Frame-breaking: “neither separate nor complete nor very important”

Marta Dvorak

Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/ces/8190>
DOI: 10.4000/ces.8190
ISSN: 2534-6695

Publisher

SEPC (Société d'études des pays du Commonwealth)

Printed version

Date of publication: 1 April 2011
Number of pages: 137-149
ISSN: 2270-0633

Electronic reference

Marta Dvorak, "Frame-breaking: "neither separate nor complete nor very important"", *Commonwealth Essays and Studies* [Online], 33.2 | 2011, Online since 18 November 2021, connection on 06 January 2022. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/ces/8190> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/ces.8190>

Commonwealth Essays and Studies is licensed under a Licence Creative Commons Attribution - Pas d'Utilisation Commerciale - Pas de Modification 4.0 International.

Frame-breaking: “neither separate nor complete nor very important”

This essay addresses the notions of freedom and constraint involved in Janet Frame's multiple forms of narrative disruption, and engages with the dialogic, heteroglossic literary space which she engineers in her stories through cunningly disguised, partially digested, and displaced intertexts. It investigates how Frame derails the set of references governing the production of discourse, and reconsiders how the writer upsets stable modes of meaning-making and ontologically shatters Western notions of subjectivity, dissolving individual identity into language itself.

The rather hostile 1952 Christchurch *Press* review of *The Lagoon: Stories* paradoxically perceived and misperceived the distinctiveness of Janet Frame's writing. It dismissed the stories as mere “sketches” or “impressions of childhood” with “little or no real point in narrative interest.” It moreover derided them for “a style that consists of simple statements, endlessly joined by a chant of ‘ands,’” for a copious “use of the pronoun ‘you’” as well as of dialogue “all run together into long paragraphs, and plenty of New Zealand slang and colloquialisms” (qtd. in King 108). What the offended anonymous reviewer had actually recognized on the march were the key notions governing modernist production. These are arguably subjectivity and perception/appearance, resulting in the unifying image clusters and motivic variations which fabricate the connections previously generated in realist writing through sequentiality and causality. But among the key notions can also be found a textualized orality grounded in the spoken idiom, engineering a strong, complicitous relation with the receiver which overshadows event. Not to mention an interest in language-bending, a preoccupation with formal effects and the mechanisms of the creative process. Frame's writing, which transforms *storytelling* into stories about *telling*, is effectively rooted in what cultural theorists have identified as the radical transformation underpinning the whole of modernist production, from the visual arts and literature to the humanities in general. The momentous event in all these fields has been the shift in subject matter from outer to inner, from the world to the human brain.¹ The object of painters and writers alike has moved from depicting occurrences considered to be realities external to humans (defined in terms of “adventure”) to delineating their cerebral activities. This “new” preoccupation with the perceiving subject² engendered a renewal of interest in Idealist currents of thought. As it had done with European Romantics, it drew many early (and late) modernists³ to

---

1. See for instance Pierre Francastel's introduction to his exhaustive history of painting, in which he observes that the picture in our modern era is no longer envisaged as the transfer to a canvas of a reality external to the individual – the artist or the viewer – but is linked to the phenomenon of consciousness and inner vision (Francastel 28-29).

2. It is worthwhile to recall that a European Romantic such as Shelley, read religiously from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, had already declared in his manifesto *A Defence of Poetry* that “All things exist as they are perceived; at least in relation to the percipient” (1085).

3. Joyce and Borges of course spring to mind. But late modernists working in peripheral regions on the edges of power range from Emily Carr, Sheila Watson and Ernest Buckler (Canada's Pacific and Atlantic coasts respectively) to writers from the Australian continent and Indian subcontinent, such as Patrick White and Anita Desai.

Neoplatonism and the derivative works of Kant, Schopenhauer, and Emerson⁴ investigating the problematic relations of the self with “a reality” which is arguably only a mental (culturally conditioned) construct. It is not surprising then, that the *Lagoon* collection of short fictions should display so little interest in traditional narrative grounded in event, and that it should be suffused with an Idealistic approach implying that reality is a mindscape or representation.⁵ The Kantian logic tending toward a fusion of subject and object, perception and percept, mind and universe throws light on stories with a twist dependent on the mind’s eye. Engaging in intratextual dialogue with the plural subject “me me me” of “Jan Godfrey” (92),⁶ Frame’s short piece “Dossy” notably contains a double torsion which the collision of incipit (two little girls) and closure (“a little girl playing ball by herself” [48]) discloses. The end reveals that the bigger playmate who has been designated throughout as Dossy does not exist. But the additional twist is the further con/fusion of the genuine and the spurious (leading in embryonic form to the more explicit ideological ramifications on authenticity and originality in a subsequent typically postmodern work like *Living in the Maniototo*). Although readers are programmed to conclude that the big girl, Dossy, is simply a figment of the lonely small girl’s imagination, a closer reading discloses that it is the small focalizer through whose vantage point the scene has been narrated who is the non-existent Dossy and thus, logically, the imaginary (or at least completely unlocatable) construct.

“Jan Godfrey” escalates and deploys more of the stratagems of conflation that confounded the Christchurch *Press* reviewer. In addition to the deliberate con/fusion staged through unstable deixis and heteroglossia which this paper will investigate, the story also exemplifies Frame’s strategy of building new texts from previously consumed ones, such as the Matthew Arnold intertext, “The Forsaken Merman,” with its two worlds above and below water, each invisible to the other except for some transgressive figures. To such signposted intertexts, the author adds cunningly disguised ones, often partially digested and displaced. My discussion and close readings of the *Lagoon* collection, privileging “Jan Godfrey,” will thus involve extending the investigations of critics such as Jan Cronin, Anna Smaill, and Lydia Wevers on how Frame explodes the reassuring predictability of realism. Smaill has remarked how the writer’s parallel, co-existing time-frames and intersecting past and present “point to the ultimate relativity of all time” (77), and has foregrounded the “typical Framean sleight of hand in which the subjective narrative voice is revealed as part of an overarching narrative consciousness” (86) so as to probe the philosophical analogies. In W.H. New’s article in this volume, the critic engages in depth with the

4. The connections with the notions of maya and the self in eastern cosmologies such as Hinduism and the derivative Buddhism arise at the level of origins (ideas circulating in ancient Greece, Persia, and the Indian subcontinent) but also at the level of rediscovery and return (theosophy). See Cindy Gabrielle’s discussion elsewhere in this volume on Frame’s attraction to a religion/philosophy positing the unreality of the self.

5. “The world is my idea” is significantly the opening sentence in Schopenhauer’s chief work. The title’s translations in English and French respectively (*The World as Will and Idea*/*Le Monde en tant que volonté et représentation*) foreground the resonances of the Idea with “the eternal form” and with the thought or understanding of “The person rapt in this perception” who is “thereby no longer individual” but “a pure, willless, painless, timeless subject of knowledge” (Schopenhauer 102).

6. All quotations refer to the 2004 Auckland edition of *Janet Frame stories and poems: The Lagoon and Other Stories, The Pocket Mirror*, which is the reprint of the 1951 Christchurch N.Z. Caxton Press edition, *The Lagoon and Other Stories*, followed by the reprint of Frame’s first poem collection, *The Pocket Mirror*, published in 1967 by G. Braziller.

problematically shifting Framean *I*, arguing for an authorial “*rhetoric of identity*” (39, original emphasis). John Thieme’s article in this issue explores how Frame eludes land-based cartographies and deploys water motifs to dissolve conventional notions of identity and being. In her article in this volume, Wevers also judiciously evokes Frame’s ventriloquism and the riddles underpinning her oeuvre, namely where the story is coming from and where the concealed “author” is located, but especially the variations on the central I-riddle: “Whose ‘skin’ are we in?” and “Who am I?” (59). Wevers wonders if the authorial goal is to empower the tested and teased reader to decrypt. I argue that, like Rimbaud, Frame seems to be declaring that “Je est un Autre” or I is Another (Rimbaud 344), and that the various forms of metalepsis or frame-breaking are designed, not so much to generate readerly competence and subsequently pleasure in decoding encoded intent, as to entrench the control of what Jan Cronin identifies as “a forceful authorial presence, one who has guided or, more accurately, goaded the reader into a given interpretative camp” (Cronin 11).⁷ My discussion will thus be grounded in the notions of freedom and constraint in the writing and reading processes and that literary space created between the producer and the receiver. It will involve reconsidering how Frame’s texts, especially their unstable subject positions, upset western society’s view of the subject as a free, coherent, distinct individual.

The *Lagoon* stories written in the mid-1940s already demonstrate Frame’s craft in wielding the unsettling tropes which are veritable twists and turns challenging the reader’s capacity to infer fixed meaning.⁸ The figure of metalepsis also known as frame-breaking which characterizes her writing practice corresponds to sundry forms of disruption. These involve points of intersection between different levels of narrative unexpectedly breaking through the logical established structure of points of view in the text (*Pale Fire*’s embedded manuscript and (meta)fictional exegetical footnotes can serve once more as a foil). One form of derailing involves Frame’s use of narrative speed or duration, which disdains the traditionally dominant narrative mode of summary and oscillates between the extreme degrees of absolute stasis (the timeless descriptive pause) and infinite speed (the ellipsis jerking the reader into an undetermined segment). To this Frame adds an astonishing use of paralipsis, a form of narratorial omission which involves stepping to one side of the narrative segment. The sidestepping occurs with such a light, deft touch in “Jan Godfrey” that readers do not know what hit them:

I was a teacher once. I taught at a school here in the city, prepared lessons, heard tables and reading and people of other lands, talked in a casual way about Robert Bruce and the Spider and King Alfred and the Cakes, and smiled at the kids when the inspector came, and spent all dinner-hour putting stars on neat work, it was an orderly life really.⁹

7. The tradition of manipulative narrators within which Frame inserts her writing calls up Nabokov’s increasingly intrusive editor persona Kinbote in *Pale Fire*, but it stretches back to obvious baroque models such as Laurence Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy* and ahead to avowed postmodern emulators of Sterne such as Salman Rushdie, in works such as *Midnight’s Children* and the playful story in *East, West* rewriting/erecting *Hamlet*, “Yorick.”

8. See John Thieme’s and Marc Delrez’s heuristic discussions in this volume on Frame’s mastery of tropes of displacement such as irony and the metaphor, and by extension on Frame’s “punning exploitation of the dead metaphor” (12).

9. The casual mention of casual mentions is exemplary of Frame’s oblique embedding practices. The author calls attention to the fact that the folklore revolving round King Alfred the Great and King Robert the Bruce of Scotland is familiar to schoolchildren even in ex-imperial spaces following the standard educational curriculum which has

But I got tired of it and I went to the hospital in Dunedin. (93)

The summary of the narrator persona's orderly routine unfolds in an incantatory series of iteratives. The soothing effects of the list are intensified by the polysyndeton, the accumulation of "ands" which coordinate predicates but also conjunctions in an apparently seamless flow. The unsuspecting reader may not remark the sudden eruption of the flash forward to a singulative event (*when the inspector came*), since the narration careens back to the life of habit (*putting stars on neat work*), only to step quietly off to one side. The brilliantly understated manner conceals and unsettles. It substitutes sequentiality for causality ("I got tired of it *and* I went to the hospital"), and positions entering the mental hospital on the same plane as going to school by deploying the same coordinator which connected the simple, quotidian activities of the schoolteacher. The shape-shifting narrator moreover quickly blurs any notion of the hospital as a distinct location by conflating it with a ship in which she, the subject, has metamorphosed into a perceiving object. She becomes a shipment gazing through the porthole at an underworld seascape which transmutes in turn from the referential to the imaginary. And the imaginary sea world which this subject/object inhabits is not her own mindscape but the world of someone else's book, Matthew Arnold's enchanted water world of mermaids. This frame-breaking blurs the subject position further through both intertextuality and metatextuality, issues I shall come back to.

The speaking pronoun

The greatest subversion to the authoritative subject positions readers expect to find within the text lies in Frame's disruption of deixis, the set of references regulating the production of discourse. In their encounters with all three forms of deixis (time, place, and person) for which the reference points are always the identity of the speaker and the time and place of speaking, the bottom falls out from under readers' feet. When is now? Where is here? Who is me? The "today" of the opening line of "Jan Godfrey" ("I am wanting to write a story today," 91) becomes more and more unlocatable as the story progresses, just as the persona's new watch which says ten past two blurs temporal distinctions by superimposing the hands marking hours and minutes (in a variation of the toy watches of timelessness forever set at ten past ten). The unusual "*I am wanting*" moreover stretches the action beyond the deictic point, hauntingly placing it outside time through the deviant use of progressive aspectuality reserved for dynamic occurrences presented as ongoing, incompatible with a static state of desire, by definition durative, and thus in the traditional grammatical schema viewed perfectly in its totality, as a whole. Simply put, Frame ejects *want* from the class of stative verbs of cognition, emotion, and attitude which habitually occur in the simple present. The writer's devious progressive insists on an immeasurable internal temporal structure. Desire is seen from the inside, as something ongoing, and thus becomes atelic or boundlessly extendable. Yet it is ambivalently overcoded by a hint of limited duration, with a focus on the present instant only (as in the more common

---

generally survived decolonization. The legends staging the Anglo-Saxon and Scottish kings in respective moments of dire discouragement on the eve of battle with hegemonic forces are interestingly complementary. In the first case it is England being invaded; in the second England is the hegemonic force to be repelled. In the manner of Wordsworth's poem "Rob Roy's Grave," Frame invites a reflection on power-holding and legitimacy.

"I'm thinking"). But also by the tentativeness and diffidence to be found in locutions avoiding brusqueness (such as "I'm hoping"), and positioning the narrator alongside deferential speakers such as T.S. Eliot's Prufrock, whose timorousness will not allow him to eat a peach, and whose indecisiveness impedes even his utterance from being successful. Prufrock and his faltering beginnings palely inhabit Frame's story, as we shall see later in the discussion. Suffice it to say here that Frame's aspiring writer persona envisages being "here for years and years" (91) with still no story, but the here/my room location metamorphoses into another room (and time) then undergoes a further slippage ("*Here is* the Age of Innocence," 91, stress added) which changes gears on all three deictic levels. The heteroglossia or interpolation of another's normative speech which engineers a new deictic position shoots readers back into the past and into a children's art class (in school? a museum?) from the suddenly intruding vantage point of a bodiless teacher persona.

Frame's most radical manhandling occurs within the deictic category of person, which normally allows distinctions among the three coordinates of textual articulation or dialogue: the speaker, the addressee, and everyone else. Social assumptions regarding a coherent subjectivity are unsettled through the protean *you*. In the opening paragraph of "The Lagoon," the inclusive second-person pronoun already implicates the dummy receiver in a universal dynamic (where *you* may find/if *you* are lucky/see *your* image, 17) But the pronoun undergoes further shape-shifting in "Jan Godfrey," where it metamorphoses dramatically from extratextual receiver ("Alison, I have told you, shares my room," 95) to an intratextual addressee ("I wait till you have gone to the bathroom," 96) who could be either the chameleon (former) I or perchance the transmogrified reader who has been sucked bodily into the text. A greater blow to our humanist assumptions of a unified self as well as to the cornerstones of the reading pact which view the confessional first-person pronoun as offering the veridicity of subjectivity and the third-person as guaranteeing objectivity is dealt by the alternation between first and third person pronouns.¹⁰ The frame-breaking involves an eerie, and reciprocal, occupation and possession between the speaker and the girl who is and is not her. The Alison who inhabits the third-person ("She is sitting on the bed") takes over the enunciative position through free direct discourse and relegates the former I into the role of addressee ("I am too tall [...] I do not read the books you read," 95) but it is unclear who has climbed into whose skin and where the voice is coming from, especially with the concluding ventriloquistic single-sentence paragraph, "My name is Alison Hendry" (96). The change in skins calls up the dynamics of haunting found in fantastic works such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman's notorious Gothic story "The Yellow Wallpaper" (which also inhabits "Jan Godfrey") and Ray Bradbury's science fiction story "The One Who Waits." But the greatest upset to stable modes of subjectivity and meaning-making is the eerie manner with which Frame replaces a fluctuating individual subjectivity with a disturbing collective self through the enigmatic first-person pronoun:

Alison Hendry. Margaret Burt. Nancy Smith. We cling to our names because we think they emphasise our separateness and completeness and importance, but deep down we

---

10. The same systematic oscillation is deployed by other modernists and postmoderns such as Emily Carr (the subtle aesthetic stylization of lived experience in *The Book of Small*, 1942) and Nancy Huston (the brutally immediate, sensationalist, alienation effect in *Histoire d'Omayya*, 1985), in alternating chapters and in mid-sentence, respectively.

know that we are neither separate nor complete nor very important, nor are we terribly happy (Alison Hendry, Margaret Burt, Nancy Smith, children) playing mud pies by ourselves in a tiny backyard when other kids are out in the big playground over the fence, look what I've made, race you Charlie, tell tale tit your tongue shall be split and all the little puppy dogs shall come and have a bit. (92-93)

Who is we? The narrator has claimed that she is not Alison Hendry (but that she cannot prove it). So where in the list (of masks) is the speaker concealed? Who author/izes the collective speech? The distinctions between speaker and other are blurred, shattering our notions of individual subjectivity and agency in the mode of affiliated magic realists ranging from Gabriel Garcia Marquez (in turn influenced by the mythopoeic shape-shifting stream of consciousness style of William Faulkner) and Salman Rushdie to Alistair MacLeod and Steven Millhauser.¹¹ Readers alert to the intratextual resonances with the double perceived object (the bees/the asylum inmates) which overlap and conflate with the speaking subject in "Snap-Dragons" and with the double subject of "Dossy" already discussed above are better equipped to identify the triple shapes of the self announced by the hermeneutic "me/ me/ me" (92). Both irony and pathos unfold as it dawns slowly on readers that *one* little girl, excluded from the contiguous busy playground, is playing by herself and peopling her world. That "Alison Hendry, Margaret Burt, Nancy Smith, [and the appositive] children" (93) are merely different names and parts of an indeterminate self in flux. The author thus invalidates the concept (and import) of a discrete I: "*I am neither separate nor complete nor important*" (96, stress added). Through this specific but also generic I representing the I-self construct, the writer dissolves individual identity into language itself, turning it, to borrow Edward Said's words, "into little more than a constituted subject, a *speaking pronoun*, fixed indecisively in the eternal, ongoing rush of discourse" (287, my stress).

Such an ongoing rush of discourse is visible in the off-set quote above ending with, initially, the near-by children's individual utterances (look/race), then their rhyming chants, a form of the heteroglossic stratification of language theorized by Bakhtin as constituting the specificity of dynamic novelistic writing. Frame's writing practice is grounded in this linguistic hybridity, which Bakhtin identifies as "the speech of another" being "introduced into the author's discourse [the story] in *concealed* form, that is, without any of the *formal* markers usually accompanying such speech, whether direct or indirect" (303, original emphases). The playground chants above (like the maxims, sayings, commonplaces, and quotations discussed by Wevers in this issue) are not original but emanate from the collective voice. They constitute one of the forms of language specific to and inherited from various socio-ideological, dialectological sections of the community (in this case an age group) which intersect with one other, collide and overlap with the narratorial or implied authorial voice. In other stories, Frame's hybrid constructions reflect and refract sundry professions, interest groups, classes, generations, and tendencies, each with its own flavour, in stylizations which are generally parodic.¹² The stratification of voices is often orchestrated for satirical

11. See the haunting combinations of the hybrid collective voice with other deictic disruptions in MacLeod's "The Closing Down of Summer" (1976), Rushdie's "At the Auction of the Ruby Slippers" (1992), and Millhauser's *The Knife Thrower and Other Stories* (1998).

12. Among Frame's later lighter-hearted parodies is the lost-luggage language used by airline travellers which she gleefully compresses and enumerates in *Living in the Maniototo*: "they talked only of luggage [...] in a predictable way as

purposes, drawing attention to a complacent society in which stock, readymade phrases signify the sclerosis of both language and thought.¹³ In “Keel and Kool” the heteroglossia parodically stylizes the language of pietism and its platitudes, representing the speech of current opinion and its verbal-ideological belief-system, or what Bakhtin terms the “going point of view” (301) of the social group. As flippant as the fragmented obituary formulas in “Spirit” (“Sacred to the memory of,/Gone but not forgotten,” 71), the visiting ladies mouth countless but interchangeable words of solace for the death of a child: “But it’s all for the best and you have Wonderful Faith Mrs. Todd, she’s happier in another sphere, you wouldn’t have wished it otherwise, and you’ve got her photo, it’s always nice to have their photos” (30). The author steps back from this common language, notably through the run-on sentences and capitalization, that marker of distancing which objectifies. The authorial language-intentions diffuse themselves throughout the ossified common language and refract a view which, when it gives equal value to a picture as to a child, we are made to feel is mindless and callous.¹⁴

Frame’s intentionally hybrid sentences thus perceive and illuminate one linguistic consciousness by and through the authorial language consciousness. The double-voiced internally dialogized syntactic structures engineer axiological relations of proximity or distance ranging from harmony to dissonance, depending on the social group given a voice. A dialectological utterance representing the parental group erupts in mid-sentence in “Snap-Dragons”: “when they were little and the rains came, inside kiddies, a storm, forked lightning, hide the scissors and cover up the machine” (74). With its ominous connotations of the violence and danger lurking in nature and society overlapping with the hint of a virtual maternal protection and power(lessness), it is in consonance with the child narrator’s and implicit author’s language consciousnesses. This harmony in language-intentions can be usefully contrasted with the implicit distance taken from the professional, schoolteacher jargon which is abruptly interpolated into the narratorial flow of “Jan Godfrey,” a distance taken more precisely from its stress on normative assessment (*study/appreciation/critical survey/exam*, 92). This emphasis is notably entrenched in a series of imperatives (*study/write/remember*) which set up directive relations promoting compliance.¹⁵ It is at the other end of the same spectrum of institutionalized authority that we encounter another interpolated series of unfinished utterances which go against the grain. The narrator recalls having once explored a mental hospital she had been admitted to. A Kafkaesque prison environment has already been engineered through objects (*locks/wired windows*). These objects embodying confinement are buttressed by agentless passives such as “the taps were locked” (94). Such a locution contributes to

---

if we read from the universal repetitive script of jet travel – stories of luggage lost, stolen, slashed, open, recovered, travelling to unplanned destinations. ‘It turned up in Thailand.’” (131).

13. Also see Mark Williams’s and Marc Delrez’s discussions in this issue on Frame’s war on cliché.

14. It is in the same way that Emily Carr creates pathos in *The Book of Small*, when her child narrator fervently wishing for a puppy for Christmas is smugly given a picture of a pup instead.

15. Such friction coheres with and is buttressed by Frame’s intratextual web of references which aim to alienate readers from figures of coercion. Fruitful parallels can be drawn with the teacher’s instructions on proper compositional process in “Miss Gibson – and the lumber-room” placing formal requirements and scriptural clarity above considerations of originality or imagination, but especially with the story “Child,” in which the narrative instance stages strappings, positioning yet another teacher persona within the dynamic of order/transgression/corporal punishment.

erasing the narrating self, since the selected grammatical subject (taps) leaves the agent performing the action *unknown*, and leaves no room for the speaking self as either experiencer or patient (in the linguistic sense of the one on whom an action is performed). The merging or rather clashing of voices which follows deserves scrutiny:

I walked into the bathroom where the taps were locked because you never know, and there was soap with NZ Gov. written on it, and a list of directions for bathing printed on the wall, A patient must be . . . An important rule of this institution is . . . Nurses should pay strict attention to the fact that . . . It is understood that on no account must . . . (94)

One can particularly remark the abundance of deontic modals (involving obligation and permission) with *unknown* deontic sources ("it is understood that"), entailing deontic logic (the implicit logical relations among propositions asserting that certain actions/states of affair are compulsory, permissible, or reprehensible). In the above passage, the deontic logic discloses the standards of desirable conduct which reign, the norms and expectations on how the institution (microsm) and larger habitat ought to be, and expresses a reform-oriented commitment to actualizing the vision. The list of directives underscores the *uniformity and regimentation* underpinning the constrictions, especially in their deliberately incomplete form, which leaves the prospect of sanctions lurking. The unfinished utterance is moreover a trademark strategy¹⁶ through which the author signposts the heteroglossic ventriloquism and readymade formulas through which language naturalizes socially coded rules which often entrench existing hierarchies and power relations. The critique of institutionalized, legal sites of authority is buttressed by the narrative sequence's contiguity with the segment which follows, and which once again enumerates objects, those encountered in the linen room – drawers, chemises, smocks (so far so good), then the jarring element not of the same nature, exploding the innocent orderly principle: canvas jackets (known as straitjackets in North America, or camisole *de force* in France). The resonances between "Jan Godfrey" and "Bedjacket" with its increasingly virulent, militant satire are obvious. Less obvious perhaps to today's general readers are the above micro-sequence's connections with the concluding allusion in the third last paragraph of "Jan Godfrey" to Lord Robert Stephenson Smyth Baden Powell who, after the Boer War, founded the Christian paramilitary youth organization called the Boy Scouts, which with its ranks, requirements, and promotion-gearred tasks (symbolized by the uniforms) can be considered a metonym of the utopian drive to homogenized normalcy and regimentation which George Orwell also denounced in the satirical novels equally written in the 1940s, *Animal Farm* and *1984*. A position which the authorial consciousness apparently shares, significantly diverging from the story's admiring owner of the British general's photo. Might there be a similar illocutionary act at work in the pairing of (the imperialist) Baden Powell's picture with that of (the colonial) Alfred William Robin? And in the perchance deliberate, ironic misremembering or misquoting Robin as holding the Victoria Cross? Yes, if one considers that Robin, who in his loyalty to Empire, pressed the New Zealand government to introduce conscription in 1910, was arguably responsible for the

16. In the *Lagoon* collection alone, see the recourse to deliberately unfinished utterances involving commands and demands and the eradication of creativity in, say, "Treasure," "Miss Gibson – and the lumber-room," "Snap-Dragons," "The Birds Began to Sing," and "Spirit."

decimation of a generation of young men. Yes, if one considers that his fighting in the Anglo-Boer War was metonymical of Great Britain's practice of using one colony to conquer another (equally deployed with Scottish soldiers in India and Indian soldiers in Burma).

The Trojan horse

The above forms of concealed and diffracted speech strengthen Frame's illocutionary act, namely what the author is trying to do by speaking/writing. After having shaken up her audience's norms concerning interpersonal experience with an ontological *I* as slippery as her deictic *I* – just what *is* a human being? – this has involved investigating issues of authority and unsettling sources (church, school, medicine) as well as relations of control and compliance. The final part of my discussion will address that other form of concealment unleashed by the writer's decentring play with etymologies (in a deconstruction of semantic expectations which Delrez explores in this volume). In this case, the other acceptance of authority stemming back to its Latin root: auctor, or author. Frame effectively engages with the issues of author/ity, authorship, and authenticity¹⁷ – as well as their ramifications of derivation and creation, imitation and invention, affiliation and legitimization. In his article in this volume, Allan Weiss investigates Frame's debt to Edgar Allen Poe's apocalyptic 1838 tale, "The Conversation of Eiros and Charmian" (and perchance to the Socratic eiron), in the construction of her modern fable "Spirit." Frame is remarkable in her homage with a twist, notably in the way she deflates the expected cataclysm with a deft touch, through the speed and concision required by Poe's two constraints, which she has also imposed on herself. These are the genre of the fable and the challenge of remaining within the tight form of pure dialogue, which justifies multivocality and shifting points of view, even if, as it does away with the implied listener along with the narrative voice, it imparts on readers an awkward feeling of eavesdropping. Frame's experiment with "Spirit" is what Genette in *Palimpsestes* would designate as an architextual one, namely the bifurcation of voice refracting not just one particular work (in this case the Poe hypotext), but a whole incorporated genre, or genres (in this case not only the fable but the [debunked] dystopia).

As Valérie Baisnée has pointed out, Frame's syncretic quotations and allusions "create an intertextual web of cultural references that run throughout her work and act as original viewpoints on her fiction" (90). Her intertexts are at times signposted, but they are often absorbed, disguised, and displaced. In "Spirit," the new soul's echo of a famous passage from *Hamlet* is detectable in spite of her stratagems of approximation and false attribution to a folk saying or proverb: "But I tell you I was a human being, a man, in form and moving like an angel (they say)" (71). What is less visible than the rectifiable *misquote* mongrelized by an alleged collective voice is the *partial* quote, a practice which stretches back to great satirists like Geoffrey Chaucer. The alluded-to sequence in *Hamlet* which begins "What a piece of work is man, how noble in reason" does apparently buttress Spirit 350's objections to a man being equated with a slug. Yet what Frame leaves out from the hypotextual speech by

---

17. In this volume, see Simone Oetli's thorough discussion of the use of intertext and the overlap of authorship and self in Frame's oeuvre, as well as Thieme's, Wilson's and Williams's enlightening approaches to these issues.

Hamlet is the ironic Shakespearean reversal. Hamlet ends the passage with the satirical lines: “in apprehension, how like a god! The beauty of the world! The paragon of animals! And yet to me, what is this quintessence of dust” (II, ii, 315-321). The absent words are inscribed in Frame’s echo in the form of a ghostly presence overcoding the spoken words with the philosophical stance of *vanitas*. In yet another devious displacement, Frame uses the disguised *Hamlet* passage as a Trojan horse in which to conceal yet another intertext which she introduces into Spirit 350’s very same (apparently) individual utterance. The words which follow, “I’ve wept and laughed and fallen in love,” resonate as something familiar in the mind of the reader. They ventriloquate the well-known lines spoken by T.S. Eliot’s persona Prufrock, “I have wept and fasted, wept and prayed” (Eliot 16), in turn containing a Biblical ring (2 Samuel i, 12). Readers pondering the enigmatic connection Frame could have found between the two speakers, Hamlet and Prufrock, will encounter two *Hamlet* intertexts in “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock.” The first is concealed: “I should have been a pair of ragged claws/Scuttling across the floors of silent seas” (Eliot 15).¹⁸ The second is explicit, either to reward the reader who has successfully collocated, or to guide the reader who has not: “I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be” (Eliot 17). The heteroglossic stratification of voices challenges the very notion of an individual, authentic speaking subject, replaced by a ventriloquist’s dummy through which the always Other speaks. The Trojan horse tactic thus places Frame in a dialogical cultural continuum. It also places her in the company of modernists from T.S. Eliot to Malcolm Lowry who chose to incorporate bits of master narratives – overtly or covertly – as tools of deflation, but also as syncretic building blocks with which to (re)create the repetition with a difference theorized by cultural thinkers like Gilles Deleuze in *Différence et répétition*.

On another plane, “A Note on the Russian War” with its reiterated “ah sunflowers” (102) and the story “Tiger Tiger” are visible displacements of poems by Blake.¹⁹ More cunningly concealed in “A Note,” however, is the manner in which “the steps of the Sun” in Blake’s “Ah! Sun-flower” (Blake 62, emphasis added) provide the acoustic underpinning for Frame’s homophonous “children on the *Steppes*” (103, emphasis added). The slippage is an illustration of Frame’s frequent recourse to musication, the device in which the phonic prevails over the semantic value. I am not arguing that Frame accords priority to the text’s sound patterns at the expense of meaning, in the vein of sundry nonsense writers as well as early modernists like Joyce, who carried the practice to an extreme (including the French lettrists in the aftermath of the Second World War). I am suggesting that she uses resemblances of sound to alter meaning, or rather to generate new meanings which can simultaneously reinforce and deviate from the intertextual trajectory.²⁰ It is arguably homophonic play that

18. See Hamlet’s remark to Polonius, “for yourself, sir, shall grow old as I am, if like a crab you could go backwards,” to which Polonius responds with an aside: “Though this be madness, yet there is method in’t” (II, ii, 205-209).

19. Beyond the semantic resonances, on the plane of rhythm and sonority, one can even remark how Frame redeloys Blake’s driving trochaic tetrameter, “Tyger Tyger burning bright/*In the forests of the night*” to “He was curled up fast asleep/*in the corner near the door*” (90, my slash and stress), thus deflating the terrible sublime to the human scale.

20. I adhere to Jan Cronin’s approach in “Through a Glass Darkly,” which involves reading how Frame’s work is put together, notably “in terms more of process than of product,” or, to borrow Susan Sontag’s terms, reading a text in terms of “how it is what it is [...] rather than [...] what it means” (Cronin 12; Sontag qtd. in Cronin 12).

engineers the Russian steppes in Frame's short piece.²¹ In this, punning aside, Frame the poet²² is following in the steps of her equally erudite predecessor, T.S. Eliot, whose presence suffuses her work.²³ In "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," for instance, collocating the intertextual references combined with acoustic play illuminates the manner in which Eliot's lines cohere.²⁴ Prufrock's hundred indecisions, visions and revisions, the poem's false starts and echoes (*how should I presume/ how should I begin*) haunt "Jan Godfrey," commingling with Frame's narrator's litanic refrain: *But I have wandered from my story/ You see I have wandered again/ But I have wandered again* (92, 93, 94). In turn, Eliot's motivic variations on "tea and cakes and ices" (15) and his famous lament regarding the trivialities of modern existence, "I have measured out my life with coffee spoons" (14) can illuminate Frame's depiction of life in mental asylums reduced in paradoxically exhaustive detail to its quotidian alimentary routine: "They gave me porridge and toast for breakfast every morning, and bread and butter for tea every night except Sundays, when it was bread and butter and gingerbread, and for dinner I had semolina and silverbeet" (94). Similarly, the allusion in "Jan Godfrey" to "green and blue waves" (94) sets up a dialogue not only with the contiguously offered title of Matthew Arnold's poem, "The Forsaken Merman," but also with the mermaids Prufrock envisions riding on waves that are "white and black" (Eliot 17). Prufrock's assertion, "I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each" (17) in turn echoes John Donne's "Song" and its enumeration of impossible things beginning with "Go and catch a falling star." The second verse which begins, "Teach me to hear mermaids singing" similarly connects with a body of siren figures and tales stretching back to Homer and Ovid, in which metamorphic, hybrid bodies and enchanting songs cast a spell evoking the *eikōs* (icon or perceptible reality) of Plato's Cave (Donne 737). Simultaneously, it is arguably the accumulative effect of the fricative [w] in Eliot's waves/wind/water combined with the long open vowels of the masculine rhymes *peach/ beach/ each/ me* which engineer the shift from the first-person singular I to the final verse's enigmatic first-person plural: "*We* have lingered in the chambers of the sea [...] Till human voices wake us, and we drown" (Eliot 17, my stress). Even so does language regulate ontology when Frame transmutes her "me/me/me" (92) into a plural speaking pronoun, effectively dissolving individual identity into language itself, turning it into a mere discursive construct.

21. The Russian connection (intricately linked of course with World War One, but also with the thickening national fear of Communism which was to lead to the ANZUS defence pact) reinforces the disquieting climate of death roiling under the Blakean and Framean surfaces (while the rising of Blake's Youth and Virgin from their graves similarly buttresses the literalism and apocalyptic resonances of the oeuvre's Christadelphian backdrop).

22. Musication is rife in Frame's poetry. The poem "Story" is grounded in the systemic derivation, torsion, and combinatory mixing of homophonic free morphemes such as "peace piecing" (*The Pocket Mirror* 154). Similarly, buttressed by the graphism, the (poly)phonic symbolism of a poem like "Napalm" deploys syllabification (*nay/ palm*) and scrambling to construct two colliding lexical fields (Sunday/psalm/Palm Sunday/Son of God vs. napalm/pay day) which invoke the two colliding axiologies of peace and war, spirituality and profit. (*The Pocket Mirror* 156)

23. Cronin notably detects the traces of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" in her illuminating discussion of Frame's complex forms of play with canonical texts in *The Adaptable Man*, including deliberate misattributions and mistranslations containing echoes of yet another canonical text ("Through a Glass Darkly" 11).

24. The verse beginning with the explicit *Hamlet* connection discussed above ends with a reference to "the Fool." It is another Shakespearean intertext which illuminates the transition(lessness) to the following verse, "I grow old... I grow old..." (Eliot 17), for in *Henry IV*, II, iv, 130-132, the fool Falstaff declares, "There live not three good men unhang'd in England, and one of them is fat, and grows old." The pressure of the established rhyme pattern then generates the second half of Eliot's couplet, "I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled" (17).

Frame's illocutionary act is simultaneously of an epistemological, metaphysical, and metatextual nature. "Who is the third who walks always beside you?" Eliot asks in *The Waste Land*, permeated with collocated echoes from eastern and western thought, from the *Upanishads* and Buddha's Fire Sermon to St. Augustine's *Confessions*. Frame, too, posits that the subject speaks and thinks through the speech and thoughts of others, both heard and read, oral and (inter)textual. Through spectral dispersions and multiple angles of refraction (which include the mass of material in the consciousness of the receiver who collocates), Frame demonstrates that "the word in language is half someone else's," and that it is living language, complete with heteroglot opinion and fruitful friction, which "lies on the borderline between oneself and the other" (Bakhtin 293). The ghosts that inhabit Blake and Arnold and Eliot walk in Frame's texts as well, and both writing and reading are a becoming. The metatextual reflection on authorship and author/ization with its corresponding questioning of originality, authenticity, and legitimacy which underpin her oeuvre acknowledges, celebrates, and promotes the processes of appropriation, assimilation, and transformation which make up the writing and reading practices – processes which imply that texts are rejoinders in a planetary dialogue, and that an author is "neither separate nor complete nor very important," but an integral part of a dialogical, diachronic, transnational whole ●

Marta DVORAK, Université Sorbonne Nouvelle-Paris 3

Works Cited

- ARNOLD, Matthew. "The Forsaken Merman." *Victorian Poetry and Poetics*. 2nd ed. Ed. Walter E. Houghton and G. R. Stange. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1968. 420-421.
- BAKHTIN, Mikhail. *The Dialogic Imagination*. Ed. M. Holquist. Trans. C. Emerson and M. Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981.
- BAISNÉE, Valérie. "A Home in Language: The (Meta)Physical World of Janet Frame's Poetry." In Cronin and Drichel, 89-106.
- BLAKE, William. "Ah! Sun-flower." *Songs of Experience*. In Perkins, 62.
- BRADBURY, Ray. "The One Who Waits." 1949. *The Machineries of Joy*. London: Granada, 1977. 25-32.
- CARR, Emily. *The Book of Small*. 1942. Toronto: Irwin, 1966.
- CRONIN, Jan. "Through a Glass Darkly: Reading the Enigmatic Frame." In Cronin and Drichel, 3-23.
- CRONIN, Jan, and Simone DRICHEL, eds. *Frameworks: Contemporary Criticism on Janet Frame*. Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2009.
- DELEUZE, Gilles. *Différence et répétition*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1968.
- DONNE, John. "Song." *Seventeenth Century Prose and Poetry*. Ed. A. M. Witherspoon and F. J. Warnke. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1963. 737.
- ELIOT, T.S. *Collected Poems 1909-1962*. 1963. London: Faber & Faber, 1974.
- FRAME, Janet. *Janet Frame stories and poems: The Lagoon and Other Stories, The Pocket Mirror*. Auckland: Random House New Zealand, 2004.
- FRANCASTEL, Pierre. *Histoire de la peinture*. Paris: Gonthier, 1983.
- GENETTE, Gérard. *Palimpsestes : la littérature au second degré*. Paris: Seuil, 1982.
- GILMAN, Charlotte Perkins. "The Yellow Wallpaper." 1899. Boston: Small & Maynard. <http://www.library/csi.cuny.edu/dept/history/lavender/yellowwallpaper.pdf>
- KANT, Immanuel. *Critique of Pure Reason*. 1781. Trans. Norman Kemp Smith. Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.
- HUSTON, Nancy. *Histoire d'Omayu*. 1985. Paris: Actes Sud, 1998.
- KING, Michael. *Wrestling with the Angel: A Life of Janet Frame*. Auckland: Viking, 2000.
- MACLEOD, Alistair. *Island: The Collected Stories*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 2000.
- MILLHAUSER, Steven. *The Knife Thrower and Other Stories*. New York: Vintage, 1999.

- ORWELL, George. *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. 1949. World Library Classics, 2004.
- PERKINS, David, ed. *English Romantic Writers*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1967.
- RIMBAUD, Arthur. Letter to Georges Izambard. *Oeuvres de Rimbaud*. Ed. Suzanne Bernard. Paris: Garnier, 1960.
- RUSHDIE, Salman. *East, West*. London: Vintage, 1995.
- . *Midnight's Children*. 1981. Toronto: Vintage Canada, 1997.
- SAID, Edward. *Beginnings: Intention and Method*. New York: Basic, 1975.
- SCHOPENHAUER, Arthur. *The World as Will and Idea*. 1818. Ed. David Berman. Trans. Jill Berman. London: J.M. Dent, Everyman, 1997.
- SHAKESPEARE, William. *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*. 1604. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.
- . *Henry IV*. First Part. 1597. *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.
- SHELLEY, Percy Bysshe. *A Defence of Poetry*. In Perkins, 1072-1087.
- SMALL, Anna. "Beyond Analogy: Janet Frame and Existential Thought." In Cronin and Drichel, 67-88.
- SONTAG, Susan. *Against Interpretation*. New York: Octagon, 1978.