroke. The news was delivered cautiously by her sister because her family did not wish to upset her. Angered at still being treated as the 'frail and mad' family member, resentful at Sargeson's lack of compassion and cold reaction to the news, Frame marked this event as a step further away from her relatives. Although her mother's death did not resound as much as her father's (both in the book and in the film, for different reasons) it may have been a contributing factor in her decision to leave New Zealand.
Acutely aware of living in a country that still associated difference with abnormality, Frame resolved to leave on a European trip to broaden her experience. Again, Frank Sargeson managed to procure funds for her travels. In preparation for her trip she received every kind of advice, from the places she had to visit to what she was supposed to wear; from the people she should meet to the correct pronunciation of city names. She was helped by other artists, in particular her close friends Jess Whitworth (former wife of writer and editor Oliver Duff and a published author in her own right) and Paula Lincoln, who gifted Frame a pair of slacks.

> I could not tell her [Miss Lincoln] that I disliked wearing slacks, that I thought these were ugly with baggy legs, and the grey flannel reminded me too much of our old junior high uniform"[120].

She seemed to have receded into an old, familiar pattern, surrounded by people who, well-meaning by all means, planned her future.

> I was again living the submissive, passive role which in hospital had been forced upon me but which my shy nature had accommodated with ease (...)[121].

In many ways her only choice was to escape, in order to affirm her true self. The second volume of autobiography ends like the first, with a journey to the Future.

[120] Frame, p. 276.
[121] Ibid, p. 282.

3.4 *The Envoy from Mirror City* and the affirmation of the Self

The third and last volume of autobiography was first published in Britain by The Women's Press in 1984, the same year as *An Angel at My Table*, and then worldwide in 1985 by George Brazillier. Like the previous volume, it won The Wattie Book of the Year Award in 1985 and the New Zealand Book Awards for Best Non-fiction in 1986.

It recounts the beginning of Frame's writing career, from her voyage to the United Kingdom in the winter of 1956 to her return to New Zealand in 1963. The book is dedicated to her friends and family, in particular to Dr. Robert Cawley and his colleagues at the Maudsley Hospital, who reversed Frame's schizophrenia diagnosis. The book retraces her journey through Europe and the process that transformed her into an acclaimed writer. Still profoundly traumatised by her experience in mental hospitals, Frame was just beginning to see life beyond the limitations she had known until she began her journey to the old continent. After a three-month permanence in London she left for Ibiza, where she lived until mid-spring of 1957. The crash of her brief romance with an American poet prompted her to leave the Spanish island and move to Andorra, where she stayed until May 1957 before returning to London. While abroad she legally changed her name to Nene Janet Paterson Clutha by deed poll, although she continued to be known professionally by her birth name.

One of the recurring themes in Janet Frame's autobiography is travelling. Early in her life it was associated with her father's railway job; for example, the annual free railway ticket was cautiously used to visit fairs or exhibitions. As she matured into womanhood and, of course, gained more confidence as a writer, it turned more into a 'spiritual' concept; in a postcolonial sense the passengers journey to find identity and anxiously await disembarkment in any land that will greet them. It was the beginning of the *bildungsroman* of her life to reclaim a lost identity that will allow her to eventually resettle in a society that had marginalised her. Her departure from New Zealand began a reclaiming quest of the missing self and the rejection of traditional mid-Nineteenth century values aimed at restricting a woman's social role to that of wife and mother immersed in domesticity (the role she mostly associated with her mother).

The journey mostly associated with this part of the autobiography is the reclaiming of her identity. Her disarming shyness contributed to her incapacity to react at other people's attempts to take control of her life, which led to a progressive relinquishing of authoritative power, reacquired only through the redeeming light of literature and writing. Abroad, especially in London and Ibiza, she was accepted for being different, out of the ordinary. She was travelling on a literary grant; she was not a tourist, had no foreign friends and was a no-nonsense type of person (the 'no trouble at all' girl of her early adulthood). *The Envoy from Mirror City* began a journey of self-discovery and demonstrated how Frame, in order to be able to reach the realm of Imagination, visiting Mirror City, had to commit to a celibate life dedicated to writing; this necessary sacrifice seemed to find its most explicative meaning when her romance with the American Bernard turned to disillusionment as it clashed with her pursuit of a poetic existence in the real world. Still affected by the traumatic experience in mental hospital, Frame could not escape the shadow of schizophrenia. By voluntarily admitting herself at the Maudsley Hospital, had she had done several times in New Zealand, she was hoping to find help that would prevent her from falling back into the pattern of anxiety and depression that led her into hospital in the first place. In many ways, the annulment of the initial diagnosis gave Janet Frame the key she needed to accept her past and unlock her future. The autobiography ends with a journey back to New Zealand, where she could no longer be ostracised; on the contrary, Janet Frame became the best known New Zealand novelist of the 20th century.

Her voyage to England began with a first stop at Willemstad, in the Caribbean, where a hint of colonial prejudice surfaced upon setting eyes on the local people.

> (...) how poor they seemed to be, and sickly, unlike the robust New Zealanders! Overseas was poor, not as civilised as New Zealand. (...) At school I had been taught that Māori and *Pakeha* had equal opportunities and I believed what I had been taught[122].

Upon arriving in London, the reader of the autobiography is suddenly catapulted in the narrative present, describing her arrival and the news that the letter she sent to reserve a room had not reached the hostel. The emphasis placed on her territorial provenance ("I'm all the way from New Zealand")[123] may indicate a re-appropriation attempt of her lost country, embodied by the luggage she clung to, in order to seek the same kind of

[122] Frame, p. 296.
[123] Ibid, p. 300, italics in the original.

refuge that she had found in her schizophrenia. The narrative present underlines not only the contrast between reality and fiction, but her deep distress at being effectively homeless, with no friends and disillusioned at finding London a “Dickensian Hell of inhospitality (everything is bleak, dark and dreary)”[124]. Eventually she found accommodation first at the Young Women Christian Association hostel and later at Clapham Common. The YWCA hostel reminded her of Seacliff, with sheets of rules pinned inside bedrooms and bathrooms clearly intended to give orders and control guests at the same time. Language is used again to establish authority and remind the reader of what Frame experienced at the hospital with “the constant jingling of keys”, the noise and lavatories in a row with floors set in black and white tiles. During her brief stay at Clapham Common she befriended the Irish hostel keeper and bus driver, Patrick Reilly. While this was not the man’s real name, he was portrayed as being obsessed with Peek Freans biscuits and consumed by his loneliness, a stereotypical immigrant with cultural and racial prejudice towards other immigrants. For example, he warned Janet about “the blacks in London, stealing all the work”. Bigotry pervaded him despite the harsh discrimination Irish people themselves suffered in post-war Britain.

The meeting and brief relationship with a Nigerian law student, Nigel (an invented name for the real Clement Nweeze) led her to question her unstable sense of identity. In opposition to her overwhelming inferiority complex as a colonial, Nigel considered her status as a white New Zealander descendant of British settlers a privilege. In addition to her growing feeling of displacement, a paradoxical situation was reached when a collection of poems, which she wrote pretending to be from the West Indies, was rejected by the *London Magazine* because it did not meet Standard English requirements. Having yet again experienced disappointment, she realised that her literary and physical escape from a country thought ‘more English than the English’ had left her “without any real identity”[125]. The *pakeha* sense of unhomeliness thus found its way through Frame’s unstable identity perception.

Behind the façade, Britain was a declining empire at the time Frame was walking through its capital’s streets. The increasing tensions of the Cold War between the US and the Soviet Union, the Suez Crisis, and a general desire for transformation weakened the

[124] Claire Bazin, *Janet Frame*. Northcote House Publishers Ltd (Tavistock, Devon), 2011 (p. 103).

[125] Frame, p. 308.

country's position as a leading power. London was the centre of a global empire, yet still scarred by the *Blitz* and air raids, and trapped in a conservative class system. Places names carried a fascination and curiosity for their origin in a way New Zealand's names do not, as they echoed with the primitive voice of ancient meanings. For example, she was surprised to discover that Piccadilly Circus was not actually a circus[126].

She stayed in London for three months, as her final destination was the island of Ibiza, which was considered more affordable to live in. Her arrival at Perpignan to catch the ferry to Ibiza coincided with the loss of her luggage, which was left in Paris. The initial panic was soon replaced by a sense of relief, for it signified the loss of colonial prejudice and a reacquired freedom of burdens from a previous life. In Ibiza, while explaining the lost luggage story, she tried to give the impression that "New Zealanders were unlike the rest of the world in being clean, pure, unprejudiced, and well disposed towards all members of the human race"[127]. Interestingly enough, Janet made no attempt to mingle with the English-speaking colony in the island and spoke only Spanish and French, becoming *Janetta* to the apartment keepers. It is as if she lost her identity one more time. Her linguistic improvements were not rejected like her – English – poem collection, as the locals appreciated her efforts and were keen to help and teach her. An out-of-the-ordinary type of person, she was accepted by her lady hosts: she was homeless, deprived of her temporarily lost typewriter; she was not a tourist, nor was she American or with foreign friends.

Everyday life on the island led to the discovery of a different kind of poverty than the one she experienced in New Zealand. She was met with awe by her hosts when she bought canned meat and butter, which she shared with them, despite the shortage of money she constantly faced. New Zealand was a rich nation where people lived in houses powered by electricity and gardens full of fruit trees and vegetables, supported by a legislative system attentive to people's needs. Frame found shelter in the magic power of words again: inspired by her lady hosts, whom she saw walking a long distance to gather fallen olives on the dusty roads, she invented a proverb in order to perhaps relieve the misery she was surrounded by. Language did not always serve as a welcoming escape. When an American painter came to stay at her place (Number Six Calle Ignacio Riquer), she was

[126] It was named after a house belonging to Roger Baker, a wealthy tailor famous for selling piccadils, 17th century frilled collars.

[127] Frame, p. 328.

irritated by the intrusion of the English language he brought with him, not to mention the fact he was not welcomed by the Spanish hosts, whom Frame considered her family. The appropriation process of the local language was in many respects similar to the one adopted by early settlers of Māori symbols to replicate authenticity.

It is possible to say that she felt safest at this point in her life. While on the island, she reconsidered her place in the world; the island is at the same time shelter and banishment, solitude and isolation. She was there as writer, immigrant and traveller, and reader. The island represents the joint of different time dimensions, past, present and future; the self was whole again. Symbolising the moment when it was restored, when she realised time was a full circle, was a visit to a pine-bordered beach, surrounded by coloured light. The invisible link originating at conception passes through childhood to reach death and start once more with a new life.

> I made this scene a replacement, a telescoping with the trained economy of memory, so from then and in the future the memory of this scene contains the collective feeling of those past (...) I felt the link, the fullness of being loved and loving and losing and wondering (...)[128].

Ibiza and New Zealand are opposed in that the former is a stable, timeless, literary *locus amoenus*, while the latter is constantly under threat of volcanoes and earthquakes. Ibiza is small and easily conquerable; New Zealand and her landscape are wild, untameable, even dangerous. An island has a double image. Safe, out of harm's way, but it could hide uncanny features kept from the view of others. Along the same line, Frame looked at her own self and her identity through the eyes of others. The self, like truth, lies between the perception individuals have of themselves and the image projected on other, creating a space for the creation of 'selves' as if through a game of mirrors. The real self never reflect the image in the mirror perfectly.

The arrival of 'Los Americanos' marked a change in the island's dynamics. She was initiated to sexual practises by the history professor turned poet Bernard. Because of him, she stopped writing. At Sargeson's hut she led a "priestly life devoted to writing". She had tried to repress her femininity in various ways but after the radical change caused by her years in hospital, evading by the means of literature, she felt obliged to dedicate her life

[128] Frame, p. 338.

to writing, effectively marrying her career and gaining the life she wanted. For a brief moment she may have believed it was possible for her to have romance and a family, but when she approached the subject of having children to her lover, his response was frightening. “That would be terrible”[129]. Change happened as fast as a finger snap. Janet’s feelings about Bernard altered almost instantly, which led to the resuming of her writing. Bernard was given but a figurative importance in the autobiography, for he was not an ideal lover but an idle character in a magazine-like romance. After her lover was gone, the island turned an unbearable environment, dark, decaying, shrivelling. The touch of gold became the touch of ash, distasteful feelings return to be associated with the real world. “I was tasting the sour and bitter of absence and lost pleasure, bound to a magnet of reality”[130]. She was resolved to leave so as to preserve Ibiza as a beautiful memory and at the suggestion of Edwin, another American, she travelled to Andorra. There, she found accommodation with a poverty-stricken family. While trying to fix a light bulb, she felt sick and fell from the chair, suffering a miscarriage. The episode, however tragic, acted as a second epiphany for Frame: in many ways she was able to retreat to her own ‘self’ after having discovered men’s ability to engage in sexual relationships devoid of romantic feelings. The disappointed hopes of motherhood were transformed by a sense of freedom to finally be able to reach Mirror City.

> Lured always by that world and by the fascination of trying to describe it in words that may not even exist, I realised increasingly the extent of its treasure, discovered during the visits to the Mirror City where the great artists had lived and returned to describe what they had seen and felt and known[131].

The loss of her baby went almost unnoticed, barely a few days’ sickness, as if nothing had happened, as if she were expecting it. She readily accepted the courtship of the Italian gentlemen also living with the family, but she refused his marriage proposal with the excuse of having things to see to in London. However, her place was elsewhere. Her early twenties had been eradicated by her stay in mental hospitals and presumably by the hundreds of electroshock treatments she received, delaying her broadening experience by nearly a decade. For years she had performed the role of the submissive, quiet, ‘no-

[129] Frame, p. 352.
[130] Ibid, p. 353.
[131] Ibid, p. 357.

trouble-at-all' girl, whose life had been largely decided by others, an alienating 'third-person'. The prospect of a domestic life was incompatible with her desire to write and travel undisturbed to and from the world of imagination; her longing to belong allowed others to take control of her life. Her 'journey to' was to be a 'journey back to', for she refused to become 'one of the characters that I had seen so romantically as living figures from the paintings of the great artists"[132].

Back in London she arranged an appointment at the Maudsley Hospital in a final attempt to find out the truth about her condition. The shadow of schizophrenia was always present, like a cloud on a sunny day. She was impressed to find that, while at Seacliff nurses were forbidden to talk to patients, at the Maudsley it was their duty to become better acquainted with them; patients were regularly interviewed by doctors, several times a week, and were also given tests to aid with the diagnosis. The condemnation of New Zealand's mental treatment system and approach in the 1940s and 1950s was counterbalanced by Frame's trust in English psychiatrists; she was able to establish an appropriate patient-doctor relationship in part due to the doctor's young age. She need not hide details of her medical history. Senior doctors may be seen as the embodiment of patriarchal authority of the coloniser over the colonised subject; the way she related to the English doctors might likely reflect the historical Britain – New Zealand relations. The young doctor she was assigned to and the hospital director, Sir Aubrey Lewis, confirm she never suffered from schizophrenia. Stripped of "a garment I had worn for twelve of thirteen years", in a similar way as her old school uniform, she felt lost and ashamed. Even though she attested to the knowledge that she was never schizophrenic, she used her illness as a sort of cloak to be worn when she most needed it, to shelter her from cruel reality. It used to be the answer to all her doubts about herself. As a 'mad' person she was not expected to conform to standard model of normality, therefore her schizophrenia was her escape from a bigoted society where her unique mode of expression, her originality and independence of mind were used to isolate and discriminate her. The parallel between New Zealand and England is central in this part of the autobiography, for it underlines how far and how long Frame had go to be declared sane; that could in many respects signify the struggle New Zealand had to endure to find its own identity separate from the 'motherland'. It is at this time that Frame changed her

[132]Frame, p. 361.

name to Janet Clutha, a tribute to the river that runs through Central Otago. She had visited the region before her hospital days and felt a strong connection to it ever since. She identified with the river, claiming a natural, primeval bond with the land; the river became the signifier of her inner turmoils through "its stages of fury and, reputedly now and then, peace"; it was also a figurative representation of her poetics, her being at the same time of the real world and of the world of imagination, while remaining a profoundly local writer from a nation eager to forge its own cultural identity:

> I now came face to face with the Clutha, a being that persisted through all the pressures of rock, stone, earth and sun, living as an element of freedom but not isolated, linked to heaven and light by the slender rainbow that shimmered above its waters[133].

After she was assigned to Dr Cawley at the Maudsley, Janet grew more confident and under Cawley's guidance understood the effects of her long stay in hospital in New Zealand. He encouraged Janet to write so that she could confront and come to terms with her immediate past, but it is also probable that her early production was considered a sort of apprenticeship, or explorative writing[134]. Interestingly enough, his suggestion was that she should live alone, unbound to social demands, dedicated to writing. They both agreed she would be able to live in the 'real' world as long as this did not deprive her of 'the other' world, existing in a sort of in-between, a world of her own. She could travel to and from Mirror City, "the raw material of life worked on by the imagination"[135], by the Envoy, a messenger between fiction and fact. Mirror City, or the manifestation of [B]eing as a point of view, is what one seeks in the quest for subjective arrival, and what one remembers one originally had[136]. Mirror City is the imagination's true country that allowed Frame to return not with a mirrorful of her, but rather with a reflection of reality. Autobiography is a mirror, aimed at representing the author's life, a lesser work of art compared to fiction.

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[133] Frame, p. 166.

[134] St. Matthew P. Pierre, *Introduction: Writing the Body in the Body of Writing of Janet Frame* in *Janet Frame*, edited by St Matthew P. Pierre, Farleigh Dickinson University Press (Madison, New Jersey: 2011) 1-12 (p. 6).

[135] Blowers, p. 116.

[136] Isabel Mitchel, *The Maternal as Site of Possibility in Janet Frame's 'Fictional Exploration*. Journal of New Zealand Literature, No. 27 (2009) 90-110 (p. 105).

Unlike the previous volumes of autobiography, the most detailed relations she formed were with men: the doctors at the Maudsley and Patrick Reilly in London, Bernard in Ibiza, 'El Vinci' Mario, the Italian gentlemen in Andorra; even her father, whose death prompted her to return to New Zealand. In London she had many acquaintances but no actual friends, so much so that she had to ask a librarian to ''see her off' at the wharf, for she could not stand a solitary departure. The decision to go back home, as she put it, was literary. Despite the opinion of Dr. Cawley, who feared her mistaken diagnosis might be questioned and potentially overturned again, the "prospect of exploring a new country with not so many layers of mapmakers, particularly the country where one first saw daylight and the sun and the dark, was too tantalising to resist"[137]. All the while Frame felt protected by literature, by her writing. By the early Sixties she was a published author with an overseas reputation, having published two short stories and four novels. Free of her schizophrenia, Frame was determined to live as she wished, not bound to the decisions of others. Returning home after her time abroad actually allowed her to confront her belonging in New Zealand, not least to understand that her image of Britain was largely dominated by her distorted, intrinsic colonial memory. The chance of a new beginning in her native land was determined by literary reasons.

> Living in New Zealand, would be for me, like living in an age of mythmakers; with a freedom of imagination among all the artists.
> Wherever one lives, in the growing necessity for a 'world view', living or not living in one's native land may give equal advantages and insights[138].

Frame's return was marked by the contrast between Now and Then. In Auckland, the roadsides once lined with trees, the tall kauris surrounded by bush and country roads where cows and horses had once grazed had been replaced by rows of houses and acres of concrete; the swamp filled with mangroves at the end of Esmonde Road, where Sargeson's house and army hut she once lived in were, extended and refilled with 'reclaimed land'. Her arrival was also welcomed by journalists and photographers and by a general curiosity as to why she had returned home... did she not have an *overseas* reputation? The return to Willowglen and the state Janet found the house were

[137] Frame, p. 414.
[138] Ibid, p. 415-416.

meticulously described, the position of every object carefully noted down. Just as she had done before leaving to go to college, she burned letters, documents and receipts not worth keeping. A sense of sadness permeates this passage of the last book of autobiography, as Janet cleaned the house of dust, junk and old memories. Past and future blended in the form of keepsakes Janet selected from the few remaining objects to give to her family, remnants of the 'good old days' when her parents, Myrtle and Isabel were still living. In the last chapter Frame expressed concern that the treasures she collected and felt so precious against the decaying condition of the house were now been treated with disrespect by her young niece and nephews. Yet she admitted to have stolen treasures while travelling to Mirror City, and having rearranged them to new settings.

Writing from and of a nation with few memories of its most historical past, Frame was able to overcome colonial clichés derived from Eurocentric views. Writing seems less a metaphor than madness or childhood, which is why there is a gap between the time of events and the time events are narrated. In the last page, *The Envoy* would not allow Janet to write any more those twenty-five years, saying: "You recent past surrounds you, has not yet been transformed"[139]. Her most recent past is still very much present to be reported, and as she offered her readers "a selection of views" of her life, it has to be remodelled by the Imagination carried by the Envoy.

[139]Frame, p. 434.

PART FOUR: ADAPTATION

4.1 Theory of adaptation

New Zealand's film industry had long been marginal until the late Eighties. The arrival on the scene of Peter Jackson (and his *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy) and Jane Campion (*The Piano* received eight Academy Award nominations and *An Angel at My Table* won international accolades) in the early Nineties was a turning point. According to *Tourism New Zealand*, the trilogy and its prequel film series, *The Hobbit*, increased arrivals in the country by 50% in 2012; about 18% credited the films as the reason they visited the country, while 33% said to have visited at least one film location[140]. These travellers generated over half a billion NZD in 2019 (a little less than 400 million euros). Tourism in New Zealand is the second-largest industry by revenue. The contribution of the film industry in New Zealand is one that involves small businesses, which represent the vast majority of the country's entrepreneurship; the demand to locate international film sets in New Zealand has substantially risen over the past decade. The New Zealand landscape acts as an inspiration and threat at the same time, which is perhaps why early settlers tried to tame it.

Jane Campion rose to international prominence with her 1990 adaptation of Janet Frame's autobiography, her second feature film. Worldwide recognition came with her third film, *The Piano* in 1993, for which she became the first female director to win the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival.

In the history of cinema, about a third of films made have been adaptations of novels. That does not include other literary forms such as short stories, autobiographies, plays or dramas. Classic literature films have been adapted several times in many different languages. The main difference between film and novel is that films stimulate the visual perception of readers, in a more direct sensory experience working with variations of reality, while novels do that indirectly. However, novels have no time restraints as films do, and are under the authorial control of a single person, that is the author. On the other hand films are the result of a multi-levelled collaboration of experts. The literary

[140] Carol Pinchefsky, *The Impact (Economic and Otherwise) of Lord of the Rings/The Hobbit on New Zealand*, Forbes, 14 December 2012, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/carolpinchefsky/2012/12/14/the-impact-economic-and-otherwise-of-lord-of-the-ringsthe-hobbit-on-new-zealand/?sh=2fd1d83931b6>

translation of a book into film can be viewed as either nonsense or betrayal, but still a constructive, creative process of a narrative; in any case, the filmmaker attempts to incorporate his or her own vision of the story into the spirit of the original work itself. The main reasons that inspire a film director or a screenwriter to make changes in adaptation are related to the demands of the medium, the desire to highlight themes or resolve problems seemingly present in the original work, and to the need to update a story or a character for a contemporary audience. Generally, the cinema has been considered a narrative entertainment, although it might be argued that its lucrative potential makes the industry waver between commercialism and loyalty to literary works. Adapting any literary work to film, according to Brian McFarlane, is "a creative undertaking, but the task requires a kind of selective interpretation (...). That is, the adaptor should see himself as owing allegiance to the source work"[141]. What is more, audiences have a tendency to create their own images of a novel and the characters, wanting to see what it all looks like so as to compare their 'version' with the filmmaker's. Considering that more than three fourths of Academy Awards for 'Best Picture' went to adaptations since 1929, it should come with no surprise that novels, or literary sources in wider terms, have been used as testbed by film directors and producers, not to mention the impact on book sales once the adaptation is presented to the public, whether on the big or the small screen. There are a number of aspects to analyse in the adaptation process, mainly story and discourse. The story includes characters, settings, dialogues, and events, whereas discourse is how the story is told. To a further extent, story is the signified and discourse the signifier. Recognising the story in order to communicate it on screen is an essential step in adaptation. Fidelity to the original text is another highly important element when discussing visual transposition. It is also one of the major criteria in the final judgment of a film, since essential meanings and narrative elements of the printed version are examined. Criticism on adaptation generates partly due to the novel coming first, in a deep rooted assumption that the older arts hold greater respectability, despite the fact that there is no established method to compare film and text. Such comparisons might depict films and literature as enemies. Moreover, fidelity is a subjective topic and should not be seen as a shortcut to make a good film. In fact some critics argue that fidelity may

[141] Brian McFarlane, *Novel to Film: An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation*. Claredon Press (Oxford), 1996, 3-29 (p. 7).

be used as a guideline by filmmakers, while others state that an excessively similar adaptation does not automatically translate into a good final product.

Critics and writers identify various categories of adaptation. In transposition, the original work is adapted with little interference; a commentary is an altered version of the original, and the analogy considers a departure from the literary text. Fidelity to the narrative's thrust, accuracy of the structural narrative and using the source as a starting point to create a different, original work, are other techniques evaluated by experts. Repetition, as Maria Ştirbeţiu contends, is a particularly appealing adaptation method: the audience is stimulated and in many ways relieved to recognise parts of the original text in the adaptation[142]. Studies on this cinematographic genre are mostly comparative, but show an enduring popularity of adaptations linked to the success of novels on which they are based. Cinema transpositions may be viewed as a continuation of their literary source joined by the potential welfare of the narrative as the chief transferable element from one medium to the other. If narrative were considered the only link between text and adaptation, then intertextuality could be viewed as its carrier. Theorists distinguish between the idea of literary texts being not isolated concepts but at mixture of elements, and the deconstruction of the traditional roles of original as prestigious and the adaptation as a mere copy. The key passage that must not be forgotten in transposition is the conservation of narrative functions. Barthes identified two categories of such functions: integrational and distributional. Distributional functions include events and actions positioned linearly in the text; integrational functions, or indices, relate to the information about characters' psychology and identity, for instance, more closely linked to language. Barthes suggested that distributional functions are more commonly transferred from novel to film. A further subdivision of these functions brings to light cardinal functions and catalysers. Cardinal functions unfold as alternatives to the development of uncertain situations in narrative consequentiality. These functions are more likely to be preserved by filmmakers as their alteration may cause the audience's dissatisfaction and critical disdain. Catalysers operate to support cardinal functions, but refer to secondary actions to create safety areas and pauses in the narrative.

[142] Maria Ştirbeţiu, *Literature and film adaptation theory*. Literature, Discourse and Multicultural Dialogue, Arhipelag XXI Press, edited by Iulian Boldea (Tîrgu Mureş), Vol. 1, 2013, 491-498 (p .493).

Cardinal functions and catalysers do not depend upon language; therefore they can be transferred directly from on medium to another. In relation to integrational functions, Barthes highlighted two further groups: informants and indices proper, the former related to ready-made information such as names, date, ages and other character's details directly transferable, whereas the latter are associated with tone, mood and more abstract elements that require a more complex approach to be adapted into film. Overall, adaptation could be considered as appropriation of meaning from a prior text. Complaint directed at adaptations, McFarlane suggests, indicate that this appropriation of meaning is an aspiration sporadically fulfilled; adapting aspects of the source's enunciation that might remind the audience of the original text without distorting it should be desirable goal to achieve[143].

Novelistic narrational modes can hardly be applied to films as narrative points of view. For example, a first-person narration in literary texts comprises a known narrator as active or non-active participant in the events, usually through subjectivity or oral narration (voice-over). Subjective cinema has been barely experimented as a mainstream technique: it features events presented directly from the point of view of characters, or one central character, usually in the form of single shots or a succession of shots. One such example is found in the opening sequence in Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan*, where the camera shows for about a minute the dramatic events of the American landing at Omaha Beach on D-Day through the eyes of the Captain John Miller (played by Tom Hanks). Another example is again an opening scene, this time from Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*. It portrays the altered state of mind of Captain Willard (played by Martin Sheen) and human feelings in the most extreme conditions possible. In oral narration, spoken words accompany images with a life of their own, so much so that characters' sense is more plausibly perceived through their commitment to the actions they are involved in rather than the commentary upon them. In omniscent novels the narrative is delivered either through the direct speech of characters or narrating prose, a position of dominating knowledge that is normally accepted in the cinema as the narration of events. Elements such as dialogues, music, costumes, sounds, function as narrative and the camera moves by focusing of aspect of the mise-en-scène to act as an

[143] McFarlane, p. 21.

omniscent narrator; in practical terms, a certain level of objectivity is implied and present in all films. Among the contributing factors that shape an adaptation or any kind of film, refer to aspects that may include, as previously mentioned, fidelity to the original text (although not a decisive issue for the audience), the social and cultural climate of the time of film-making and the prevailing conditions within the industry. To the latter it is possible to ascribe the influence of film stars or directors' observance of genre conventions; as to the former category, it could include the shifts in society morals regarding, for instance, sex or gender roles.

Returning to the opening subject of this chapter, and in broader terms of this entire study, landscape plays a significant role in shaping a national identity in settler colonies that is both separated from the 'motherland' and distinguishable through its local features. Director Jane Campion's study and use of landscape as means to express its cultural and metaphorical significance contribute to the representation of settler society in relation to their unresolved national identity issue, in addition to the dichotomy between genders and the troubled relations between colonisers and colonised. Through her representation of women stories in particular, she explored her native country's conflictual past and geographical distance as a similitude of women's delimited roles in colonial communities. Critics have recognised a gothic element in postcolonial nations' films, where landscape is depicted as imposing and intimidating in order to command fear and awe. The threatening features of an untamed, uncivilised, wild landscape could be ascribed to the Gothic's emphasis on irrational and unconscious fears, haunted interiors and dangerous outdoors; not to mention their traces found in postcolonial literature and modernist cinema. The gothic and postcolonialism find their *trait d'union* in the settler or the coloniser's sense of homelessness, the fear of political instability or disorder, strangeness and alienation found in a foreign, unhomely place, and in the psychological perception of the dangerousness of the environment. The landscape is depicted through the use of Gothic representational features to mirror not only the state of mind of the central female character, but also the cultural turmoil of colonial nations. Landscape is often a sort of continuation of the female body and a way of seeing the appropriation of land by the colonisers[144]. In portraying her heroines not as meek victims of the male power they try to escape, Campion concentrates on their quest to find their own identity and to evade the confining social and gender roles reserved to them, which is why her films have been praised by feminist critics. The female characters' refusal to comply with the rules usually brings them into direct conflict not only with male subjects (who symbolise patriarchal authority) but also with other women, insofar that they are labelled as 'mad' or 'crazy' by virtue of their rebellion against conformity. Campion's films carry some distinctive features; among them, the almost absence of soundtrack, surreal mise-en-scène where characters react slower than normal, a preoccupation with sanitary hygiene and haptic visuality. The latest regards the idea of a tactile element to the film, a connection that brings the audience in direct contact with the film through feelings conveyed by vision. For example, in *An Angel at My Table*, after Janet wins the Dux medal at school (and a free membership to the Athenaeum), she selects books for her family, picking an illustrated *Grimm's Fairy Tales* for herself, the same book she had originally borrowed from her friend Poppy. She carefully flips the pages, with special attention while turning the tissue paper that protects the presumably hand-painted illustrations. Later on, about to face the school inspection while teaching, the camera focuses on her nervously twisting the chalk between her fingers, unable to proceed. An omen to potential trouble ahead.

[144] *Out of place: reading (post) colonial landscapes as Gothic space in Jane Campion's films*. The Free Library. (2014). Retrieved 20 January 2022 <?a0172169169>

4.2 Critical review of Jane Campion's '*An Angel at My Table*'

Originally meant to be a television mini-series, it was later released as a two and half-hour feature film due in part to the richness of content of the literary source, and as such included a sufficient amount of information taken from the autobiography. Although it was not a commercial success, the story is told simply and slowly, with an intersection of songs, childhood rhymes and poems Frame and her sisters recite. Frame's ambivalent relationship with her country and her refusal of traditional roles are expressed through a tight focus on her persona, particularly her inner world of imagination and self development from a shy, poor working class child to one of the most celebrated New Zealand literary artists of the 20th century. Throughout the film, the use Campion makes of landscape symbolises an extension of Frame's poetic imagery. For example, the recurrence of trains and train journeys represents the family's moving due to Mr Frame's railway job. In the film as in the books, it is during a train journey that Frame sees the 'loonies' of Seacliff for the first time, in the shape of a man squirming against the wall at the railway station. The farm and daily chores could be a symbol of her mother's self-sacrificing for her family. Campion, like Frame, is aware that landscape is both an embodiment of life and death, which is why the spaces that define Janet are never huge or exotic, but intimate, almost claustrophobic. Campion is also conscious of the gaps in the autobiography, with special regard to the mental hospital years, so she included scenes from Frame's novel *Faces in the Water*, a fictional account of life inside psychiatric institutions, to fill these gaps. Suzette Henke described the film as "the palimpsestic compilation of random tableaux, all gathered together in a loosely structured memoir"[145], meaning the story is recognisable through the film, but it is not its literal rendering. The same opinion is shared by Derek Neale, as he defines the film as a series of "juxtaposed images which if viewed in isolation might not make any narrative sense"[146], a technique more adaptable to a TV setting than a wide screen. Moreover, Campion does not comply with the demands of the industry by producing the traditional climax and denouement required of a *bildungsroman*, incorporating Frame's fictional text (*Faces*) with her

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[145] Suzette A. Henke, *Jane Campion frames Janet Frame: A portrait of the artist as a young New Zealand poet*. Biography, Vol. 23, No. 4, University of Hawaii Press (Honolulu, 2000) 651-669 (p. 652).

[146] Derek Neale, *Literature and Film: Reading Film – An Angel at My Table*. The Handbook to Literary Research, 2nd edition, edited by D. da Sousa Correa and W.R. Owens. Routledge (London, 2009) 162-165 (p. 162).

autobiography to create a faithful recount using symbolic fragments, biographical allusions and domestic vignettes. Pauses and silences, one of Campion's directorial characteristics, convey the protagonist distress and self-conscious disadvantages, such as the deafening-silent college inspection scene. The film's close-ups and medium shots, more appropriate for a television screen, and the fact it is based entirely on the life of one person were the main reasons Campion was initially resistant to its big screen release.

As an author concerned with the public reception of her work, an interesting paradox considering her rebuff of gender and social clichés, Frame could dispel doubts surrounding the reading of her texts, especially the autobiography and her misdiagnosis, by relinquishing authorial control to Campion. The film shows how the writer was able to free herself from the socially-imposed identity forced on her gender. Instrumental was also the role Jane Campion's own family past had in the adaptation.

Campion became interested in Frame after reading *Owls Do Cry* at the age of fourteen and often identified Janet Frame with her mother and herself. She was mostly impressed by the gossip and mythology around her and schizophrenia, developing a deep curiosity after she learned of the publication of the autobiography. The connection between Jane and Janet acquired almost a prophetic tone, as years later Campion's own mother Edith was committed to a mental health hospital after her multiple attempts to commit suicide[147]. Interestingly enough, it was Edith who sent Jane the first book of autobiography, *To the Is-Land*, published in 1982.

There are multiple connections between Jane Campion and her mother, Jane and Janet, and Edith and Janet. Edith Campion's inherited money from her wealthy grandfather she later used to establish with her husband Richard, the New Zealand Players Theatre Company, New Zealand's first national theatre. The enterprise was not successful and Edith suffered from depression and mental instability, triggered in part by her parents' early death due to alcoholism. In addition, Frank Sargeson played the role of mentor to Frame as well as for Edith after both underwent electroshock therapy and turned to writing to alleviate their unhappiness. In 1979 one of Edith's novellas, *The Chain*, was co-published with a novella by Sargeson called *En Route*. In 1959 Edith became a Member of the Order of the British Empire, while Frame received the grade of Commander in 1983.

[147] Alexis Brown*, An Angel at My Table (1990): Janet Frame, Jane Campion, and Authorial Control in the Auto/Biopic*. Journal of New Zealand Literature, Vol. 34.1 (2016) 103-122 (p. 110).

Casting Edith as a teacher was part of the process intent on adapting the story with Campion's personal references. For example, young Janet is frequently wearing gumboots as a reminder of Jane Campion's own childhood in the country, where everyone wore gumboots because of the mud. According to the perspective from which viewed, it is possible to see Jane Campion in Janet Frame or Edith Campion in Janet Frame, creating a complex double representation of the relationship between Campion and her mother.

Campion found the experience of her mother's illness traumatic, particularly Edith's rejection of her maternal role and her contagious way of looking at things. The paradoxical nature of Jane's relationship with her mother, made of both admiration and resentment, could explain the unsubstantial presence of maternal figures in her films. It reverberates of the contradictory relationship between Frame and her mother Lottie, whom her daughter admired for her poetic gift and for having transmitted it to her, but grew to reproach her self-effacing in favour of a domestic-focused life.

By contrast, the figure of the father, in *An Angel at My Table*, is the one providing encouragement and help. It is he who gives young Janet a book to write her poems in, and once she is released from Seacliff, he tells her not to leave home again. The idolised image of the father, similar to that of Frank Sargeson as a literary father, represents Campion's artistic creation, reaching its most significant moment at the very end of the film, when Janet returns to Willowglen and steps into her father's boots, effectively taking over his role as head of the family. It symbolises Janet's experience, acquired through the exercise of art, and the affirmation of her own self in her life.

Adaptation gave Campion the possibility to explore this relationship as if through the metaphoric, indirect intervention of her characters, protecting herself from feelings she may want to keep back. The act of adjusting the literary source to the adaptor's purpose demands a creative effort which can be considered a form of authorship. The link between Frame's life and Edith Campion's illness is not fully explored in the film, but Jane Campion plays on the edge of allusion to her own childhood and the rejection of any association with the story told. The similarities between mother and daughter remain largely private.

In an interview with Simon Hattenstone, Campion said she felt disconnected as a child and found solace in films. “I had no energy or direction”[148]. Mental illness is a recurrent theme in Campion’s films. Her portrayal of Janet Frame in the adaptation shows her as being scared and insecure, but never really mad.

The film opens with the perspective of infant Janet and the dark figure of her mother obscured against the sun, blocking the baby’s vision of the sky. It moves to a wide shot of a hilly landscape, cut in half by a gravel road and the young Frame walking toward the camera. The memory of Frame readers might go back to what she attributed to her earliest memory, the long dusty road outside the gate of their house in Outram. She is seen nervously touching her gold velvet dress (called her ‘beastie dress’ in the autobiography) as if to seek comfort, before suddenly running away from something the audience cannot see, possibly the invasive stare of the onlooker. The scene might be an indication of her inner loneliness, but also an allusion to the twitches and tics Frame developed after her brother’s epilepsy diagnosis which effectively turned Lottie Frame’s attention away from her daughters in favour of her sick son. Her red hair, unnaturally upright in shape, contrasts with the greenness of landscape as a symbol of her isolation.
The older Frame’s voice narrates over events that begin with: “This is the story of my childhood”[149], giving details of her early life and the death of her twin brother shortly after birth. The latter information is partially wrong, as Janet did indeed have a twin but it did not develop beyond the first few weeks. It might be another personal allusion Campion made in reference to her mother Edith, who lost a son shortly after birth in 1949 while in London. Campion herself would later lose a son a few days after birth, in 1993.
The adult Frame’s voiceover implies the existence of two Janets, the older functioning as a mediator with the younger; the audience have exclusive view on the story, occupying the position of the narrator, through the voice, and protagonist through the events as they occur, creating a temporal distance between present time (time of narration) and past time (time of events).

[148] Jane Campion: *The clever people used to do film. Now they do TV*. Interview by Simon Hattenstone, The Guardian, 22 July 2017 <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2017/jul/22/jane-campion-clever-people-film-tv-top-of-the-lake> [accessed 21 January 2022].
[149] *An Angel at My Table*, dir. by Jane Campion (Sharmill Films, 1990).

Young Janet is portrayed, for the first twenty-five minutes of the film, as a plump, red-faced girl with tears on the few clothes she wears, immersed in her own world of books and poems, and isolated at school. Her desire to be accepted ends pathetically after the teacher, Miss Botting, forced her to admit in front of the entire class to have stolen money from her father's pocket to buy chewing gum for her classmates, who in turn call her 'thief'. The shock that her lie is not believed turns to guilt and shame. The close-up of Janet tearful face against the blackboard show her as a lonely, imaginative individual trapped in a static, narrow-minded institutional environment, suffering the consequence of a little white lie. Her self-esteem suffers irreparable damage; she is even further hurt when her revelation that Myrtle and Ted 'did it in the plannies' triggers her father's furious reaction, which leaves her mortified without fully understanding why. In this phase of her life she is called Jean at school and Nini at home.

The money theft episode highlights the power teachers have over their pupils, especially when it comes to their family's circumstances, as indicated by the doctor inspection scene. The teacher points at a list of names and selects the 'poor and dirty' for the lady doctor to examine: she whispers something about one of the children's ears – and it turns out Janet's ears and inner arms are "filthy" – and another child is described as having a "terrible family". Janet is constantly mortified by her appearance and to a certain extent by her brother's epilepsy. The film shows Janet avoiding her brother during playtime at school, her head lowered as to attract the least attention as possible, while other schoolboys mock and bully him.

On her way home after school one day she finds her best friend, Poppy, and they sit together in an abandoned bathtub; Janet lets Poppy touch her frizzy hair and Poppy proudly displays welts on her legs, a result of her father's strapping. They set up a nail mock-inspection using empty glass bottles to impersonate children and punish those with dirty fingers by pretend-spank them. Frame shows her creativity at school, when the teacher, Mr Gussy (Reuben) Dimmock, asks his pupils to write a poem beginning with 'When the sun goes down and the night draws nigh'. A few days later Janet sits on the teacher's knees and together they read her poem, with Mr Gussy's son – who has Down syndrome – beside them.

Despite the lack of resources or even the most basic domestic comforts, and the cramped spaces they inhabit, the four Frame sisters amuse themselves with stories, games and evening dances dressed as fairies, never alone in the company of books.

The loss of a significant feminine role model to look up to (her look-alike elder sister Myrtle) begins Janet's descent into loneliness and retreat in the world of imagination.

Together with a new friend, Marguerite, the family goes on a camping trip to Rakaia. In one of the pictures taken that day, Myrtle appears as a transparent presence next to her family. The sad foreboding is there to indicate her upcoming premature death at the public baths of Oamaru. There is to be no real trace left of Myrtle, since even her posthumous picture is reforged with a reconstructed arm by the photographer. With Myrtle's death Janet acquires the role of the eldest daughter, but her mother's reaction to her first menstruation is practical, almost bothering. She seems more concerned with the blood-stained nightdress and bed sheets than with the potential embarrassment her daughter might experience among the other school girls. Janet's classmates, who call her Fuzz, attempt to give her advice on how to style her hair by suggesting having it straightened or clipped to make it stay flat. She envies her classmate Shirley for being lost in the poetic world of her imagination, so much so that she imitates her absent-minded expression and her hair twirling habit in front of the mirror. Mirrors create an extended metaphor for Frame's search for identity and for a place to call home. They reflect the gap between a sought authenticity and a constructed self motivated by social demands.

Campion cast her own mother Edith (whose real name was Beverley G. Hannah) as the elderly senior high school teacher Miss Lindsay, who passionately recites verses from Lord Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* captivating the class and Janet's imagination[150]. The passage was chosen because it used to be one of Edith Campion's favourite theatrical pieces. Miss Lindsay is seen walking across the corridor revising her lesson, the camera placed at floor level as if to give the impression of a respectful looking up, the way Janet Frame looks up to the teacher and Jane Campion to her own mother. As Miss Lindsay recites the verses, the image of a hand grasping a sword's handle is shown, representing the teacher's grip on her students.

The twenty-two minutes portraying Janet in her adolescence end when she watches her father enthusiastically joining the military reserve force at the outbreak of the Second

[150] The verses are nr. 133 to 146.

World War. Janet's face is seen disappearing in the dark while her family marches around the table, to show how this phase of her life has been largely obscured by the war.

The adult Janet first appears while walking through railway lines reading a book, the voiceover reciting a poem by George Borrow. The following scene concerns Janet's hopelessness at reading the list of clothing she is required to have for training college. Having lived a life constrained in her school uniform, with but a tartan skirt to wear daily, she is overwhelmed by the amount of clothes she must now procure, which may be prevented by the shortage of financial means. Before leaving for college, she is seen burning all her childhood writings and diaries while her youngest sister June dances around the incinerator bin, in a metaphoric farewell to a significant part of her life.

College represents the loneliest phase in Janet's life. She lives with her Aunt Isy and Uncle George, who is terminally ill with cancer, and her extreme shyness prevents her from eating with her aunt with the excuse of preferring to eat while studying. She becomes a vegetarian but her constant hunger leads her to steal scraps of food from the dirty dishes. She secretly buys chocolate bars to eat in her room and disposes of their wrapping among the cracked tombstones at the cemetery, along with her soiled sanitary towels. She takes little part in college activities, especially after her sister Isabel joins her at college. Janet is concerned that her sister Isabel spends more time at the union and with her boyfriend rather than focusing on her academic performance. After being evicted from their aunt's house for eating all her boxes of chocolates, Isabel and Janet return to Willowglen. They are later seen talking while walking at the railway station, before being interrupted by other school girls announcing the dropping of the atomic bomb in Japan. They part ways; both their figures look like dark silhouettes and disappear in opposite directions as to underline their growing distance.

The next scene shows the day of the school inspection. Janet stands once more against the blackboard holding a chalk while the camera lingers patiently on her, without any dramatic music or frenetic montage. Politely she asks to be excused and walks out. She is then seen walking barefoot and crying: the cardigan has fallen off her shoulders as if it were snake skin ready to shed, while melancholic background music plays. She walks with open arms and looking up, ready to embrace her new, true self. She continues to attend Dr. John Forrest's psychology class and he is most impressed by her autobiography, complimenting her for her writing and for the short story she published in *The Listener* magazine. When he inquires after her attempted suicide, which is not shown in the film but implied by his mention of the swallowing of Aspro tablets, she honestly admits of having drunk them with water and that the attempt was not hard. She is seen repeating his compliment in front of the mirror in her room, adopting a sensual pose by exposing her neck and chest under her chemise.

The mirror turns out to be deceiving and disappointing like the words of Dr. Forrest and the two medical professionals who visit her and convince her to rest for a few days at the hospital. As a child, she was punished until 'the truth' came out. Now, the truth has led her to the psychiatric ward, as written on the name place of the ward swinging doors.

After refusing to go home when her mother comes to collect her, she is committed to Seacliff. Janet travels in the backseat of a car with two other patients. As she gazes at them and outside, her status as spectator to other people's witness is clear, just as she stared between her mother's fingers at Seacliff station's mad man as a child. The dayroom of the asylum where other patients spend their time resembles an underwater scene, with green-coloured walls and curtains giving almost a sense of a damp place. She is seen returning to her family at Willowglen and organising a trip for her mother in her old hometown of Picton, with Isabel chaperoning Lottie. Both the autobiography and the film do not show Isabel's death, who drowned at Picton Harbour in circumstances similar to Myrtle's. Throughout the story, literary and visual, Frame is portrayed as a spectator to the illness of others. She does not see her sisters' drowning; Bruddie's fits have no cure, her Uncle George's only traces of illness are the empty tubes of lanoline; finally, she sees mental illness in the other patients without suffering from it.

Later on, in solitary confinement, Janet is found in a similar watery environment, a bare, unheated cell "where she scratches fragments of recollected poetry with a pencil stub on the wall"[151]. There is a constant oppressive sense of dread that reaches its climax when Janet is told she is to have a lobotomy (or leucotomy) while a woman hovers behind the office window as a sinister premonition. Frame has become a "fearful but self-possessed author imprisoned among the inhuman ill"[152]. The eradication of her rotten yet natural teeth (arranged by John Forrest and a wealthy patroness) and their replacement with false ones led her to personal alienation as human being, as she is convinced to visit

[151] Henke, p. 662.
[152] Brown, p. 116.

Sunnyside Hospital, where a “new treatment” apparently could help her. The graphic scene of the electroshock therapy scene focuses on her disfigured face, which the audience see upside down, and on her twitching body, a reminiscence perhaps of Bruddie’s epileptic fits. Patients are gagged and scream in fear, doctors and nurses appear calm; a sense of still horror pervades the scene as Janet, a rolled cloth in her toothless mouth, is unable to scream although the obvious pain she suffers. The voiceover describes each ‘treatment’ as equivalent of an execution. In spite of the overwhelming cruelty she experiences, the true horrors are hidden in the world outside, in well-meaning, friendly faces who then participate in the process of her incarceration.

The first sign of normality is shown when her sister June and brother-in-law bring her copies of her published books. She is disappointed that her photograph is not present, but she puts her signature on the inside front page. The episode, similar to that of the blurred image of Myrtle in the photograph anticipating her death, discloses her winning the *Hubert Church Award* for Best Prose, which saves her from the leucotomy. The news is delivered to Janet while she is tightly holding a newspaper and a torn book against her chest in a defensive gesture, to symbolise the protective role literature had in her life. She is discharged from hospital in 1954 and later moves to writer Frank Sargeson’s hut, in his property outside Auckland. He immediately assumes the role of mentor and protector of Janet, helping her with her writing until her first novel is published. The voiceover tells of how Frank was instrumental for Janet’s literary grant application which resulted in her overseas journey. She is collected by her father and sister at Frank’s bach; the film does not mention Lottie Frame’s death, occurred while Janet was staying with Frank. Only at receiving news of her father’s death do the audience become aware that she already died.

The story moves to Janet travelling on board the *Ruahine* to Europe. The third part, *The Envoy from Mirror City*, begins with a quote from Robert Burns’ poem Duncan Grey and a flashback shot of the four sisters in their adolescence on top of a cliff by the sea, singing one of the poem’s stanzas, possibly an allusion to the Scottish origin of the Frame family.

Arriving in London, she discovers the letter she wrote to book a room has not reached the hostess. Eventually she settles at the YWCA where she is welcomed by Patrick Reilly, a narrow-minded, prejudiced Irish man. He rarely makes eye contact with Janet when he speaks to her, and disapproves not only of her hanging around with other artists, but of her being a writer as well. She quickly continues her journey to Paris, where her luggage is lost, and then to Ibiza. Throughout this phase, in contrast with the majority of the Spanish women, who wear black, she wears clothes in an opaque shade of green: her tartan skirt, shirts and cardigans, her coat, her new pair of slacks and dress made from a curtain by her sister. Green is often associated with safety, vivacity, hope and renewal. Disillusioned by her broken affair with the American poet Bernard, she leaves Ibiza and returns to London, where the loyal Patrick Reilly welcomes her again. Campion does not replicate Frame's stay in Andorra in the adaptation, as the most significant event that happened there (the miscarriage) is seen happening in London. Nor does Campion adapt the trial scene at the Maudsley, where her diagnosis was reversed, as her release from Seacliff seemed sufficiently explicatory of a righted wrong. The adult Frame voiceover does it for her, after Frame the protagonist has trouble finding a suitable, 'normal' job, as Patrick Reilly repeatedly suggests, due to her medical history.

In the adaptation, all the specialists at the Maudsley are condensed into Dr Cawley, a bulky gormandiser and straightforward figure, who was to become a lifelong friend of the writer. He is seen eating chocolate bars during interviews and wearing multiple layers of clothes (in the book, this was Dr Miller, who complained about the cold English weather). He specifically tells Frame not to mix with other people if she does not want to, and encourages her to write about her time in hospital in New Zealand. He is the first person to read *Faces in the Water* at the behest of Frame's agent. All of Frame's losses (her sisters, parents, best friend, and her pregnancy) are compensated but not entirely recuperated by writing.

The film ends with Frame return to New Zealand after her father's death. At Willowglen she finds her father's boots and tries them, imitating her father's pose. While Janet is burning a large quantity of paper sheets, possibly old documents, bills and letters, two journalists climb up the steep hill near the house to take pictures of the now famous novelist with an overseas reputation. The last sequence shows Janet's niece Pamela dancing to a 1960s song while Janet types. The writer is shown living in a tiny guest trailer in her sister June's garden, a mature and confident woman determined to follow the Envoy to the Mirror City of her imagination.

Campion stated that by making the film she gained a better understanding of her own childhood, but also wanted to share her love of Frame with a wider public. The director's experiences as both reader and writer, contradictory as they may be, construct the relation between faithfulness to the writer's vision and the director's authorial creativeness without excluding, altering or damaging either. The adaptation might be considered as the final piece of the puzzle in the representation of Janet Frame's life.

Reviews on the adaptation have been generally favourable. Pulitzer-winner and film critic Roger Ebert called it "simply the record of a life as lived. It is told with a clarity and simplicity that is quietly but completely absorbing"[153]. Mark Chalon Smith at the *Los Angeles Times* reported that the film "gives us an idea of the price someone pays to be truly different" and praised Campion's decision not to delve deeper into the years Frame spent institutionalised[154]. Isabella McNeill wrote: "*An Angel at My Table* is remarkable for its attention to detail, for its pure, striking and resonant images, and for its appreciation of human idiosyncrasies"[155]. On the other hand, Hal Hinson at *The Washington Post* offered a less sympathetic review. In his opinion, Jane Campion's inability to provide a key to the meaning of Frame's behaviours throughout the film is the most evident problem, as "she seems to have fallen under Frame's affectless spell"[156]. For readers of the literary text is might be easier to find an answer; no matter how much on the subject has been written, the fascination with Frame is not only her incredible life story, but the story of how she overcame restrictions and misjudgements simply through the magical power of her own words.

[153] Roger Ebert, *Robert Ebert*, 1991, <https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/an-angel-at-my-table-1991> [accessed 21 January 2022].

[154] Mark Chalon Smith, *A disturbing but uplifting "Angel at My Table"*. The Los Angeles Times, 7 May 1992 <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1992-05-07-ca-2436-story.html> [accessed 21 January 2022].

[155] Isabella McNeill, *Senses of Cinema*, 2017, <https://www.sensesofcinema.com/2017/cteq/an-angel-at-my-table/> [accessed 21 January 2022].

[156] Hal Hinson, *The Washington Post*, 21 June 1991 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/style/longterm/movies/videos/anangelatmytablerhinson_a0a6b0.htm> [accessed 21 January 2022].

CONCLUSION

Throughout the 20th century, New Zealand's path to the assertion of an independent national identity passed through a progressive decolonising challenge to the colonial system. The physical and mental deconstruction of colonial practices required a need for New Zealanders, especially *pakeha*, to reassess their complicity in the process that led to colonisation in the first place, and the consequent exclusion of minorities from political, cultural and societal participation.

Minorities, including indigenous people, women and immigrants, created a necessary tension in the debate on the identity formation in settler nations, as they represented the force that shifted the attention away from a Eurocentric vision. The identification with the indigene by the appropriation of symbols serves the settler's claim of authenticity and attempts to break the conventional views of settler identity enclosed in the figure of the complicit in the colonisation process.

The argument proposed in this work had been to understand that diversity in New Zealand's bicultural society is not only at the base of the discourse on subjectivity, but has been adopted as a common practice in the transformation of cultural and political institutions since the beginning of the new millennium.

As a *pakeha* of British ancestry, Janet Frame witnessed the progressive loosening of ties with Britain. Nevertheless her country shaped not only her personal life but her writing as well, at a time of significant changes in New Zealand's history.

Her childhood poetic compositions published in the pages of *Dot's Little Folk* encouraged her literary artistry; readings of the *School Journal* contributed to her school performance and regular stories addressed to 'Mr Ardenue' in her diary offered shelter and refuge in the world of imagination. Shy and introverted, Frame's out of the ordinary personality and appearance separated her from her peers, leaving the future author with a deep desire to be accepted within a conventional society who did not tolerate differences. Lacking role models what could fit with her unique vision of the world, Frame became increasingly isolated and out of place, her identity becoming gradually more unclear.

Her nervous breakdown represented a courageous step to affirm her own individuality, but it led to eight years of dramatic psychiatric institutionalisation following a diagnosis of mental illness.

What this thesis attempted to highlight has been the crucial role her life and personal experiences had in her literary production as a whole, culminated in her three autobiographical books. More than other authors, precisely because of her experience in mental asylums, she asserted her need to 'set the record straight' and tell her story, dismissing all sorts of previous claims and theories promoted by critics and intellectuals. Despite the ongoing debate as to the wavering authorial control that might emerge from a close analysis of the text, an intrinsic characteristic of the autobiographical genre and its dependability on memory; the result is an overall readable, rich in details yet pleasant work. It is the story of the making of the author, and exudes Janet Frame's light sense of humour and incredible modesty, as transpires in one of her rare interviews: "Well, some authors are articulate and... some aren't, and I think it's wise for the ones who aren't just to acknowledge it and not say anything, like me".[157]

[157] 'Janet Frame', *Three New Zealanders*, Endeavour Television (NZBC), 1975 <https://www.nzonscreen.com/title/three-new-zealanders-janet-frame-1975> [accessed 7 February 2022].

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