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“What is’t that ails young Harry Gill?” Containers, Contents, and Composition in Janet Frame’s *In The Memorial Room*

This article explores the apparent contests within, and the resulting controversy surrounding, Janet Frame’s posthumously published novel *In the Memorial Room* (2013). By focusing on issues of literary mode and the relationship between the various authorial interests and narrative constituencies of the text, this essay assesses both the novel’s contribution to existing understandings of Frame’s compositional processes and its place in Frame’s oeuvre.

Michael King’s 2000 biography made Janet Frame scholars aware of an unpublished novel produced in 1974 during Frame’s stint as the Katherine Mansfield Fellow in Menton, France. *In the Memorial Room* was posthumously published in 2013, and is a complex marriage of satire on an expatriate literary community with an extended musing on familiar Frame themes of perception, language and the creation of text. It narrates the experience of novelist Harry Gill, who is the recipient of a Fellowship commemorating esteemed New Zealand poet, Margaret Rose Hurndell. Harry finds the tomb-like conditions of the Menton memorial room, in which he is supposed to work (and in which Margaret Rose Hurndell never did), unamenable; and this leaves him prey to the competitive hospitality of the expatriate English and New Zealand community who are keen to consume Harry while they sustain themselves by “feeding on the death” of Margaret Rose Hurndell (65). This attempted consumption is facilitated by Harry’s curious ailments. According to the auspiciously named Dr. Rumor, Harry’s deteriorating eyesight involves “the incipient signs of intentional invisibility” (60), a condition based on complicity with the world’s attempts to “annihilate[e]” him (62) and “on the childlike theory that if you can’t see, then you can’t be seen” (61). Two thirds of the way through the novel, Harry’s encroaching blindness is suddenly replaced by total deafness, and this re-routing is in turn overridden as the novel ends in a series of extracts from social and professional letters of superficial exchange. This serial resetting of the text is largely responsible for the controversy surrounding the novel’s status as a completed work. The anonymous note that precedes the novel tells us that

Frame did not allow publication of the manuscript during her lifetime – would certain people see themselves in the characters portrayed and, finding unflattering portraits, be offended? But she always intended the novel to be published posthumously, at the right time. (n.p.)

In its reception, the published text resembles the contested space of the memorial room it depicts. The novel’s memorial room has been “neglected” and is the subject of “promised alterations” (49) and planned “improvements” (50). In the meantime, aficionados of Margaret Rose Hurndell, the feted dead poet, happily “feel” the presence of the author there (42). In similar fashion, Frame followers duly enter the novel, and while some experience it as a re-visitation by, and further access to, the lost author, others speculate about the status of the text: were improvements planned? Were they warranted?

Steve Walker and Paula Green, reviewing the text for the major New Zealand newspapers, concur with the novel’s dust-jacket that this is “Frame at her sparkling best.” Peter Simpson, writing in the *New Zealand Listener* is more ambivalent: “I doubt if Frame

considered the abandoned novel 'finished'. It ends too abruptly to be fully satisfying, at least in conventional fictional terms (to which, admittedly, she paid scant attention)" (40). C.K. Stead goes further, concluding: "I find it difficult to believe Frame could have thought the novel was finished, [...] there is [...] too much unevenness of tone and uncertainty of direction – and in the end, no shape" (n.p.).¹

Reviewers (e.g., Stead, Matthews) point to the publication of the text as an ironic extension of the processes of memorialization satirically critiqued in its pages.

– who knows? – there might be golden fruit left, [...] for the picking, solid gold fruit.
 —There's always a chance, Connie had said, —we may find an unpublished manuscript.
 (114)

The circumstances of the text's publication gift an additional layer of self-reflexivity to a text already hugely concerned with its own mode of production. My sense is that this text's self-reflexiveness, and the features cast as evidence of incompleteness and of the novel's shortcomings – "unevenness of tone," "uncertainty of direction" and lack of shape – construct a helpful profile of a compositional process *in process*. Through an exploration of the novel's metafictional concern with narrative mode, and the analysis of the relationship between competing modes and attendant authorial interests within the text, this essay considers the contribution *In the Memorial Room* makes to our understanding of Frame's compositional processes and reflects on the novel's place in the trajectory of Frame's oeuvre.

Every aspect of the presentation of *In the Memorial Room* heightens an awareness of textuality. Following the title page, a note, printed in typewriter script reads "Grateful thanks to the publishers of Margaret Rose Hurndell for permission to quote from her work" (n.p.). This note explicitly positions the ensuing work as a completed, crafted and published text within the diegesis of Frame's novel. What is more, that completed text is itself presented as a series of several texts which, in turn, comprise further textual extracts. The first installment is titled (again in typewriter script) "Harry Gill's Menton journal" and is made up of Harry's journal entries, which include newspaper clippings and extracts from Margaret Rose Hurndell's poetry. It concludes with the entry "My preliminary journal ends here" and promises that, during the Menton sojourn, Harry "shall make notes in between writing a novel" and that upon his return from Menton (with the projected completed novel in tow) he "shall write the story of [his] tenure of the Fellowship" (18). The next installment is titled "The Tenure," implying that what we now read is posited as the creative product of the peripheral notes surrounding the construction of the projected novel. This web of relations with unseen texts is an extension of a series of indeterminate intertextual relations with published works. "The Tenure" begins with Harry, as narrator, courting a range of literary contexts from *Beowulf* to Ian Fleming. It is interspersed with snippets from literary greats (among them Wordsworth's "Goody Blake and Harry Gill" from which Harry's name is pilfered) and from fridge manuals (in French). This is in addition to including transcriptions of speech from Harry's unresolved period of deafness before ending with the series of extracts from letters. It is not, I think, that there are specific intertextual relations to decode here, but that the prospect of intertextuality flags the novel's concerns not only

1. My thanks to C.K. Stead, and to the editors of *Katherine Mansfield and World War One*, for permission to quote from his forthcoming review.

with the generation of text from, and within, text, but with distinctions between modes of writing.

These concerns are focalized in chapters seven to twelve of "The Tenure." Harry arrives, towards the end of chapter seven, at "the ideas for [his] novel" (79). These are drawn from his deteriorating eyesight, his extraordinary visit to Dr. Rumor and the account of the retired Shakespeare professor "whose preoccupation in retirement became the stripping of his mind of the corruptions of language," (79) and who abandons all adjectives and takes an oath to speak "only in nouns and verbs" (77). In the conclusion of that chapter, Harry, in an attempt to escape what Stead terms "The Hurndellites" (n.p.), "retreat[s]" into the novel he is writing, becoming "the retired professor" (80):

and if you want to find me, you must look there, and beneath [...] a man of sixty-five, you will find Harry Gill, living his pure life, unadjectived, unadverbed, fully nounced and verbed, and numbered; and you will read of the consequences of his decision: "*Quick non; here, non; always*—". In the next chapter. (80-1)

The vantage point at the end of chapter seven thus directs the reader towards two views. One is the inaccessible view of Harry as contained within the absent novel he is supposedly writing. The other is the view the reader gets in chapter eight, where s/he sees this process from the outside. From the perspective offered by chapter eight, Harry remains the container for the absent novel he creates and for the retired professor character within it, while the character of the retired professor is simultaneously inhabited by Harry. In this way, Harry is both container and thing contained, and this stages the paradox later expressed in Harry's address to the reader at the start of chapter twelve:

Have you sensed the nothingness of my nature, that I am as empty as the carriages of the trains that pass [...] A novelist must be that way, [...] otherwise how shall the characters accommodate themselves in his mind? To this you reply that it is he who must enter the minds of his characters? Certainly, but where shall he house them while he enters their minds but in those empty used trains [?] (116)

Over the course of chapters eight and nine, Harry is possessed by, and possessing of, the professor's determination to avoid any imagistic expression. This complication of container and thing contained, along with these chapters' attention to modes of expression, suggest writerly sensitivity towards, and the courting of readerly attention to, the status of narrative constituencies. As he later represents himself, Harry is:

Mr Metonymy, the container for the contents, [...] while others [...] embrace the simple genre, whatever that means, become members of the Literal Family, which survives through its centuries-long feud with the Metaphors and the Similes. (155-6)

In the Memorial Room seems to knowingly traffic in competing modes. My contention is that the exploration of this mix of modes and associated interests can supplement an understanding of the emergence of "direction" and "shape" within Frame's compositional processes.

The novel proceeds primarily via two modes of representation. One relates to "the simple [or 'literal'] genre" (155); the other involves a mode of metonymic enactment. In the first place, there are the portraits of Menton-based characters which form the satire of the expatriate community with its literary aspirations and pretensions. At the end of chapter two, Harry resolves to "get to know" (35) the principal benefactors of the Fellowship: the Watercress family. This he does, producing a searing account of familial power relations, thwarted ambition and literary parasitism. The Watercresses are "the

Literal Family”; and their depiction unfolds within the “simple genre.” This does not mean that these sections are devoid of figurative expression (far from it), but that these characters are not exploited as vessels; they are not “containers with few contents” (155). Rather, these are portraits where what is *letterally* (as in presented in letters) on the page is the literal or actual subject of the section.² There are the realist accounts of Michael (the young writer) and his parents’ excessive pride and determination that his success will “obliterate both the life and death of Margaret Rose Hurndell,” (55) and the compelling descriptions of the daughter-in-law whose “privileges” do not extend to “retelling” her mother-in-law’s stories, and who is resented for her disinclination to procreate (54-5). By contrast, Harry, his ailments (the blindness allegedly wrought by an inclination towards “intentional invisibility,” and the sudden onset of deafness), and Dr. Rumor are explicitly presented as vehicles,³ devices, and containers within the text.⁴ Harry comments repeatedly on the unbelievability of the doctor (64, 154); and Harry Gill and his ailments, of course, comprise a borrowed literary container. Harry’s entire character seems to have sprung from a single line in a Wordsworth poem: “What is’t that ails young Harry Gill?” (29). In chapter one of “The Tenure,” Harry tells us that:

the life-long disability with my eyesight has accustomed me to the belief that others see the “real” world but I do not – how can I when my eyesight is defective; I have to take the words of others and of the world on trust and be labelled [...] someone who is forever being imposed upon. (26)

This passage is crucial in terms of set-up. It establishes the pretext for the ensuing letteral/literal satire of the consumption of writers, in that Harry’s doormat status obligingly creates the conditions for satire. It also presents the terms for the enactment of a more theoretical set of interests. Harry and his ailments facilitate a mode of metonymic enactment that is distinct from the literal mode and “simple genre” of the Watercresses and their peers. As Chandler and Munday, drawing on Roman Jakobson’s seminal distinction between metaphor and metonymy and their respective provinces of similarity and contiguity (232), elaborate:

metonymy is [...] based on contiguity [“the condition in which something is in some sense part of (or part of the same domain as) something else”]—in contrast to metaphor (which involves transposition from one domain to another) since metonyms stand for things to which they are regarded as “belonging” (in some ontological framework). (75)

Harry’s ailments are the containers or vehicles for the staging of a series of preoccupations with perception and expression. The terms of those ailments or containers (sight/blindness, sound/deafness) are contiguously linked with the contents they enact (perception and expression).

For the first two thirds of the text, sight/blindness functions as the container or metonymic source for various stagings of the trajectory Harry outlines from “‘real’ world” object to perception and expression (26). Initially, this metonymic staging depends on an exploitation of the contiguity of the word “image” with sight but also with figura-

2. I am drawing on, without entirely embracing, Maureen Quilligan’s assertion that “[t]he truly literal meaning of “literal” is, in fact, not “actual,” “real,” or “lifelike,” but “letteral” – having to do with letters” (67).

3. My use of the term derives from I. A. Richards’s distinction between the vehicle (that which carries an idea) and tenor (“the idea”) in his study of metaphor (96-7).

4. This is a more extreme version of what Marc Delrez recognizes as a tendency, in the early work, for Frame “to use her characters” “as privileged instruments” (70, 69) or “vessel[s] of exploration” (31).

tive expression. Harry is obsessed with the tyranny of the image in both (converging) senses. He asserts that language is “trapped by images, which are the comfortable refuge from the stark fact of the limits of human conception” (74).

[A]n onslaught of language [...] slowly confuses what, one only *imagines*, might have been the “truth.” One cannot think of it in itself; images rise in the mind: arbitrary images prompted by how one slept the night before, [...] the image encircles the “truth,” *clothes* it [...] makes personal what one had *hoped* existed, like a star, outside the human mind. (75-6)

Stances on the serial removal from “truth,” the interference of the mediating mental image, and the further cloaking of that clothed mental image in language, are acted out across the text.

The first notable enactment involves the practices of the professor who, provocatively, simultaneously contains and is contained by Harry for a portion of the text. Harry and the professor focus on “visible” objects (77), objects of “common sight” (78) and report in nouns, verbs and numbers. Chapter eight and most of chapter nine stage an attempt to access and distill the “‘real’ world” (26) and “‘truth’ in words” (77) (e.g., “the heater was a radiator with thirteen panels,” 83). I would stress that this section is deliberately set up to act out an unsuccessful response to the challenge accepted by Harry. The quotation marks that surround “real” (26) indicate that the professor’s quest is conceived as predetermined to end in failure. What is more, the conclusion of chapter nine effects a neat vignette where the borders between object and reflection are scuppered, and external reality is emphasized as a matter of internal perception: “I could see the objects in the room reflected in the darkness of the windows. [...] I closed my eyes to stop seeing what was outside, but I could not stop seeing it” (87).

The limitations of Harry’s and the professor’s collective approach are both exposed and exploited in chapter ten. Here, Harry’s eyesight is deployed as a malleable vehicle or container for the purposes of enactment. Harry realizes that the radically different visions afforded by his variously naked and bespectacled gazes present an obstacle to his “plan of describing only what was external and visible”: “how could [he] be sure that the two people which had become two chimneys would not become, with each deterioration of sight, completely different yet faithfully observed objects?” (100). His response is the mental adjustment of his prescription for perception. He telescopically modifies his vision and then finds himself in his hosts’ living room perceiving teacups as “craters” “on their saucers (truly *soucoupes volantes!*)” (105). A bookshelf becomes “a cliff [...] filled with [...] bricks which opened and were leaved with [...] double sheets,” while print becomes the product of a child’s game of dismembering insects “and arranging them in rows upon the bedsheets” (105). None of this material is presented as metaphoric, but rather as a literal rendering of that which is perceived when Harry adopts a particular setting of vision. The blatantly transpositive nature of this allegedly literal mode augers a return or “surrender [...] to metaphor” (122). Chapter ten thus identifies the inescapability of subjectivity, revealing the literal as inherently metaphoric and representational. In positing non-figurative expression as an impossibility, the cited section supports the conception of the literal mode in Frame’s work as characterized by something other than non-figurative expression. This section, of course, never evidenced a literal mode to begin with. It exemplifies a mode of metonymic enactment, where the letteral schematics of sight act out a theoretical interest with perception. In

so doing, this material highlights, by virtue of contrast, the literal mode (evidenced, for example, by the Watercress material) as one where the letteral event or character is the subject of exposition, rather than a vehicle or container enacting a related set of concerns or contents.

The abrupt shift from incipient blindness to total deafness makes explicit the primary status of Harry and his ailments as containers, as metonymic vehicles that are donned and discarded in order to facilitate versions or enactments of issues of interest. Harry's deafness works in three ways in the novel. It affords a means of perpetuating the "simple genre" of the satire by exposing the insularity of the Watercresses, who fear the Fellowship may be harmed by Harry's disability (181). It also opens up an additional humanist interest by affording a moving letteral/literal account of the world without sound (e.g., 149). This contrasts with the previous attention to visual impairment as a non-realist vehicle. Vying with this affect, however, is the emphasis on deafness as a conceit. Harry asserts that he "would never have let this happen in fiction – a man going blind who instead becomes deaf" (148). This is the same claim the narrator of *Living in the Maniototo* will make about the chief contrivance of the text (the death of the Garretts in an earthquake in Italy, 119), investment in which renders the reader the butt of the joke. Harry is flummoxed by his own acceptance of his condition and speculates that his remarkably accepting attitude suggests that he may be "conducting a human experiment after all" (174). Dr. Rumor tantalizingly asserts that the deafness will be commensurate only with the four-month duration of the Fellowship (153), all of which flaunts the status of Harry's deafness as a vehicle.

If the section using sight as a vehicle broached the relationship between concept, image and word, and the impossibility of literal truth, Harry's Gill's substitute ailment stages relations between concept, sound and word. While *Living in the Maniototo* may provide Frame's definitive account of language, the Menton novel presents closer attention to semiosis.⁵ It seems influenced by Frame's research into semantics and languages during the 1971 composition of *Daughter Buffalo* (Cronin 91). While the identity of the individual texts Frame read is unknown, I suspect she was reading Saussure, whose *Courses in General Linguistics*, first translated into English in 1959 (though Frame was also working on her French in the 1970s), gained popularity in the 1970s, and perhaps some Charles Peirce. Throughout her oeuvre, Frame's familiarity with various philosophers tends not to result in precise commentary on existing works or contexts. Rather, she seems to appreciate core tenets and to adapt at will. Her work often gives the impression of a parallel foray into sets of ideas and concerns we associate with particular thinkers, rather than an engagement with that pre-existing work in a strict sense.⁶

Like Saussure (66), Harry Gill writes about "an image of sound" (145), "auditory images" that depend "largely on memory" (145). He expresses the fear that in his newly deafened state, he "would forget the sound of words" (158). His hosts bring him books to read: "a portable supply of words that I could only look at now, and see in my mind, for my inner hearing of them was fast vanishing and they were becoming to mean mouth movements only, in others, and in myself mouth and throat movements" (169). For Harry, diminution of "inner sound" (190) results in written signifiers becoming "strange" (169), and in additional recourse to the visual in terms of preserving semiotic

5. Paul Matthew St. Pierre analyses Frame's early work as "anticipat[ing] structuralist semiotics" (21).

6. This is not to deny instances where Frame, as St. Pierre illustrates, also anticipates schools of thought.

function. When Harry is presented with the prospect of his first “sirocco,” (177) the written signifier (passed to him on paper as part of his communication with a neighbour) produces a signified or, perhaps more accurately, a Peircean interpretant (a signified that is a further sign) that is a literary image:

In my mind I half-heard a theatrical wind and I saw, suddenly, a book [...] with a page called “The Wind” and the picture of the people in the streets, the hats held, skirts billowing, [...]. I saw in my mind, then, a “literary” wind. A literal wind, literarily portrayed. (178)

This passage reasserts the conflation of the literal and the imagistic. Here the “literal wind” is, letterally and literally, an image; and literary representation equates to the generation of a *visual* image. The vignette restages the tyrannical conspiracy of word and image that preoccupies Harry in the earlier part of the text; but this power is challenged by the next move in the sequence that forms the text.

I watched the lips moving with the recognisable words, the words utterly isolated from sound expression – [...] we own the words, command them, shift them, re-emphasise them; they, powerful, have little power over our speaking them [...] (187)

Without the sound, and accompanying inflection, words become “degrad[ed]” “outcasts” (187). The autonomy of words, more usually represented in Frame’s work as perilous to human communication, is here exposed as illusory.

Somehow I had always thought they could look after themselves, they could be used and even abused and they would always recover or sleep it off within the pages of the dictionary where most of them spent most of their time anyway. I suppose it will affect my writing, I thought. My being deaf. Deaf-and-Dumb. (189-90)

The intimation is that the loss of the vibrancy of speech, of the continuum with language as performed in and received from speech, will impact on the kind of writing Harry produces. This unspecified symbiosis between language in speech and language in writing underlies Harry’s encounter with the pile of transcriptions of his would-be verbal exchanges (the notes that facilitate communication with others), which he initially mistakes for a manuscript. While the “banality of [the] paper conversations” (195) reasserts an age-old hierarchy of speech over writing, the fact that they comprise only a “seeming ‘manuscript’” (195) implies that transcribed would-be speech is not “writing” per se. The valuable continuum between speech and “writing” remains unexpounded. Instead, what we might term *written non-“writing”* is enacted in the final pages of the novel. Here Harry and the letteral narrative are absented, and we *do* get a manuscript comprised of conventional correspondence, or writing that does not “eavesdrop on words” (190).

The sudden abandonment of Harry is, for some readers, evidence of the unfinished status of the text. The final line of the text, however, is “Would you like letters from me?” (202). This wonderfully wry and darkly comic conclusion to the benumbing collage of convention strikes me as a throwback to the trademark interrogative endings of Frame’s early texts: *Faces in the Water* (1961), *The Edge of the Alphabet* (1963) and *The Adaptable Man* (1965). This trope signals that this ending is conceived as the conclusion of the novel. What is more, the unceremonious banishment of Harry is confirmation of Harry as vehicle. One staging is simply replaced by another. As to what exactly is being staged, there is no stable and developed position here; and this is a reminder of the exploratory nature of Frame’s fiction. As I have discussed elsewhere, Frame, while

never considering her texts “novels,” gradually moved away from a default reference to her texts as “explorations” (Cronin 62). Her fictions can be considered exploratory, but not necessarily in the sense of genuinely seeking to explore and develop an idea. They tend to be musings and ponderings and, as Frame would outline to Elizabeth Alley, “explorations in the sense that [...] it is seeing what pattern emerges” (Alley 161). Multiple issues are broached as Frame produces her work, and in the midst of this proliferation of interests or writerly access points, one broad issue (or facets of that issue) emerges as staged in a variety of different guises. Usually, as a Frame text proceeds, the weight of that repetition profiles a shape, in relation to which other material gradually diverges into competing parts or parallel tracks. In this way, a finished Frame text, more often than not, remains process rather than product-oriented.

In the Memorial Room is a text that results from, to use Harry Gill’s apposite phrase, “a combination of hauntings” (79). There is the perpetual haunting by language and perception (here with specific attention at the level of the sign and even cognitive processing). There is the haunting by Menton – site of retirement and memorialization – that gives rise to recurring ruminations on permanence and preservation as well as to satire. Reading the text, I am struck by the way in which the pervasive concern with textuality – typified by the housing or filtering of these hauntings by the borrowed literary container of Harry Gill – is not the only factor creating some sense of intra-textual sympathy. Textual emphasis on permanence and preservation asserts a conceptual contiguity between seemingly divergent and ultimately competitive interests in the work. The memorialization of Margaret Rose Hurndell is driven by “the desire to seek [...] permanence in the dead” (136); the Watercress inter-familial power struggles are “the politics of permanence,” (55) while “the joke of permanence” (164) also informs the dynamic between speech and writing towards the end of the novel.

These various interests do lend themselves to particular modes, however. Alongside the literal mode of the satire, there is a sense of Frame trying out different routes towards what (as a result) emerges as a privileged subject. Facets of a privileged broad issue encompassing perception and expression are not necessarily developed, but rather serially staged across the text. Even as this repetition (and through it some semblance of shape) emerges, further interests develop and are pursued simultaneously in different modes. The section on deafness, for instance, works, sometimes alternatively, sometimes simultaneously, as literal humanist exposition, and as a furtherance of a literal satire, and also as an enactment of semiotic concerns. Sections of this text skillfully interweave literal and enactment modes. For example, Harry’s chapter twelve exchange with Louise Markham is at once a literal (in this case physiological) study in its letteral subjects (the Markhams “seemed to be much of the time in a state of salivation”), and an enactment of Harry’s more theoretical concerns with metaphor (122). The dismissal of the literal/letteral narrative of Harry’s deafness at the end of the text, however, and its replacement by a further enactment of issues of expression, does emphasize a privileging of ideas and attendant mode. Even more importantly, these shifts attest to status of the text as an ongoing process of emergence.

In the Memorial Room is one completed version of an exercise, but what we know of the life of the text beyond its composition sustains an emphasis on emergence. King writes that “for most of the second half of 1978 Frame was wrestling to produce a single coherent novel from the [...] manuscripts on which she had been working” (421).

He previously establishes those manuscripts as having “grown out of the manuscript conceived in Menton” (417). We see portions of *In the Memorial Room* (44-6) repeated, lightly edited, in *Living in the Maniototo* (226-7). The Watercress family and Margaret Rose Hurndell are the subjects of the novel from which Mavis, the narrator of Frame’s later novel, is perpetually distracted. All of this emphasizes *In the Memorial Room* as part of a larger process. Frame’s (until recently) unpublished works – the less controversially complete *Towards Another Summer* and *In the Memorial Room* – clearly had a different status from Frame’s other texts. They function like tributary, and indeed subsidiary, works that feed into the texts published in Frame’s lifetime. Material in *Towards Another Summer* is rewritten for *To the Is-land*; phrases from that novel are dispersed across subsequent published works (Cronin 175-6). *In the Memorial Room*’s concerns with the writing life and the production of fiction find their fullest articulation in *Living in the Maniototo*, as does the attention to language and “tongue blossom” (211) or speech.

To my mind, the chief addition *In the Memorial Room* makes to an understanding of Frame’s compositional processes is the attention it draws to contiguity and to metonymy in Frame’s work. Like most Frame scholars, I tend to think of Frame’s writing as predominantly metaphoric in orientation. Many of her systems of enactments depend on a “transposition” of a subject “from one domain to [the privileged terms of] another” (Chandler 75).⁷ Even Frame’s most famous articulation of her interest in metonymy reworks the standard association with, or conception of, contiguity. Frame told Marion McLeod that she had always been interested in “figures of speech”: “especially synecdoche and metonymy – the part for the whole, the whole for the part [...] the container for the thing contained” (Frame to McLeod 25).⁸ This comment was made in the context of discussion of a short story Frame wrote “set in the old Auckland synagogue after the news came that a company planned to build a European-style hotel within the synagogue, while keeping the stone façade” (25). In this way, the relationship between container and thing contained was predicated on disruption and surprise; and this has always seemed to me indicative of Frame’s predilections. However, Frame’s work has also functioned according to more conventional, albeit highly complex, metonymic and synecdochic systems. In *The Edge of the Alphabet*, as I have previously discussed (Cronin 100-16), the thread of individual identity is part of the whole potentially patterned tapestry of existence; and the text proceeds by enacting identity in terms of pattern, and deploying identity as a vehicle for pattern.

Harry Gill is Mr Metonymy rather than Mr Metaphor. The role of contiguity in *In the Memorial Room* is highlighted by the text’s notably metonymic enactments, where the terms of the textual containers presented by Harry’s ailments (blindness and deafness) are extended as vehicles for contents/concerns (perception expression, semiosis) that are contiguous with the terms of those ailments/containers. The way in which the satire of memorialization, family dynamics and the competition between the eye and the ear form *parts* of a larger *whole* of the “politics of permanence” (55) increases this impression of contiguity. Attention to *In the Memorial Room* emphasizes the extent to which *Living in the Maniototo* operates by, and indeed furthers, the same principle. In the later text, the literal house of replicas (the house in Berkeley) is a metonymic vehicle for the

7. See, for example, the analysis of *Scented Gardens for the Blind* in Cronin (62-78).

8. For Frame, as for Jakobson, “metonymy includes synecdoche” (Lodge 75).

conceptual “house of replicas” (this ontological realm) discussed throughout the text, just as the act of writing stands in for the *negotiation* of reality, of which it is also a part.⁹

The fabric of Frame’s texts unfolds associatively. That association is not necessarily based in likeness or metaphor, despite the operation of metaphor and simile at the level of individual sentences. In her 1964 defense of metaphor to Charles Brasch, Frame asserted that the perception of relationships was “the source of all art” (Gordon and Harold 11). *In the Memorial Room* focuses attention on the way this commitment to relationality is not simply a commitment to metaphor but to the recognition, coaxing and creation of contiguity, to relations between containers and their contents, and the innovative exploitation of one to facilitate musing on the other.

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9. See Cronin 169–96 for an elaboration of this reading.