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MA 1 Aug 94

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SPEAKING FOR HERSELF:

**THE AUTOBIOGRAPHIES
OF JANET FRAME**

BY

VANESSA FINNEY

A thesis submitted in fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts (Honours)

Department of English
University of Sydney

December 1993

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the University of Sydney and the Department of English for providing me with a room of my own and enough money to live on so that I could undertake this thesis. In particular I would like to thank my supervisors, Simon Petch and Adrian Mitchell, for their ideas, encouragement and support.

Special thanks to Gina Mercer who provided much needed advice and reassurance on a trip to Townsville in the early stages of my research and who generously shared of her time, knowledge and Frame resources.

Thanks also to the people in Interlibrary Loans at the University of Sydney and elsewhere who processed my numerous requests for material from New Zealand. Thanks to the participants in the New Zealand Literature Association Conference on Janet Frame held in Dunedin in August 1992 for giving me new enthusiasm for my project and also to the staff at the Hocken Library in Dunedin for their help. In particular I would like to thank Joan Blackburn for a memorable visit to Oamaru and to Willowglen.

Thanks also to all those outside the University who believed I could and would finish this 'thing':—to Judy Finney and to the rest of my family who kept asking when (and how) it would end; to the friends who listened—to Eliza Hutchison, Tracy Tucker, Andrew Wright and Jenny Puhach; to Vanessa Smith who introduced me to Janet Frame's writing and always to Simon Heesh, who suffered with me—and also endured.

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ABBREVIATIONS

All references to works by Janet Frame are given within the text. The editions used are those given in the Bibliography. The following abbreviations are used throughout:

'Beginnings'	B
<u>Faces in the Water</u>	FW
<u>To the Is-Land</u>	I
<u>An Angel at My Table</u>	II
<u>The Envoy From Mirror City</u>	III

CHAPTER ONE

'BEGINNINGS':

Reading 'Janet Frame' 1965–1982

'Beginnings', which appeared in Landfall in 1965 as part of a series in which New Zealand writers discuss how they came to write, was Janet Frame's first (published) account of her childhood and adolescence.¹ Although she has written autobiographical articles since, none has received the same critical attention or gained the same critical and popular currency.²

As far back as 1972 H. Winston Rhodes noted critics' appropriation of 'Beginnings' for their discussion of Janet Frame's work and pointed to the danger of the emerging biographical bias in such studies:

It is demonstrable ... that too great a concern with the state of mind of the

¹ 'Beginnings', Landfall 19.1 (1965): 40–47.

In 'Beginnings' Frame mentions a novel-length autobiographical essay, 'Towards Another Summer', written during the years in which she was living and writing in London. The essay has never been published. Prior to 1965, the only available account of Frame's childhood was one written by her cousin, May Williamson, 'Janet Frame—N.Z. Writer', Northland: A Regional Magazine 23 July 1963: 5–11.

² Of course, with the publication of her autobiography in three volumes, 'Beginnings' no longer has the same priority in the biographical studies of Frame's work that continue to appear.

Other autobiographical articles written by Frame (before the autobiographies) are:

'Review of Terence Journey's "Take My Tip"', Landfall 8.4 (1954): 309–310.

'This Desirable Property', NZ Listener 51 (1292) 3 July 1964: 12–13.

'The Burns Fellowship', Landfall 22.3 (1968): 241–242.

'Artist Retreats: An Interview', NZ Listener 64 (1605) 27 July 1970: 13.

'Charles Brasch 1909–1973: Tributes and Memories from his Friends', Islands 2.3 (1973): 251–3.

'Janet Frame on "Tales from Grimm"', Education [NZ] Early Reading Series, 24.9 (1975): 27.

'Departures and Returns', Writers in East-West Encounter: New Cultural Bearings, ed. Guy Amirthanayagan (London: MacMillan, 1982) 85–94.

man behind the artist, too close an attention to the personal drama of the artist's life, cannot only be a positive hindrance to critical understanding, but can seriously distort a reader's appreciation of the pattern of values and the artistic method by means of which imaginative literature achieves its aim. ...

Such an approach to the writing of Janet Frame is no less damaging and critically injurious because it is often unconscious, or merely adapts and elaborates snippets of biographical information gleaned for the most part from the author's 'Beginnings', and applies them to the hypothetical requirements of one or other of her novels.³

Against the trend of recent theories of autobiography which insist that autobiography, more than simple 'fact', is a kind of literary 'fiction' (or that the line between the two cannot be decided), 'Beginnings' has been persistently read for its referential meanings. The text is the person: it is read and interpreted as a transparent representation of a conscious, coherent, individual, living self and of her past.

Beyond the obvious reductionism and the critical limitation of considering the author as origin and arbiter of the meaning of a 'fictional' text (or an autobiographical one), the project of biographical criticism of Janet Frame is problematic from its inception. For 'Janet Frame' no longer exists as a legal entity, as a 'real' person or as a subject. Although that is the name that continues to sign her books and designate her public persona, she long ago changed the name of her 'private', physical person to Janet Clutha. Janet Frame has made an explicit part of her own self-representation the distance between her identity and history

³ H. Winston Rhodes, 'Preludes and Parables: A Reading of Janet Frame's Novels', Landfall 26.2 (1972): 135.

as a 'real' person (fluid and dispersed like her namesake the River Clutha) and her author figure and function (literally, a 'frame').⁴ A history of 'Janet Frame' can only be a history and an interpretation of her public figure, a discursive object, a name.

Two anecdotes from 'Beginnings' have received most attention. Indeed, they remain the overwhelming critical commonplaces (clichés) of Frame studies. Why, in particular, have these two stories been chosen by so many commentators to stabilise or symbolise Frame's person and to interpret her work? And what do such 'critical fictions' reveal about reading 'Janet Frame'?

The first of the anecdotes is Frame's account of the first story she ever 'made', at age three, sitting with her family on the banks of the Mataura river 'after a meal of trout and billy tea':

'Once upon a time there was a bird. One day a hawk came out of the sky and ate the bird. The next day a big bogie came out from behind the hill and ate up the hawk for eating up the bird'. (B:42)

Critical interpretation of the sequence and elements of this tale has varied. What readings share is a tendency to generalise and moralise the story, to make of it not only a stabilising, explanatory parable or allegory of the patterns of Frame's fiction but also of her (perceived) personality and life history.⁵ H. Winston

⁴ In Michel Foucault's formulation, the Author-figure acts (like a frame around a picture) to filter and constrain the text it is attached to: it serves to 'regulate the fictive', so that in our current system of authorship, the questions critics ask of a text are; 'Who really spoke? Is it really he and not someone else? With what authenticity or originality? And what part of his deepest self did he express in his discourse?' See Michel Foucault, 'What is an Author?', *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984) 119.

⁵ Apparently confirming this structure, the bird, hawk, bogie fable also occurs in Frame's fiction and poetry. For examples, see C.K. Stead, 'Janet Frame: Language is the Hawk', *In the Glass Case: Essays on New Zealand Literature* (Auckland Univ. Press and Oxford Univ. Press, 1981). In this repetition across texts (as well as in the use of autobiographical elements in her fiction) Frame

Rhodes, the first of many critics to comment on the 'parabolic' structure of all Frame's fiction—'Janet Frame's distinctive characteristic is that she depends far more on the inter-relation of parabolic fragments to provide structural unity and a pattern of values, than she does on formal plot, human relationships and character in action'⁶—uses the story to describe the spiritual quest, 'the search for treasure' that is, he says, Frame's dominant theme. He also uses it to illuminate The Lagoon stories where he claims that 'It is not too fantastic to discover a characteristic way of seeing in this early composition'.⁷ In his reading, 'life and death are close companions; and at any moment a hawk may swoop from the sky, and a bogie descend from the hills' on the 'harmless happy bird'.⁸

In an essay he names after the story, 'Bird, Hawk, Bogie: Janet Frame, 1952-62', Robert Robertson claims that, as well as relating Janet Frame to other 'provincial' novelists, the fable provides the recurrent symbolism for all her later work. For Robertson, in a colonial provincial society the bird is the sensitive individual, the hawk is both the unimaginative society—'Janet Frame finds her hawk in the average New Zealander'⁹—and the external forces of nature that threaten the bird, and the bogie is 'the art which eats up both for eating up the bird of inspiration of imagination in an unimaginative society' (sic).¹⁰ Jeanne Delbaere,

seems to willingly and deliberately exacerbate the biographical readings she is prey to. Patrick Evans, in an article that also discusses the 'parabolic' structure of Frame's fiction, claims that the parables of her fiction are all autobiographical. He argues they refer in particular to the deaths of her two sisters and the electric shock treatment she received in hospital. See Patrick Evans, "'Farthest From the Heart": The Autobiographical Parables of Janet Frame', Modern Fiction Studies 27.1 (1981): 31-40 and also his 'Janet Frame and the Art of Life', Meanjin 44.3 (1985): 375-383.

⁶ Rhodes (1972) 138.

⁷ H. Winston Rhodes, 'Janet Frame: A Way of Seeing in The Lagoon and other stories', Critical Essays on the New Zealand Short Story, ed. Cherry Hankin (Heinemann, 1982) 123.

⁸ Rhodes (1982) 122.

⁹ Robert T. Robertson, 'Bird, Hawk, Bogie: Janet Frame, 1952-62', Bird, Hawk, Bogie: Essays on Janet Frame, ed. Jeanne Delbaere (1978), rpt. in an expanded edition as The Ring of Fire: Essays on Janet Frame (Aarhus: Dangaroo Press, 1992) 35.

¹⁰ Robertson 34.

who also named the volume of Janet Frame criticism she edited after the 'little' fable,¹¹ proposes an interpretation of the bird as a 'composite of nature, sensibility and imagination, all things that are despised and repressed by the powerful, mind-oriented and predatory hawks of the modern world'.¹² The 'lesson' of the tale is that 'no part of reality can be evaded with impunity: "the next day" the bird re-emerges from the collective unconscious in the form of a "big bogie" haunting people's dreams with threats of pollution, social upheavals or atomic war'.¹³

More recently, Judith Dell Panny has continued the quasi-biographical readings of the story, calling this 'primitive and simple' tale 'an original myth'.¹⁴ She equates the bird with the writer, 'its song being the story or novel'. The hawk then alludes to those human predators who would silence the singer and 'if bird and hawk suggest the artistic and aggressive members of a community, all must perish when the bogie takes its revenge'.¹⁵ Applying the tale even more directly to Frame's person, James Bertram sees Frame herself as the bird who 'has learnt how to keep them [the hawk and the bogie] at bay with the magic spell of words'.¹⁶

The story and its reductionist image of the author have also crossed into the popular New Zealand press.¹⁷ Again seeing Frame as, literally, the timid bird, Jill

¹¹ In its 1992 reissued form the volume was renamed The Ring of Fire, indicating, perhaps, a post-autobiography shift in Frame's author figure and the complexity of the literary criticism about her.

¹² Jeanne Delbaere, 'Introduction', Delbaere (1992) 13.

¹³ Delbaere (1992) 13-14.

¹⁴ Judith Dell Panny, I Have What I Gave: The Fiction of Janet Frame (Wellington: Daphne Brasell Associates Press, 1992) 10.

¹⁵ Dell Panny 9.

¹⁶ James Bertram, rev. of The Reservoir and Other Stories, Landfall 20.3 (1966): 292.

¹⁷ Although articles about Janet Frame are scarce in this period, almost all adopt the same wary, tentative approach. See, for example:

'Noted NZ Writer is "Inspired by People"', NZ Herald 22 Oct. 1963.

McCracken begins a 1974 magazine profile with the story and then uses it to explain Frame's special need for camouflage and protection when she is discovered and driven out of hiding by 'a literary world, by the people who drink cocktails':

She had been awarded the 1974 Winn-Manson Fellowship—it was a formal occasion. She mixed among the formality, camouflaged, she was introduced and talked, smiling, eyes far away. Enveloped in a yellow brown dress with dolman sleeves, her feet in dilapidated brown shoes, a dull green velvet bag over her arm she stood, moving from one foot to another, while people congratulated her and made speeches. Her hair shot up in a frizzy mass from her head, her face was completely devoid of make-up. ...

During the speeches the fantasy-weaver folded her hands around her whisky glass, the contents untasted, and smiled like a child. In the end she sat on a chair behind a man in a suit—she wasn't there. ...

Clapping, approval, more congratulations—she wrote her signature for someone on the page of one of her books. She talked vaguely of things and eventually turned to her companion, Jacquie Baxter, and suggested it was time to leave.¹⁸

Frame is observed from a safe distance, as though she is a rare, timid and exotic animal caught out of her natural habitat and exposed; attempting to 'camouflage' herself in her dress and accessories, Frame moves from foot to foot as she stands, stunned, silent and remote. She is a child prodigy¹⁹ (or a debutante, perhaps) in

¹⁷ 'Top Author Settles in Taranaki', Taranaki Daily News 12 Nov. 1976.

¹⁸ Mark Goulden, 'Introspective Genius' (extract from Mark My Words!), NZ Listener 9 Dec. 1978: 24.

¹⁹ Jill McCracken, 'Janet Frame: It's Time for France', NZ Listener 27 Oct. 1973: 20.

²⁰ This is the same image C.K. Stead uses when he describes Frame as 'like the manifestly brilliant child in the classroom who is always disappointing the teacher's notion of how brilliant children

her first awkward encounter with the adult world of fashion and small talk. Frame has on the 'wrong' shoes for the occasion. She does not wear but is 'enveloped' by her dress. She is out of 'place'. Observing the surface of Frame's body and her actions (birdwatching) the journalist hopes to find connections or clues to the workings of Frame's mind and talent. But because Frame's body and presence confuse or even deny the complexity and so-called 'darkness' of her fiction, McCracken's response is uneasy and ambivalent. Failing to adequately describe or delimit Frame, she shifts attention to the relationship between the writer and her audience and the specific problem of address—Who is Frame talking to? What is she saying? What subject position does she assume in speaking? The end effect of McCracken's distancing observations is a denial of Frame's voice and subjectivity: Frame is not even granted control of the act of signing her name. Instead, she 'wrote' her signature for someone, somewhere on one of her books, much as she talked 'vaguely of things', without the authority of a voice or a subject or an audience.

In 'Beginnings' Frame provides her own interpretation of the bird, hawk, bogie story:

When I was small, and the hawks so often came swooping out of the sky to kill the birds and the bogies so often lived behind the hills, and I thought I'd make up a story to put hawk, bird, bogie into their proper hierarchy, then I had few words to waste. Getting them, using them were as simple as being the hawk which swooped out of the sky. (B:42)

Instead of following this authorial advice from within 'Beginnings' that it is the writer who is the predatory hawk, most critics share a reading of the writer, or Janet Frame herself, as the vulnerable bird, swallowed up by the predatory hawk (variously seen as nature or society). Carried into interpretation of her fiction,

the story and the childlike, fearful, vulnerable and victimised—the feminine—figure of Frame it generates has provided a stable authorial identity or origin in which to fix and limit the meaning and significance of her writing.

And what of the bogie, the neglected element in almost all interpretations of the story? When it is mentioned, it is most often re-figured, its complexity and instability resolved without comment, as a 'bogey', an 'object of terror or dread'.²⁰ It is contained within the mind. But Frame, who says she strives to 'choose words that bind with their spell' (B:42) has not chosen this spelling. According to the O.E.D., bogie, as well as being a variant of bogey, is a northern dialect word (and Frame mentions the influence of her Scottish grandmother on her childhood world) meaning a kind of trolley; 'a low truck or frame running on two or more pairs of wheels and supporting the forepart of a locomotive engine or the ends of a long railway carriage.' This meaning is at least as plausible as any other, connecting as it does with Frame's extended railway analogy for reading and writing (so that perhaps the two versions of bogie/bogey might even be connected) and with Frame's historical connection with railways and presumably, railway terminology. It is, however, much more difficult to reinscribe onto Janet Frame's person.

It seems to me, moreover, that in 'Beginnings' Frame uses the bird, hawk, bogie story to refute the very desire for fixity in language and meaning that readings like these demonstrate. Through her larger narrative account of the tale's composition and telling, Frame is questioning our confidence in language (and storytellers) to communicate and tell the truth (any truth). As its author, the

²⁰ Also spelt bogy. The definitions of bogie given in the Oxford English Dictionary are: 1. 'The evil one, the devil', 2. 'A bogle or goblin; a person much dreaded' and 3. 'an object of terror or dread; a bugbear.'

young Frame has control of the elements and composition of the story. However the story's significance depends not on its writing, but on its reception—and readings are notoriously, inevitably, subjective.

Within 'Beginnings' itself, the bird, hawk, bogie story is said to be a failure for its audience:

I keep that story in mind as an example of a time in my life when I did not waste words, when I had fewer words to choose from, yet I was still unable to perform the miracle of keeping my listeners 'from play' and ... from the paddling pool—clear water on a bed of white stones—near the river. I remember that I called on the authority of my mother—Mum, they're wriggling, stop them from wriggling while I tell a story. (B:42)

In the railway analogy Frame uses, the author lays the tracks, but it is the individual reader's point of departure (her point of view or way of seeing) and her (inexplicable and unpredictable) journey along the narrative track that forms a story's significance:

When I write, and my words go astray, with unexplained stops and 'wrigglings' of concentration in those who read, I think to myself—I'm of the country—the country of words—I should have known. (B:42)

Or, on another interpretation, the story or language (the bird) cannot be disciplined or policed to mean just what its author (the hawk) wants. Once the story is told it belongs to its unruly audience (the bogie). The author's plan for its meaning, her intentions and expectations, will always be exceeded in the reading (the bogie will come out from behind the hill):

How much more difficult it is now, to choose words that bind with their spell, and to realize that once the words are chosen and written, there's no one to appeal to, to help recall the wandering attention! One is quite alone,

one must decide alone. (B:42)

Beyond even the writer's ability to write and the reader's ability to read, language is itself a powerful agent outside the full control of its users. It is language, not the writer, that is unstable and unreliable. Whilst at best it can be used by the writer to transform, create and preserve, it can also manipulate, deceive and lie. Writing, in other words, is only ever partial, scarred as it is by the gap between what we choose to say and what is excluded from the bounds of speech. It is divided against itself. Language, as Frame concludes, may be the hawk—'*A Hawk Came out of the Sky*' (B:47). From within writing or without, there is no final authority for language. By its very nature it always exceeds our expectations and our attempts to control it. The author figure called 'Janet Frame' that critics have constructed from the bird, hawk, bogie story, is but another example of the (failed) attempt.

The same critical assumptions about the transparency of the link between a female author and her writing and the particular, peculiar 'otherness' of Frame (whether she be animal, child or mad) that shadow interpretation of the bird, hawk, bogie story are also invoked in the second critical commonplace that arises in response to 'Beginnings'. This is the story of Frame's choice of 'that' world as a place to live:

As it was becoming impossible for me to reconcile 'this' and 'that' world, I decided to choose 'that' world, and one day when the Inspector was visiting my class at school I said,—Excuse me, and walked from the room and the school, from 'this' world to 'that' world where I have stayed, and where I live now. (B:45)

Jill McCracken, who began her Listener profile with the bird, hawk, bogie story,

concludes with a literal application of the 'this world' / 'that world' division. A disembodied, third person 'she', Frame randomly 'wanders off' back to her inaccessible, inner world, where, it is assumed, she still wanders:

She now has the freedom to write. Her latest novel, Daughter Buffalo, is proof of that. She has seen disaster, but "I've managed to survive. I'm happy." But she wanted to leave the world of grey walls and journalism, the strangers of "this" world. "Let's go home." She wanders off down the corridor.²¹

This literal appropriation of the division is the same one Shona Smith examines in an analysis of the reviews of Daughter Buffalo. Because of the well-known fact that Janet Frame spent more than eight years in mental hospitals, Smith says, 'The political relevance of Frame's work has been ignored or even dismissed because we choose to doubt the author's sanity. At the same time we exploit this perceived madness pretending that it heightens 'poetic imagination', 'childlike simplicity' and so on.'²² Gina Mercer has identified the same tendency—for there to be 'a leakage of reference to the author's perceived condition into discussion of her work'²³—as widespread in criticism of Frame's fiction.

Patrick Evans, the self-styled doyen of Frame's literary critics, and the most persistently biographical, has long attempted, as he puts it, 'to construct a biographical base for a discussion of her art' so that he might then 'record how her art grew out of her life.'²⁴ His 1977 account of her fiction, Janet Frame, does not attempt to discuss or analyse 'Beginnings' as text, though it relies heavily on

²¹ McCracken 21.

²² Shona Smith, 'Still Suppressing...: Reviewers & Daughter Buffalo', Untold 8 (1987): 38.

²³ Gina Mercer, 'The Subversive Fiction of Janet Frame', PhD. Diss., Univ of Sydney, 1989: 15. Gina Mercer also describes the other side to this blurring between Frame as a person and her books in the collocates of witchcraft and magic used to describe both Frame and her work.

²⁴ Patrick Evans, Preface, Janet Frame (Boston: Twayne, 1977).

its structure and detail. The first two chapters of the book present a speculative biography of Frame based around the 'this world'/'that world' division. Evans describes Frame as moving from 'Life in This World', 'the everyday world of society with its common values and mass culture' to a 'Life in That World', 'the private and possibly idiosyncratic world of the gifted, imaginative individual'.²⁵ He uncritically adopts the very division his subsequent interpretations of Frame's fiction rely upon.

In the tradition of what Domna Stanton calls 'the age-old, pervasive decoding of all female writing as autobiographical',²⁶ Evans, having established to his own satisfaction a biographical base, goes on to use 'autobiographical' as a weapon to diminish Frame's texts.²⁷ In Evans' opinion, Frame does not, or cannot, 'transcend', but only records, the concerns of her private self.²⁸ Writing, for example, of The Lagoon stories, Evans says that 'Only an understanding that many references in this earlier fiction are disguised incidents in the writer's own life will enable the reader to understand the work fully.'²⁹ In the same analysis, he goes even further to claim that a 'knowledge of her life will *always* increase our understanding of her fiction and poetry rather more than is the case with

²⁵ Evans (1977) Preface.

²⁶ Domna Stanton, 'Autogynography: Is the Subject Different?', The Female Autograph, ed. Domna Stanton (Univ. Of Chicago Press, 1987) 4.

²⁷ This is not to declare the 'author' dead or deny the important influence of a writer's life history and her cultural background on her writing (as feminist approaches, for one, attest). Interpretation should not, however, be limited or confined by the author's extratextual existence. For a discussion of the relation between the deconstructive resonances of the 'death of the author' and the reconstructive project of feminist criticism, see Nancy K. Miller, 'Changing the Subject: Authorship, Writing and Reading', Subject to Change: Reading Feminist Writing, (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1988).

²⁸ Evans does say that 'There is a point at which her fiction quite suddenly begins to resonate more clearly, to indicate wider themes and meanings and to transcend the autobiographical. This is in Scented Gardens for the Blind.' (Evans (1977) 39). However, the statement is undermined by the 'Epilogue' to the volume where he once again returns to 'the central problem of her art, its inward orientation and the many personal factors which seem to prevent its turning fully outward. Her imaginative world is possessed by a force of gravity that draws all things to a center at which she herself stands' (Evans (1977) 203-04).

²⁹ Evans (1977) 40-41.

most other writers ... such a knowledge will be seen often to reduce the *apparent* complexity of her writing.'³⁰ Again, in a 1981 article, whilst admitting the theoretical shortcomings of his approach, he nevertheless defends himself by an extraordinary appeal to Frame's exceptional life story:

I have broken the rule which states that a writer's life has nothing to do with a writer's art. I break it because it does not fit the writer: Janet Frame seems to me to dictate a different critical approach because, as anyone familiar with the details of her life will know, she constantly places herself at the center of her own writing. ... Frame is an extraordinarily egocentric writer who finds herself in everything and will empathize with her environment only in order to cannibalize it so that the flesh of others may become the substance of her fiction.³¹

The figure of the author called 'Janet Frame', created by Evans, then serves him in reducing the danger of her fiction.³² Evans thus promotes his own powerful joint roles as psychologist and critic.³³

—

The same critical fascination with, and appropriation of, the 'this world'/'that world' structure applies in post-colonial discourse about Janet Frame. Janet Frame's personal 'marginality' is here seen as an expression of her political and

³⁰ Evans (1977) 46. My italics.

³¹ Evans (1981) 31–2.

³² This is the author function Michel Foucault describes: 'The author allows a limitation of the cancerous and dangerous proliferation of significations within a world where one is thrifty not only with one's resources and riches, but also with one's discourse and their significations. The author is the principle of thrift in the proliferation of meaning'. See Foucault 118.

³³ Evans' attacks may not seem important, in view of their date. His remarks are now more than 15 years old and criticism of Frame has moved well beyond this predatory, paternalistic level. However, Evans remains one of the most influential and widely read of Frame's critics—witness his keynote address to the inaugural conference on Janet Frame, held in Dunedin, NZ, August 1992 (papers forthcoming in a special issue of *Journal of NZ Literature*, 1993). His 'pursuit' of Janet Frame continues in his extraordinarily egocentric article 'The Muse as Rough Beast: The Autobiography of Janet Frame', *Untold* 6 (1986): 1–10 in which he provides the background to his Twayne biography and describes his 'part' in prompting Frame to write her autobiography—although, modestly, adding that he is 'not necessarily saying that she wrote her autobiography because of my specific intrusion into her life' (Evans (1986) 4).

geographic condition. Jeanne Delbaere, for example, uses the location of 'Willow Glen' (sic), 'just a few metres beyond the boundary of the town', 'with its ground covered with weeds and later with demolished cars or pieces of rubble and old iron', to figure not only Frame's position in conformist New Zealand society, where she is 'the divided outsider: literally beyond the pale, she was poor in a predominantly bourgeois society, artistic in an unimaginative world that threw poetry onto the local rubbish dump'³⁴ but also the global geography of New Zealand culture existing on the edge of Empire:

The young provincial of 'Willow Glen' on the fringe of Oamaru has remained faithful to her original choice and situation. Though she has gained an international reputation she has chosen to remain on the edge of what used to be the most formidable empire of the Western world. Her marginal stance and her obstinate refusal to compromise with 'this' world have given her a completeness of vision rarely achieved among contemporary writers. The little bird afraid of the hawks has now turned into a powerful bogie soaring high above them. Close to the sun, alone, and terrible.³⁵

Alone in 'that' world of her art, Frame no longer has a recognisably human form. She is completely the 'other'. And the other, the object, cannot speak; she is either spoken for or spoken at.

In 'Beginnings', from which Delbaere borrows her terminology and division, Frame is the subject who speaks for and about herself. Even though she may

³⁴ Delbaere (1992) 14.

³⁵ Delbaere (1992) 21.

Despite its easily appropriated symbolism, Willowglen was not the house Frame grew up in. Frame's family bought the house when she was eighteen and she has never lived there for any substantial amount of time. The rented, characterless house in suburban Eden Street, Oamaru, where Frame actually grew up is not so convenient a metaphor as the sprawling, undisciplined Willowglen, with its shady history on the town's geographic and social margins.

seem to deny her identity or her subjectivity by placing herself in internal exile in the anonymous and powerless 'that world', she does it in the very space of identity, the discourse of autobiography. As well as the object of her own discourse as the 'other' in 'that world', she is also, and simultaneously, an active subject in 'this world', creating and displaying herself as a text. By self-consciously occupying both positions (subject and object) and invoking both modes of discourse (narration and description), Frame subverts the gap between them, or indeed erases it altogether. Both the person who sees and the thing seen, it is Frame herself, as text, who is the site of these overlapping discourses.

This mediation of a woman's self-representation, her 'I', not just by the agency of significant other(s) (as a cognitive mode)³⁶ but also by its presentation of itself as an other in discourse (as a rhetorical strategy) is a common theme in women's autobiographical narratives (although not, of course, restricted to women writers). Leah Hewitt, for example, says that 'Autobiography is in some sense an impossible strategy to bridle or control otherness'.³⁷ Julia Watson sees women's autobiographies as part of a tradition of the 'anti-metaphysical autograph'; 'texts which retain something of the fragmented, mosaical quality of the "I" in dialogue with powerful others'.³⁸ Indeed, theorists of autobiography increasingly

³⁶ See, for example, Mary Mason, 'The Other Voice: Autobiographies of Women Writers', Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical, ed. James Olney (Princeton Univ. Press, 1980) 207–35. Mason writes that 'the self-discovery of female identity seems to acknowledge the real presence and recognition of another consciousness, and the disclosure of female self is linked to the identification of some "other"'. (Mason 210) In her examples the chosen others are god, husband, religious community and collective experience.

³⁷ Leah D. Hewitt, Autobiographical Tighropes (Lincoln & Nebraska: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1990) 194. Linda Anderson makes the same point: 'the autobiographical self is a fictional construct within the text which can neither have its origins anterior to the text nor indeed coalesce with its creator'. The difference of women's autobiography (and other groups not in a position of social authority) comes about because women's sense of self is less sure, less unified and continuous than men's. This means that a woman may have a 'greater formal awareness in her writing, an emphasis on the self-reflexiveness of writing, the idea of the self as written'. See Linda Anderson, 'At the Threshold of the Self: Women and Autobiography', Women's Writing: A Challenge to Theory, ed. Moira Monteith (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1986) 59–60.

³⁸ Julia Watson, 'Shadowed Presence: Modern Women Writers' Autobiographies and the Other',

see this kind of self-reflexiveness and alienation (and fiction) as the determining structure of all autobiography. Michel Beaujour says that 'self-portraiture' (of which 'Beginnings' is an example, distinguished as it is by a thematic, associative structure in place of a continuous narrative) is always based on this scheme: 'Self-portrayal is writing on the outside and from a Without that dispossesses the "inside" and yet does not settle down to a position of mastery'.³⁹

More, then, than the literal application of the 'this world'/'that world' division to Frame's personality or history what is important in 'Beginnings' is its structure, the conventional paradigm it displays and dismantles. This is the structure that Gina Mercer argues is central to all Frame's texts:

Otherness in terms of place, colonisation, gender, insanity, death, dichotomous thinking, language and literary conventions forms the strongest link between all her diverse works.⁴⁰

According to Mercer, critics of Janet Frame's fiction have often identified what she is doing, but have usually failed to see that more than presenting the system of dichotomous thinking ('Life/Death, False/Real, Seeing/Blind, Sane/Insane, Treasure/Rubbish'⁴¹), she is writing about 'the mechanisms and structures which create and maintain the whole *system* of otherness'.⁴² As W.H. New explains:

There is a certain responsibility for seeing which Janet Frame requires her readers to accept. We are asked not to construct monolithic philosophies but to understand what occurs at a moment of insight—not to shape a frame (for that is where we begin, angled on experience, safely distanced from it), but to comprehend what happens when the divisiveness of

Studies in Autobiography, ed. James Olney (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1988) 182.

³⁹ Michel Beaujour, Poetics of the Literary Self-Portrait, trans. Yara Milos (New York & London: New York Univ. Press, 1991) 345.

⁴⁰ Mercer 16.

⁴¹ Anna Rutherford, 'Janet Frame's Divided and Distinguished Worlds', Delbaere (1992) 41.

⁴² Mercer 9. My italics.

dualism itself breaks down, when the seer and the seen become one.⁴³

H. Winston Rhodes also recognises the metaphysical import of the 'this world'/'that world' division. It marks, he says, Frame's 'distinctive way of seeing, the double vision, the combination of the inward and outward look'.⁴⁴ Frame writes on the border between these two ways of seeing, with access to both: 'she is an unorthodox realist who can enter the world of fantasy and dream without losing her bearings'.⁴⁵ But Frame's artistic control is ultimately, for Rhodes, contingent upon its restriction. According to Rhodes, it was Frame's literal retreat to a 'glorified linen cupboard, converted into a bedroom' to type The Lagoon stories (themselves concerned with ways of seeing) that enabled her 'to rescue from the confusion of dream those memories of childhood and experiences of later days that constitute the raw material from which her stories were shaped'.⁴⁶ Placed in the position of isolate author once again, in her twilight world where 'the borderline of fact and fantasy is not clearly marked',⁴⁷ Frame is removed from sight, both as subject and as object. What initially appeared to be control and breadth of vision is, for Rhodes, really the only way Frame can see and the only position she can occupy. She writes in, from and of her restricted world.

Again and again, it seems, critics will use the 'this world'/'that world' division to place (confine) Frame firmly in 'that world'. It is, as Shona Smith points out, a way for critics to explain (away) the political concerns of Frame's writing with ultimate recourse to their socially and psychologically dysfunctional author.

⁴³ W. H. New, 'The Frame Story World of Janet Frame', Essays on Canadian Writing 29 (1984): 188.

⁴⁴ Rhodes (1982) 129.

⁴⁵ Rhodes (1982) 126-27.

⁴⁶ Rhodes (1982) 112.

⁴⁷ Rhodes (1982) 115.

Frame's so-called 'failures' (her interest in death, insanity and poverty; her experiments with form and narrative; her 'obsession' with language) are then blamed on her as failures of art, and not seen as failures of our system of critical thinking.⁴⁸

* * * *

In 1983 Janet Frame published the first volume of her autobiography, To the Is-Land, to critical and popular acclaim.⁴⁹ In 1984 and 1985 two more very successful volumes, An Angel at My Table and The Envoy From Mirror City followed. Frame herself, when asked why she wrote her autobiographies, has variously replied that she wanted to have 'my say', 'to correct some things that had been taken as fact and are not fact',⁵⁰ to 'show that I'm not—well, that I am a human being',⁵¹ and that she wanted to 'share with others so they might understand how and why I write as I do'.⁵² Her literary agent has commented that the autobiographies and Jane Campion's 1990 film of An Angel at My Table have made Frame famous: 'The whole thing has allowed us to break through with Janet.'⁵³ What difference, then, have the autobiographies made to her critical

⁴⁸ Smith 38–41. Also see Mercer 12–13 for a detailed discussion of this point. The history of Frame's critical reception is not unique, particularly among women writers. Jacqueline Rose discusses the same problem in the reception of Sylvia Plath:

There is nothing like the concept of a purely individual pathology for allowing us, with immense comforts, to conjure it all away (her problem, not mine; or, talking about danger as a way of feeling safe). For me, one of the central challenges presented by Plath's writing has been to find a way of looking at the most unsettling and irreducible dimensions of psychic processes which she figures in her writing without turning them against her—without, therefore, turning her into a case.

See Jacqueline Rose, The Haunting of Sylvia Plath (London: Virago, 1991) 4.

⁴⁹ The book won the 1983 Wattie Book Award and in the same year Frame won the Turnovsky Prize for outstanding achievement in the arts.

⁵⁰ Janet Frame, 'Having My Say', interview with Elizabeth Alley, Radio NZ, Wellington, 28 Apr. 1983.

⁵¹ Tony Reid, 'Visionary View of the "Tapestry of Words"', NZ Herald 12 Feb. 1983, sec. 2: 1.

⁵² Frances Levy, 'Janet Frame ... Joy in a World of Words', NZ Women's Weekly 21 Mar. 1983.

⁵³ 'Angel—A Sleeper Waking Up to Fame ... And Fortune?', Sydney Morning Herald 16 Feb. 1991.

reception and reputation? How have they made that change? What does 'Janet Frame' mean now?

CHAPTER TWO

TO THE IS-LAND:

The Subject of Autobiography

Since its acceptance as a specifically 'literary' genre, autobiography's theorists have continued to argue over its nature and definition.¹ Indeed, it is the debate over its generic inclusions and exclusions, histories and definition that began autobiography's current rise to prominence in literary studies.² The first attempts to define and demarcate autobiography were in bibliographies and histories and for some time critics sought to establish and legitimise the genre by distinguishing it from the adjacent forms of biography, letters, diaries, memoirs, history and fiction.

But despite the enormous growth in both the number of autobiographies published and the critical effort to describe them in the past twenty or so years,³

¹ As opposed to autobiography's use as source material in history, Ethnic Studies and Women's Studies which all preceded its 'discovery' by literary critics. See James Olney, 'Autobiography and the Cultural Moment: A Thematic, Historical, and Bibliographic Introduction', Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical, ed. James Olney (Princeton Univ. Press, 1980) 3-27. He calls this first phase of autobiography criticism its 'bios' phase.

² Studies began in 1907 with George Misch's History of Autobiography in Antiquity but it was not until the 1960s that interest began to gather pace. Two bibliographies, William Matthew's British Autobiographies: An Annotated Bibliography of British Autobiographies Published or Written Before 1951 (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1955) and Louis Kaplan's A Bibliography of American Autobiographies (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1961) really set debate in train. Histories include Paul Delaney, British Autobiography in the Seventeenth Century (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969) and Wayne Shumaker, English Autobiography: Its Emergence, Materials and Forms (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1954). See Sidonie Smith, A Poetics of Women's Autobiography (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1987) for a more detailed history of the criticism.

³ The effort is still growing. The MLA bibliography to September 1993 has 1,600 items indexed under 'Autobiography'.

it seems that there has never been agreement among critics about just what an autobiography is or does. In his influential 1980 collection of essays James Olney concluded that:

Autobiography, like the life it mirrors, refuses to stay still long enough for the genre critic to fit it out with the necessary rules, laws, contracts, and pacts; it refuses, simply, to be a literary genre like any other.⁴

Avrom Fleishman surveyed the criticism in 1983 and identified six different critical approaches. He goes further than Olney in concluding that autobiography 'make[s] no urgent claim to a place among the genres':⁵

The canons of a standard of truth (or even of purported truth), of a quest for meaning (whether as a goal or process), of a set of conventional markers or consistent rhetorical gestures, of an inevitable self-expression or personal myth or dialectic of desire—all are broadly enlightening but are useful only operationally in exhibiting the behavior of one or another self-writing. Autobiography is not generically distinguished by formal constituents, linguistic register, or audience effects.⁶

Perhaps, as Phillipe Lejeune suggests, autobiography's 'problem' is endemic to any academic study of genre. Genre theory's aim is a legitimising one: 'it rationalizes or systematizes, in order to ground in law and in dignity the genre studied'.⁷ It plays the role of 'order's principle': 'resemblance, analogy, identity and difference, taxonomic classification, organization and genealogical tree, order of reason, order of reasons, sense of sense, truth of truth, natural light and sense

⁴ Olney 24–25.

⁵ Avrom Fleishman, *Figures of Autobiography* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1983) 38.

⁶ Fleishman 35–36.

⁷ Phillipe Lejeune, 'Autobiography and Literary History', *On Autobiography*, by Phillipe Lejeune, ed. Paul John Eakin (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1988) 141.

of history'.⁸ This means that genre theory cannot conceive of history or change: 'it organizes literature in the forms in which we already know it; recognizability and an unbroken line of descent are the final criteria, and literary hierarchies remain unchanged'.⁹ Where formalist genre criticism inevitably fails is in its attempt to formulate a synthesis in the absolute using concepts that make sense only in the historical field. Genre does not occur 'naturally', it is not a structure immanent to literature (or to individual texts); genre exists only within the system. It is a literary classifying order (an 'artificial synthetic language', a 'kind of Esperanto'¹⁰ —a fiction) and so must be studied as a historical phenomenon functioning within the greater literary and social systems.¹¹

But there does seem to be something more than the problems of generalised genre theory at stake in the particular case of autobiography. As Paul de Man concludes:

Empirically as well as theoretically, autobiography lends itself poorly to generic definition; each specific instance seems to be an exception to the norm; the works themselves always seem to shade off into neighboring or even incompatible genres and ... generic discussions ... remain distressingly sterile when autobiography is at stake.¹²

De Man bypasses the critical impasse by extending autobiography indefinitely:

Autobiography, then, is not a genre or a mode, but a figure of reading or of understanding that occurs, to some degree, in all texts. The

⁸ Jacques Derrida, 'The Law of Genre', trans. Avita Ronell, *Glyph* 7 (1984): 228.

⁹ Mary Jacobus, 'The Law of/and Gender: Genre Theory and The Prelude', *Diacritics* 14.4 (1984): 47.

¹⁰ Lejeune 153.

¹¹ Robert Elbaz, The Changing Nature of the Self: A Critical Study of the Autobiographic Discourse (Croom Helm, 1988) uses the same arguments against genre as a system of classification. He calls it 'an ideological grid forced upon consciousness ... Generic classification has to do with institutionalisation—canonisation and therefore fetishisation—of literature. ... Generic classification is a hegemonic phenomenon which restricts literary practice to approved, institutionalised forms of expression' (Elbaz 14–15).

¹² Paul de Man, 'Autobiography as De-facement', *MLN* 94 (1979): 920.

autobiographical moment happens as an alignment between the two subjects involved in the process of reading in which they determine each other by mutual reflexive substitution.¹³

Instead of this 're-fixing the face of genre with the face of Derrida',¹⁴ it is more appropriate, as Mary Jacobus does, to consider the closeness of theories of genre, theories of the subject and theories of writing.¹⁵ Generic classification is an act of appropriation, of naming or legitimation: it is a means of 'stabilizing the errant text by putting a face on it, and so reading into it a recognizable, specular image of our own acts of understanding'.¹⁶ Like the autobiographical act itself, 'genre allows us to find our own faces in the text rather than experience the anxious dissolution of identity which is akin to not knowing our kind; or should I say, gender?'¹⁷

De Man's functional approach to autobiography has become a common contemporary response to the genre's difficulty. For many theorists currently attempting to describe what an autobiography 'does', 'autobiography' refers less to a system of classification than to a writing or reading performance or attitude. The autobiographical text is contextualised; it is given a social dimension. Its definition is extratextual; it lies in the receptive consciousness.¹⁸ However, as any

¹³ De Man 921. De Man's infinite extension of autobiography is problematic even within his article. He singles out autobiography as illustrating 'in a striking way' the system of tropological substitutions on which all language is based. As Avrom Fleishman replies: 'if autobiography can serve as this striking illustration, it must have, if not the defining characteristics of a genre, at least such distinctive marks as those that lead most readers to take The Prelude as autobiographical and not Essays Upon Epitaphs' (Fleishman 38).

¹⁴ Jacobus 57.

¹⁵ Invoking, as many theorists including James Olney, Sidonie Smith and Phillipe Lejeune have, autobiography's three-way split into 'autos', 'bios' and 'graphe'.

¹⁶ Jacobus 55.

¹⁷ Jacobus 57.

¹⁸ Elizabeth Bruss and Phillipe Lejeune are probably the most important theorists of this 'dynamic' approach. The text is not a self-enclosed, logical entity but in its being postulates 'otherness', a receptive and dynamic group consciousness. The approach can be criticised for failing to question the concept of genre itself; it merely adapts it to provide a social dimension to the literary structure and does not question the autobiographical text as an ideological statement.

study of a range of theoretical texts on autobiography will show, despite the general acceptance of autobiography into the literary canon, the tensions in the critical discourse have not abated. For autobiography, the attempt to write the self or give the self a narrative, is deeply bound up with contemporary questions or questionings of identity.

Feminist theories are by now a part of the debate. With them, the focus on generic definition and tradition has shifted to challenge the primarily masculine conventions and canons of its 'conditions and limits'.¹⁹ Unlike the self-certain, self-centred male (or masculinist) writer whose 'Autobiography is the mirror in which the individual reflects his own image',²⁰ the female writer who approaches autobiography may be, by virtue of her gender and the cultural position she has been assigned, profoundly alienated from the 'fiction' of unitary, self-sufficient selfhood which autobiography has traditionally expressed. Because she is not as closely aligned to the 'universal' as a male writer, the female writer may be particularly aware of the social base of subjectivity and the social forms of gender identity and knowledge²¹ and of how this position affects her relationship to generic possibilities—'to the autobiographical impulse, to the structuring of content, to the reading and writing of the self, to the authority of the voice and the situating of narrative perspective, to the problematic nature of representation itself'.²² Autobiography may self-consciously exist for her as an alternative place of identification.

¹⁹ Georges Gusdorf's 1957 article 'Conditions and Limits of Autobiography' is the 'seminal' article most often criticised for its andocentric assumptions and conclusions. See George Gusdorf, 'Conditions and Limits of Autobiography', trans. James Olney, Olney (1980) 28–48 and Susan Stanford Friedman's reply in 'Women's Autobiographical Selves: Theory and Practice', The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings, ed. Shari Benstock (London: Routledge, 1988) 34–62.

²⁰ Gusdorf 33.

²¹ That is, as Susan Stanford Friedman replies to Gusdorf, 'That mirror does not reflect back a unique, individual identity to each living woman; it projects an image of WOMAN, a category that is supposed to define the living woman's identity' (Stanford Friedman) 38.

²² Smith 17.

In the same way that modernist, self-reflexive autobiographies (wherein the text 'creates' the self and the subject is dispossessed if not eliminated) are favoured by critics for their usefulness as models of writing in general (Michael Leiris's The Rule of the Game and Roland Barthes par roland barthes are the most often-cited texts), particular attention in feminist accounts of autobiography has also been focused on non-canonical, culturally marginal texts including diaries, oral narratives and modernist fiction which break most of the obvious rules of the genre. The implicit assumption in each case is that 'locating outlaw genres enables a deconstruction of the "master" genres, revealing the power dynamics embedded in literary production, distribution, and reception'.²³ Autobiography is to be studied in the context of (and provide an example for) theorisations about the construction of subjectivity and gender and the reading and writing processes.

But the popularity of the *concept* of autobiography has not obviated its troubling legacy. This legacy includes first of all an intertextual negotiation with the formal genre of 'autobiography'.²⁴ As well, however, autobiography deals with the clash of traditional and modernist conceptions of literature itself—the traditional view which grounds itself in the metaphysics of the conscious, coherent, individual subject and the modernist erosion of the authority of the subject in which the text creates the fiction of the 'self' rather than the reverse. This is the 'autobiographical tightrope' Leah D. Hewitt describes:

²³ Caren Kaplan, 'Resisting Autobiography: Out-Law Genres and Transnational Feminist Subjects', De/colonising the Subject: The Politics of Gender in Women's Autobiography, eds. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (Minneapolis: Univ of Minnesota Press, 1992) 119. Kaplan's article, for example, is an oppositional study of prison memoir, *testimonio*, ethnography, 'biomythography', cultural autobiography, and 'regulative psychobiography'.

²⁴ Linda H. Peterson, Victorian Autobiography: The Tradition of Self-Interpretation (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1986), demonstrates that Victorian autobiographers believed they were participating in a distinctive generic tradition, and this still seems to hold true, in spite of the critical instability of the category.

In walking the tightrope 'between' fact and fiction, experience and language, the autobiographer hesitates 'between' performance, description, and interpretation, while balancing the demands of truthfulness and literary inventiveness. As a genre that includes rules and a weighty tradition, autobiography is a model with which the writers must come to terms through their own strategies. ... autobiography is anything but an innocent genre, whether one is considering it as a function of a literary tradition, or as a social, historical, and political negotiation with the postcolonial, Western world.²⁵

In all these accounts it is on its borders that the tension of autobiography lies, in its generic definition (autobiography and/or fiction), in the relation of the author to her text and in the relation of the reader to that text. Where autobiography is concerned, writer and reader are assumed to have a heightened awareness of both intertextuality and genre. Autobiography, in Jacques Derrida's terminology, is transformed into 'otobiography': 'it is the ear of the other that signs'.²⁶ This 'testamentary' structure is, of course, the structure of textuality in general. But in the case of autobiography, the reader now has a political responsibility to listen with sensitivity and an open ear for difference.

Autobiography is a self-reflexive and a self-critical act. It must itself, then, include some kind of response to received notions of autobiography, subjectivity, authority and gender, for they are the set of cultural and historical expectations within which and against which the autobiographer writes.²⁷ Contemporary

²⁵ Leah D. Hewitt, Autobiographical Tightropes (Lincoln & London: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1990) 193–94.

²⁶ Jacques Derrida, 'Roundtable on Autobiography', trans. Peggy Kamuf, The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation: Texts and Discussions with Jacques Derrida, ed. Christie V. McDonald (New York: Schocken Books, 1985) 51.

²⁷ See, for example; William Spengeman, The Forms of Autobiography: Episodes in the History of a Literary Genre (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1980); Phillipe Lejeune, 'The Autobiographical

autobiographers are particularly aware of their own difficult position as both subject and author and most have definite views of what, for them, an autobiography is and does. Janet Frame, herself widely subject to and very aware of criticism which confuses her as an author with her work, is no exception. She is mindful of her autobiography's place before an audience and within a generic tradition. She is quite conscious of her own complicated, tenuous position as subject, protagonist and narrator of the text and of the tradition in which her narrative lies; of its generic involvement and its departures.

Her narrative marks its self-consciousness most directly at its outset. Between the title which announces the book-to-come as 'Autobiography 1' and the introduction of herself as the subject and protagonist of the narrative, Frame 'situates the place from which the life will be *recited*, that is to say, reaffirmed'.²⁸ This 'place', the book's first chapter, is found neither in the work (it is more like an epigraph), nor outside it, in the life of the author. It is, perhaps, the text's borderline, the line which separates the person of Janet Clutha from the textual object 'Janet Frame'.

This first chapter of the first volume of the autobiography is titled 'In the Second Place':

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 toward the Third Place, where the starting point is myth. (I:9)

Pact' and 'The Autobiographical Pact (bis)', Lejeune (1988) 3-31 and 119-140; Elizabeth Bruss, *Autobiographical Acts: The Changing Situation of a Literary Genre* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1976); and Sidonie Smith, 'Woman's Story and the Engenderings of Self-Representation', Smith 44-62. James Olney claims that some of the most pertinent theory about autobiography is to be found within autobiographies themselves (Olney 25).

²⁸ Derrida (1985) 14.

The autobiography begins not with Frame's role as its subject or her role as its protagonist, but with her presence as the text's author and her role as its narrator. Her narratorial 'I' is not only the fulcrum upon which this chapter balances and turns but also the active agent on which the autobiography depends for its existence, coherence and meaning. According to this beginning, it is not the material events of Janet Frame's life which will dominate the autobiography—she makes no claim to special status or relevance for that 'mixture'—but rather their transformation in the telling. The 'real' reference of the autobiography is not to Janet Frame or the history of her life, but to the writing, to the unfolding in language of the autobiographical act itself.

This is Frame's autobiographical 'pact' with her reader. In Phillipe Lejeune's formulation of it, the autobiographical pact or contract denotes the conventional understanding between author and reader in an autobiography—the one signing herself as committed to tell the truth; the other considering herself authorised to take the text as truth and not fiction.²⁹ However, unlike Lejeune's pact which would stabilise the relationship between author and text in the external referent of the author's name on the title page and/or in the author's physical person and biography,³⁰ Frame's *anti*-pact destabilises that relationship and the readerly expectations of authorial 'good intentions' which Lejeune's pact relies on. Her narrative is directed neither to her past history nor to her present person and legal status as a subject or signature, but to 'the Third Place, where the starting

²⁹ See 'The Autobiographical Pact', especially p. 4, and his clarifications in 'The Autobiographical Pact (bis)'. Lejeune (1988) 3–31 and 119–139.

³⁰ Lejeune explicitly states that:

Nous n'admettons que les auteurs qui demandent eux-mêmes à être admis... La déclaration d'intention autobiographique peut s'exprimer de différentes manières, dans le titre, dans le «prière d'insérer», dans la dédicace, le plus souvent dans le préambule rituel, mais parfois dans une note conclusive (Gide), ou même dans des interviews accordées au moment de la publication (Sartre): mais de toute façon cette déclaration est obligatoire.

See Phillipe Lejeune, *L'Autobiographie en France* (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1971) 25.

point is myth'.

If autobiography has a founding myth, it is the myth of 'selfhood': that everyone has a self which precedes its inscription in language. Lejeune, for example, claims that it is 'common sense' (or at least a fact of contemporary culture) that autobiography refers to a self, to a pre-given structure outside the text, to an essence, to a Man. But as Lejeune agrees, this belief is ultimately just that—an act of faith: 'I believe that when I say "I," it is I who am speaking: I believe in the Holy Ghost of the first person. And who doesn't believe in it?'³¹ However, as feminist critics among others point out, subjectivity and its expression are not so obvious and unproblematic for minority or 'colonised' groups in a society.

This 'myth of autobiography' in fact involves two related postulates: not only is the self inside each one of us, it is also a pre-given structure, or a finished product. But if, as in Frame's gesture *toward* myth and *to* the 'is-land' of the book's title, the self is structured by language and comes into being in writing, then it can never be a finished product. There is only myth-making. Frame's text, like all autobiography, is a 'starting point', a point that exists only as it produces meaning or myth. It is endlessly beginning.

This does not mean, however, that Frame's autobiographical pact is as fluid as the 'pact' which applies in a fictional text.³² In autobiography, as Francis Hart remarks, 'unreliability is an inescapable condition and not a rhetorical option'.³³ And as Hewitt's 'tightrope' analogy shows, autobiography is the effort of a historical and not a fictional person to come to terms with the past. Unlike

³¹ Lejeune (1988) 131.

³² The 'autobiographical pact' is in this sense a version of Umberto Eco's 'intertextual frame' or Roland Barthes 'codes'.

³³ Francis R. Hart, 'Notes for an Anatomy of Modern Autobiography', New Literary History 1 (1970): 492.

fiction, autobiography dramatises the confrontation between the present and the narrative past, between the psychological pressures of discourse and the narrative pressures of story.

Frame's opening declaration or 'pact' does not just construct her narrator and the narrative goals of the text. In marking out her own central position and point of view as subject and narrator, Frame also constructs or defines the role of the reader. Unlike Lejeune's autobiographer, she makes no claim to the literal truth or externally verifiable reference of the text. Instead, she proclaims the literary truth of the text. This means that at the same time as the role and scope of the narrator to control and synthesise the disparate elements of 'fact and truths and memories of truths' is strengthened, that of her reader is weakened or limited. Because there is no reference outside this text, the reader is denied the policing function Lejeune's pact would grant her and this role reverts to the narrator.

All autobiographies are public accounts of private lives. From the various 'selves' available to her, Frame has very deliberately chosen this account or narrative of herself (this myth) to re-present as her life story. For any public figure, but particularly for a woman who is so aware of the social constructions of self and of herself as subject of myth-making by others, autobiography is a gesture of control and authority before an audience. As Nancy Miller describes it, autobiography is 'the production of a female self as *theater*: that which literally is given to be seen'.³⁴ Frame starts, then, with writing, and it is writing that secures posterity. The autobiography she writes is both a counter to and a usurping of the

³⁴ Nancy K. Miller, 'Women's Autobiography in France: For a Dialectics of Identification', Women and Language in Literature and Society, eds. Ruth Borker and Nelly Furman (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1980) 260. As Miller also notes, 'The decision to go public is particularly charged for the women [sic] writer. ... It is fair, I think, to assume that while for all autobiographers already figures of public fiction there is a strong sense of responsibility about speaking out, because being known, they expect their words to have an impact within a clearly defined reader's circle, the female autobiographers know that they are being read as *women*' (Miller 261-62).

dominant narratives, the 'myths' others have made and told about her. Frame re-tells the (largely) already-existing story of her life but this time in her own, authoritative version, to bring a slightly different self into being.

Although it presents personal material in sometimes intimate detail, in its 'literariness', decorum and control, Frame's autobiography in no way allows itself to be confused with the perhaps still dominant idea of women's autobiography as 'confessional'. Her pact actively precludes reading her autobiography, after the model of consciousness-raising, as the 'truth' of subjective experience. The readings which Frame's beginning or pact most surely excludes are those that she has historically been most subject to: psychologising or biographising 'case' studies.³⁵

The idea of women's autobiography as based on the confessional is present in the work of the very first theorists of 'women's autobiography' (still most often used in the homogenising, singular form) and is no doubt preceded by the (political) use of women's autobiographical writings by the women's movement and in Women's Studies courses. With its 'theoretical' birth as a genre, in order to formalise and define their critical object, early feminist theorists looked for the 'generic' differences that would distinguish women's autobiographical writing from men's. Estelle Jelinek in the 'Introduction' to the 'new' genre's first volume

³⁵ This does not mean that some critics have not contrived to read it this way. See for example, A.L. McLeod's remarks about *To the Is-Land*: 'almost every incident, observation, riposte or reaction has been recalled for inclusion, though not always of interest to the reader ... It is this lack of selectivity—of discretion, perhaps—that accounts for the failure of this work'. *World Literature Today* 57.2 (1983): 352.

I was first alerted to this idea by Rita Felski's categorisation of Janet Frame together with Simone de Beauvoir, Lillian Hellman, Mary McCarthy and Nathalie Sarraute as 'more consciously stylized and "literary" examples of twentieth-century women's autobiography'. Opposed, that is, to the confessional writers who 'share an explicit rhetorical foregrounding of the relationship between a female author and a female reader and an emphasis upon the referential and denotative dimension of textual communication rather than its formal specificity'. See Rita Felski, 'On Confession', *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change* (London: Hutchinson Radius, 1989) 88.

of critical commentary, proposes a series of traits to characterise women's autobiography. She finds that women 'emphasize to a much lesser extent the public aspects of their lives, the affairs of the world, or even their careers, and concentrate instead on their personal lives', that 'the idealization or aggrandizement found in male autobiographies is not typical of the female mode' and that 'irregularity rather than orderliness informs the self-portraits by women', attesting, she says, to 'a continuous female tradition of discontinuity'.³⁶ Although such prescriptive descriptions have ceased to appear, the idea that women have a 'special' relationship to autobiographical writing, with its accompanying assumptions about the appropriate style, form and content of women's autobiography, seems to persist still. There is a feeling prevalent among some feminist theorists that autobiography occupies a 'private' place and serves a purpose that more openly 'public' forms cannot.³⁷

'Private' may be a suitable label for autobiographical forms such as the diary, journal or letters not intended for publication, but where autobiography 'proper' differs from these forms is in its sense of genre and its address to the public reader. Sidonie Smith identifies autobiography's motivating desire as the desire to go public:

³⁶ Estelle C. Jelinek, 'Introduction: Women's Autobiography and the Male Tradition', Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism, ed. Estelle C. Jelinek (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1980) 7-19.

Jelinek's project, as she describes it in her 'Preface' is to 'give legitimacy and status to many excellent and innovative autobiographies by women that have been ignored or excluded from the critical canon' (Jelinek xii). She wants 'women's autobiography' added to current analysis—rather than challenging the ideological base of the oppositional categories she uncritically recycles. For a discussion of the shortcomings of Jelinek's approach, see Domna Stanton 'Autogynography: Is the Subject Different?', The Female Autograph, ed. Domna Stanton (Univ. of Chicago Press, 1984) 3-20.

³⁷ In her 'Introduction' to the volume of essays called The Private Self Shari Benstock, for example, says she uses the word 'private' because it 'suggests a scene of writing that invites the female, a separate space at the very limits of the generic divide between the autobiographical and other kinds of writing and the gender divide between the masculine and the feminine' (Benstock 1). This idea, as Domna Stanton points out, is closely tied to the idea that everything women write is (merely) autobiographical. Rita Felski discusses the feminist movement's influence in 'personalising' (and therefore politicising) the literary text by emphasising its autobiographical dimension. See Felski 114-121.

An andocentric genre, autobiography demands the public story of the public life. ... When woman chooses to leave behind cultural silence and to pursue autobiography, she chooses to enter the public arena.³⁸

At the very least, autobiography is a genre that provides a strategy for the writer to alternate between the private and public worlds. In her autobiography Janet Frame is self-consciously demonstrating her ability not only to resist the classification of the self by others, but also to select an image (or images) of her 'self' for public display.³⁹ In Nancy Miller's theatrical image, Frame can adopt a variety of poses or roles in order to find one that fits both the private self and the public image. Like the French women writers Miller discusses,⁴⁰ the meaning Janet Frame chooses for her written life is her professional career as a writer.

The application of 'myth' to Janet Frame's autobiography is not confined to the new self or the 'personal myth' she creates. It is equally applicable to the autobiography's structure, themes, characters and narrative. Throughout the autobiography, Frame points to the mythic dimensions and parallels of the people, places and events of everyday life, to the 'closeness, the harmony, and not the separation of literature ... and life' (I:160). Indeed her entire poetic project, as she explains and develops it in To the Is-Land, is to 'anchor' the world of

³⁸ Smith 52. I would not, however, suggest, as Smith does, that women have traditionally written for a male audience or that they necessarily reproduce the prevailing ideology of male selfhood, which is the ideology of individualism.

³⁹ Patrick Evans disagrees, however. He finds that, unlike other autobiographies of the past decade ('Brasch, Sargeson and Ashton-Warner come immediately to mind') 'all of which are, naturally written "for the author" but are still essentially 'public utterances ... written with an ear to how they sound and a mind to what they reveal', Janet Frame's autobiography is 'unusual ... in that it seems to be written primarily for the author and not for the reader'. 'The customary censorships of revelation simply do not seem to operate'. Patrick Evans, 'The Muse as Rough Beast: The Autobiography of Janet Frame', Untold 6 (1986): 5. See also A. L. McLeod's series of reviews of the autobiographies. Of To the Is-Land he says 'Frame's prolixity concerning ordinary experiences of early childhood and adolescence gives her work a private quality rather than a public one: it is as if she were writing her reminiscences for family use'. World Literature Today 57.2 (1983): 352.

⁴⁰ Colette, Daniel Stern, Simone de Beauvoir and George Sand.

literature 'within this everyday world where I hadn't the slightest doubt that it belonged? Oamaru, the kingdom by the sea' (I:148). Her written life itself can be seen as a mythic quest, as a legend of the artist.

Frame focuses on the process as well as the materials of narrative without insisting on any one rule or form for both. The autobiography has layers of meaning, layers of history and layers of readings and rereadings, much like a map. As she explains at the end of The Envoy From Mirror City:

Living in New Zealand, would be for me, like living in an age of mythmakers; with a freedom of imagination among all the artists because it is possible to begin at the beginning and to know the unformed places and to help to form them, to be a mapmaker for those who will follow nourished by this generation's layers of the dead. (III:166)

Frame also deals extensively with the cultural milieu and 'mythologies' of the New Zealand of her youth in her autobiography—with its class and gender structure and roles, with the beginnings of its literary scene, the popular culture of magazines, comics and books, as well as the radio, films, fads and fashions that surrounded and shaped her growing up.⁴¹

Clearly, 'myth' has no single or authoritative meaning, here or anywhere.⁴² It

⁴¹ In Roland Barthes' terminology, this is the 'sociolect' of her youth, where language is most social, and so most mythologised or 'thick'. 'The mythical', he says, 'is present everywhere *sentences are turned, stories told* (in all senses of the two expressions): from inner speech to conversation, from newspaper article to political sermon, from novel ... to advertising image—all utterances which could be brought together under the Lacanian concept of the *imaginary*'. It is the literary text which, standing in a region which is 'airy, light, spaced, open, uncentered, noble and free' (much like Frame's 'second place of air and light'), 'fights' the sociolect and provides the 'antidote' to myth. Roland Barthes, 'Change the Object Itself: Mythology Today', Image, Music, Text, trans. and ed. Stephen Heath (London: Flamingo, 1984) 168–69.

⁴² Indeed, 'A Western critic who focuses on myth ... must battle with giants from several realms: anthropology, psychology, sociology, biology, theology, and feminology. Each has representative hordes—functionalists, Euhemerists, structuralists, Freudians, Jungians, and diffusionists'. See Grace Stewart, A New Mythos: The Novel of the Artist as Heroine 1877-1977, (St Alban's: Eden

refers to both structure and content, it can be both an object (in a traditional body of tales or cultural mythology) and a theme. It is both 'paradigm, model and substance', and 'process, absence, incalculability and protean mystery'.⁴³ By using such a deliberately elusive term as 'myth' so emphatically in this first chapter Frame immediately focuses her autobiography on its own language and writing. The word's uncertain status⁴⁴ and meaning and, therefore, the uncertain end of the autobiography, reflects her desire to break down rigid distinctions between 'fact and truths and memories of truths'. Myth describes a pattern that is everlasting, 'it explains the present and the past as well as the future'.⁴⁵ Myth may be the unattainable, unresolvable, indefinable and disruptive third term that undoes the binary logic of the truth/fiction divide on which autobiography balances.

Frame begins her autobiography with a firm statement of its 'literary' status. Well aware, it seems, of the danger and pervasiveness of autobiographical reading and of the necessary fiction of 'selfhood', she positions her text to be read within the formal genre of autobiography at the same time as she questions its parameters. If, as Edward Said says, 'To begin to write ... is to work a set of instruments, to invent a field of play for them, to enable performance',⁴⁶ then Frame's textual stage of authorial control, decorum and writing-as-action is set.

Having positioned herself within and without the autobiography, in its past, present and future in Chapter One, Frame moves on, in traditional autobiographical order, remaining in the self-conscious present tense of the

Press, 1979) 1.

⁴³ John B. Vickery, *Myths and Texts: Strategies of Incorporation and Displacement* (Baton Rouge & London: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1983) 2.

⁴⁴ It is not entirely clear that myth is simply fiction. Because it is prescriptive rather than descriptive it may just as well be seen as 'universal truth'.

⁴⁵ Claude Lévi-Strauss, 'The Structural Study of Myth'. Quoted in Stewart 2.

⁴⁶ Edward Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (New York: Basic Books, 1975) 24.

autobiography's writing, to consider 'The Ancestors—who were they, the myth and the reality?' (I:10). Instead of providing the origin that will legitimate her life and account, 'The Ancestors' are highly subjective constructions who exist in versions ('myths') that accord with the needs of the teller. Janet's childhood boast that 'the Frames "came over with William of Orange"' is one such myth.

Just as this autobiography is Janet Frame's record of her life, so her mother and her father have their own, slightly different accounts of the past—her mother's an oft-repeated and extensive, romantic myth of family and community and her father's a brief tale of boyhood adventure and an enduring presence in everyday, home-made objects. For both parents, family history is important not so much for its factual content but for the sense of continuity and identity imparted in its rituals of naming and telling. It is important for its two potentially conflicting or contradictory directions; toward myth and toward the 'is-land'. Indeed, for Lottie, almost totally 'immersed' in the 'foreign' world of her past (I:11), family history is so rich as to be almost overwhelming, threatening to destroy her identity and functioning in the present.

These family pasts are part of Janet Frame's 'first place', the place 'of liquid darkness' (I:9). By demonstrating her parents' different autobiographical strategies, and their reflection of and function in their identities, Frame is reinforcing the mythical (or fictional) dimension of her own history and origins. As she writes she is creating (weaving) her own particular meaning for the names and events of the past. One of her first revisions is to recast 'Frame' as 'Flamand', backgrounding its import as a container or border and foregrounding instead its referential, geographical meaning and its craftwork associations:

Frame is a version of Fleming, Flamand, from the Flemish weavers who settled in the lowlands of Scotland in the fourteenth century. I strengthen

the reality or the myth of those ancestors each time I recall that Grandma Frame began working in a Paisley cotton mill when she was eight years old; ... (I:10)

By beginning with myth rather than narrative, Frame points to the status of her own record, wilfully shaped as it is by both the place from which she speaks—'within the second place of air and light' (I:9)—and her destination, 'the Third Place', where once again identity will be indistinguishable from myth. What she writes is only one form of the myth that reality becomes when it is reclaimed by memory.

Frame situates her own autobiography between the opposite directions of personal myth-making taken by her parents, her mother's to excess and to the exclusion of the teller by the tale ('Mother, a rememberer and talker ... remembering her past as an exile remembers her homeland' (I:11)) and her father's to silence and a presence not in language but in objects ('a leather workbag, a pair of ribbed butter pats, a handful of salmon spoons' (I:10)). In the analogy of the first chapter, the autobiography is directed not toward but away from the past and even from the present of writing. Although her autobiography is the successor or heir to theirs, and takes after both of their accounts, for Frame it is necessary to move beyond her parents' versions of the past or their 'memories on loan' (I:13) in order to demonstrate her own control over language and the material of her past. She recasts the past not to recover it (as 'liquid darkness' it is irrecoverable, at least in language)⁴⁷ but in order to transform it and move beyond it: 'to supply the individual furnishings of each Was-Land,

⁴⁷ In which sense it might be compared to Julia Kristeva's 'semiotic'—'the energies, rhythms, forces and corporeal residues necessary for representation ... [or] the space or locus the subject-to-be will occupy as a subject'. See Elizabeth Grosz, Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1989) 43.

each Is-Land, and the hopes and dreams of the Future' (I:13).

The autobiographical narratives of her parents are selective and particularly for her mother, overwhelmingly governed by nostalgia for what is lost. Lottie looks back with regret to a past that was fuller and more satisfying than the present. Homesick, permanently 'exiled' from the past by time and distance and by her absorbing, engulfing role as mother (she is 'in a constant [sic] state of family immersion' (I:11)), her memories are as much based on her desire to forget in the present as on the facts or truths of the past.

Lottie's encounter and clash with Grandma Godfrey's, version of the past is a cruel demonstration of this. Grandma Godfrey is a living link with Lottie's treasured past. But Lottie's stories (now re-labelled fantasies) about her mother are not confirmed by the reality of Grandma Godfrey's presence. Lottie's memory is seen more and more as a form of individual representation, her past as a kind of Utopia.⁴⁸ Her narrative (her version) of the past has swollen to assume mythic proportions:

although ... we struggled to escape, we were haunted by her tales of the Guards, the Heberleys, Diffenbach, shipwrecks in the Sounds, life in Waikawa Road and down the Maori pah, family life at the Godfreys', remembered as paradisaal. We came to know by heart incidents reported with exact conversations at school, at home, in the dentist's rooms, and in the homes where Mother worked. (I:11-12)

But in spite of its fragility and mutability, memory is necessary. For there is no

⁴⁸ In Utopia's double sense of *eu topos*: good place and *ou topos*: no place. The implications of considering women's autobiographical memories as a kind of Utopian quest have not been taken up by theorists of Utopian literature. The idea of childhood as a Utopian sphere (Edenic, paradisaal, innocent) is, however, common in writings on autobiography.

identity without memory: 'We validate ourselves by comparing past and present, similar and dissimilar, familiar and unfamiliar'.⁴⁹ This 'presence-through-memory' can also be an act of resistance. By retaining and retelling her history, by keeping it audible and visible, by carrying her loss with her and living through it, Lottie retains for herself at least some presence in the present outside her maternal role.⁵⁰ For Janet Frame, Lottie and George's very different histories and narrative strategies for survival begin the search for a history that she can use in the present (in writing) in order to imagine a future that will both respond to and be different from the past. The end point of this process in To the Is-Land is Janet's trip with her sisters to the Centenary Exhibition in Wellington.

At a time just before 'our parents had receded from our lives' (I:159), the trip is described as a deliberate and forceful rejection, a 'cancellation' (I:156) by the girls of their parents' nostalgia—of the memory of the time of the South Seas Exhibition in Dunedin, the halcyon days, 'Oh, they were heaven days "when Myrtle and Bruddie were little ..."' (I:155). The container of Lottie's nostalgia is 'candy floss' which, sensing 'our parents' use of it as a memory of vanished happiness' (I:156), the girls reject. In the inevitable recycling and repetition of memory, however, the visit becomes the same kind of candy floss for Janet and her sisters, 'remembered as a time of great freedom and fun' (I:156).⁵¹ Janet, perhaps inevitably, repeats the vocabulary of childhood and happiness she has

⁴⁹ Catharine R. Stimpson, 'The Future of Memory: A Summary', Michigan Quarterly Review 26.1 (1987): 262.

⁵⁰ In Hélène Cixous's phrase, Lottie's is an 'open memory that ceaselessly makes way' (quoted in Linda Anderson, 'At the Threshold of the Self: Women and Autobiography', Women's Writing: A Challenge to Theory, ed. Moira Monteith (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1986) 58), it moves 'simultaneously forwards and backwards, outwards and inwards' (Anderson 58). This presence and self-creation through memory becomes more and more ambivalent as the narrative progresses, as the account of Grandma Godfrey's visit makes clear. Whilst Lottie's 'daughterly' narrative is exposed as somehow fraudulent, she is never given a narrative voice with which to defend herself.

⁵¹ The association of 'candy floss' with the Fun Fair and the Hall of Mirrors (with carnival) might be linked to the memory as a return of the repressed, pre-Oedipal imaginary—its disorder and its lack of distinction between the performer and her audience.

learnt from Lottie.⁵²

Frame's very first memory is, she says, of:

something that could not have happened: a tall woman wearing a clothes peg on her nose peered into the bedroom from a small window high in the wall and, looking down at me in my wooden cot, said sharply, 'You're a nosey-parker.' (I:16)

At the end of a list of memories and feelings, her first memory is clear, detailed and fictional. Like the characters from Uncle Tom's Cabin or the 'bogies' that came 'after dark when the candles were pinched out' (I:16), the woman is a character in a fiction. Unlike these other characters, however, she is the first figure created by Frame's childish imagination. Frame's first memory is not a 'representation', for it never happened, but a 'reproduction'.⁵³ The founding moment of Frame's consciousness is a fiction. It refers to Frame's first dream.

Frame's first memory is immediately displaced, however, by her 'most vivid memory of that time'. This memory is an intensely visual one of the landscape and its colours and textures. She specifically remembers:

a gray day when I stood by the gate and listened to the wind in the telegraph wires. I had my first conscious feeling of an outside sadness, or it seemed to come from outside, from the sound of the wind moaning in the

⁵² Frame's description of 'the "perfect" days, "before we shifted to Oamaru"' (I:127, 155) is another example of the repetition and nostalgia of memory, as are her later descriptions of 'Willowglen' as 'paradise' (II:150).

⁵³ These are the terms Mary Jacobus uses in her discussion of Freud and screen memory. A 'screen memory' (particularly associated with childhood) is a memory that preserves not a content but something that is 'screened off' or unavailable to consciousness. Screen memory, that is, refers to the unconscious. It ceases to be a representation and becomes a reproduction. Mary Jacobus, 'Freud's Mnemonic: Women, Screen Memories, and Feminist Nostalgia', Michigan Quarterly Review 26.1 (1987): 119–20. There is, of course, a sense in which all memory is a reproduction, with no existence in reality outside its psychic function.

wires. ... I felt a burden of sadness and loneliness as if something had happened or begun and I knew about it. I don't think I had yet thought of myself as a person looking out at the world; until then, I felt I *was* the world. (I:16–17)

The incident is an archetypal one of childhood psychic growth. At the same time, within the experience of the individual child it is the moment that marks her as exceptional, as different. At the moment when she discovers or realises separation and loss, the child must give up her previous imaginary identity with all other possible positions—with the world. It is this sacrifice which makes it possible for her to take up a position as a speaking subject. She can now, self-consciously, say 'I am'.⁵⁴ The child, however, can only conceive of herself as the source of her own origin and unity, and so come into being as a speaking subject, as she represses the desire for the lost identity with the world (with her mother). The speaking subject is a split subject—split between the unconscious and its desires and the conscious, speaking subject: 'It comes to distinguish itself as subject from its own body, over which it establishes a hierarchical distance and control. It gains from, as well as loses itself in, the other'.⁵⁵

The founding moment of Frame's subjectivity (her *autobiography*)—of all subjectivity—is this knowledge of separation and loss.⁵⁶ Its repressed desire is the desire to recover that lost (or, rather, never possessed) and irretrievable sense of oneness with the world. Memory is inevitably and from its very beginnings, bound up with nostalgia, the longing to possess something which the subject

⁵⁴ Jacques Lacan, 'The Mirror Stage as Formative of The Function of The I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience', *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Tavistock/Routledge, 1977) 5.

⁵⁵ Elizabeth Grosz, *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1990) 47.

⁵⁶ Indeed, autobiography (or self-knowledge), the identity of the speaker and the object spoken about, is no longer possible. See Jeffrey Mehlman, *A Structural Study of Autobiography* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1974) for further elaboration of this impossibility.

(Janet Frame) may never have had. In its place is a sign, in this case the sound of the wind's song in the telegraph wires. Later incidents which Frame explicitly links to this memory or feeling are her discovery of 'My Place' (I:18) and the singing of 'E para ra' and the death of Old Cat (I:51).

Having described her 'most vivid memory', Frame stops the narrative to comment on memory itself:

I don't attempt to search for the commonplace origins of such a feeling. When you bring home a shell treasure from the beach, you shake free the sand and the mesh of seaweed and the other crumbled pieces of shell and perhaps even the tiny dead black-eyed inhabitant. I may have polished this shell of memory with the application of time but only because it is constantly with me, not because I have varnished it for display. (I:17)

She does not search for the origins of memory, or indeed, a myth of origins. Its origins, after all, are in the irrecoverable place of 'liquid darkness' which gives up this treasured memory to the present. Memory or perception is a starting point rather than an origin. Memory, as in Greek mythology, is the Mother of the Muses. The myth Janet Frame seeks in remembering is a new myth. Its narrative movement will take her *beyond* herself.⁵⁷

Memory consists of a series of isolated, found objects, like the shell on the beach. The narrative of memory is fabricated from these fragments and is itself a kind of fragmented, temporal patchwork or map. Memory is not simply a past that can be willed to presence, it needs to be reconstructed to become an object of ordinary

⁵⁷ The danger being that, as for Lottie, history will be cast so large that it overwhelms the present, unsettling it to the extent that presence becomes impossible. Lottie's narrative of her past is so detailed and so involving that she is seldom 'at home', seldom fully present in the present. She is like an 'unreal person with her real self washed away' (I:11).

perception. What makes it coherent is its pattern, the personal mythology that is created through it and by it and which brings the past into relationship with the present. Although Frame describes the process of memory as one of purification or 'polishing' rather than rearrangement or 'varnishing', it does involve removing the memory (the shell) from the beach to view it in another context.⁵⁸ The memory fragment cannot be identical to its reconstruction in perception and language: 'Identities and continuities, generated by the repetitive mechanism of re-collection, reconstruction, or re-presentation, in fact, hide an unresolvable difference between the elements buried in the past of memory and their belated re-memoration in the present of representation'.⁵⁹

But memory is not just the stuff of autobiography. It is also its method. The writer who undertakes to write an autobiography must decide on a method or methods by which to select and arrange the details of her life. The techniques of memory—its mnemonic or rhetorical principles—including narration, repetition, and association, are the ways in which a life can be retrieved and reconstructed in writing.⁶⁰ As Frame describes it in her only other present tense, authorial intrusion into the volume's past tense:

I sit here at my desk, peering into the depths of the dance, for the movement is dance with its own pattern, neither good nor bad, but individual in its own right—a dance of dust or sunbeams or bacteria or

⁵⁸ The shell's first displacement is from its more 'natural' but hidden location under the sea—in the unconscious. Frame invokes the same image of the unconscious as a body of water later in the volume. This time, however, instead of shells found on a beach, memories are disconnected, once-living objects propelled to the surface of a river by unknown forces:

I think of the times we used to sit by the Rakaia river, watching the branches and trunks of trees, the dead cattle and sheep, swept suddenly from the main stream to the many whirlpools at the side where, their force no less swift, they stayed a moment only before being drawn down down toward the center of the earth. (I:161)

⁵⁹ Eugenio Donato, 'The Ruins of Memory: Archeological Fragments and Textual Artifacts', *MLN* 93 (1978): 576.

⁶⁰ See Michael Gruneberg, 'The Feeling of Knowing, Memory Blocks and Memory Aids', *Aspects of Memory*, eds. Michael Gruneberg and Peter Morris (London: Methuen, 1978) 193–209 for a list of 'mnemonic aids'.

notes of sound or colors or liquids or ideas that the writer, trying to write an autobiography, clings to in one moment only. (I:161)

The patterns of the autobiography are the familiar methods of Frame's fiction; the words that create designs, the sequences of images, the characters set by the language that is given to them. For the young Janet, learning language is learning the terms in which the world is seen. This is the political significance of Frame's fiction and it is carried over here, although in more muted fashion. In describing the process of her own learning to use and interpret language, she once again challenges dominant orders of thought.

The clearest example of this is the book's title, To the Is-Land. Because it is already foregrounded, when it appears in the text it assumes an added significance. Whilst accepting, 'reluctantly', Myrtle's ruling on the silent letter 's', Janet nevertheless still retains, privately, her original, idiosyncratic pronunciation with its additional layer of meaning: 'within myself I still thought of it as the Is-Land' (I:41). It is the personal and changeable, sometimes invisible, meanings and configurations of words, their fictional or metaphoric possibilities beyond their visible, literal meanings, that are important to Frame.

Alongside the autobiography's chronological narrative it is the associative, synchronous links of memory that construct Frame's life. These words and word groups are often marked in italics or with inverted commas to set them apart from the rest of the text. The techniques of memory include emphasis, juxtaposition, commentary and omission. All break the linearity of her chronological narrative. There is, for example, a cluster of words around is-land—adventure, decide, destination, observation—not in themselves 'attractive words', but which 'had a dramatic effect in their use' (I:43) and which appear

repeatedly to mark the co-presence of literature and life. In particular they link Frame's exaggerated experience of movement and change and the dynamics of narrative.

Perhaps the most important of the book's grammars of memory is that built around Frame's association with the natural world. From the very earliest stages of the narrative, childhood and nature are intimately connected. It is in harmony with the natural world that Frame and her family live in her first years. Nature is the place of her childhood. But nature is also the place of her first sense of her self apart from her family and apart from human relationships, it is 'My Place' (I:18) where she spent much time 'enjoying its being there' (I:20). Her most intense and formative (individualising) experiences are those of landscape, seasons and weather. Frame's intense emotional link to the natural world as a place apart, a place of identity and solace is an important thematic across the three volumes of the autobiography. It is the locus of her nostalgia.

Another of the associative constructions (maps) of memory is an increasingly complex geography of Inside and Outside. As a child, Frame's first memories are overwhelmingly of the outside, natural world, 'the colors and spaces and natural features of the outside world' (I:18). Soon she is also aware of the outer limits of that outside world, in particular of the sky in 'its faraway aboveness' (I:18) and of the feeling of 'homesickness and longing' (I:19) the sky evokes. As her world widens, Frame's concept of outside expands to include an outside (underside) to the social world generally: 'Gypsies, beggars, robbers, swaggers, slaves, thieves, all the outcast victims of misfortune who yet might be angels in disguise, had become part of my dreams and comprehension of the Outside World' (I:42-43). As the Frame family itself moves to the outer edge of Oamaru society and Janet to the fringe in her school life, she becomes aware of her 'self' as divided in the

same way—between life lived in the social world of her difference, where ‘to be different was to be peculiar, a little “mad”’ (I:136) and her ‘real’ life, lived ‘so much within and influenced by English and French literature’ (I:142). Sealed and restricted within her personality and social position she is aware of ‘Looking out at the world’ (I:144). It is from this outside position that she ultimately develops her poetic ambition and vocation, an ambition to integrate poetry and life, literature and living, inside and outside:

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 refused to accept that if I were to fulfil my secret ambition to be a poet, I should spend my imaginative life among the nightingales instead of among the waxeyes and the fantails. I wanted my life to be the ‘other world.’ (I:126)

Importantly, Frame’s last authorial intrusion on the methods of memory occurs in a chapter entitled ‘Imagination’. Its climactic moment (and the climax of To the Is-Land) is Frame’s written declaration of her ambition to be a poet: ‘I wrote in my diary, “Dear Mr Ardenue, *they* think I’m going to be a schoolteacher, but I’m going to be a *poet*”’ (I:163). It is at this moment that she actively, wilfully assumes her own adult identity and goal apart from the wishes and labels of others: ‘*Thief*’ (I:33); ‘dirty’ (I:49–50); ‘devils at home angels abroad’ (I:72); ‘a teacher like Dad’s Cousin Peg, who immigrated to Canada’ (I:106); ‘Jean’s brilliant... She’s shy’ (I:134); ‘Jean’s so original’ (I:136); ‘You Frame girls think you’re so different from everyone else’ (I:136). She decides not to become what others want to call her.

It is ‘Imagination’, and its public acknowledgment as Janet Frame’s possession, the public mark of her difference, which resolves the growing tension between

fact and fiction; between the ordinary, everyday world of family tragedy, fashion edicts and female roles and the worlds of literature, romance and the Romantic poets. 'Imagination', again usually marked off in the text with inverted commas or italics to indicate its special status and importance, is the quest object, the mystery, the Holy Grail, the narrative desire of To the Is-Land.⁶¹ In the book's own 'literary' terms, its acquisition or realisation marks the end of the narrative and the end of childhood.⁶²

Indeed, 'Imagination' is the term that stabilises the entire representational system of the autobiography. It is that faculty which produces the images or the myth that constructs an autobiography from memory. As Frame marked in her autobiographical pact in Chapter One, it is imagination (as an attribute of the narrator, the transcendental subject) that transcribes and transforms memory in the narrative of autobiography. Imagination substitutes for perception to create the image of an original object which is no longer spatially or temporally available. In Coleridge's explication of it in the Biographia Literaria, which Frame quotes at length in an early chapter of An Angel at My Table, it is Imagination which:

dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify. It is essentially *vital*, even as all objects (*as* objects) are essentially fixed and dead. (II:30)

Memory, inevitably, puts a barrier between the self and nature or natural objects;

⁶¹ Imagination presents a different problem in An Angel at My Table. 'The most magical word to me was still *Imagination*, a glittering noble word never failing to create its own inner light.' Here, however, the emphasis is on Coleridge's distinction between Fancy and Imagination and the 'lonely journey when the point of Fancy had been passed and only Imagination lay ahead' (II:30).

⁶² There is of course, an element of self-parody in the accolade of 'poetic insight and *imagination*' coming first from Dot of 'Dot's Little Folk' in the Otago Daily Times (I:162).

a barrier which, according to Coleridge, the writer cannot break to salvage self, nature and presence without the aid of Fancy, the 'drapery' of 'poetic genius', or Imagination, 'the soul that is everywhere and in each; and forms all into one graceful and intelligent whole' (II:30). The original object of perception or memory no longer exists in language. Frame's life, her autobiography, is a tropological construction, a metaphor, created by Frame, the transcendental subject's, imagination. Imagination is the faculty that integrates inside and outside, literature and life.

Soon after this epiphanic moment of 'Imagination', the book closes as she journeys to her 'Future' in Dunedin as a student teacher. The end of Frame's childhood (or adolescence) is marked temporally; geographically, by her remove from Oamaru; and also creatively, by her new name and signature: 'Janet Paterson Frame, I wrote, looping carefully' (I:173). In a gesture that, significantly, mimics the repetitive but pathetically ineffective signing of her father, Frame (con)signs and seals her past and this past self.

As Richard Coe describes it, the essential feature of the genre of 'childhood' is its temporal isolation.⁶³ It describes an era that is sealed and complete in itself, a dimension that is materially, linguistically and spiritually different from that of the adult writing. This is the 'innocence', the 'otherness', or, in Coe's term, the 'magic' of childhood. With this emphatic closure, To the Is-Land positions itself to be read within the genre of childhood, as some of its reviewers point out:

Reminiscences such as this of the early years of a sensitive child and future writer have a familiar rhythm, as Frame is certainly aware.⁶⁴

To re-create her innocent awareness during these halcyon days of a

⁶³ Richard N. Coe, When the Grass Was Taller: Autobiography and the Experience of Childhood (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1984).

⁶⁴ Anne Chisholm, 'Needing to Imagine', Times Literary Supplement 8 July, 1983: 737.

childhood during the Twenties and Thirties, Frame deliberately eliminates any foreshadowing of her future life.⁶⁵

The childhood Frame describes is not like the present of writing and is looked back on, largely, with nostalgia. Like other 'childhoods', it contains archetypal experiences and people—the most obvious examples of which are Frame's parents; her ineffectual but cruelly tyrannical father and her 'good' mother, gentle to the point of futility and unassertive to the point of characterlessness.⁶⁶ Like other accounts of the childhood of a poet, the book's most overwhelming and inexplicable experience is Frame's contact with the natural world. Nature is a place of stability, solace and integration (an is-land) away from the mysteries, demands and alienation of the approaching social world.

As various feminist theorists of development point out, childhood and its freedoms may be particularly precious for women, a time and a place before gender identity and roles become imperative and restrictive.⁶⁷ Simone de Beauvoir describes, for example, 'the young girl' who 'has not as yet acquired for her use any portion of the universal: hence it is her kingdom as a whole; when she takes possession of it, she also proudly takes possession of herself' and the traumatic process of her transition into adulthood: 'as a member of society, she enters upon adult life only in becoming a woman; she pays for her liberation by

⁶⁵ Shelley Cox, *Library Journal* 1 Oct., 1982: 1872.

⁶⁶ Richard Coe and Joy Hooton both discuss the 'archetypes' of childhood, Hooton with reference to Australian women writing about their childhoods. See especially her two chapters 'Father Figures' and 'Mother Images'. Joy Hooton, *Stories of Herself When Young: Autobiographies of Childhood by Australian Women* (Melbourne: Oxford Univ. Press, 1990).

⁶⁷ Or, as Patricia Meyer Spacks holds, nostalgia for childhood may be a nostalgia for the passivity and dependence which are childhood's pleasure and power: 'To look upon childhood as life's high point equates irresponsibility with happiness. It may also suggest profound social pessimism, a hopelessness about the state of the world expressed in nostalgia for a time in life when no one could possibly expect one to do anything about it'. See Patricia Meyer Spacks, 'Stages of Self: Notes on Autobiography and the Life Cycle', *American Autobiography: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Albert E. Stone (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1981) 58–59.

an abdication.⁶⁸

In To the Is-Land the narrative movement toward adult identity and the social is underlined by the Frame family's geographic journey from Outram where 'the world (was) all sky, green paddocks, swamps, bulrushes, tussock, snowgrass, sheep, cattle' (I:23) to Wyndham, where, 'In my memory Ferry Street and the street at the end ... were the only streets in Wyndham' (I:23) and then on a 'long train journey ... remembered as a dream of strangeness and strange landscapes' (I:36) to the town of Oamaru, where 'houses and people and streets replaced our familiar landscape of wild spaces' (I:37).

In the literary model offered by her father, the transition from childhood may involve a simple re-signing of names, but in social and gender terms it is a much more difficult and cruel process which involves abandoning the shelter of family and home and the shedding of a precious layer of identity:

In a life where people had few clothes and a man one suit and one overcoat, the clothes were part of the skin, like an animal's fur.

When I stopped wearing my school tunic after six years of almost daily wear, I felt naked, like a skinned rabbit. (I:171)

There is one sense, then, in which Frame's childhood, like Coe's model childhood, is clearly discontinuous with the present of writing. But there is another, stronger, sense in which memory links childhood to the present of writing. Throughout the three volumes of the autobiography, the memory of childhood and the experience of nature, of those innocent times when 'the world (was) My Place' (I:18), continue to be both places and symbols of regeneration and

⁶⁸ Simone de Beauvoir, The Second Sex, ed. and trans. H.M. Parshley (1953, London: Penguin Books, 1983) 385-86.

redemption, of a place apart from the social and its strictures and structure of concentric circles.

* * * *

And so the future ... had begun as the present once again, the Is-Land from which there is no escape, and I was equipped to face it as a shy young woman most at home and experienced with 'creatures' such as cows, sheep, dogs, cats, insects, anything living that was not human; with the natural world of sea, earth, sky, and the plants, trees, and flowers; and with written and printed language with its themes and thoughts and its alphabet with the bowers of A's and O's and U's and D's large enough to hide in. (I:172)

CHAPTER THREE

AN ANGEL AT MY TABLE:

Performing the Self

The most direct, or simply the first, limit on any text is its title. It is the first point of mediation between the world of the text and the empirical reality of its potential readers; it is the 'threshold'¹ or 'the obvious stepping stone provided into the text'.² Unlike the utterances of the textual world, where even the most personal of narrators belongs to a represented world, the title is a direct authorial speech act, a communication between the author and the 'public' in general.³ Whether it is inclusionary or exclusionary, intertextual or generic, sincere or insincere, even deliberately misleading or obscure, no title leaves the reader unaffected. The title's function is always to 'offer guidance, attempt to control the reader's approach to the text, and the reader's construction of the text'.⁴

The title of Janet Frame's second volume of autobiography, An Angel at My Table, may, initially, reassure the reader of the book's 'happy' ending. Frame's

¹ Gérard Genette's book on the textual threshold and its implications is called Seuils ('Thresholds') (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1987).

² Marie Maclean, 'Pretexts and Paratexts: The Art of the Peripheral', New Literary History 22.1 (1991): 275.

³ Marie Maclean explains the distinction between the 'paratext' or verbal frame (which includes the title) and the text proper in terms of speech act theory: 'The paratext involves a series of first order illocutionary acts ... on the other hand, the world of the fictional text is one of second order speech acts where even the most personal of narrators belongs not to the real world but to the represented world'. The paratext is a direct communication between the author and her audience, the text a communication between the narrator and the textually-constructed narratee. See Maclean 275.

⁴ Maclean 275.

personal (guardian) Angel (her muse, perhaps) will, it implies, be present throughout, watching over her in her troubles and tribulations (or watching over her table as she writes them) and seeing her through them to a more tranquil future. Alternatively, the angel may simply signal another order of meaning for the events of the book, even a specifically Christian one. It may be the Romantic angel of poetic inspiration, conjuring up the image of the inspired artist. Or, read with The Envoy From Mirror City in mind, the angel may be another figure of the envoy. At the very least, the title demystifies the place of the artist, locating her in the concrete and material circumstances of her writing. In any case, the title seems to promise some greater meaning or spirituality for the material of Frame's life. The book's subtitle, Autobiography 2, provides both serial and generic contexts in which to read the text.

Any initial reading of the title is soon tempered, however, by looking inside the cover of the book to consider the title's intertextual reference. Frame provides her own, edited, version of that reference in the epigraph on the book's title page:

Reste tranquille, si soudain
L'Ange à ta table se décide;
Efface doucement les quelques rides
Que fait la nappe sous ton pain

Rilke, *Vergers*⁵ (II:3)

Like the title, the epigraph is part of what Gérard Genette calls the 'paratext'; those productions which 'surround and prolong' the text proper and whose function is to '*present*' the text, 'in the usual sense of the verb, but also in its

⁵ Stay calm, if unexpectedly
The Angel settles at your table;
Gently smooth whatever wrinkles
There are in the tablecloth beneath your bread (my translation).

strongest meaning: to make it present, to assure its presence in the world, its "reception" and its consumption in the form, nowadays, at least, of a book'.⁶ Unlike the book's title, cover text, illustrations⁷ and packaging, however, which appear on the outside of the book and are therefore addressed to the public at large (to anybody), the epigraph's address is restricted (like any text found between the covers of a book), to an actual reader of the autobiography. Even further, however, the language and style of the epigraph appeals to Frame's preferred reader; to an educated, literary reader, a reader who understands French and who may go on to place the extract in its original literary context.

The epigraph's context includes first of all Rilke's use of the central figure of the angel. Angels appear throughout Rilke's poetry, not as images of divinity but as intensely personal and self-reflexive symbols of the goal of the artist's striving. Robert Hass describes the angels of Rilke's 'Duino Elegies' (written before the quieter, lighter 'Vergers') as an embodiment of 'the sense of absence which had been at the center of Rilke's willed and difficult life. They are absolute fulfilment. ... The angel is desire, if it were not desire, if it were pure being'.⁸ His angel, his personal demon, is the 'furious opposition'⁹ at the centre of his work. According to Rilke himself, the angel enacts the poet's quest to:

imprint this temporary, perishable earth into ourselves so deeply, so painfully and passionately, that its essence can rise again, 'invisibly,' in us. ... The angel of the Elegies is that creature in whom the transformation of the visible into the invisible, which we are accomplishing, already

⁶ Gérard Genette, 'Introduction to the Paratext', trans. Marie Maclean, *New Literary History* 22.1 (1991): 261. His italics.

⁷ In the Paladin edition's front cover illustration, the angel at Frame's table is clearly Frank Sargeson. He hovers over Frame's hut, bearing a cup of tea, as she writes inside. He is also named in the back cover blurb as 'nurturing' her through her first novel.

⁸ Robert Hass, 'Looking for Rilke', *The Selected Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke*, ed. and trans. Stephen Mitchell (1980; London: Picador Classics, 1987) xxxv.

⁹ Hass xliii.

appears in its completion.¹⁰

In 'Vergers', a rarely-published series of 59 poems of which Frame's epigraph is the first stanza of the third poem, the same vision is expressed in a careful attention to the ordinary and the everyday. The poetic transformation of the world is a result of this intense concentration on the things of this world. In the words of the stanza following the one Frame quotes:

Tu offiras ta rude nourriture
pour qu'il engoûte à son tour,
et qu'il soulève à sa lèvre pure
un simple verre de tous les jours¹¹

This intertextual angel is very different from the guardian angel Frame's title initially invokes. Of course, interpretation of the epigraph is dependent on its context, so that the angel's meaning is not rigidly determined by Rilke's symbolic system or its specific appearance in 'Vergers', just as interpretation of the title, An Angel at My Table, is not solely determined or exhausted by the epigraph that accompanies it. Read, however, with the epigraph in place, the title can be seen to signal Frame's artistic goal to creatively reconcile 'that world' and 'this world', the world of the imagination within which she writes and the 'real', dominant factual world she lives in. Like Rilke's angel and like the angels Lottie invokes in To the Is-Land ('One never knew; the world was full of people in disguise, and only God knew whether or not there was an angel inside a beggar or swagger' (I:34-35)), Frame's angel embodies the potential for the artistic transformation of the everyday world, and therefore, of 'life' in a 'literary' autobiography. The title

¹⁰ Rainer Maria Rilke, letter to Witold Hulewicz, 13 Nov. 1925, quoted in Rilke 317.

¹¹ Then offer him your own rough food
so that he can take a turn in tasting it
and so that he can raise to his pure lips
a simple, everyday glass (my translation).

is also an important cue to the place of the artist within the everyday and within this autobiography. Not distant or separate from the reader or the world in a realm of inspiration or aesthetics or beauty, Frame is present at her table, working and living and writing in the here and now: writing is her way of *life*.

In effect, and particularly because of the poetic fragment's indeterminate addressee ('you'), the epigraph enables Frame to broadly signal her authorial position and intention without assuming ultimate (interpretative) responsibility for it. The responsibility for the utterance remains with Rilke and for its interpretation with the reader. Neither To the Is-Land nor The Envoy From Mirror City depend in the same way on a literary epigraph to explain the reference of their titles. Further, and again unlike the other two volumes, An Angel at My Table provides no internal explanation, from within its text, of the title's meaning or reference. The paratextual context is the definitive one.

A similar effect is achieved with the use of an extract from The Tempest as an epigraph to Part One: 'Tricks of Desperation':

Prospero: My brave spirit!
Who was so firm, so constant, that this coil
Would not infect his reason?

Ariel: Not a soul,
But felt a fever of the mad; and play'd
Some tricks of desperation.

Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, Act 1, Scene (ii)

Like Rilke's text, the extract functions at one level as a kind of 'apology' or caution for the text and events to come. Again, the quotation indicates the mythical dimensions and parallels of Frame's written life. And again, it points to

the binary divisions—'this world'/'that world', sense/spirit, essence/existence, Caliban/Ariel—which the text aspires to overcome. It also sets up a chain of associations between the action of the play (itself highly stylised and symbolic) and the narrative of the autobiography.

The quoted exchange occurs during a storm that Prospero has deliberately made, suspending the 'normal' laws of nature, around his idyllic 'island'—a very evocative word in the context of Frame's earlier autobiography¹²—much as Frame insists that she created the conditions of her own 'bewilderment' in An Angel at My Table (II:95). Frame again refers to the parallel as she reappears from the lost decade of her hospitalisation to face a world that is either hostile or indifferent: 'I comforted myself by remembering that in my years in hospital ... I had absorbed the spirit of The Tempest. Even Prospero in his book-lined cell had suffered shipwreck and selfwreck; his island unreachable except through storm' (II:128).

The same ambiguity of redemption, rescue and reconciliation that operates in The Tempest operates in Frame's text. For the epigraph also sets up comparisons between the 'dramatis personae' of the two texts. Frame and Prospero are immediately comparable as artists, both finding release through their different arts, Prospero's book-learned magic and Frame's writing (which she compares to magic in 'Beginnings' (B:40)). In which case Ariel, Prospero's 'brave spirit', may be seen as akin to Frame's 'Envoy from Mirror City'. The difference, of course, is that Prospero is the artist-god, undisputed ruler of his island which he controls through the spirits he has learned to master (or tyrannise) so that the self-

¹² In To the Is-Land, the is-land of the title stands for personal identity. It is also, however, an indicator of Frame's attention to and special relationship with language and a symbol of her geographic and historical post-colonial location as a writer in New Zealand and of her peripheral economic and social position in New Zealand.

knowledge he attains as the outcome of the action of the play is somewhat ironic, resulting as it does in the loss of his art. Frame's own vision of the artist's realm and function is quite opposed to Prospero's. She never relies on her 'self' to transform the material of life into art, for she holds that it is language that is (potentially) powerful, not simply its user. Frame might better, perhaps, be compared to Caliban, the post-colonial subject who learns how to 'speak for himself' just as Frame describes (and demonstrates) how she learnt to write and be herself in her autobiographies.¹³

Textual frames or paratexts—of which the book's packaging, author biography, dedication, 'Acknowledgments' page, 'Index of Chapters' and individual chapter titles are also a part—proliferate in An Angel at My Table to pre-empt and surround the autobiographical text proper. In the case of the two epigraphs, the appearance of a book of Rilke's poetry and a volume of Shakespeare as the only texts Istina Mavet has with her in hospital in Faces in the Water, as a kind of talisman of her artistic promise, extend the paratext outward to Frame's fiction. Together, An Angel at My Table's textual frames tend to draw the reader away from the text and its narrative voice, and to concentrate instead on its paratext or context, a zone not just of 'transition, but of transaction; the privileged site of a pragmatics and of a strategy, of an action on the public in the service, well or badly understood and accomplished, of a better reception of the text and a more pertinent reading—more pertinent, naturally in the eyes of the author and his allies'.¹⁴ The number of frames used here, their wide-ranging literary reference and their concentration on acts of writing, authorship and authority make it clear that the author's relationship to her audience is both more complex and

¹³ For a more detailed discussion of The Tempest's role in the autobiography and throughout Janet Frame's writing see Dianne Caney, 'Janet Frame and The Tempest', The Association of New Zealand Literature Conference on Janet Frame, Dunedin, 28–30 Aug., 1992.

¹⁴ Genette (1991) 261–2.

more problematic than was the case in To the Is-Land. They signal a more intrusive and a more anxious author and a narrator who is less confident of the reader's ability to read and judge (her).

In its serial position as the second volume in a larger three-volume autobiographical narrative, An Angel at My Table is perhaps necessarily less sure of its rhetorical space than the other two volumes in their more definite and definable first and last positions.¹⁵ In Tzvetan Todorov's version of it, the 'ideal narrative' begins 'with a stable situation which is disturbed by some power or force. There results a state of disequilibrium; by the action of a force directed in the opposite direction, the equilibrium is re-established; the second equilibrium is similar to the first, but the two are never identical'.¹⁶ An Angel at My Table deals with Todorov's second state of active disequilibrium. It is therefore much more difficult not only for the narrator to describe but also for her to control.

Unlike To the Is-Land, which Frame self-consciously positions to be read within the generic context of 'childhood autobiography', the events of her youth are not seen by the narrator to display a recognisable, accessible pattern of development or conventional narrative structure. An Angel at My Table does not 'fit' into the psychological and autobiographical development model of childhood, youth and maturity, a (fictional) pattern that is so familiar as to be convention. Susanna Egan, in her study of the 'mythic paradigms' of nineteenth-century autobiographies, shows how in each case (childhood, youth, maturity) the metaphor describes 'precisely those aspects of human experience that are least

¹⁵ This may change, of course, if Frame continues her autobiographical series as she has foreshadowed she will. See, for example, Janet Frame, 'Traces of Honey', with Elizabeth Alley, Concert Programme, Radio NZ, 29 Nov. 1988, in which Frame says there will be two more volumes of autobiography.

¹⁶ Tzvetan Todorov, The Poetics of Prose, quoted in Susanna Egan, Patterns of Experience in Autobiography (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1984) 20.

subject to cultural or even personal variation', so that 'individual use of such metaphors to describe profoundly subjective experience facilitate(s) adequate expression for the writer and ready comprehension for the reader'.¹⁷ From the outset the events and thematics of An Angel at My Table are seen by the narrator to be more difficult to comprehend or categorise. For the events of Frame's twenties there is no 'costume' or 'pose' that the audience will recognise.¹⁸

It is the same journey south, 'to Dunedin and my Future' (I:173), which completed the narrative of To the Is-Land that opens the narrative of An Angel at My Table: 'The Sunday slow train ... took seven hours to travel the seventy-eight miles between Oamaru and Dunedin, stopping at every station, waiting ..., crawling ...' (II:12). Extending the connection already established by subtitling this volume 'Autobiography 2', the journey marks the two books chronologically and thematically as a continuum.¹⁹ This time, however, Frame is alone, remembering and reviewing the legacy, the places and the events, of the childhood she has just departed, 'with memories created from the past as a foraging bee creates its own sweet architecture' (II:12).

Autobiography is both the process and the product of assigning meaning to a series of events after they have taken place by means of emphasis, juxtaposition, commentary and omission:

¹⁷ Egan 167.

¹⁸ 'Visions of heroism are modes of dramaturgy. When one climbs upon a literary stage to perform the self, one chooses the costume, assumes the poses, that the audience of one's own time—and oneself as audience—will recognize'. See Patricia Meyer Spacks, 'Stages of Self: Notes on Autobiography and the Life Cycle', American Autobiography: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Albert E. Stone (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1981) 60.

¹⁹ More widely, the journey functions as one of the associative links of memory that shape the autobiography. It directly recalls an earlier train journey that marked another significant stage in Frame's life—that of the Frame family from Wyndham to Oamaru, 'remembered as a dream of strangeness and strange landscapes' (I:36). Other 'versions' of the journey in this volume are Frame's journey back to Dunedin after 1945 (II:70); her journey from Dunedin to Oamaru at the end of 1946 (II:83) and her journey back to Dunedin at the end of Part One (II:112).

The autobiographer joins together facets of remembered experience—descriptive, impressionistic, dramatic, analytic—as she constructs a narrative that promises both to capture the specificities of personal experience and to cast her self-interpretation in a timeless, idealized mold for posterity.²⁰

It is then inevitable that the text will be temporally divided. Like its central term 'bios', which can mean the historical course of a life or 'spirit, or vital principle, or the act of consciousness, or transcendent reality, or a certain mode of living, a certain set of personality and character ... displayed in a particular life as lived',²¹ autobiography oscillates between the present moment of narration and the past on which the narration is focused. The autobiographer is both creator and creation, writer and that which is written about. Indeed, the very language she uses to name herself is simultaneously empowering and vitiating, since 'words cannot capture the full sense of being and narratives explode in multiple directions on their own'.²²

Chapter One, 'The Stone', sets out the dilemma of 'bios' by comparing the two versions of Frame's life and the narrator's different relationships to them:

The future accumulates like a weight upon the past. The weight upon the earliest years is easiest to remove to let that time spring up like grass that has been crushed. The years following childhood become welded to their future, massed like a stone, and often the time beneath cannot spring back into growth like new grass: it lies bled of its green in a new shape with those frail bloodless sprouts of another, unfamiliar time, entangled one with the other beneath the stone. (II:11)

²⁰ Sidonie Smith, *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography*, (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1987) 45.

²¹ James Olney, 'Some Versions of Memory/Some Versions of Bios: The Ontology of Autobiography', *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, ed. James Olney, (Princeton Univ. Press, 1980) 239.

²² Smith 46.

Just as she did in the first chapter of To the Is-Land, Frame here remains on the ill-defined border of her text. Attention is on the process or the act of autobiography. Its writing is no longer, however, the Ariadne-like process²³ of To the Is-Land in which the announced project is to trace the narrative back from its present to its beginnings in history and forward to its end in myth—but a more difficult and ill-defined act to liberate and approximate the past.

The problem is the familiar one of memory and history: autobiography is simultaneously an act of recovery and an act of creation. In a continuing, reciprocal relationship, memory's reclamation of the past is shaped by the present—'we write the past that the present needs'²⁴—just as the present is shaped by memories (or the past is a function of the future). In An Angel at My Table, where the material of memory is neither as available in the writing present nor, when accessible, as orderly as the events and emotions of Frame's childhood were for the writing of To the Is-Land, it is the 'fiction' of memory, rather than identity, that is immediately foregrounded. Like the grass under the stone,²⁵ or Arachne and her unresolvable, unending, circular-shaped web,²⁶ the past and the present cannot be separated but lie together impossibly tangled in an ambiguous limbo and there is no clear or easy distinction between 'is' and 'was':

²³ James Olney uses Ariadne's thread to describe the process of autobiography. Memory is 'the forever hidden thread' describing the teleological process, the specific goal or end of the narrative of autobiography. See Olney 240–41.

²⁴ Catherine R. Stimpson, 'The Future of Memory: A Summary', Michigan Quarterly Review, 26.1 (1987): 261.

²⁵ The stone metaphor can be linked to the philosophical stone of the alchemist's or, perhaps, to Jung, in whose autobiography, Memories, Dreams, Reflections, the stone figures as 'the secret that was the secret of his own identity'. See Egan 19. The stone would then be analogous to Frame's 'Third Place, where the starting point is myth' (I:9).

²⁶ The difference between Ariadne and Arachne, as Nancy Miller explains it, is that Arachne is the maker of a text. Punished, however, by Athena for her point of view, she is restricted to spinning outside representation, 'to a reproduction that turns back on itself'. See Nancy Miller, 'Arachnologies: The Woman, The Text, and The Critic', Subject to Change: Reading Feminist Writing, (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1988) 93–94. Frame comes back to the image of the spider, her web and weaving again and again to describe the process of establishing an identity and the power that her control of her identity gives her (II:50, 63, 70). She even draws attention to the frequency with which she uses the images (II:70).

The process of writing may be set down as simply as laying a main trunk railway line from Then to Now, with branch excursions into the outlying wilderness, but the real shape, the first shape is always a circle formed only to be broken and reformed, again and again. (II:143–44)

By focusing on the (necessary) omissions and distortions of memory and the impossibility of encompassing the totality or complexity of lived experience in a written version of it, Frame denies the artist–god figure of Prospero and the autobiographer–god of theorists like Georges Gusdorf (for whom ‘autobiography is the mirror in which the individual reflects his own image’²⁷). Unlike her earliest years when ‘time had been horizontal, progressive, day after day, year after year, with memories being a true personal history known by dates and specific years, or vertical with events stacked one upon the other’, outside the enclosed, charmed world of childhood she describes in *To the Is-Land*, time becomes ‘a whirlpool’:

and so the memories do not arrange themselves to be observed and written about, they whirl, propelled by a force beneath, with different memories rising to the surface at different times and thus denying the existence of a ‘pure’ autobiography and confirming, for each moment, a separate story accumulating to a million stories, all different and with some memories forever staying beneath the surface. (I:161)

Frame is also deliberately distancing her ‘self’ as (implied) author or as narrator from her recreated ‘self’, the subject of the text. She ‘creates an iconic representation of continuous identity that stands for, or rather before, her subjectivity as she tells of this ‘T’ rather than of that ‘I.’’²⁸ It is this deliberate

²⁷ Georges Gusdorf, ‘Conditions and Limits of Autobiography’, trans. James Olney, Olney 33.

²⁸ Smith 47.

doubling of the textual self into a narrating 'I' and a narrated 'I' (and the further fracturing of the narrated 'I' into multiple speaking postures) that Sidonie Smith argues marks the autobiographical process as 'rhetorical artefact' and the 'authorial signature as mythography'²⁹ and which Janet Frame says denies the existence of a "'pure" autobiography'. The 'self' of autobiography is constructed in and by the language that produces it; it is a rhetorical and tropological rather than a historical or referential construction.³⁰ What distinguishes Frame's autobiography, and modern autobiographies in general (texts which often show more interest in difference and change than sameness and identity), without however removing them from the tradition of autobiography, as Leah Hewitt remarks, is that 'their self-consciousness becomes so fully a part of the experiential account'.³¹

It is in Part One of An Angel at My Table that the narrator's voice is both most distinct from the voice of her autobiographical subject and most active and intrusive, by turns excusing, criticising and condemning her younger self:

I did not realize the extent of my loneliness. I clung to works of literature as a child clings to its mother. ... Writing now, I am impatient with my student self that was so unformed, ungrownup, so cruelly innocent. (II:23)

I could see the family so clearly enveloped in doom that it frightened me. I felt that my mother lived in a world which in no way corresponded with the 'real' world, and it seemed that her every word was a concealment, a lie, a desperate refusal to acknowledge 'reality'. I was not even aware that I, in my turn, had joined the world of pretence which I so condemned in

²⁹ Smith 47.

³⁰ This insight that the 'truth' of autobiography lies not at the level of history but at the level of narrative is also implicit in Lejeune's autobiographical contract and explicit in de Man's idea of autobiography as a figure or trope.

³¹ Leah D. Hewitt, Autobiographical Tighrtropes: Simone de Beauvoir, Nathalie Sarraute, Marguerite Duras, Monique Wittig, and Maryse Condé (Lincoln & London: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1990) 194.

others. (II:27)

The long, early chapter called 'The Student' from which these two quotations are taken sets the background of Frame's personality, her first exciting, daunting year at College and University and the helpless, hopeless situation that would lead to her admittance to hospital. As a story of continuity—the story of her life—she links the narrative back to her 'self' in To the Is-Land and its 'shared 'we' (her family), which I [now] knew to be lost' (II:27). She also offers parallels and identities between herself as narrator and subject (narrated), mostly traceable to a life-long fascination with 'the feast of imagination' (II:30), with words and the power of language to both create and destroy. She continues, in the style of To the Is-Land, to provide extensive lists of the words and phrases that marked this period of her life: the names and labels for the people and places of Dunedin, the language of the new subjects she is studying and above all the fascinating but distant speech of the students she so ardently wishes to emulate.

But the narrator identifies with herself as 'The Student' in a very ironic, disrupted way. She includes, for example, her thrilled acceptance of the second-years' song (given in full transcript to emphasise its banality and immaturity) which she found 'as moving as if it had been an extract from the Messiah. ... The idea that soon I, too, would be singing, 'Oh the deacon went down' ... seemed to me like a promise of heaven' (II:19). She was, she says, 'dazzled' by the 'new language [of the classification of people] and its powerful vocabulary' (II:26), and 'almost delirious with excitement at the contemplation of the life of a student' (II:28) whilst far too timid to participate. The portrait of 'The Student' is heavy with such intrusions and with the frustrations of the narrator at the excesses and innocence of her young self. Its adjectives are extravagant (for 'it was a time of finding shelter among the mightily capitalised abstractions of Love, Life, Time,

Age, Youth, Imagination' (II:23)), its descriptions sometimes close to pastiche: 'I could see my father as a helpless character struggling against the buffeting winds of a cruel world' (II:27).

In narrative terms, this temporal and cognitive distance between the narrator and her subject/object is the difference between focalisation and narration, between seeing and telling. Although the text is a record of the actions, thoughts, feelings and understanding of the young Frame, the authority for the portrait always lies with the narrator in its telling. Even in those passages which get closest to a translation of her younger self's language and perception (of which the examples of her youthful poetry she includes are the only direct evidence), verbal communication and non-verbal focalisation remain separate. More usually, the distance is clearly marked by the narrator's ironic tone. In the hierarchy of the text, 'The Student' is always a creation of the act of narration in a represented world. The smooth, controlled, adult voice of the narrator covers or contains (or, perhaps, muffles or smothers) the troubled voice and experiences of her younger self. At times the narrator exhibits so strong an ambivalence toward her student self that the connection between the writer and her subject remains unspecifiable, falling somewhere between identification and condemnation.

In the formulation of the 'rules' of autobiography that Phillipe Lejeune calls the autobiographical pact, 'in order for there to be autobiography ... the author, the narrator, and the protagonist must be identical'.³² Whilst Lejeune's appeal to the author's legal existence as a subject outside the text does not solve the problems of intentionality and authenticity and ground autobiography in an entirely self-conscious subject as he would like it to,³³ his pact does point to the 'metaphysics

³² Phillipe Lejeune, 'The Autobiographical Pact', *On Autobiography*, ed. Paul John Eakin (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1989) 5.

³³ See Jane Marie Todd, *Autobiographics in Freud and Derrida* (New York & London: Garland, 1990)

of presence'³⁴ that lies behind all autobiography. As Lejeune himself replies to criticism of his formalism and idealism, 'Telling the truth about the self, constituting the self as complete subject—it is a fantasy. In spite of the fact that autobiography is impossible, this in no way prevents it from existing'.³⁵ Rather, as Sidonie Smith argues, 'In autobiography the reader recognises the inevitability of unreliability but suppresses the recognition in a tenacious effort to expect "truth" of some kind'.³⁶ Some sense of continuity is as essential for autobiography as it is for identity. In psychological terms 'Only when a core self begins to cohere can one enter into or make use of the "transitional space" ... in which the differences and boundaries between self/other, inner/outer, and reality/illusion are bracketed or elided'.³⁷

Against this 'core self's' background sense of continuity, of 'going on being', an opposite sense of alterity or alienation is also a necessary precondition for the self-recognition of autobiography. The process of knowing oneself includes differentiating the self from others. In George Gusdorf's masculinist analysis, the psychic health of the autobiographer is measured by the extent to which the self is constructed in separateness, the boundaries between self and others carefully circumscribed:

The recapitulation of ages of existence, of landscapes and encounters, obliges me to situate what I am in the perspective of what I have been. My individual unity, the mysterious essence of my being—this is the law of

92–7 for an elaboration of Lejeune's problems with intentionality.

³⁴ Jacques Derrida sees the 'metaphysics of presence' as governing all the binary oppositions of Western thought, beginning with the fundamental division between Nature and Culture. The myth of presence is first of all the myth of nature-before-culture. See Gayatri Spivak's introduction to Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1976).

³⁵ Phillipe Lejeune, 'The Autobiographical Pact (Bis)', *Eakin* 131–32.

³⁶ Smith 46.

³⁷ Jane Flax, 'Re-Membering the Selves: Is the Repressed Gendered?', *Michigan Quarterly Review* 26.1 (1987): 93. Flax is critiquing postmodernists' confusion of 'all possible forms of self with the "unitary," mentalist, deerotized, masterful, and oppositional selves they rightfully criticize'.

gathering in and of understanding in all the acts that have been mine, all the faces and places where I have recognised signs and witnesses of my destiny.³⁸

More, however, than recognising her external difference from others, the autobiographer must become aware of her internal difference, so that 'The "I," something apparently familiar, becomes something other, foreign'.³⁹ In psychoanalytic terms, this is the division on which the very notion of 'the subject' rests: 'Otherness is always already present in the Same ("person") because it is the subject's entry into the language of the Other that informs "him"'.⁴⁰ Or, more simply, 'The split between subject narrating and object narrated constitutes the distance needed to see oneself (as another)'.⁴¹ There will always, then, be both a connection and a tension between identity and difference and between 'is' and 'was'; and this is the space of autobiography.⁴²

For women, the social and political effects of the 'phallic law' which divides men and women from the mother, from the unconscious and from themselves are further complicated by their gender so that women autobiographers (and all those who are not seen to represent authority) may be particularly aware of their own 'otherness'—both their external difference from others and the internal difference embodied in their past 'selves' resurrected in writing—and of autobiography as the effort to control it. As Nancy Miller explains 'the self being justified is indelibly marked by what Beauvoir calls "feminitude:" a culturally

³⁸ Gusdorf 38. Gusdorf does not consider the extent to which self and self image may not coincide, or can never coincide, in language.

³⁹ Smith 47.

⁴⁰ Alice Jardine, *Gynesis: Configurations of Women and Modernity* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1985) 106.

⁴¹ Hewitt 194. This is why Jacques Derrida sees alterity as characteristic of all language and of all texts, and not just literary language and texts.

⁴² This is the same gap that, in Marxist terms, produces the inevitable symptoms of the subject's alienation.

determined status of difference and oppression. ... The subject of women's autobiography here is a self both scotomized and overexposed by the fact of her femininity as a social reality'.⁴³ Whether the writer likes it or not, the female name particularises the text in a way a male name does not and for the female autobiographer who is also a figure of public fiction (as are Janet Frame and the French women Miller discusses) the awareness of performing 'on the stage of her text'⁴⁴ will be particularly acute: 'The female autobiographers know that they are being read as *women*'.⁴⁵ Domna Stanton concludes in her study of the 'difference' of women's autobiography that:

Because of woman's different status in the symbolic order, autogynography ... dramatize(s) the fundamental alterity and non-presence of the subject, even as it asserts itself discursively and strives toward an always impossible selfpossession.⁴⁶

Instead of seeing the inevitable tensions of identity as a threat to individuality or autonomy, Janet Frame, like many modern autobiographers, is quite happy to reveal the part of fiction in the self. By renaming her young self 'The Student' and so externalising the (necessary) split in her autobiographical self, the narrator turns that young self into something more like a character in her own text, sealed off by name and temporal distance. The autobiography can then be seen not just as an act of narration but as an act of staging, 'that which is literally given to be seen'.⁴⁷ The subject is made an 'object' of investigation, for 'to write an autobiography commits one to performing one's changing selfhood in public'.⁴⁸

⁴³ Nancy Miller, 'Women's Autobiography in France: For a Dialectics of Identification', Women and Language in Literature and Society, ed. Sally McConnell-Ginet et al (New York: Praeger, 1980) 263. Miller is discussing Daniel Stern, George Sand and Simone de Beauvoir in particular.

⁴⁴ Miller (1980) 260.

⁴⁵ Miller (1980) 262.

⁴⁶ Domna C. Stanton, 'Autogynography: Is the Subject Different?', The Female Autograph, ed. Domna C. Stanton (Univ. of Chicago Press, 1987) 15.

⁴⁷ Miller (1980) 260.

⁴⁸ Meyer Spacks 56.

young Frame from within the train: 'I, with memories created from the past as a foraging bee creates its own sweet architecture, looked out' (II:12). But simultaneously, at the level of interpretation or writing, the young Frame is herself always closely observed and contained by the narrator who has the subject's past, present and future available to her as she writes. A spectacle or scene within the narrative, the description shows Janet Frame as actor in her own narrative. With an illusion of presence, what the narrator in fact achieves is the foregrounding of her 'self' as other. The interposed, interpreting narrator self-consciously recreates or role-plays her younger self.

Some of these distancing techniques of comment and control are familiar from To the Is-Land. In that volume the chronological narrative of Frame's childhood was editorialised not just in authorial intrusions (for example, on memory and autobiography) but also in the book's fragmented structure of short chapters. The titles of the chapters serve as another (almost paratextual) level of narration and explanation. Where An Angel at My Table differs is in the narrator's barely disguised struggle with the image of her younger self. Suzette Henke, for example, goes so far as to say that Frame 'battles with her purportedly deranged persona in order to assert artistic control over an earlier, inadmissible image of the self'.⁵⁰

In the four chapters entitled '1945: One', '1945: Two', '1945: Three' and '1945: Four' the stage metaphor is quite explicit. Presented by the narrator as a self-contained 'epic'⁵¹ (II:54 and 60) or tragedy in four acts, the chapters deal with the year in

⁵⁰ Suzette Henke, 'A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Woman: Janet Frame's Autobiographies', Span 31 (Feb. 1991): 93.

⁵¹ Considering Frame's desire to distance her narrating self and her narratee from the subject of the text in these chapters and the mythical dimension she invokes for her autobiography, it is useful to consider Bakhtin's generic characteristics of epic here: '(1) ... the "absolute past" serves as the subject for the epic; (2) national tradition ... serves as the source for the epic; (3) an absolute epic distance separates the epic world from contemporary reality, that is, from the time in which the

which Frame is first admitted to Seacliff Hospital. In these chapters the narrator's voice becomes so dominant over that of her subject as to all but exclude the point of view of her younger self.

The year is presented as a year of beginnings, of Frame's excited discovery of classical music in John Forrest's gramophone recitals (II:57–59), of writing and publishing her first story (II:61), of 'coming of age' (II:60). She was, the narrator says, on the brink of discarding the 'masks' (II:50 and 63) of her adolescence and establishing an adult identity apart from her family and her past (II:60). She was 'struggl[ing] to accept and be responsible for myself as a whole being without having to conceal my inner dreams in order to preserve them, or without having to deceive by playing roles of teacher, smiling, happy, "a lovely girl, no trouble at all"' (II:46).⁵² By providing some of the social and historical background to the New Zealand of the time (particularly in the abruptly interposed chapter describing the (parallel) infancy of New Zealand literature and the publication of Speaking for Ourselves (II: 67–8)) and through the already established links with To the Is-Land and The Tempest, the narrator provides a context and an explanation for her younger self's fears about the future.

Indeed, the narration stresses the normality of her (late) development and the chapters are laced with explanation and comment from the narrator on the situation and plight of her younger self. The narrator editorialises, for example, that 'I was on the usual adolescent path of worry and wondering how to "cope"

singer (the author and his audience) lives'. See M. M. Bakhtin, 'Epic and Novel', The Dialogic Imagination, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981) 13–17.

⁵² Frame's development to this point is very much in the tradition of the *bildungsroman* in which the hero (sic) 'struggles to integrate himself, his ideals, and his perspectives into an increasingly industrialized, materialistic, and alienating bourgeois society'. See Sandra Frieden, 'Shadowing/ Surfacing/ Shedding: Contemporary German Writers in Search of a Female *Bildungsroman*', The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development, ed. Elizabeth Abel et al (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1983) 304.

with everyday living; yet, strangely, in order to lessen my anxiety, I found myself forced to choose a more distinctly signposted path where my journey drew more attention and so, I found, drew more practical help' (II:81). By repeating the Part One title 'Tricks of Desperation' in one of the last chapters of the book, Frame again stresses the 'normality' of her actions and reactions and reinforces her explanation by explicitly comparing her situation and actions to those of Paula Lincoln and other 'people in their "ordinary" setting': 'How could I have forgotten so quickly all the tricks of desperation that people will use to assure and reassure themselves of their place, their p(a)lace?' (II:174).

In retrospect, '1945' is seen as the last year of Frame's 'innocence'. More than this though, it is the last year of the existence of this naive, experiencing self apart from the knowing narrator. The dislocation Frame experiences in hospital and the 'difference' that madness makes are so extreme as to cancel the existence of this younger, innocent self except in memory: 'Many of my student days and experiences are now sealed from me by that substance released with the life of each moment or each moment's capture of our life' (II:23). The break between subject and narrator is so extreme that the second part of the book is entitled 'Finding the Silk' with its epigraph, 'Separated from time as a silkworm from the silk'. Its project will, then, be to recover that lost sense of continuity and temporal connection.

Where the narrator lays the 'blame' for her 'fall' is in the gaping contradiction between her emerging sense of her self and the social expectations imposed upon her which she has by now 'woven so carefully, with such close texture' as her 'visible layer' (II:62) as almost to suffocate her 'real' self: 'I felt completely isolated. I knew no-one to confide in, to get advice from; and there was nowhere I could go' (II:63). The turning point, the crisis, of this self-declared epic is the dramatic

act of turning her back on the school inspector to walk out of her classroom and out of the school: 'I walked out of the room and out of the school, knowing I would never return' (II:61). With no social outlet for her self-awareness, in despair she abandons her quest for social integration and acts to completely, radically annul all her irreconcilable 'selves' in suicide.

According to the narrator, the problem and the tragedy is one of identity. Her student self is a 'shadowy "I", almost a nothingness, like a no-woman's land' (II:27). She has moved, she says, from the shared 'we' of family life but finds in Dunedin no quick or socially acceptable replacement sense of her single self: 'In order to survive I had to conceal my "I", what I really felt, thought, and dreamed about' (II:27). As Frame gradually, over many months, joins the 'community of the insane who yet had no legal or personal external identity', where many of the patients had '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 everchanging sky' (II:69) her subject self disappears altogether. She can no longer claim the personal pronoun: 'I became "she", one of "them"' (II:70); 'I had become a third person ... Sometimes, as if I were my own obituary, people asked, "What was she?"' (II:98).

The narrative makes frequent reference to the young Frame's lack of a place to be herself as the cause of her confinement and the reason for its continuance:

Faced suddenly with the prospect of going home, I felt all the worries of the world returning, all the sadness of home and the everlasting toil of my parents and ... my inability to find a place in the Is-Land. ... If only I had the world of poetry, openly, unashamedly, without having to hide it in secrecy within myself! (II:65-66)

Early in my stay there were two or three periods of several weeks when I

was allowed to leave hospital and each time I needed to return as there was nowhere else for me to live. (II:96)

I could no longer bear the nothingness. I retreated to an inward state ... I, in my nothingness and nowhere-ness was asserting the nothingness and nowhere-ness of everything and everyone around me. Such a condition, of course, led to my removal to the Auckland Mental Hospital at Avondale; at least it was a 'place' for me where I was believed to be 'at home'. (II:98)

The world, it seems, can accommodate her only by providing a 'crevice in time' (II:97) into which she can silently step and thus pass out of existence: 'I inhabited a territory of loneliness which I think resembles that place where the dying spend their time before death' (II:96); 'I experienced a feeling of nowhere-ness and nothingness as if I had never existed, or, if I had, I was now erased from the earth' (II:97). Because she no longer has an 'I' of her own, she no longer has an identity or actions for the narrator to describe.

For factual detail on the following eight years and 'the surroundings and events in the several mental hospitals I experienced' (II:70) the reader is referred instead to the documentary fiction⁵³ of Faces in the Water (also at II:96, 99 and 106). About the years on which so much attention, both critical and popular, has concentrated, Frame is largely silent, donning the protective mask of fiction. Faces in the Water, she says, countering the autobiographical readings the book has generated,⁵⁴ sets out 'the actual events and people and places, but not myself, except for my feeling of panic simply at being locked up' (II:96). She says only that 'were I to rewrite Faces in the Water I would include much that I omitted because I did not want a record by a former patient to appear to be over-dramatic'

⁵³ The term 'documentary fiction' is the one Frame uses to describe the book in its prefatory note: 'Although this book is written in documentary form it is a work of fiction. None of the characters, including Estina (sic) Mavet, portrays a living person.' (FW:6).

⁵⁴ See Gina Mercer, 'The Subversive Fiction of Janet Frame', PhD. diss., U. of Sydney, 1989: 46–47 for some examples of these autobiographical readings.

(II:99), but does not right the record here.

Frame pointedly excludes the reader of the autobiography from her 'actual' experience of madness, except through the 'I' of a (fictional) documentary reporter. It is Istina Mavet who takes the reader inside the 'crevice in time' into which Frame had fallen to describe the people, events and treatments of the lost world of the insane.⁵⁵ Not only, however, is Faces in the Water formally, in its prefatory note (FW:6), balanced between autobiography and fiction, but Istina is also herself of ambiguous authority as narrator. She was, she says, 'put in hospital because a great gap opened in the ice floe between myself and the other people whom I watched ... I was alone on the ice ... I was not yet civilised; I traded my safety for the glass beads of fantasy' (FW:10–11). Her borderline position undermines the either/or, inside/outside model on which the division between madness and sanity, hospital and society or narrator and reader is based. The instability is underlined by the frequent shifting of tenses and point of view in the text and by its indeterminate ending:

I looked away from them and tried not to think of them and repeated to myself what one of the nurses had told me, "when you leave hospital you must forget all you have ever seen, put it out of your mind completely as if it never happened, and go and live a normal life in the outside world."

And by what I have written in this document you will see, won't you, that I have obeyed her? (FW:253–54)

The references in An Angel at My Table to Faces in the Water question whether, because the world of the insane is so removed, so 'other', there is a language adequate to describe it, except in fiction. As Catherine Belsey explains:

Subjectivity is discursively produced and is constrained by the range of

⁵⁵ For an analysis of the gap, hollow, crevice imagery of Faces in the Water see Mercer 48–49.

subject-positions defined in the discourses in which the concrete individual participates ... In this sense existing discourses determine not only what can be said and understood, but the nature of subjectivity itself, what it is possible to be ... Since meaning is plural, to be able to speak is to be able to take part in the contest for meaning which issues in the production of new subject-positions, new determinations of what it is possible to be.⁵⁶

The enclosure of the 'asylum'—protective not of the patients but of the conformist order 'outside'—is so complete that dominant 'reality' cannot penetrate or understand it. Faces in the Water investigates and questions the very fragmentary foundations on which concepts of reality are based.

The references to Faces in the Water in An Angel at My Table also, however, serve as a reminder that the reader is always an invited guest in those parts of her world and experience that Janet Frame chooses to reveal. Frame is asserting her control over the terms as well as the content of her text. Part of her self-definition is in deciding what to tell or display and what will remain silent.⁵⁷ The distance between Janet Frame as narrator and Janet Frame as subject is now the (undrawable) line between fact and fiction.

The effect of this break-out of fiction in what has been to now a conventionally-cued 'factual' (autobiographical) text is something like the 'revolving door' De Man employs to describe the unstable base of all autobiography: 'the distinction between fiction and autobiography is not an either/or polarity but ... is

⁵⁶ Catherine Belsey, The Subject of Tragedy: Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama, (London: Methuen, 1985) 5–6.

⁵⁷ Janet Frame herself has only this kind of partial, edited view of her own mother. Lottie shares her experience 'of marriage and bed and birth' with June but not with Janet. Frame recognises that controlling the access to the self, as both she and Lottie do, is really about power: 'Always in our family there was the struggle between powerlessness and power where the closeness to people and the ability to prove that closeness became a symbol of most power' (II:101).

undecidable'.⁵⁸ Frame's pointed avoidance of these years in her autobiography disrupts the smooth surface of the text and dislocates, once again, the reader's policing and authenticating roles—both the reader's desire for reference and her desire for identification with the text and its heroine. Frame excludes both the reader as judge and the reader as therapist. She steers her text once more firmly from the confessional and toward the literary.

Frame's narrator does not just describe her younger self in Part One, but describes her self in such a way as to display her authority over the characterisation. She therefore also invites complicity by assuming her reader shares the values—knowledge, maturity—that she announces. Indeed, she actively creates her ideal audience by dividing them from herself as the fatally innocent young student, the archetypal naive reader. The reader is encouraged by the text itself to appreciate the narrator's performance. In the 'scene' of the text, this distancing from the representation can be felt and interpreted as art.

Perhaps, then, in plot terms, the truly decisive act of Frame's 1945 'epic' is not the act of abandoning her career as a teacher, or even her attempted suicide, but the translation of these acts into words in the autobiography she writes for her psychology class. She chooses writing over suicide, self-inscription against self-destruction and so takes a decisive step against the symbolic and political system that has oppressed her.⁵⁹ The power, she says, is not in the act itself but in its telling, its 'more impressive' recreation as the climax to her (literary)

⁵⁸ Paul de Man, 'Autobiography as De-facement', *MLN* 94 (1979): 921. De Man borrows the metaphor from Genette and uses it to describe 'the inherent instability' of generic definitions of autobiography. Autobiography, he says, demonstrates in a 'striking way the impossibility of closure and of totalization ... of all textual systems made up of tropological substitutions'.

⁵⁹ *Faces in the Water* as part of her therapy at the Maudsley Hospital is another example of Frame's empowerment through writing, and of Hélène Cixous's assertion that woman must write her self to mark 'her shattering entry into history that has always been based on her suppression'. See Hélène Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 1 (1976): 880.

autobiography, 'using the chemical term for aspirin—*acetylsalicylic acid*' (II:64). It is certainly John Forrest's naive (mis)reading of the language of her despair and desperation that is crucial in determining her fate.

Throughout the three volumes of her autobiography, the terms in which Frame measures her progress are literary. The autobiography is always firmly focused on the story of Janet Frame becoming a writer; on her trials, tribulations, setbacks and successes. The autobiography is part of the tradition of *Kunstlerroman*: it tells the (adult) story of the artist's development. This is how Suzette Henke describes it:

Frame's memoir unfolds as a poignant account of female artistic development in the face of harrowing physical, spiritual, economic and psychological vicissitudes. Her narrative of creative determination despite soul-destroying domestic circumstances calls to mind James Joyce's Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man—but with a difference. ... Gender difference marks boundaries of experience that are rarely crossed in either the colonies of the Empire or the dominions of the Commonwealth.⁶⁰

In To the Is-Land, for example, Frame develops from a reader learning the meaning and depth of words to a writer finding her poetic voice, to the point where, leaving her childhood behind to journey to Dunedin, she finally achieves her signature: 'Janet Paterson Frame, I wrote, looping carefully' (I:173). The narrative of An Angel at My Table, apart from its obvious 'literary' events, is again surrounded with literary allusions and standards. In Part One, Frame describes the process of 'uprooting' herself from her flesh-and-blood family to find in the pages of poetry and prose a new family. Language is her 'adopted world' (II:91) and her continuing discovery of literature is both a re-birth and a

⁶⁰ Henke 85–86.

home-coming (II:24 and 68). Centrally, at the point where 'All I had left was my desire to be a writer, to explore thoughts and images which were frowned upon as being bizarre, and my ambition thought to be suspect, perhaps a delusion' (II:95) it is Frame's identity and practice as a writer which is described, quite literally, as saving her life: 'It was my writing that at last came to my rescue. It is little wonder that I value writing as a way of life when it actually saved my life' (II: 106) and again, 'I repeat that my writing saved me' (II:107). Marked down on the list for a leucotomy (lobotomy), her erasure as a person almost complete, Frame's personality and future is 'saved' by the announcement of her win of the Hubert Church Award for The Lagoon.

Part Two marks a new narrative movement with another journey to Dunedin. This time, 'on my third visit to live in Dunedin, the University and the Training College were no longer my world: I had no world' (II:115). After brief encounters with waitressing and an uncomfortable introduction to Charles Brasch, Frame journeys to Auckland. The world Frame makes there, with Frank Sargeson's help, is the daily life of a writer, of reading and writing and routine. The resolution the narrator offers to the tension between the past and the present, between writing and experience, between memory and its translation into words—'the silk' (II:113) that she finds in Part Two—is the thread of writing.

The solution An Angel at My Table offers to its problems of identity, memory and language is a victory for language and for writing and, importantly, for their public acknowledgment and recognition. Just as her control of the material of her life is a demonstration of the authority and power of the narrator to 'save' (preserve) her 'life' in art,⁶¹ so within the tale of Frame's coming-to-writing

⁶¹ With the warning, however, that the self is not god. Like Dobson's tumour in the brain museum at the Maudsley Hospital, it is Frame's autobiography that will survive (and represent) her:
For three years now it has told how Dobson died: with my double tongue

always lies this embedded narrative of the 'saving' power of narrative and of language⁶²—and a directive to the reader to submit to the power and authority of the performance of the teller.

I spat at God. In formalin
 my prestige grows fat. I survive
 as Dobson's tumour, nineteen fifty-five. (III:118)

⁶² This situation is mirrored in the text in those situations in which the narrator must prove her ability as storyteller. For Janet Frame, her continuing diagnosis as schizophrenic is such a demonstration. Schizophrenia, she says, is a language she learns—from others and from books—a discourse with its own restrictions and rules which she performs for John Forrest, 'young handsome ... glistening with newly-applied Freud' (II:78): 'to *suit* the occasion, I wore my schizophrenic fancy dress' (II:81). In a twist in the normal order of doctor/patient relationships it is Frame who has control of the relationship and, again, of the narrative situation in which she describes it. Her lack of efficacy and power in the real world is displaced by the power of her narration.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE ENVOY FROM MIRROR CITY:

The female artist as hero?

All of Frame's texts, her fiction as well as her autobiography, deal with the figure of 'The Artist', her role and her place.¹ The kinds of questions she is asking are: What is the role of the artist? What are her characteristics? Is her point of view privileged? Is there an aesthetic realm? Is the artist transcendent of self? and Where does an artist belong? In her autobiography, besides herself, Frame also includes a series of alternate or potential artists who reflect not only on her own development, but also on the place and power of art and the artist. In To the Island, other 'artists' seeking to express themselves and their unique view of the world include Lottie and George Frame, Myrtle, Aunt Maggie, Poppy and Shirley Grave. In An Angel at My Table they include Prospero, Aunt Isy, Isabel, the women inmates of the psychiatric hospitals, Frank Sargeson, Paula Lincoln, even Aunt Polly—'Dressmaker to the world! Like an artist who is constantly framing the view, isolating and freezing objects in order to transform them with imagination' (II:188). The most important of these alternate artists is Lottie, Frame's mother.

It is Lottie, Frame says, who gave her the gift of language that was necessary for

¹ See Carol H. G. MacLennan, 'Fictions and the Scope of the Artist in the Novels of Janet Frame', M. Phil Thesis, Univ. of Waikato, Hamilton, NZ, 1986. See also Susan Ash, 'Janet Frame: The Female Artist as Hero', INZL 6 (1988): 170-189, for a discussion of the female artist in State of Siege, Living in the Maniototo and the autobiographies.

her to become a writer. Not just Janet's biological mother, Lottie is also Frame's literary forebear. As well as being herself a writer, it is Lottie who provides Janet with access to language and literature, myth and history. Guide and interpreter, Lottie is the autobiography's first and most influential model of the scope and power of language not only to describe but to creatively transform and make meaningful the natural world:

When Mother talked of the present, ... bringing her sense of wondrous contemplation to the ordinary world we knew, we listened, feeling the mystery and the magic. She had only to say of any commonplace object, 'Look, kiddies, a stone' to fill that stone with wonder as if it were a holy object. She was able to imbue every insect, blade of grass, flower, the dangers and grandeurs of weather and the seasons, with a memorable importance along with a kind of uncertainty and humility that led us to ponder and try to discover the heart of everything. Mother, fond of poetry and reading, writing, and reciting it, communicated to us that same feeling about the world of the written and spoken word. (I:12)

For Lottie, nature is a realm apart, a sacred world of language and truth and potentially absolute meaning not touched by the threat and difficulties or the corruption of language in society and the drudgery and alienation of everyday life. Hers is not a desire to transcend the natural world, but a desire for communion and for immanence. Throughout the autobiography she is described as living in 'complete peacefulness' (I:159), close to the natural world, so that 'when she told us about the birds of the air, flying down to feed from Grandma Godfrey's hand, Mother was really talking about herself' (I:73)—to the extent, however, that not noticing Janet's tight tunic and developing breasts, she will not allow her to 'put restrictions on [her] body' with corsets and brassieres (I:138). She is also described in images drawn from the natural world. She is the

'mother bird of the world' (II:137).

In prelapsarian Wyndham where the family lives in Janet's earliest years, Frame describes the world, simply, as 'a place where we lived alone with the weather; with our mother and father working all day and singing and playing the accordion and the bagpipes in the evening while we children played from waking till sleeping' (I:23). Lottie is active and involved in her family and outside the family in local life, publishing her poems each week in the local newspaper, the Wyndham Farmer. At perhaps the highest point of her subjectivity and identity in the autobiography, she is known as "Lottie C. Frame, the local poet" (I:26).

As Janet grows, however, and grows in understanding, and she and her family move from a living closeness with nature to social life in Oamaru, the narrative affords her mother (and, to a lesser extent, her father) progressively less and less independence and stature.² Increasingly, Frame describes both her parents as children unable to cope with the complex social world they have entered. In particular, it is Lottie who is shown to have a childlike understanding of the people and things around her: in her search for a cure for Bruddie (called a 'pilgrimage' (I:70) to emphasise its irrational fervour) Frame shows her mother as innocent prey first of all to the useless prescriptions of various doctors and

² Richard Coe argues that this is a feature of all autobiographies of childhood. The autobiographer will always have difficulty portraying her parents, and her mother in particular, because the child 'necessarily starts with an uncritical and purely subjective relationship with their major character, and gradually evolv(es) toward a critical and objective assessment. And the process of evolution becomes a significant structural feature of the narrative'. See Richard Coe, When the Grass Was Taller: Autobiography and the Experience of Childhood (New Haven & London: Yale Univ. Press, 1984) 150. It is also part of the Freudian narrative of child development, in which the child's separation from the mother is a mark of her psychic health: 'The child, coming to language, becomes subject to the name-of-the-father, accepting the exigencies of symbolizing desire in language and thereby transcending the mother's silence'. See Marianne Hirsch The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1989) 168). In To the Is-Land, as Janet is shown discovering the world and her own voice, Lottie is shown retreating from the world and is more and more silent.

then to a series of unattributed opinions and remedies for the cause of Bruddie's fits (I:'Cures'); she is said to divide Parliament into 'goodies' (praised) and 'baddies' (criticised) (I:92); her 'first venture into time payment wasn't made lightly; it was like a loss of financial virginity' (I:102). At the same time, Frame's parents no longer enjoy the simple pleasures of their earlier life: 'our parents, apart from us now, went about their endless adult work, which might better be known as "toil" in all its meanings—trap or snare, battle, strife, a spell of severe, fatiguing labor—meanings of which we were unaware' (I:40). In Oamaru there is no music: Lottie 'no longer played her accordion, while Dad's bagpipes and bagpipe music now stayed untouched in the cupboard, and there was no more singing in the evenings' (I:60).

Lottie does maintain a literary life outside her family, but it is little described and given no narrative prominence.³ She is said to host, for example, a group of young men who come to the house to read poems (I:70). This information is given, however, in the context of an example of the children's wild and unruly behaviour and Lottie's lack of control within her family and home. In the same way, describing her diary of Ardenue, Frame mentions (in brackets) that '(she [Lottie] corresponded with one or two people who wrote poetry)' (I:145). What the narrative foregrounds is Lottie's increasing lack of voice and autonomy and her lost sense of a 'place' in which to be herself.

Most importantly, Lottie, with her family tradition of words and literature, and 'whose overwhelming might-have-been was *publication* of a book' (I:95), is no longer shown writing and publishing her poetry.⁴ To emphasise the lost

³ May Williamson, by way of contrast, says 'Janet Frame's mother was an amazing woman. All through her life she wrote song lyrics which were never published'. See May Williamson, 'Janet Frame—N.Z. Writer', *Northland: A Regional Magazine* 23 (1963): 6.

⁴ In the account Frame gives of her mother in 'Beginnings', Lottie does not stop writing. There Frame describes her mother as 'A dreamer who never gave up her romantic notion that great writers

possibilities of her youth, the narrator re-establishes Lottie's talent by mentioning her collection of poems and her prize-winning song only at the very point where it is also recorded that she no longer writes (I:95–6). For Frame, her autobiographical narrative focused on the life she has made in writing, writing for publication represents 'entrance into the world of others, and by means of that passage a rebirth: access to the status of autonomous subject'.⁵ Lottie has progressively lost this access to full subjectivity and identity. When Janet brings home news of the poets she is reading at school, Frame describes her as receiving them 'as an exile receives sight of a long-lost native land' (I:94).

Indeed, Lottie is said to no longer have even the time to read. When Janet borrows her a Dickens from the Athanaeum she is said to have 'no time to read it but ... touched it and opened it and flipped the pages and read out striking descriptions, saying, "How wonderful, kiddies, Charles Dickens, born in poverty, growing up to be a great writer"' (I:89).⁶ Poetry for Lottie is more and more reduced to the names (and not the texts) of the (Romantic) poets she admires: 'Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Harriet Beecher Stowe, John Greenleaf Whittier, William Pember Reeves ... Michael Joseph Savage—never failed to awaken a sense of magic' (I:14). Like the refuge and redemption offered by her Christadelphian faith, the poets are an incantation of hope: 'Mother sought the

compose masterpieces on the backs of envelopes, receipts, old letters, she left each day a trail of poem-spattered fragments' (B:41). In 'Beginnings' Frame's coming to writing and publication is not incompatible with her mother's (or her father's or her sisters') self-expression: 'my father sat at one end of the table writing his time-sheets ...; my mother sat at the other end writing her poems to submit for publication, while my sisters and I sat on the long kauri form or the bin near the fire writing *our* poems to send to the newspapers' (B:41). Similarly, in interviews Frame has mentioned her mother selling poetry door-to-door during the Depression in order to support her family. See, for example, Janet Frame, 'Visionary View of the "Tapestry of Words"', by Tony Reid, *NZ Herald* 12 Feb. 1983, sec. 2: 1–2.

⁵ Nancy Miller, 'Women's Autobiography in France: For a Dialectics of Identification', *Women and Language in Literature and Society*, ed. Sally McConnell-Ginet et al (New York: Praeger, 1980): 266. Miller is discussing George Sand, Daniel Stern and Simone de Beauvoir, all of whom, like Frame, make writing the meaningful trajectory of their autobiographies.

⁶ The narrative connection to the copies of Rilke and Shakespeare Janet kept with her, talisman-like, in hospital, but seldom read, is clear.

poets not necessarily for their poems but for the romantic idea of them, as if they might be a more tangible Second Coming' (I:111).⁷ More and more split between the past and the present, in the poets and her Christadelphian religion Lottie sees the possibility of a redemptive and explanatory, organising plot that will remove her from time and the world over which she has less and less control.⁸

Reversing the image of Lottie as an integral part of the world of Nature, she is now compared to a plant, uprooted and transplanted to the enclosed, cultivated, confined space of a garden. She was, Frame says:

worn out by her living ... for her husband and children, as if without her own life, like a stake cut from a grand tree, stripped of its own shoots and set beside flourishing plants, bound to them, taking the force of the prevailing wind, moving only as the wind moved while the sheltered plants trembled lightly with only a rumour of storm. (II:111)

Or Lottie is herself the garden, stripped bare and full of alien and exotic plants or weeds:

We had washed away her evidence of self, all her own furniture from her own room, and crowded it with our selves and our lives; or perhaps it was not a room but a garden that we cleared to plant ourselves deeply there. (II:105)

⁷ And again, 'Her favorite poems were those of first and last, the newly discovered and the long lost, all of which seemed to fuse with her preoccupation with the "latter days" creating opposite images of total darkness and loss with total light and revelation' (I:94).

⁸ Mark Williams offers another analysis of the importance of Lottie's Christadelphian religion to Fame's artistic vision. He sees Christadelphian doctrine as bearing the imprint of a tradition of working class culture and resistance to authority. It is opposed to religious orthodoxy and social conformity: 'It stresses the radical capacity of the individual to resist conventionally approved ways of seeing the world and to open what Blake called "the doors of perception"'. Its doctrines, he finds, are the base of Frame's inspiration to resist the values of the society. See Mark Williams, 'Janet Frame's Suburban Gothic', *Leaving the Highway* (Auckland Univ. Press, 1990) 33. His analysis removes, however, the important dislocation of class and economic relations within the household. Carolyn Steedman discusses the conventions of working class autobiography and their gender bias in *Landscape for a Good Woman: A Story of Two Lives* (London: Virago, 1986) 72-77.

What Frame is describing is the absorption of her mother by the maternal role that overwhelms and incorporates all others. Lottie is twice called the 'mother bird of the world' (I:73–74 and 137): not just Frame's mother, she is a universal symbol of motherhood. The dissolution of Lottie's personal identity and creativity in her domestic and maternal roles is central to Frame's very first description of her mother:

Mother, in a constant [sic] state of family immersion even to the material evidence of the wet patch in front of her dress ...: an immersion so deep that it achieved the opposite effect of making her seem to be seldom at home, in the present tense, like an unreal person with her real self washed away. (I:11)

The collocates of exile and absence, real and unreal, past and present that describe Lottie here, shadow her throughout the autobiography. Equally distant from her past and from the present, Lottie is never quite 'at home' in the 'real' world (and, it seems, makes little attempt to recuperate her lost self).

When she is in 'this' world, she is indelibly marked by domesticity and maternity, more intensely even than other mothers—'thin mothers with no lap and no titties' (I:73)—and certainly more intensely than other women. Lottie has lost (or had worn away or given up) not only her personality but also her bodily boundaries in her unlimited maternity. For Lottie, her anatomy (or rather her morphology, her anatomy's social meaning) is her chosen destiny. Maternity functions for her as a shelter from the demands of political, social and economic exchange.⁹ But for Janet Frame, who wishes to escape this essentialism or female

⁹ Maternity, as Luce Irigaray points out, is one of the few socially and personally legitimated functions women are granted. Constricted, suffering motherhood like Lottie's is not the result of lack but of an excess which finds no other social avenue or validated outlet. See Elizabeth Grosz, 'Luce Irigaray and Sexual Difference', *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1989) 119–26. Like her uncritical acceptance of the Christadelphian creed, Lottie's maternity limits her criticism of the determining effects of cultural ideologies on the fictive patterns of the self.

'fate' and its characteristics of vulnerability, dependency and lack of control in order to become a professional writer, Lottie is a problematic figure.¹⁰

Lottie's life story follows the archetypal 'female plot' of marriage and family.¹¹ Once she is a mother, in psychoanalytic terms she no longer has a voice or a social value in her own right:

The adult woman who is a mother ... continues to exist only in relation to her child, never as a subject in her own right. And in her maternal function, she remains an object, always distanced, always idealized or denigrated, always mystified, always represented through the small child's point of view. ... Although she produces and upholds the subject, she herself remains the matrix, the other, the origin. And the child's own narrative—the narrative of our culture—rests on that "othering".¹²

Lottie, as the narrative emphasises, has failed to bring about change. From a real, externally-measured literary talent she has retreated into a powerless, private world of symbols and dreams. For the young Janet, in part she represents the threat of adult (female) life: at the same time as she is 'haunted by' her mother's power to tell stories and make legends from them, 'fearing immersion in this foreign world, [she] struggled to escape' (I:11). What Janet struggles against is an identification with her mother's stories (and, for the narrator, with her life-story)

¹⁰ Marianne Hirsch contends that 'feminist discourse [which] has set an extremely high value on control—control of women's bodies, of their legal status, their salaries, their choice of life and plot' is often characterised by a 'discomfort with the vulnerability and lack of control that are attributed to, and certainly are elements of, maternity' (Hirsch 165).

¹¹ Carolyn Heilbrun uses the term 'marriage plot' to describe women's traditional developmental path. According to Heilbrun, in order to become the subject of her own life, the female artist must choose the male 'quest plot' and abandon the female erotic (marriage) plot in which women live by a script they did not write, and once married, have no further story. 'What was Penelope Unweaving?', *Hamlet's Mother and Other Women* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1990) 103–11. Perhaps though, instead of choosing either one or the other 'plot', Frame is bringing both plots to the surface to rival one another.

¹² Hirsch 167–68.

that threatens engulfment and self-loss but which also offers her the very basis for her self-consciousness and self-representation. In the pattern of the Freudian 'family romance', intimacy and identification with her mother threatens Janet with a share of her mother's subordination, but rejection of her is the ambivalent embrace of patriarchy and male power.

Lottie's intense identification with motherhood does not, however, make her a 'good' mother.¹³ Within her chosen identity Lottie is, indirectly, portrayed as somewhat lacking. Although she has an encyclopedic knowledge of family history, she remains an 'outsider' in the complex world of family relations. She is exiled from her own family because of her marriage outside the Christadelphian faith and marginalised in the Frame family because of her lax standard of household management and her lack of interest and skill (I:60) in the 'female' arts the Frame aunts are famous for; 'Polly, Isy, Maggie spent their working lives as dressmakers and in their leisure produced exquisite embroidery, knitting, tatting, crochet' (I:10). In the opinions of a series of authoritative outsiders who supplement and legitimate Frame's view of her mother, doubt is cast on her ability to care for all her children. Miss Low, the lady doctor, Mr Crump (the health inspector) and Aunt Maggie all provide implicit comment on Lottie and her mothering and performance of her chosen 'female plot'. By implication, Lottie becomes so obsessed with the search for a cure for Bruddie that the children do not just run wild, but, more seriously, Janet becomes:

an anxious child full of twitches and tics, standing alone in the playground at school ...: a freckle-faced, frizzy-haired little girl who was somehow 'dirty' because the lady doctor chose her with the other known 'dirty and

¹³ Theories of mothering—psychological, psychoanalytic and sociological—draw on socially evolved and quite recently determined ideas about what 'good' and 'bad' mothering is. See Shelley Phillips 'The Roots of Mother-Daughter Conflict: A Century and a Half of Unreal Expectations and Myths About Mothers', *Beyond the Myths: Mother-Daughter Relationships in Psychology, History, Literature & Everyday Life* (Sydney: Hampden Press, 1991) 3–24.

poor' children for a special examination. (I:49)¹⁴

As intensely as she is shown to identify herself with her own motherhood, Lottie is not allowed a complete or even stable identity in that role in the autobiography.

The most damning of these 'outside' views of Lottie is provided by her own mother, Grandma Godfrey. In her mother, Lottie has a living link with her treasured past. Lottie has long held up Grandma Godfrey to her children as the living evidence for the existence and legitimacy of her version of the 'old times' in her 'other world' (I:72). But Lottie's fantasy image of her mother, 'the perfect mother' (I:71), is not corroborated by her presence in Oamaru. Far from having the 'wonderful nature', understanding and love Lottie has eulogised, Grandma Godfrey (like all the other figures who represent the social order the Frames are excluded from) 'began at once to complain about our behavior' (I:72). She is disparaging of Lottie as a housewife and mother and condemns the children and their father.

By denying Lottie any historical verification of her past through Grandma Godfrey, the narrative denies Lottie any identity outside her maternal present. The voice of the account of Grandma Godfrey's visit shifts between the child Janet who 'disliked Grandma Godfrey at once', Grandma Godfrey's complaints, and the narrator in the present who describes Lottie, 'her fair-skinned face patched with red, tears in her eyes, her loyalty torn' (I:72). Lottie herself is allowed no voice and no identity except in relation to her family.¹⁵ Specifically,

¹⁴ Lottie's care and concern for Bruddie and her insistence that he should not go into an institution. are directly comparable to her seeming lack of care for Janet when she is in hospital. Frame says that it was her reaction against the sight of her helpless, passive mother come to collect her which sent her back to the 'sanctuary' of hospital that first fateful time (II:66). So implicated is Lottie in Frame's hospitalisation, that Frame even says it was Lottie (and not, as seems more likely her father, George) who signed the papers giving permission for her leucotomy (II:106).

¹⁵ In Kristevan terms, and again paralleling Frame's experience in hospital, Lottie becomes the

she is denied the 'daughterly voice' Janet Frame herself assumes.¹⁶ It is the narrator, Janet Frame, who creates the links in time Lottie is not allowed to forge. Increasingly, the narrative voice of To the Is-Land will not cede Lottie any place—daughterly or motherly—from which to speak or write. Perhaps, as Marianne Hirsch concludes:

Women writers' attempts to imagine lives for their heroines which will be different from their mothers' make it imperative that mothers be silent or absent in their texts, that they remain in the prehistory of plot, fixed both as objects of desire and as examples not to be emulated.¹⁷

When Lottie does 'speak' again, fleetingly, it through the metaphor of her final illness and death. It is only the breakdown in Lottie's health, in her body, that allows her to change and speak for herself, at last. She becomes a subject. The narrator twice uses the same phrase to describe her reaction to her mother's heart attack—'Mother had spoken at last, in pain' (II:104 and 105). The event is compared in its import to Bruddie's first fits, marking another decisive change in the family and their relations. Still, however, Lottie does not speak within or with her family. It is only removed from her family in hospital that she becomes 'a person such as you meet in the street. She could laugh and talk and express opinions without being ridiculed; and there she was, writing poems in a small notebook and reading them to the other patients who were impressed with her talent' (II:105). In hospital Lottie is a member of the human race and not a symbol of peace, quiet and caring.¹⁸

embodiment of the female 'other'. She is put to death as an addressee, "'you' becomes a fictional third person 'she'". Quoted in Alice A. Jardine, Gynesis: Configurations of Women and Modernity (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1985) 115.

¹⁶ The daughterly voice which, Marianne Hirsch contends, colludes with patriarchy in placing mothers in the position of object—'thereby keeping mothering outside representation and maternal discourse a theoretical impossibility'. See Hirsch 163.

¹⁷ Hirsch 34.

¹⁸ This of course is in direct and pointed contrast to Janet Frame's experience of hospitals, where she gradually becomes a non-person, a 'she' with no individual identity, personality or history.

Although the exact location of the 'world' that Lottie lives in is somewhat hazy because it is in her mind and 'invisible' (I:160)—it is her past and her religion and future salvation and her poets—it is always described as not related to the everyday world of facts, the 'real'¹⁹ poetic world that Janet Frame herself wishes to inhabit: 'It was my insistence on bringing this world home, rather than vanishing within it, that increased my desire to write, for how else could I anchor that world within this everyday world where I hadn't the slightest doubt that it belonged?' (I:148). Lottie's discourse is a story of her dreams: 'It was she who was happy merely to dream of it ['going down on the flat in the cool of the evening']; I wanted its reality' (II:131). Just as she had as a child, Frame the narrator still insists on her difference from her mother in remaining present in 'this world':²⁰

I remained uncomfortably present within the world of fact, more literal than imaginative. 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 refused to accept that if I were to fulfil my secret ambition to be a poet, I should spend my imaginative life among the nightingales instead of among the waxeyes and the fantails. I wanted my life to be the 'other world'. (I:126)

There was no removal of myself and my life to another world; there was simply the other world's arrival into my world, the literature streaming through it like an array of beautiful ribbons through the branches of a green, growing tree, touching the leaves with unexpected light that was

¹⁹ 'Real' in Lacanian terms, represents the opposite to this: 'the 'Real' designates that which is categorically unrepresentable, nonhuman, at the limits of the known; it is emptiness, the scream, the zero point of death, the proximity of jouissance' (Jardine 122).

²⁰ Lottie's 'other-worldliness' might be something more radical than Frame's interpretation of it suggests. Just as she is not confined or contained in her own body, Lottie, it seems, cannot be named, placed or co-opted in language. She cannot be limited to one description or to one interpretation. She is unrepresentable, and therefore potentially subversive of the very notion of identity.

unlike the expected deserved habitual light of the sun and the seasons. It was the arrival, as of neighbors or relatives or anyone who belonged there and was at home, of the poets and the prose writers and their work at 56 Eden Street, Oamaru, 'the kingdom by the sea,' bringing their hosts of words and characters and their special vision. (I:143)

As a poet and an artist, Lottie would seem to provide an obvious narrative parallel or role model for Janet as she grows. Instead, Lottie provides a counterpoint to Frame's development—their different experiences of 'illness' and hospital being the most marked. Indeed, the narrator takes pains to stress Janet's lack of role models and the different outcomes of her and Lottie's same poetic vocation. The usual patterns of influence and relationship are reversed: it is Janet who represents for Lottie 'the birth of something she had mourned as lost from her life' (I:95).²¹ Like Nola, who had the leucotomy Janet Frame was saved from by her prize-winning writing, Lottie functions in the narrative as a 'conscience', an image of 'what-might-have-been, and what was' (II:109).²²

It is Shirley Graves, who is (desirably) 'imaginative ... dreamy, poetic' (I:126) and who embodies all the artistic attributes Janet feels she lacks (but who is last described working in a shop) and Poppy, with her rituals and unending store of folklore or 'truth rumours' (I:53) about the natural world, who left school early 'and soon married and settled in one of the coastal towns of Otago' (I:121), who are more closely comparable with Lottie and her life story. Poppy's 'parting gift' to Janet is her recitation of 'Ode to a Nightingale', again expressing through the image of the bird the impossible sadness and waste of Lottie's (and Poppy's)

²¹ This lapsing of identity between Janet and Lottie is also illustrated in Janet's change of name from Frame to Clutha.

²² Just as other women, such as Jess Whitworth and Paula Lincoln at the end of *An Angel at My Table*, function to illustrate other possible economies based in women's relationships.

married 'fate': 'Thou wast not born for death, Immortal Bird!/ No hungry generations tread thee down' (I:120).

With no female with whom to identify and cut off from access to Lottie, it is to her father, George, a (once again) highly ambivalent representative of male power, that Janet looks for encouragement, praise and love: 'I longed to be close to my father' (I:125). It is with George that she is increasingly aligned in her reactions to Lottie: 'Her invisible life spent on her distant plane of religion and poetry, her complete peacefulness, angered me just as I knew it angered my father' (I:159). From the outset, Frame presents her father as a kind of narrative opposite to Lottie.²³ His family tradition is one of presence in objects not words—in weaving, knitting, embroidery, rug making, painting, leatherwork and, for George, in 'a leather workbag, a pair of ribbed butter pats, a handful of salmon spoons' (I:10). Against Lottie's strong sense of place, his family's strongest association is with the railways, with adventure, movement and change. Against Lottie's sense of wonder and awe at the world, he has a 'sense of the imperfection of everything' (I:60). With no belief in Christian redemption or asylum in poetry and the image of the poets, he finds refuge from the world in the power he can wield at home, in his taunts and petty cruelty toward his children (I:80, 106), his domination of Lottie (I:111, 159) and later, in Janet's (the son he never had (I:106)) academic success (I:87, 116). Even as a schoolgirl, however, Frame says she saw him as pathetic and pitiful (I:125). He is never burdened with the same symbolic weight and complex cultural and artistic messages that Lottie carries in the narrative, and so remains a simpler, more sympathetic figure.

As Frame's difficulty in locating or describing her mother perhaps illustrates, the

²³ This opposition is not couched in simple gender terms. Frame would rather break down such rigid differentiation between the sexes to move beyond the Freudian 'family romance', beyond the already-determined gender of the self.

break between the two is not definite or final.²⁴ Indeed, Frame cannot definitively separate from her mother, for the loss of Lottie would be the loss of both her language and her potential for self-representation. Although the narrative at times oscillates between a desire for disconnection or differentiation and a desire for connection or fusion, through images and actions the two women always remain linked. Frame need not choose between her mother's love and her father's worldliness. She must find another path, one beyond the usual endings of female lives in marriage or death, or both. Using the bird image first associated with Lottie, Frame describes her younger self at the end of To the Is-Land as repeating Lottie's futile gestures of self-protection or escape. Like Lottie, she turns to the 'shelter of poetry': she creates a 'nest of difference' for herself and lines that nest with poetry. Unlike Lottie, however, she will eventually leave the nest and fly.

The Envoy From Mirror City, Janet Frame's third and, to date, final volume of autobiography begins by decisively removing her from the restrictive and punitive social structures she grew up within. As the volume opens she is voyaging to England on board the *Ruahine*. With social and spatial distances collapsed, removed from her native land and 'on the road',²⁵ the narrative is then focused on Janet Frame alone, making and breaking relationships, negotiating sexual politics, overturning her diagnosis as schizophrenic, defining and working at her vocation as a writer. In the three-volume structure of the autobiography, this volume offers a resolution to the other two. After An Angel at My Table—which can be described as a time of transition, exploration, and testing of various possible roles—The Envoy From Mirror City presents an

²⁴ In Freudian accounts of subject formation, the break between mother and child can never be achieved and the subject's inevitable sense of loss or absence is always centered on the mother.

²⁵ See M. M. Bakhtin, 'Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel', The Dialogic Imagination, ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1981) 243-45 for a discussion of the 'chronotope' of 'the road'.

integrated identity that makes sense both to Frame's inner person and to the outer world. It is a statement of Frame's position in the world of people and of art.²⁶

As the narrative of The Envoy From Mirror City begins, Frame specifically invokes her (male) mythical predecessors and the age-old drama of the questing traveller leaving home. She is writing within the genre and tradition of the *bildungsroman*, the novel of development in which the (male) hero travels far from home in order to discover his own identity, with the ultimate goal of re-integrating himself, his ideals and his perspectives into the society from which he came.²⁷ She is writing one of her favourite childhood fictions of adventure, using the 'three words: *decide, destination, and observation* all of which worked closely with *adventure*' and that 'seemed to be a part of the construction of every story' (I:43). She is also re-writing the Grimm's Fairy Tales of her childhood²⁸—perhaps her favourite, the escape fantasy of 'The Twelve Dancing Princesses'—all the tales of Mother, Father, Sister, Brother, Aunt, Uncle, none of whom were more nor less than we were, for all the list of extraordinary gifts, miracles, transformations, cruelties, and the many long years of wandering and searching, full of hope and expectation. Grimm's Fairy

²⁶ In the *kunstlerroman*'s monomythic pattern of 'a separation from the world, a penetration to some source of power, and a life-enhancing return'. See Grace Stewart, A New Mythos: The Novel of the Artist as Heroine 1877–1977 (St Alban's: Eden Press, 1979) 109.

²⁷ Sandra Frieden explains the tradition: 'The classic course of development took the hero from his typically rural environment out into the wide world. Forced to pull away from familial ties, he journeyed into risks and errors—although these risks were indirectly encouraged (and often secretly supported) by the very social structures that seemed hostile to his progress. He engaged in new love relationships which in themselves functioned as steps in his education. At last he made his choice of partner and profession, indicating thereby his integration into the social structure'. Autobiography, Frieden says, developed alongside the *bildungsroman*, with the same expressive role. See Sandra Frieden, 'Shadowing/Surfacing/Shedding: Contemporary German Writers in Search of a Female *Bildungsroman*', The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development, ed. Elizabeth Abel et al, (Hanover: The University Press of New England, 1983) 304.

²⁸ Fairy Tales depict in imaginary and symbolic form the essential steps in growing up and achieving an independent existence. They reduce a complex process of socialisation to its essential paradigm. Frame rejects, however, the fairy tale's acquiescent female roles.

Tales was everybody's story seen in a special way with something new added to the ordinary rules of observation. (I:55)

She is confirming, once again, 'the closeness, the harmony, and not the separation of literature ... and life' (I:160).

In An Angel at My Table Frame says that she chose to leave New Zealand not for literary reasons, but to escape the continuing threat of enclosure in hospital and the limiting expectations generated by her medical history: 'He [Frank Sargeson] and I planned my next move We both knew that in a conformist society there are a surprising number of "deciders" upon the lives and fate of others' (II:163). She is also, however, fleeing her 'fate' of marriage (the persistent question of visitors to Willowglen is "Have you met your fate, yet?") (II:152 and also II:189)) or, failing that, the social prescription for women's domesticity, caring and connection—"your place is at home looking after your father" (II:187). By leaving New Zealand, she is ignoring society's desire for her compliance and for her submission to the 'heroine's plot' of rescue by the hero.²⁹ Like the male heroes she invokes, she is seeking instead action, self-determination, authenticity and identity. She has broken with the past and the 'marriage plot' 'within which women might only wait to be desired, to be wed, to be forgotten'³⁰ in order to initiate herself into the (traditionally male) 'quest plot'.³¹ Claiming

²⁹ Which does not necessarily mean she has resolved the question of femininity. The last chapter of An Angel at My Table, like the last chapter of To the Is-Land, is focused on the vexed question of what to wear.

³⁰ Heilbrun 108.

³¹ 'Marriage plot' and 'quest plot' are Heilbrun's terms. Sidonie Smith uses the terms 'maternal discourse' and 'paternal discourse' to describe the same pattern as it appears in women's autobiographies. Historically, women who have written autobiography have written from a position of marginality—marginal both to society and to the cultural fiction of male selfhood autobiography has traditionally expressed. 'They become women writing a man's story ... they become involved in a dynamic dialogue between two stories, two interpretations, two rhetorical postures. The autobiographer's confrontation with those "maternal" and "paternal" narratives structures the narrative and dramatic texture of her self-representation and shapes her relationships to language, image, and meaning'. See Sidonie Smith, 'Woman's Story and the Engenderings of Self-Representation', A Poetics of Women's Autobiography (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1987) 51.

ownership of her 'self' (II:184) and control of the direction of her life, she is rejecting the restriction of women to a story of courtship and marriage (or madness) that has been, not just her mother's, but the story of so many of the women in the previous two volumes—women who are not able or never learn to 'speak for themselves'.

Frame is also, as Suzette Henke identifies,³² writing within the tradition of the *kunstlerroman*, a form of the *bildungsroman* which deals with the development, formation or special problems of the artist. In this quest, the artist-hero returns not just with self-salvation or a gift for society or both, but with 'a message or gift of eternal life, laws to live by, fire, knowledge, or a work of art'.³³ Frame is the female artist as hero, coming to terms with the *kunstlerroman*'s process and models of development, its goals and its male heroes: Prometheus, Daedalus, Faust and Icarus.³⁴ Frame's journey or quest also then involves a creative process: 'the process of autobiography transforms [her] life into a fiction that describes both the making of [her] story and the hero [she] chooses to be'.³⁵

Unlike the earlier volumes of her autobiography, in which her formative

³² 'An autobiography in the shape of a fictional *Kunstlerroman*, Frame's memoir unfolds as a poignant account of female artistic development in the face of harrowing physical, spiritual, economic, and psychological vicissitudes'. See Suzette Henke, 'A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Woman: Janet Frame's Autobiographies', *Span* 31 (1991): 85.

³³ Stewart 8.

³⁴ Whilst all artists face the dilemma of Faust—the 'man's' drive for fulfillment in experience and the artist-self's desire for freedom from the demands of life—for women the problem is particularly acute. Traditional models of the artist (he is either 'experiential, seeking ... personal fulfillment' or 'reflective, aloof, self-centered [and] ... solitary') are incompatible with the traditional concept of 'woman': 'Thus the female writer must defy the cultural definition of artist or of woman is she is to remain artist and woman' (Stewart 14).

For a comparison of Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* with Frame's autobiographies which sets out the additional pressures on a woman artist at the edge of empire, see Henke 85–94.

³⁵ Egan 112. Women's autobiography in particular can be described in this way: it is both 'a reaching towards the possibility of saying "I" and towards a form in which to say it. Writing is a quest, a process'. See Linda Anderson, 'At the Threshold of the Self: Women and Autobiography', *Women's Writing: A Challenge to Theory*, ed. Moira Monteith (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1986) 65.

relationships were largely with women, in this volume the most prominent and detailed descriptions are of the relationships she forms and then discards with a series of men; Patrick Reilly, Bernard, El Vici Mario, Dr Berger, Dr Miller and Dr Cawley, and finally her father, whose presence and influence she farewells when she leaves London and returns to New Zealand to live.

As soon as Frame meets Patrick Reilly, he assumes control of her life, setting limits and making rules. Taking charge of her present and her future, he plans a 'real job' for her at Peek Freans (III:42). The relationship is presented as an extension of Reilly's desire to name and know, to quantify and control the objects around him: 'his best bluetop and Peek Frean's dark chocolate digestive biscuits and best Irish bacon and Irish butter' (III:42-43). His interest in Frame is also deeply marked by gender role stereotypes. Ignoring her as a writer and anxious to control her as a woman, Reilly becomes a symbol in the narrative of the ways in which authority has functioned in Frame's life, and of her uneasy relationship to that control.

He is several times explicitly linked to the repressive moral order and conformity of New Zealand society: 'It seemed to me as if Patrick Reilly had sprouted from a handful of New Zealand earth that had found its way in my green haversack and spilled into the garden at Cedars Road' (III:42) and 'like a conformist New Zealand conscience that had somehow travelled with me and assumed human shape, kept reminding me, "You want a steady job. A typist or secretary. You don't want to spend your time writing. There's no money in it. And it's not savoury"' (III:105-6). More specifically, Reilly is seen as a figure of Frame's father:

His resemblance to my father, particularly when his lips pursed with disapproval, was uncanny and caused me to wonder about myself and my

life. Dr Miller had said frankly that he thought my father was a bully; he had a similar opinion of Patrick Reilly. My life had been erased, almost, by expert bullying while I played the role of victim that like any other repeated role, resists a change. (III:144)

Like Frame's father, Reilly does not question or challenge his place in society. Instead, he perpetuates the order he works within through his uncritical repetition of its cultural myths (Ireland, like New Zealand and Ibiza is 'God's Own Country' (III:23, 56); the blacks are 'lower than us' (III:25)) as well as through acts of petty tyranny and control and an insistence on proper behaviour, dress and gender and class roles. Unlike her father, however, Reilly has no link with any of Frame's previous 'selves' or histories (family or medical). He is therefore much more easily simplified to the 'other' against which Frame shows herself learning to define and be herself in The Envoy From Mirror City. He is 'The Greeter who was also the Warner' (III:22) and 'the provider, the companion' (III:144)). In effectively fictionalising him like this (and sometimes reducing him to a caricature) Frame is also distancing Reilly and denying him voice and action. In writing it is she who takes control of the relationship.

Her friendship with Reilly is central to the book's twin processes of discarding old self images and of creating a new vision of herself as an artist. When it happens, Frame's final rejection of Reilly is a rejection of both the false comfort he offers her, and of the system of authority and prescriptive gender relationships he represents. Using once again the images of nature and the garden that describe her relationship to Lottie, she says she:

felt like a clinging insect that had glued itself to the wrong plant in the wrong garden in the wrong world. Wrong for the insect, the plant, the garden and the world.

I shook myself free of Patrick. (III:147)

The central episode in Frame's journey/quest in The Envoy From Mirror City, and its geographic breaking point, is her trip to the 'I-Land' of Ibiza. She travels once more to a place apart from the dominant narratives of Europe—to a place, like New Zealand, on the margins of empire. Having already discarded much of her Eurocentric cultural 'baggage' in London, when she loses her luggage on the way to the island, Frame leaves behind yet another (protective) layer of identity. Her arrival, she says, is like 'the first spring of all time' (III:54). Soon she also leaves behind the English language and takes on a new language (Spanish) and a new identity (*Janetta*, 'an industrious *escritora* who did not have foreign friends' (III:61)) in the household of Fermin, Catalina and Francesca.

It is on Ibiza, where she had, 'in part, come home to [her] own childhood' (III:61), that Frame is artistically reborn, so that she leaves behind or telescopes the memory of her childhood with the memory of Ibiza (III:68).³⁶ It is here that she locates the image of the mirror that resolves her place as an artist. For Frame, the island is a

new country where everything glistens with marvel. For me, that marvel was the light, the sky, the colour of the olive trees and of the buildings thumbled and worn like old stone pages ... And crowning the marvel was the receptiveness of the tideless ocean admitting to its depths the entire world standing on its shores, creating a mirror city that I looked upon each day. (III: 56–57)

Frame has already, in the book's second chapter, begun to turn the events and

³⁶ Again, the location for her epiphanic moment of release from childhood is outside, in a garden-like grove of pine trees (III:65–69).

people of her daily life into 'fictional gifts': 'as if within every event lay a reflection reached only through the imagination and its various servant languages, as if, like the shadows in Plato's cave, our lives and the world contain mirror cities revealed to us by our imagination, the Envoy' (III:19).³⁷ On Ibiza, Frame at last feels 'at peace within my own mind, as if I were on an unearthly shore, seeing the creation of scenes from the great paintings of the world ... I felt it [Ibiza] contained within me' (III:66–67). The island combines time and timelessness; history, myth and tradition. This is Frame as the artist-god; self-created, self-contained and self-fulfilled.³⁸

Her timeless idyll does not last long, however. It is shattered by a series of aligned events: by the coming of spring, 'dark pleats of pain ... folded within the pleasure' (III:70); the arrival of Edwin, 'El Americano', and Dora's overnight stay with him; and Frame's introduction to Bernard and her first sexual relationship. The mirror city she has carefully constructed and preserved, 'my perfect world' (III:73), cannot survive the coming of so much reality. Specifically, it is not secure against time and change and the disruption of desire.

Although her appearance in the narrative is brief, it is Dora, called '*la diabla*' (III:75) by Catalina and Francesca, (and not Bernard himself) who is said to awaken in Frame the dormant sense of her own body and sexuality and the cost of her continued repression of so large a part of herself: 'for so long I had blocked all exits and entrances that I knew or felt that I was as sexless as a block of wood. I had smoothed myself away with veneers of protection' (III:74). Dora tempts Frame ('the keeper of the rules, the "good" person delivered from evil, never led

³⁷ The image is announced and foregrounded, before reading begins, in the book's title, *The Envoy From Mirror City*.

³⁸ This, I think, is the image of the artist Susan Ash is referring to when she says that 'Frame makes a conscious decision to privilege art and its creation over other experience ... curt[ly] dismiss[ing] human realtionships' (Ash 184).

into temptation' (III:75)) with the knowledge of good and evil—with experience. Restricted to his first name, Bernard is never allowed life in the autobiography beyond his figurative importance. The relationship itself is always presented with self-deprecating irony. Bernard is not the 'ideal lover' Frame so wished him to be or even a compliant part of the fairy tale she wishes to enact so that 'as soon as there were signs of disarray [in the 'determined kind of love' she felt], I had quickly straightened and smoothed [them] to preserve in perfection' (III:86). He is selfish, tasteless and insensitive. Once again, through authorial comment and strict control of the text, Frame as narrator is creating distance between herself as (knowing, writing) narrator and herself as (naive, experiencing) subject of the text. She felt, she says 'the sadness and finality of being in the midst of a *True Romance*' (III:82).

The end of the affair is Bernard's rejection of Janet as a mother. When Janet thinks she may be pregnant, Bernard reacts by saying "That would be terrible" (III:86). Suddenly, Frame is no longer living in the land of the lotus eaters (III:84) where people forget their homes and friends and lose all desire of returning to their native country, their only wish being to live in idleness. She is brought back to 'a reality that until then had been unable to reach me' (III:86). With his words:

quite suddenly the place on earth marked—as I thought indelibly—by the giant resumed its former shape and growth. I felt my life, like the grass, resuming its place, responding to sun and light and wind: my longing and love and passion for Bernard were gone. (III:86)³⁹

³⁹The image is linked both to the stone that appears in the first chapter of *An Angel at My Table*, crushing the past under the weight of memory (II:11), and to Frame's reaction to the death of Lottie: 'I felt that their death might expose us but it would also let the light in from all directions, and we would know the reality instead of the rumour of wind, sea, snow, and be able to perceive all moments of being' (II:158).

The 'fall' into experience also, of course, involves expulsion from the (enclosed and therefore restricted) garden:

Ibiza was suddenly changed, steeped in my own feelings, destroyed by my glance. Where before my surroundings (I supposed) had existed in their own right, the sky and the sea and the weather and the Mirror City, and I too had existed in my own right, with the island and its features as my companions, now all suffered an effect, not the Midas touch but the touch of ash: I could almost see the trees decaying, the olive blossoms withering. (III:87)

The expulsion is painful and involves sacrifices, but it is also necessary. Frame has lost her camouflage—her protective coat of 'innocence' removed, she is aware of her own nakedness. But she also gains a new, clearer and more comprehensive awareness of the world around her:

Now I, more clearly looking through this and that world and its seasons become also more clearly looked at. My own surroundings lose their camouflage; I myself lose my camouflage. There is even the possibility of nests, new or abandoned, in my own tree! (III:88)

Once again, the world of nature is a metaphor for (or, perhaps, an agent in) Frame's quest for authenticity. Outside the confines of the garden (the confines of social hierarchy, structure and rules), nature represents the possibilities for Frame's survival and growth as a person. As it has been for Lottie, nature is Frame's ally, keeping her in touch with her selfhood. It is both the place from which she sets forth and the haven to which she returns for renewal.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ It is something like the green-world archetype Annis Pratt discusses in women's novels of development. The girl's desire for freedom and society's discouragement of that desire are reflected in women's fiction where 'as a result, nature for the young hero remains a refuge throughout life ... Visions of her own world within the natural world, or naturistic epiphanies, channel the young girl's protests into a fantasy where her imprisoned energies can be released'. See Annis Pratt, *Archetypal Patterns in Women's Fiction* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1981) 17.

In the tradition of the *kunstlerroman*, Frame re-emerges from the island with a new sense of control and vision. Her relationship with Bernard, her pregnancy and (aborted or miscarried) baby and engagement to El Vici Mario in Andorra are transformed into the archetypal pattern of conversion:⁴¹

I knew a feeling that was stronger than regret but not as intense as bereavement, a no-woman's land of feeling where a marvellous sense of freedom sprang up beside hate for myself, longing for Bernard and what he had given me and never knew, sadness for a lost path, vanishings, with the sense of freedom and the prospect of living a new life in Mirror City, triumphing like the rankest, strongest, most pungent weeds that yet carry exquisite flowers, outgrowing the accepted flowers in no-woman's land. (III:95)

Instead of, like her male heroic predecessors, finding marriage at the end of her development or quest, Frame finds solitude and self-sufficiency. In her drive for identity, Frame is self-consciously breaking fundamental social structures and the plot of 'female' development. She is not, however, rejecting her female 'fate' in order to initiate herself into the male 'quest plot' or model of development. Rather, she casts herself out into 'no-woman's land', a borderline, anti-social space where there are no gender models and no rules. She wants to live neither in 'this world' or 'that world', but in a world of her own making.⁴²

Frame generalises her experience through the words of Albert Camus:

I quote Albert Camus for I cannot express it so well myself, 'Living is slightly the opposite of expressing. If I am to believe the great Tuscan masters, it means bearing triple witness, in silence, flames and immobility.' (III:101)

⁴¹ See Egan 137–47 for a full discussion of the pattern of conversion in autobiography.

⁴² The world she lives in is however within society and not removed from it as so many of her critics hold. Part Two of the book is titled 'At Home in the City'.

For Susan Ash this is Frame as the artist-hero, alone and powerful:

It seems to me that Frame subscribes to and perpetuates the myth of the artist as elite, isolated being; that she almost self-righteously martyrs herself to writing and the romantic image of being a prisoner to language.⁴³

Ash worries whether, as a feminist, she can accept this solution to the dilemma of the female artist. She is disturbed that Frame apparently rejects her femaleness in order to define herself as a writer: 'I question whether the isolation Frame advocates in her novels and autobiographies is actually so much a function of art (and meaning-making) as a function of patriarchal society ... She belongs to those women writers who manage by removing themselves from the conundrum, the paradox that faces all women writers: how to be both a woman and an artist'.⁴⁴

Frame does not, however, break with relationship or her gender in the autobiography in order to become an artist. Rather, she is able her to find nests in her own tree (III:188). What she rejects are the prescriptions and restrictions and the gender boundaries and rules that have governed her relationships and therefore her development thus far. In the 'submerged' plots or the marginal narratives of the female characters who appear in the volume, Frame demonstrates not just the limitations on women's self-representation but also the possibilities for women who, like the storytellers of Battersea, learn to 'speak for themselves'.

In learning to speak of their shared experiences of the London Blitz, the storyteller's memories have such 'combined force' that they are able to 'abolish the present, nineteen fifty-six, the long wooden dining table, the students, the

⁴³ Ash 186.

⁴⁴ Ash 186.

Technical College, and replace the group of household workers, mostly women between forty-five and fifty, with their former thirty-two-year-old selves, my contemporaries' (III:30). The women's shared speech is subversive: they are 'quietly arranging their own revolution, even without thought of past uprisings' (III:31). Although they remain within a hierarchical, masculine institution, by coming together and disturbing the accepted versions of the past, the women are effectively undermining that hierarchy from within.

The women's story is presented in the context of Frame's literary pilgrimage to Hampstead Heath and her awareness of the (male) literary figures' control of the 'languagescape' of London—I did not know whether to thank or curse John Keats and others for having planted their sedge, basil, woodbine and nodding violets, and arranged their perennial nightingales to sing in my mind' (III:28). What the storytellers represent is an alternative to the models of (female) development and narrative—the fictional possibilities of female selfhood—through which Frame has been taught to define herself, the 'unreal notions of myself, fed to me by myself and others' (III:127). Telling their stories of personal experience, the women are an example for Frame of a way out of the potential suffocation ('the prospect for burial by entrapment or warmth' (III:28)) of national identity and literary history and influence. Prefiguring Frame's own autobiographical act, the women have found in their life stories a way to affirm and express their own points of view:

experience, that like a determined, pursuing, eternally embracing suitor ... at last secures its match with speech, even if the process, as here, takes fifteen years' work in its refining, defusing, washing, drying of tears, change of content and view, preserving, discarding, undergoing death and rebirth. (III:30)

Like the women of Battersea, Frame learns, with the help of Drs Berger and

Cawley, to 'unearth myself' (III:126) after the 'repeated earthquakes' of her youth (III:111). Self-expression, particularly the writing of Faces in the Water is an essential part of her 'cure':

There had never been any question of my not being able to exist in the 'real world' unless that existence also deprived me of my 'own world', the journeys to and from Mirror City, either by the Envoy who is forever present, or by myself. (III:128)

For Frame and the women of Battersea their achievement is to move from a past dominated by stories told to and about them to a present articulated by their own storytelling.

Frame's project in The Envoy From Mirror City is to integrate living and writing, not simply to privilege one over the other. This is what she has achieved when she decides to return to New Zealand: 'Now that writing was my only occupation, regardless of the critical and financial outcome, I felt I had found my 'place' at a deeper level than any landscape of any country would provide' (III:167). She chooses to authorise herself by her writing.

The image that resolves the problematical separation of living and writing is the Mirror City of the imagination, 'where everything I have known or seen or dreamed of is bathed in the light of another world' (III:154–55). Mirror City is Frame's own version of the 'mirror dream' that is always present, 'parallel' (III:20) to reality. Mirror City is where all great artists live (III:93) and where Frame is now a citizen (III:154). Instead of seeing herself in the mirror, and forcefully dis-regarding its potential for self-definition—for 'what use is there in returning [from Mirror City] only with a mirrorful of me?' (III:155)—Frame looks through its reflection to another reality. The mirror is converted into a window.

This is, of course, the reverse of what women (and autobiographers) are usually held to do.⁴⁵ Frame does not look in the mirror to see an image of herself (an image which is in any case never more than a sign of the reality which is within and different in kind from that sign). What Frame is looking for is a means of self-definition outside autobiography and the specular economy of the looking glass. By writing texts (and therefore, in a sense becoming a text in the eyes of the world) Frame has found an alternative to becoming a mirror image. In the book's final analysis, living is subsumed in and to writing, so that as the volume (and the series) closes, Frame 'submits' herself to the Envoy, who 'waits at my door, and watches hungrily as I continue to collect the facts of my life' (III:190). She disappears not into the sunset of romance, but into fiction: 'It is Mirror City before my own eyes. And the Envoy waits' (III:191).

⁴⁵ Historically, the mirror is one of the few means available to women for their objectification and a woman's strong identification with her mirror image is taken as normative in Western culture.

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II. GENERAL

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