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**Locating the Self:
Re-reading Autobiography as Theory and Practice,
with particular reference to the writings of Janet Frame**

**by
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**Thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
at the
University of Warwick**

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Summary

Title: Locating the Self: Re-reading Autobiography as Theory and Practice, with particular reference to the writings of Janet Frame

The thesis is a three-part study of the theory and practice of autobiography. The writing of the New Zealand novelist, poet and autobiographer Janet Frame (1924-) is used as case-study throughout, juxtaposed to canonical texts of autobiography (typically written by white western males) which have been used to draw conclusions about the self. Frame's 'autobiographical' writings (in particular her three-volume autobiography, *To the Is-Land, An Angel at My Table* and *The Envoy From Mirror City*; and her novels *Faces in the Water* and *Owls Do Cry*) are used to suggest a new approach to interpreting both the self in society and the relationship between narrated self and context.

Part One is a re-reading of three classic texts of the genre, St. Augustine's Confessions, Dante's Vita Nuova and John Bunyan's Grace Abounding. The assumption that such texts describe an 'autonomous, unitary' male protagonist is thoroughly questioned and the texts are read to reveal instead the characteristics of fragmentation and alterity usually reserved for descriptions of the self in women's autobiographies. The point is emphasised that the narrated self of autobiography must always be precisely located in time and space.

In Part Two, the definition of autobiography as genre is explored. Two schools of thought are identified: one which focuses on the contract between reader and writer (Lejeune), the other which highlights that the self is constructed in and through the narrative which purports to represent it (Bruss, Barthes). Frame's writing is then used to test the application of such models. The relationship between 'history' and 'fiction' is discussed as the pivotal distinction on which the notion of autobiography hinges. Through a reading of Frame's autobiographies and Paul Ricoeur's *Time and Narrative*, the notion of a 'textual contract' as a new definition of autobiography as genre is developed: this definition maintains both the importance of the life outside the text but also the representative nature of narrative to transform that reality within the text.

Part Three puts into practice the theory of 'locating the self'. Frame's autobiographies are first analysed through a series of categories of 'belonging': gender, class, race, nationality and coloniality. It is suggested, using Elspeth Probyn's notion of *Outside Belonging*, that Frame invents and performs the categories of both poet and schizophrenic in order to find a place to belong. Finally, Frame's narrated self is analysed in the very specific context of the local and national writing culture, demonstrating that the narrated self of autobiography is, to a large extent, instructed in society and rehearsed by the author long before she puts pen to paper.

The thesis concludes with the notion of **autobiography as metaphor** which is seen as resolving many of the theoretical dilemmas posed throughout.

The research for this thesis was made possible with a two-year grant from the Warwick University Graduate Awards and a one-year grant in my final year from the British Academy. I was also awarded an International Federation of University Women scholarship which funded a three-month research trip to New Zealand. I am extremely grateful to these institutions.

Declaration

A very small portion of the Introduction to my Master's thesis (Marlboro College, Vermont, 1990) is used in the introduction to this thesis: notably the discussion of Foucault's concept of 'discourse'.

Early versions of nearly all the chapters have been presented to various seminar groups and conferences and I am extremely grateful to the participants for their insights, comments and feedback. Such discussions invariably led to a re-write or the development of another strand of the thesis.

Versions of Chapters Three and Four were presented as papers to the panel on 'Biography and Autobiography' at the *Fifth Conference of the International Society for the Study of European Ideas* at the University of Humanist Studies in Utrecht and to the *Feminist Philosophy Society* at the University of Warwick.

Embryonic versions of and extracts from Chapters Five and Six were given to the *Gender Studies Seminar* at the University of Birmingham; *The Aotearoa/ New Zealand Seminar Series* at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies in London; the *English Dept Faculty Seminar Series* at the University of Otago (New Zealand); the *Dept of English Visiting Scholars Seminar Programme* at the University of Auckland; and the conference 'Representing Women's Lives: Women and Auto/biography' at Nottingham Trent University.

Versions of Chapter Eight were presented to the *Aotearoa/ New Zealand Seminar Series* at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies and the *Humanities Postgraduate Research Forum* at the University of Warwick.

Publications:

A version of chapter six, section three, is due to be published in the summer '98 issue of the Journal of New Zealand Literature as 'Madness, Philosophy and Literature: a reading of Janet Frame's *Faces in the Water*'

A condensed version of chapters five and six is due to appear in an edited collection, Representing Lives: Women and Autobiography, edited by Alison Donnell and Pauline Polkey and published by Macmillan, summer 1998.

Acknowledgements

The greatest and most direct influence on this thesis must be my supervisor Professor Carolyn Steedman whose work in the field of autobiography has always been careful to consider historical and economic context as priorities: this perspective has kept me on my toes; her style (a mixture of discursive ingenuity and historical precision) remains a model I can only aspire to. Her intellectual influence on my work has been profound.

Many other faculty members from various institutions have generously given their time, reading and commenting on drafts, sharing ideas and suggesting reading material. In particular I would like to thank Benita Parry, Lawrence Jones, Rod Edmond, Ruth Brown, Janet Wilson, Christine Battersby, Adriana Cavarero and Michael Bell.

Very special thanks are owed to those fellow students who, throughout my time at Warwick, have read and commented on drafts, discussed ideas and suggested appropriate reading, often photocopying relevant material: Emma Mason, Lynn Guyver, Irene Gedalof, Tracey Potts and Ruth Livesey.

Prof. Steedman has consistently had great faith in my abilities to organise and has encouraged me to take on projects that I would not otherwise have had the confidence for. It was at her suggestion that I set up the Autobiography Workshop, a graduate forum for students in all disciplines. This Workshop proved to be a crucial ground for my reading and thinking and I would like to thank the various stalwart members over the years who kept it going: most especially in its embryonic phase Rachel Hepworth, Yonson Ahn and Linda Maitland, and later to Jean Rath, Jennie Antonio, Kathryn Winter and Antje Lindenmeyer. I was also privileged to be able to invite prestigious speakers in the field to the Workshop and am very grateful for the time and generosity the following speakers gave and for their advice and comments on my own work: in particular, Liz Stanley, Nancy K. Miller and Debra Kelly; also Carole Boyce Davis, Nicole Ward Jouve and Eva Hoffman. With a grant from the European Humanities Centre at Warwick (thanks to Peter Mack for putting his faith in a post-grad student) I was able to organise a one-day conference on autobiography. I would like to thank the speakers and chairs at this event: Carolyn Steedman, Maureen Duffy, Adriana Cavarero, Yonson Ahn, Jean Rath, Murray Pratt, Sara Ahmed and Ruth McElroy.

Many other reading groups at Warwick sustained me both intellectually and socially: in particular, Challenging History (thanks to Ruth Livesey, Jonathan White, Seth Denbo and Ian Hill, all especially eloquent in the Arts Centre coffee bar); the Feminist Philosophy Society (Rachel and Cathrine); the Humanities Postgraduate Research Forum; the Feminist and Postcolonial Theory Reading Group (Irene Gedalof, Tracey Potts, Bibi Bakare-Yusef, Luciana Parisi, Jennie Antonio, Marsha Henry); the Centre for the Study of Women and Gender Research Student Seminar Programme; and the Centre for Social History Research Forum.

The research for this thesis, though officially spanning three and a half years at the University of Warwick, has been inspired and encouraged by the members of many academic institutions in four different countries. It began in 1988 when I embarked on a two-year Master's thesis at Marlboro College in Vermont, supervised by Jay Birje-Patil or 'Birje' as he is known to his students. It is perhaps only now that I fully appreciate his immense learning and reading and above all his awareness of the most current thinking. Working closely with him in the tiny isolated college whose graduate population at the time numbered two, I developed a theoretical framework in postcolonial, feminist and poststructuralist theories which has served as the theoretical and methodological foundation for all subsequent research. I continue to be profoundly interested in notions of 'difference' and in debt to Birje for his insistence that even the most difficult theorists can only be fully appreciated and understood by painstakingly reading them in the original. The comments of my external examiner, Prof. Neil Lazarus, gave me the confidence to go on.

The next influential nudge in the direction of this present thesis was a written examination I sat for entrance to a doctoral programme in English at the University of Genova in Italy. There was only one question and we had six hours to write an answer: the question was about autobiography. Forced to invent connections between autobiography and the research I had done to date, I realised that autobiography was in fact the ideal genre to explore the notions of difference, subjectivity, marginalisation and representation I was interested in. Although I was only enrolled at Genova for a short time, I am grateful to conversations with and comments from my supervisors and advisors on the programme: Prof.ssa M. Bignami (Milan), Prof.ssa T. Cerutti (Torino) and Prof. M. Bacigalupo (Genova).

I eventually found my way back to the University of Warwick (where I had taken an undergraduate degree in Sociology ten years earlier) and was enrolled in the Centre for the Study of Women and Gender, directed by Terry Lovell. I am grateful to Terry for her encouragement (and persistence!) in getting me to confirm my plans to return to academia full-time.

In my second year at Warwick I spent three months as a Visiting Scholar in the English Department at the University of Otago. This was made possible by a very generous grant from the International Federation of University of Women as well as additional funding from the University of Warwick Graduate Awards and the Centre for the Study of Women and Gender.

There were many people at Otago who were willing to give their time and share their knowledge of Janet Frame, New Zealand and Literature. In particular, Professor Lawrence Jones was an invaluable source of information, always available for discussions and was ready to read any drafts of work in progress I might send his way. He continues to be a much-needed font of advice and I am very grateful to him. Heather Murray made me very welcome and provided invaluable material on Frame, as well as escorting me to suitable locations. Annabel Cooper generously shared her teaching and her research with me: it was great to find someone with such a similar perspective! Thanks also to Pam Sharpe, Chris Prentice, Tessa Barringer, Bernadette Hall, John Dolan and Nicholas Reid for sharing ideas. I also benefitted from an exchange visit between Janet Wilson (Otago) and Rob Pope (Oxford Brookes). Janet was in England prior to my trip and helped with much of the admin as well as reading and commenting on my work: Rob Pope was a friendly face at Otago. To the many students I spent time with, to my housemates Mike, Sarah and Riani (that was a great Frame party we had) - hello and thanks.

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As I come to writing these last lines (they come at the beginning of the text but thanking people must always be the last thing we do), I am made very aware of the interconnections between my research and my life - not surprising when the topic is autobiography. This thesis was officially begun just two days after my mother finally died of cancer after a year's hard struggle. In the spring of my third year on this project, my grandmother also died, unable to cope with the disorder of things, a daughter who had left the world before she did. Now, on the eve of consigning my completed thesis, there are just three weeks (E.T.A.) before I too become a mother. There is a pleasing cyclical symmetry to it all, a sense of beginning, middle, end; life, death and continuity; the inextricable connections between life, research, the universe and everything. Never have the links between writing and reproduction been clearer to me.

This thesis is dedicated to the past, the present and the future:

to the memory of my mother
Gillian Hadley Blowers
March 22, 1944 -
September 30, 1994

and of her mother
Dorothy Hadley
January 28, 1914 -
May 20, 1997

and to the wriggling being inside my belly

that makes me too a mother
? May, 1998

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

Janet Frame, To The Is-Land

**Locating the Self:
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with particular reference to the writings of Janet Frame**

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**Locating the Self:
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Introduction

The following analysis of autobiography as theory and practice focuses on the writing of the New Zealand novelist, poet and autobiographer Janet Frame (1924-). Frame's writing is used throughout the thesis as case-study, juxtaposed to canonical texts of autobiography (typically written by white western males) which have been used to draw conclusions about the self. What happens to our interpretation of this narrated self when a woman writing from a specific social, historical and geographical location is used as the yardstick with and against which we 'test' so-called universal accounts of the self? In addition, Frame's writing is used to investigate more contemporary claims about the characteristics of autobiography as genre: to what extent can we see the theoretical problems associated with autobiography mirrored or challenged in her texts? Finally, Frame's writing is used to suggest a new approach to interpreting both the self in society and the relationship between narrated self and context.

The aim of the thesis then is to explore textual selves and to be able to say what 'the self' is only as constituted within a specifically located space. Locating the self of autobiography means identifying, describing and analysing the various *discourses* through which that self is constructed. What might these discourses be and how are they described within the text? It is for this reason that the term 'self' remains undefined throughout the thesis: different discourses establish located selves which can never have a permanent or universal application. The term 'locating the self' is used to stress the importance of a self that is constantly shifting in and out of various discourses and must therefore be temporarily situated by the reader of the autobiographical text without reference to preconceived notions of what a self enduringly is.

The term 'discourse' is associated with the work of the French philosopher, Michel Foucault. In his Archaeology of Knowledge, Foucault explicitly refers to literary texts as examples of discursive systems. These systems can be explained by extending the 'archaeology' metaphor of the title and using the analogy of a Grecian urn. Just as a Grecian urn can be examined as a material entity by looking at how detailed figures are juxtaposed, how they stand in relation to one another, whether the strokes are bold or narrow, so Foucault argues we can examine the internal structure of a discourse. In fact, this is reminiscent of structuralist and formalist approaches to literature which focus on the work of art as an end in itself: the literary text is judged according to the coherence of the linguistic system which it inscribes and which needs no reference to context for its meaning to be discovered. Similarly, F.R. Leavis, the founding father of 'English' as the compulsory subject taught in secondary schools throughout Britain today, argued that great literature, rather than being dependent on a highly subjective question of taste, could be subject to rigorous critical analysis and a disciplined attention to the 'words on the page'.¹ However, for Foucault, the individual urn also has a specific relationship to other 'monuments' of the period: paintings, statues, a mathematical text. It is this relationship that determines both the urn's individual design and its very existence as a work of art in relationship to other works of art. Therefore, the urn cannot be examined 'out of context' but only as a 'node within a network'. Foucault sees the book as one of the most immediate examples of a discursive unity. It is a whole, being materially contained between two covers, spatially as a single bound volume and economically existing as a specific unit of price. This unity is only superficial, however:

¹ Stuart Hall has pointed out that Leavis did in fact recognise that this analysis was absolutely related to the society from which it originated, arguing that only by focusing on the internal organisation of the text could the relationship to social context be fully understood (Stuart Hall, 'A critical survey of the theoretical and practical achievements of the last ten years' in Literature, Society and the Sociology of Literature (Proceedings of the conference held at the University of Essex, July 1976), ed. by Francis Barker et al (University of Essex, 1977), pp.1-7 (p.1)).

The frontiers of a book are never clear-cut: beyond the title, the first lines, and the last full-stop, beyond its internal configuration and its autonomous form, it is caught up in a system of references to other books, other texts, other sentences, it is a node within a network.²

Throughout this thesis I explore specific discourses within that broader network of possible discourses. These include on the one level the text (and can mean the rigorous analysis of vocabulary, metaphor, sign and symbol) and on the other the context (which can mean a focus on local, regional or national characteristics at social economic and political levels, for example) and also includes an awareness of the personal specificity of both author and reader within the text and outside it (which might encourage identification with certain suggestions in the text and ignorance or ellision of others).

Autobiography is a good candidate for this kind of interdisciplinary study of the interstices between literature, sociology and history. The reader and critic is forced to make connections between the world of the author before, alongside and after the text, and encouraged to question the accuracy or transparency of the representation of that self in the text. Reading autobiography is a particularly accentuated continual to-ing and fro-ing between the imagined (or known) *hors-texte* and the text itself. As Derrida describes it, writing autobiography is equivalent to 'put[ting] one's name on the line'.³ We can borrow the phrase and change its meaning slightly, seeing that line as the division between text and hors-texte, inside-outside, empirical and fantastic: the name of the author of autobiography simultaneously participates in both.

The present study then charts a course between text and context: how they feed in to and can be made to comment upon each other. It is the inextricable relationship between the two that is the premise of the thesis itself. Throughout I have been guided by the belief that literary texts not only take their form, characterisation and strategies

² Michel Foucault, (1969 & 1971) The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language, trans. by A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon, 1972), p.23.

³ Jacques Derrida, (1982) 'Otobiographies' in The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation: Texts and Discussions with Jacques Derrida ed. by Christie McDonald (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1985), pp. 1-40 (p.7).

from social and ideological sub-texts but are created through an imaginative vision that problematises given social and ideological categories. Literary texts present rich and ambiguous social situations in a structure which can alter or question the meaning of any concept through a variety of artistic techniques. Literary texts are not consistent in their descriptions, analyses or conclusions of the experience and effects of, for example, gender, race and class as components of the self, just as their authors have varied and sometimes contradictory experiences and recollections of what it means to be defined as inhabiting such categories. Kim Worthington has described a similar process:

The construction of a subject's sense of selfhood should be understood as a creative narrative process achieved within a plurality of intersubjective communicative protocols. In the act of conceptualizing one's selfhood, one writes a narrative of personal continuity through time. That is, in thinking myself, I remember myself: I draw together my multiple members - past and other subject positions - into a coherent narrative of selfhood which is more or less readable by myself and others. Understanding personhood in this way [...] leaves open the possibility of revision of one's conception of self, and also acknowledges the potential for misreading and misinterpretation of the narratives of self and others.⁴

This thesis is indeed about exploring how selves are actually represented in narrative, as opposed to using unsubstantiated assumptions and categories of description to say what the self is. Literary texts are invaluable then in questioning and qualifying the existence of monolithic and universalising social categories which are in turn used to describe the self in society.

The tendency of disciplines within the humanities to focus on either text or context rather than examining their cross-fertilising relationship is mirrored in the tendency to distinguish between theory and practice. This was highlighted in the 70s by a series of conferences in Britain and the U.S. which sought to examine the relationship between literature and society, and the resulting discipline, the 'sociology of

⁴ Kim Worthington, Self as Narrative: Subjectivity and Community in Contemporary Fiction (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p.13.

literature'.⁵ Introducing a collection of papers from the English Institute (U.S.A.) in 1978, Edward Said complains that 'English' on the one hand, has become intensely introspective and self-referential, relying on a series of infamously 'difficult' theorists to explain and analyse the text:

The issues debated do not involve values or social and cultural questions or urgent philosophical questions; they are most often about "texts" (so that one is made to feel that there are only texts), they deal in complex abstractions whose main reference is to other complex abstractions, their dense language belies a thin texture of ideas, experience, history.⁶

On the other hand, the disciplines of history and sociology depend heavily on 'empirical' data and claims to objective reality which are constantly undermined by the very theorists making such an impact on English. Said is equally critical of this 'rather empty standpoint of "humanistic" scholarship, which seems no less marginal, unworldly and rarefied than some of the theory' it so often attacks. Indeed, in the light of this debate, the founding beliefs and practices of 'humanist' disciplines across the spectrum have been and continue to be severely undermined: literary critics proclaim the death of the author; philosophers, sociologists and psychologists describe the fragmentation of the self or the decentering of the subject; and historians struggle with challenges to the possibility of an objective or empirical description of the past. It is fascinating (but perhaps not surprising) that the popular and academic preoccupation with the representation of lives should coincide with this crisis. Typically, commentators seeking to define the genre of autobiography have attempted to distinguish autobiography from the novel by focusing on these very concepts: the self, truth, sincerity, reality, fact. (The fact that each of the words in this list should now

⁵ See for example, Literature, Society and the Sociology of Literature (Proceedings of the conference held at the University of Essex, July 1976), ed. by Francis Barker et al (University of Essex, 1977); and Literature and Society: Selected Papers from the English Institute, 1978, ed. by Edward W. Said (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1980).

⁶ Edward Said, 'Preface', Literature and Society, p.ix.

normally be enclosed within quotation marks underlines the perceived instability of such terms.)

The potential result is a widening gap between disciplines constantly at odds with one another. However, since the late 70s, the relevance of historical and social contexts to any study of literature and the contribution a close study of literary texts can make to analyses of society has been much more widely accepted and indeed practised. There has been a steady input of enlightening studies which use the insights of one discipline to elaborate and/ or challenge the long-held beliefs of another. Thus, Paul Ricoeur (as is explored in Part Two of this thesis) uses the insights of a rigorous philosophical understanding of the postmodern issues discussed above to describe instead the shared foundations of literature and history, which both rely on a specific construction of narrative to 'refigure' time. Edward Said recommends an approach which always situates writing within its social and historical context but then attempts to deal with that context from many viewpoints, 'all of which are informed by but by no means emasculated by the latest trends in modern critical theory.' This is the approach followed in this thesis.

I thus contest the notion that theory be applied to creative texts in a one-way revelatory practice. On the contrary, it is through a close textual reading of autobiography as practice that I am constantly made aware of the lacunae in the present state of theory. I proceed then through a series of mutually illuminating readings, continuously paralleling theory with practice. Richard Dyer, in the Preface to his most recent book, White, suggests that:

Theory needs checking off against the particularity and the sheer intractable messiness of any given example; but equally, no cultural production is ever apprehended except through the frameworks that are brought to bear on it, of which theoretical constructs are only a particularly self-reflexive and elaborated kind.⁷

⁷ Richard Dyer White (London: Routledge, 1997), p.xv.

The 'messiness' and 'intractability' of the primary sources can be frustrating and challenging but an attempt to think through the ambiguities and contradictions which arise from literary texts has always led me to considering other theories and approaches and, often, to constructing theories of my own. This tendency is crucial to another underlying tenet of my methodology: the belief that creative writing is itself a highly productive source and expression of theory. In turn, the use of a broad range of commentary and analysis of autobiography applied to Frame's writing has proved highly suggestive and productive. To my knowledge, no other research has been done on Frame's autobiographies *as* autobiographies, informed by contemporary debates about autobiography as a genre and the theoretical issues it raises.⁸ As a result, I am able to suggest new readings of complex and prominent metaphors in her writing such as 'to the is-land' and 'the envoy from mirror city' which have particular resonance when considered as participants in a developing discourse around the nature of writing autobiographically. Likewise, thinking through the significance of such metaphors has led to new interpretations of other philosophic conceits (such as Coleridge's description of 'fancy' and the 'Imagination' explored in Part Two) and their implications for a theory of autobiography.

Of necessity, I narrow down the field: by autobiography, I mean 'literary autobiography', those autobiographies written by writers who are first and foremost renowned for their writing rather than for their lives. This distinguishes the autobiographies I have focused on from the more popular and successful genre of writing by public (political and cultural) figures whose lives are already of interest and

⁸ This is not to say that nothing has been written on the autobiographies: reviews, commentaries and articles abound. The articles that do focus on autobiography as genre, however, have a very different perspective from my own. Worth noting are Patrick Evans' 'Janet Frame and the Art of Life' (Meanjin 1985, 44-50), which gives a brief survey of the novels, defining the parable-like nature of the fiction and discussing its relationship to autobiographical details; Suzette Henke's 'A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Woman: Janet Frame's Autobiographies' (Journal of the South Pacific Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies, 31 (1991), 85-94) which looks at Frame's autobiography as a description of how a writer comes to write; Lawrence Jones, 'Autobiography 1973-85: The One Story, the Two Ways of Telling, and the Three Perspectives: Recent New Zealand Literary Autobiography' in Jones, Barbed Wire and Mirrors: New Zealand Prose (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 1987, pp. 222 - 242), which includes commentaries on the autobiographies of Frame, Brasch and Sargeson; and Simon Petch. 'Janet Frame and the Languages of Autobiography' (Australian and New Zealand Studies in Canada, 5 (1991), 58-71), which discusses autobiographical discourse and its relationship to renegotiation.

often heavily mediated by the popular discourse of the media before they put pen to paper. 'Literary' autobiography, or rather, autobiographies by 'writers' are not surprisingly, often reflexively about writing and more precisely, about writing autobiography. Writers who write autobiographies are typically acutely aware of issues of representation, textuality, narrative, and the relationship between the world out there and their description of it. Such texts are a valuable source for commenting back on autobiography as practice and as a basis for examining the efficacy of theoretical commentaries on the nature of autobiography.

I have not used the currently fashionable slashed 'auto/biography' because I do not include biography in my study. My sense is that while 'autobiography' and 'biography' have much in common (the reference to an external, historical reality, the retrospective (re)construction of a life, the slippery borders between fact and fantasy, chronicle and good story, the infallibility of memory), they remain two quite distinct genres: indeed the prefix that distinguishes one form from the other - 'auto' - is the root of autobiography's fascination for me (the story of a person's life written by that person). The definition of autobiography is in itself highly problematic and the source of much theorising: the thesis as a whole continually grapples with the consequences of various conflicting definitions of autobiography.

The reading base for this thesis is in fact very broadly interdisciplinary, including literary criticism, philosophy, sociology and history and drawing on theorists who would fit into one or more of the categories: postmodern, poststructural, feminist and postcolonial. The primary material used as 'evidence' throughout the thesis for the discussion of aspects of theory concerning autobiography ranges from traditional autobiographies by the 'masters' of the canon in Part One to the unpublished poetry and letters of Frame, her family and contemporaries in Part Three. I have often drawn on the work of 'high-profile critics'⁹ because I assume that the constant attention paid to them by academics justifies my own attention. On the other hand, the specificity of my research has led me to engage with many little-known writers who, whilst important in

⁹ Benita Parry uses this apt term in her article 'The Postcolonial: Conceptual Category or Chimera', *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 27 (1997), 3-21 (p.8).

New Zealand, for example, are rarely referred to 'over here'. Like all theses, then, mine is a constant balancing act between engaging with the canon - of both theory and practice - and the neglected, the underrated, the dismissed and often the simply unread. The material thus covers very diverse historical periods, cultural traditions and writing styles.

Although the sources are somewhat eclectic, the path that is mapped is by no means arbitrary. My research began with commentaries on autobiography as genre, which have proliferated from the 70s onwards. This earlier material continually refers to a set of autobiographies which have simultaneously been used to draw various conclusions about the self in different historical periods. Any serious researcher who wants to say anything about autobiography is inevitably drawn to these primary sources. However, my own reading of the canonical texts was at odds with the readings expounded in critical anthologies. This made me think hard about what it means to read autobiography from a specific cultural, historical and theoretical location and the very different versions of the self that arise as a result. In the meantime, I was also working my way through Janet Frame's *oeuvre*: ten novels, three volumes of autobiography, three books of short stories, two collections of poetry and a children's book. My reading of theories of autobiography alerted me to specific passages, concepts and metaphors within Frame's texts which offered insights into the nature of autobiography. On the one hand then I arrive at an alternative reading of the canon; simultaneously Janet Frame's writing suggests lines of fruitful inquiry to pursue in autobiography.

Frame as author and Frame as narrator/ protagonist of the autobiographies is a particularly appropriate composite figure through which to attempt such an investigation. Her very specific location in time and place (twentieth century New Zealand) complicates the strict dichotomy subject/ other. She is white, heterosexual, colonial. Yet she speaks the 'english' language¹⁰ of a dominion which has, however, a

¹⁰ The practice of english language use in 'post-colonial' countries is by no means straightforward, however. I use the lower case 'english' here, following Ashcroft et al (1989) in The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures (London: Routledge, 1989): 'We distinguish in this account between the 'standard' British English inherited from the empire and the english which the

complex relation to the 'mother country' of Britain. As a writer this is particularly relevant to her sense of marginalisation since New Zealand's literary identity has until very recently been dependent on British models and canons and access to British publishing houses. Moreover, Frame's specific life experiences force open categorical, uniform and unifying descriptions of the self: the death of her twin sister at birth and the subsequent death of her two sisters when teenagers; her family's nomadic mobility through her father's job on the railways; her mother's love of language; her own decaying teeth; her intense shyness; her incarceration in a mental institution for eight years as a classified 'schizophrenic'. Taking on board such diverse experiences which do not fit easily into any of the 'given' social categories (gender, class, race) so often relied upon in contemporary analyses and descriptions of the self forces the reader to locate the narrated self in a specific time and place.

Frame's texts similarly supply abundant material for an analysis of what have been termed the 'set of relatively distinct concerns in literary theories of autobiography', identified as 'the nature and expression of subjectivity; the generic specificity of autobiography; the truth-status and referentiality of autobiography in relation to the fact-fiction dichotomy and the status of fictional entities.'¹¹ Frame is indeed preoccupied with the distinction between fact and fiction, the real and the imagined, the authentic and the copy. The insights that Frame's writing brings to definitions of the genre are then re-inserted into a new definition of autobiography as genre.

The thesis is divided into three parts: each part constitutes a self-contained discussion of diverse approaches to 'locating the self' via the theories and practice of autobiography. Part One ('The Usual Suspects: Re-reading the (Male) Subjects of the Autobiographical Canon') is founded on a close reading of three 'canonical' texts: St.

language has become in post-colonial countries. [...] We need to distinguish between what is proposed as a standard code English (the language of the erstwhile imperial centre), and the linguistic code, english, which has been transformed and subverted into several distinctive varieties throughout the world' (p.8).

¹¹ Laura Marcus, *Auto/biographical Discourses* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1994), p.179.

Augustine's Confessions, Dante's Vita Nova and John Bunyan's Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners. Since autobiographies by men are consistently referred to as paradigmatic of the genre, I investigate what these paradigms are assumed to represent and whether in a contemporary feminist re-reading they continue to represent what has been claimed for them. In particular, I explore and critique the notion that male subjects inscribe themselves in autobiography as 'unitary' and 'autonomous'. In order to expose this reading as superficial and simplistic, I perform a diametrically opposed analysis, effectively reading exactly the opposite characteristics into these texts. I propose that the 'gendered self' (a term I define within chapter two) has no value if taken as a cross-cultural, cross-historical fixture with an implied essence (be it biological/ experiential/ psychological) which predetermines subjectivity. Indeed, the gendered self can be read as a sub-set of the broader term 'located self': I argue that the self is indeed gendered but that what this self represents in any given moment must be rigorously examined. In this sense my approach to gender is also a Foucauldian one, seeing gender as a discourse, a 'node within a network', the culmination and collision of various discourses in a particular time and place. The work of the feminist theorist is then to identify such discourses and attempt to describe what gender has come to represent within a particular set of colliding circumstances.

In Part Two, 'Constructing the Self: the Writer and Reader of Autobiography', I analyse commentary, criticism and theory of autobiography as genre, focusing on what I have found to be the more influential and useful models. These models are then applied to Frame's autobiographies, which are used as a case-study through which claims about the characteristics of autobiography as genre are investigated. In the first of these two chapters I divide the commentary on autobiography as genre into two main schools of thought: the first I identify as locating the reader as a key player in the definition of autobiography, focusing on Philippe Lejeune's notion that autobiography is distinguished from other kinds of texts by an explicit and implicit 'pact' entered into between reader and writer. The second school of thought I outline concentrates on the writer. Is the self already constituted before writing, or does it come into being in and

through the text? This second model of autobiography as act focuses on the relationship of the writer to the text and to the world, suggesting that autobiography, far more than being a representation of a life, has in fact, a direct role in creating the life it describes. Throughout these discussions I draw on the writing and life of Janet Frame to show how readers construct the subjectivity of the author in the act of reading just as writing autobiography can constitute an act in the life it describes. In Frame's case the definition of the genre is not one of mere academic interest: it becomes fundamental whether her work is read as autobiography or fiction because ultimately her mental health is at stake. This is complicated by the fact that Frame is a living author who can confirm or deny any readings of her textual self, although infamously insisting on her privacy.

The chapter that follows again focuses on the line between experience, reality and fiction. It takes as starting point the fact that most readers of Frame notice that her autobiography says almost nothing about her time in psychiatric hospitals, whereas her 'novel' Faces in the Water speaks of nothing else, indeed is a first-person account of what it means to be defined and treated as schizophrenic (although it is never clear whether we should conclude that the narrator *is* schizophrenic). Drawing on a debate between Foucault and Derrida around the impossibility of naming or speaking madness, I argue that Frame, by suggesting through comparison and transformation what madness is, communicates the real via the fictive. Here the work of the hermeneutic philosopher Paul Ricoeur brings fresh insights to the problematic definition of autobiography. In reading Janet Frame's work alongside Ricoeur's, the blurring between autobiography and novel, history and fiction, forces a new form of reading autobiography which integrates both modes of thinking outlined above: this is to read autobiography as a 'textual contract', allowing the reader to hold on to a sense of 'the real' outside the text whilst foregrounding the representative nature of reality within the text.

The model of autobiography I set up in Part Two is then the model through which I examine the autobiographies in Part Three: the only self that we have to go on is that

represented in the text even though that self is implicitly and explicitly united to the world outside the text. We can make no assumptions about that self which are not textual representations and we can come to no conclusions about the nature of the author's subjectivity which are not references to textual representations alone. What we *can* do is to use the text as a frame of reference within which we investigate the construction of subjectivity, the prominence or importance of certain organising principles in the construction of a life. In this way, for example, we can ask to what extent gender is a category of subjectivity for both author and reader. Is the self in the text gendered? In reading a life through the lens of gender, what happens to it, especially when 'gender' itself is considered as a historically and culturally specific and situated category? I take social categories as the springboard for a close textual reading of Frame's texts. Here the autobiographies are used as empirical evidence (the claim being made previously that autobiographies do indeed have privileged access to the real) and the protagonist/narrator Janet Frame as case-study for an analysis of how selves experience such categories. Once again, this approach bears fruit on both sides, providing new readings of Frame's autobiographies but also more complex understandings of categorisation.

Whereas in Part One I considered the 'group-identified category' of gender, in Part Three, 'Specifying Difference: Local and National Influences on a Sense of Self', I move on to focus on the differences *within* 'group-identified categories' rather than *between*. In this alternative reading, the representation/ interpretation of any autobiographical self is seen as intensely informed by the geography, history and culture of both reader and writer. In order to capture the complexities of the categories which overlap and are blended within any description of subject-ivity we must look closely at the specific location a subject is writing - and being read - from. In the first of these two chapters (chapter seven) I investigate how Frame's pervading sense of exclusion from subject positions that might ordinarily have been available to her (woman, white, coloniser), leads her on a search for a 'homeland' or a place to belong that will both centre her experience and acknowledge her difference. This search also

highlights the extent to which a national sense of identity can collude with an individual's sense of identity. Again, using Frame's three volumes of autobiography as case study, I trace instances of a sense of self that might be related to, or put in an illuminating juxtaposition with, the historically problematic sense of national identity of New Zealand. I argue that the popularity of Frame's autobiographies in her own country, their very positive international reception and Jane Campion's award-winning film interpretation can, to a degree, be put down to the collusion of Frame's description of her battle for identity with New Zealand's struggle for a national identity.

The final chapter explores the notion that the practice of writing autobiography is a historically- and culturally- specific act. Far from being a unique text that is the product of an individual's uniquely remembered and recorded experiences, an autobiography participates in and conforms to an extended network of literary and social rules and expectations within the broader society. This chapter then focuses on the extent to which writing autobiography can be seen as a practice that is historically and culturally *instructed* in society at both local and national levels. To what extent has a narrative of the self been determined before the author puts pen to paper? Similarly, to what extent have the narratives we construct in autobiography already been suggested through local and national institutions of instruction? Is there a degree, then, to which narratives of the self which originate in certain times and places conform to a very localised model of the self? In order to explore such questions I focus on the influences of family, religion, education and the local informal writing culture, including letters Frame wrote to the children's pages of a local newspaper during the mid-1930s between the ages of twelve and sixteen. The autobiographies suggested such sources of Frame's narrative self which have not previously been used in an academic study of her work.

My aim in this thesis then is threefold: to emphasise the necessity of situating the self historically and culturally, that is to emphasise the inextricable relationship between text and context; in so doing, to be able to say what constitutes the narrated self at any

given moment; and finally, to add something to research on the writings of Janet Frame. I hope to convince the reader to take autobiography very seriously as both popular practice and academic tool that can reveal much about historical constructions of the self and our reading of them. I hope too, to draw the reader into the wonderful and endlessly suggestive world of words that is uniquely Janet Frame's: a writer with whom I have lived in awe, mistrust and wonder for the duration of this thesis and whose words I keep returning to, and will continue to do so long after my task in this thesis is over.

PART ONE

'The Usual Suspects':

Re-reading the (Male) Subjects of the Autobiographical Canon

Chapter Two

Histories of Autobiography: His Stories of the Self

The question of genre and the question of the subject are intimately related in autobiographical discourse.

Laura Marcus, Auto/Biographical Discourses¹

Autobiography could be described as the most democratic of all literary genres: everybody has a life. Yet, in the relatively short time that autobiography has become an important literary genre for both readers and writers, it has also become evident that those writing and (critically) reading autobiography represent only a small minority of the world's population. While it is perhaps true that, more than any other literary genre, autobiography is open as a practice to almost anyone, in reality relatively few people ever pen self-contained narratives of their lives. Some are *unable* to write: the illiterate, the chronically ill or physically constrained (although their stories are sometimes told through others²). Many people will simply not have the *inclination* to write down the story of their lives. In many parts of the world, and in many stratas of society, the very concept of autobiography is culturally irrelevant. Coupled with this is the fact that the most influential readers and critics of autobiography have tended to ignore those life stories that do not seem to represent the lives they themselves have lived. Thus, autobiographies will inevitably be over-represented in some groups and under-represented in others. Certain people and

¹ Laura Marcus, Auto/Biographical Discourses (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1994), p. 179.

²By oral historians, for example, or by others such as close friends or specifically employed 'ghost writers'. Murray Pratt, for example, discusses the recent proliferation of aids testimonies in 'Cultures of the Self: Aids Autobiographies in France'. (Paper presented to conference 'Autobiographies: Strategies for Survival', 12 October 1996, and to be published in forthcoming collection of conference papers, edited by Tonya Blowers. Publisher as yet unconfirmed.)

groups will continue to be excluded. For every working-class woman's story told there will be a thousand others untold. And yet the history of autobiography as genre until very recently has been a history of generalised claims about the self, extrapolating from the example of one life to conclusions about the many. It is this continuous tension (and to a large degree, the impossibility of resolving this tension) between the *specificity* of a person's life and the *representativeness* of that life which is explored here.

Indeed, tracing the history of autobiography as genre is often confused with or at least fused with tracing a history of the self, or how we came to have our contemporary sense of ourselves as individuals. Thus Karl Weintraub's 1978 study The Value of the Individual: Self and Circumstance in Autobiography, as its title suggests, traces the history of the self by focusing on key autobiographies stretching from antiquity to the present day;³ William Spengemann's 1980 survey The Forms of Autobiography: Episodes in the History of a Literary Genre identifies three forms of autobiography, the 'historic', 'philosophic' and 'poetic', each of which corresponds to 'a climate of opinion regarding the self';⁴ Ann Hartle's 1983 The Modern Self in Rousseau's Confessions: A Reply to St. Augustine compares and contrasts these two most canonical autobiographies to point to two fundamentally distinct ways of perceiving the self.⁵ Most significantly perhaps, Charles Taylor's 1989 historical and philosophical survey Sources of the Self: the Making of the Modern Identity, which makes no claims in its title to be a study of autobiography, calls on many of the canonical autobiographical texts to illustrate the development of the modern self.⁶

³ Karl Joachim Weintraub, The Value of the Individual: Self and Circumstance in Autobiography (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1978).

⁴ William C. Spengemann, The Forms of Autobiography: Episodes in the History of a Literary Genre (New Haven: Yale UP, 1980). 'Historic' corresponds to the period from the Middle Ages to the Enlightenment; 'philosophic' to the turn of the nineteenth century; and 'poetic' to the period from the nineteenth century onwards.

⁵ Ann Hartle, The Modern Self in Rousseau's Confessions: A Reply to St. Augustine (Indiana: U of Notre Dame P, 1983).

⁶ Augustine, Montaigne, Goethe, Rousseau, Bunyan and Wordsworth are among those discussed. Charles Taylor, Sources of the Self: the Making of a Modern Identity (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989).

Glancing through critical works on autobiography which retell and critique autobiographical texts, the 'classics' are apparent and continue to propagate themselves, as do all canons, by subsequent critics who have used these collected critiques as guidelines. Commentators from the late 70s through to the mid-80s typically start with St. Augustine as the 'first' 'real' autobiographer and move on through a selection which variously includes Abelard, Petrarch, Cellini, Cardano, Descartes, Montaigne, Bunyan, Baxter, Franklin, Vico, Hume, Gibbon, Rousseau, Goethe, Stendhal, John Stuart Mill, Cardinal Newman and Charles Darwin. Spengemann and Weintraub's historical overviews of the self deduced from such autobiographies collect together eclectic mixtures of 'representative' authors but make no mention of the fact that Montaigne is French, Goethe German and Hawthorne American. Surely these important differences should not go unnoticed? Similarly, few women are mentioned in the canons of the great autobiographers. Spengemann mentions not one but justifies his selection thus:

Since I do not maintain that the formal evolution of autobiography was unilinear, proceeding directly through any particular sequence of texts, I have felt free to single out works that illustrate most clearly what seem to me the crucial episodes in the larger movement that is my subject.⁷

However, surely not coincidentally, the works he considers to be worth singling out because they illustrate such crucial episodes are all by male, white Europeans. It remains to be seen if a selection that includes women, blacks, or non-Europeans could represent the issues Spengemann claims to have found in autobiography. Surely, if they do not, he would need to redefine his genre to include them. Weintraub, in a survey of at least fourteen authors, mentions only two women, the 'mystics' St. Teresa and Madame Guyon. Apparently aware of the bias of his project but arguing

⁷ Spengemann, p.xv.

that he chose his authors according to 'their availability and their suitability for testing the growth and nature of self-conception', he candidly admits:

It should go without saying that a choice of other texts, analyzed by other minds, would result in a different history. To this historian the chosen texts seemed to function as the most revealing signposts along the long road, through a complex historical territory, that Western man [sic] has traveled in his effort to arrive at a sense of individuality.⁸

Not surprisingly, once again, the most revealing signposts in the history of Western man's sense of individuality are autobiographies by white western men. The arbitrary inclusion of some works in translation and not others really begs the question: exactly how representative are these studies? Why Bunyan, Goethe and Rousseau and not Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, or Anne Frank? While the exclusion of all kinds of authors writing from a myriad of diverse cultures and locations is a feature of all canons and autobiography as genre is no exception, here I choose to focus specifically on the exclusion of women.

Even a respected critic such as John Sturrock, writing as late as 1993, makes the ingenuous and unsubstantiated claim that the absence of women in his collection is due to the selection of 'canonical' authors on quality alone:

I do not apologize for choosing only canonical examples of literary autobiography [...] rather than looking outside the canon as the fashion currently is, to writers previously unconsidered. There are excellent reasons why certain works become canonical, having to do with their quality and not with the coercive impulses of the canon-makers.⁹

While Sturrock implicitly claims it a casual coincidence that none of his chosen authors are female, earlier commentators make more overt claims: women write

⁸ Weintraub, p.xiv.

⁹ John Sturrock, *The Language of Autobiography: Studies in the First Person Singular* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993).

differently and should therefore be examined under a different category. In Paul Delaney's (1969) British Autobiography in the Seventeenth Century, for example, the chapters are divided into academically feasible categories such as 'secular autobiography' and 'religious autobiography' with these categories in turn categorised as 'Quaker' or 'Sectarian'. Under these headings, for some unspecified reason, *women cannot be mentioned* (as if 'religion' and 'female' were mutually exclusive) and so to make up for this absence a very short chapter entitled 'Female Autobiographies' is squeezed in at the end. Delaney's justification for the inclusion of a small number of women's autobiographies only under a separate heading is the following:

Autobiographies by women, whether secular or religious in emphasis, merit separate treatment. In general, female autobiographies have *a deeper revelation of sentiments, more subjectivity and more subtle self-analyses* than one finds in comparable works by men. The sociological reasons for this difference are obvious, and have existed since antiquity; yet it is not until the seventeenth century that what we now call the 'feminine sensibility' enters the main stream of English literature.¹⁰

Delaney offers no description or evidence of this 'feminine sensibility'. We can only assume that what the women hitherto identified as the authors of 'women's autobiographies' have in common is an essential shared biology and one should add, authorial claims to sexed bodies. It is, then, literally, a 'female body' of work that is under investigation. The connections between these bodies and writing is notoriously vague.

Feminists have identified a problem here: the subject of history is not universal but in fact very specific, 'the straight white Christian man of property', to quote

¹⁰ Paul Delaney, British Autobiography in the Seventeenth Century (London: Routledge, 1969), p.5; emphasis added.

Gayatri Spivak's inclusive, economical and memorable phrase.¹¹ Similarly, the autobiographies called upon to describe this supposedly 'universal subject' have also been written by men. As Laura Marcus remarks, 'by denying women writers a place in the history of autobiography, critical work in the field, for all its insistence on mirroring universals, has presented a distorted reflection of the autobiographical genre'.¹² As a result, the description of both the genre of autobiography and the history of the self will inevitably be lop-sided.

I. 'A Different Poetics'

Feminist critics have, of course, begun to redress the balance. The first necessary move was to introduce women's autobiographies into the canon. This has meant finding, publishing and critiquing texts by women which had hitherto been overlooked. Sometimes this project has tended to produce an alternative female canon, the same names, once rescued, continually cited: Dame Julian of Norwich, Margery Kempe, Zora Neale Hurston, and those old favourites Gertrude Stein and Virginia Woolf. Alternatively, feminist critics have undercut the very foundations of canon-making by introducing a myriad of names and texts from specific periods. Thus Felicity Nussbaum, in her powerful (1989) reading of eighteenth century gender and ideology, introduces 'women's spiritual autobiographies', including unheard of 'autobiographers' such as Elizabeth West, Mary Mollineux, Joan Vokins and Elizabeth Andrews;¹³ Regenia Gagnier similarly discusses unknown texts by working-class women.¹⁴

Second, and closely allied to this move, feminist critics, in looking for historical evidence of women writing the self, have broadened the definition to include various forms of self-writing such as diaries, journals and letters, as well as fragmentary and

¹¹ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Harper's Magazine* (September 1989), p. 52; quoted in Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, eds. *De/Colonizing the Subject: the Politics of Gender in Women's Autobiography* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1992), p.xvii.

¹² Marcus, p.221.

¹³ Felicity A. Nussbaum, *The Autobiographical Subject: Gender and Ideology in Eighteenth Century England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1989).

¹⁴ Regenia Gagnier, *Subjectivities: A History of Self-Representation in Britain, 1832 - 1920* (New York: Oxford UP, 1991).

unfinished pieces. These forms of writing have traditionally been more accessible to women who, owing to the division of labour and ideologies of gender, have rarely led lives deemed important or interesting enough to justify a full-length retrospective account of 'how I became who I am'. Domna Stanton's (1984) anthology The Female Autograph is perhaps the most salient example of this approach, a collection which she describes as 'a collage of pieces representing different disciplines and fields, different cultures and eras, different "genres" or narrative modes'.¹⁵ The discipline of social history in Britain draws heavily on first-person narratives never intended for public view (letters, journals, diaries, memoirs), written in secret and discovered or revealed post-mortem, donated by distant relatives to local archives, perhaps never read by anyone but author and historian: such narratives can provide access to lives which are hidden from history because they are not deemed public or important enough - the working-class, women, first-generation immigrants. There is a persistent attraction in the notion that a real-life person is telling it like it was - and that this tale can be analysed and used as statistical and experiential evidence which can then feed back into theoretically constructed notions of identity.¹⁶

Third, feminists have focused on the differences between men's and women's writing in autobiography, what Shirley Neuman describes as a 'different poetics'. Like previous commentaries, the differences discovered have tended to correspond to perceived differences in male and female subjectivities. In responding to philosophical, literary, historical and scientific texts where the male subject masquerades as universal, feminists have been keen to point out the differences between men's and women's experiences in order to expose the vast amount of material that has been systematically excluded from histories of the self. Within the

¹⁵ Domna C. Stanton, The Female Autograph: Theory and Practice of Autobiography from the Tenth to the Twentieth Century (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1987), p.vii.

¹⁶ Carolyn Steedman discusses this assumption about education adapted by (a few) historians in 'The Peculiarities of English. Autobiography: An Autobiographical Education, 1945-75', using as example the publication of a fifteen-year old schoolgirl's autobiography which is then used as a secondary school text book (Valerie Avery's [1964] London Morning): 'You enable the dispossessed to tell their story, and to come into consciousness of their self through the practice of writing, and then you return that story, not just to the child in question, but to many, many working-class children, so that they too, might come into a sense of self' (p.92).

history of autobiographical criticism, feminists argue that women's texts have hitherto been excluded from the male canon because they don't conform to given 'male' standards and expectations of what a 'model life' is or how it should be described. Feminists have then shown just how far women's writing can deviate from the norm and this has led to a listing of male versus female characteristics. Some feminists go so far as to see these differences as transcending time and place. Estelle Jelinek in her (1986) study The Tradition of Women's Autobiography, declares that in women's autobiographies:

[There is a] consistent pattern of similar characteristics [from Antiquity to the Present] [...] for the most part irrespective of, indifferent to, or ignorant of what others (female or male) were writing, or even the time, place, occupation, personality, or historical/ political events involved.¹⁷

Jelinek summarises the timeless and oppositional characteristics of men's and women's writing in autobiographies as follows: while the male 'identity image' is 'self-confident' and 'one-dimensional' women display a 'multidimensional, fragmented self-image' which is 'coloured by a sense of inadequacy and alienation'. Similarly, she argues that the style of men's and women's autobiographies reflects this different self-image, men writing 'progressive and linear narratives' while women's narratives are 'episodic and anecdotal, nonchronological and disjunctive'.¹⁸

Sidonie Smith has described at length the birth of the male bourgeois individual: 'the certitudes of well-defined, stable, impermeable boundaries around a singular, unified, and atomic core, the unequivocal delineation of inside and outside'.¹⁹ This self 'positions on its border all that is termed the "colorful"'.²⁰ Women are thus inevitably excluded. The implications are that the female self displays characteristics

¹⁷ Estelle C. Jelinek, The Tradition of Women's Autobiography: From Antiquity to the Present (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1986), p.x.

¹⁸ Jelinek, p.xiii.

¹⁹ Sidonie Smith, Subjectivity, Identity and the Body: Women's Autobiographical Practices in the Twentieth Century (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1993), p.5.

²⁰ Smith, p.9.

which are the direct opposite of the male: undefinable, unstable, permeable boundaries around a fragmented, divided and dispersed 'centre'. Domna Stanton similarly describes how women have been defined in opposition to the (male) 'totalized self-contained subject present-to-itself'.²¹

These feminist critiques can be paraphrased as follows: the male subject of autobiography is 'unitary and autonomous'; the female subject of autobiography is his exact opposite: 'fragmented and non-individuated' regardless of the time or place she is writing from.

There are of course serious problems with this approach. As we have already seen, it takes for granted a given definition of male subjectivity and sets the female up in opposition to it.²² Two, there is no analysis of the complex mechanics of the textual representation of the self. On this subject, Rita Felski remarks that:

To simply read literary texts in terms of their fidelity to a pregiven notion of female experience or feminist ideology is in effect to deny any specificity to literary language and meaning, rendering literature redundant by reducing it to a purely documentary function as a more or less accurate reproduction of an already existing and unproblematically conceived political reality.²³

Thirdly, it takes what is in fact a historically situated understanding of the self (developed since the late eighteenth century onwards) and applies it transhistorically, reading texts written prior to the eighteenth century as exemplary of this male unified autonomous self.

It is important to note here too that the terms used to describe the female self ('multi-dimensional, fragmented, [...] episodic and anecdotal, nonchronological and disjunctive', to use Jelinek's phrase again) could equally well be descriptive of the 'postmodern' self. Since women's texts have often been evaluated and read critically

²¹ Stanton, p.15.

²² Domna Stanton makes the same point: 'The assertion of difference was based on a preselected male corpus of male autobiographies and a pre-established set of common traits' (p.11).

²³ Rita Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change* (UK: Hutchinson Radius, 1989), p.8.

for the first time in the postmodern era, it is not surprising that critics are now finding evidence of such characteristics. It is also true however, that, in this critical moment which has made us aware of the 'postmodern self', the same characteristics can also be read into many contemporary texts by men and, as I will argue below, many of the canonical texts by men which have been held up as models of the unitary, autonomous self.

II. 'A Poetics of Difference'

There is a fourth impulse in feminist criticism of autobiographies which runs contrary to the one described above and I would like to place my own approach within this growing tradition. Shirley Neuman has described the feminist approach outlined above (typified by the Jelinek-Mason approach) as a 'different poetics': the characteristics of one group are defined against another rather than looking for differences *within* groups. While acknowledging 'the exceptional usefulness of these different poetics of group-identified subjects for challenging hegemonic notions of the self, for giving us detailed studies of some particular autobiographies, and for revising the canon of autobiography', she advocates instead a 'poetics of difference'.²⁴ In looking for the differences between subjects described in and through their autobiographies, critics are not restricted to monolithic categories of male and female that override time and place: on the contrary, each text is contingent on numerous variables. This is not to say that there are no differences between men's and women's texts but that these differences are subject to constant change depending on the particular location or positioning of the man or woman in question. Other feminist critics I would identify as describing a 'poetics of difference' and who have focused specifically on the genre of autobiography are Nancy K. Miller and Françoise Lionnet (whose work on alterity in canonical male texts I will discuss below), Liz Stanley, Regenia Gagnier, Felicity Nussbaum and Laura Marcus.

²⁴ Shirley Neuman, 'Autobiography: From Different Poetics to a Poetics of Difference' in Essays on Life Writing: From Genre to Critical Practice, ed. by Marlene Kadar (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1992), pp. 213-230 (p. 222).

Working within a framework of a 'poetics of difference' it becomes possible to re-read the canonical texts of autobiography and ask whether they really contain/represent the 'unitary, autonomous' male self that so much criticism of the canon has taken for granted. Laura Marcus argues that it is 'crucial [...] that we stop equating autobiographies by men with their idealised representations in conventional autobiographical criticism, and look again at the autobiographical texts, not least in terms of the way they represent the construction of masculinities'.²⁵ In this vein, Françoise Lionnet re-reads Augustine's Confessions and Nietzsche's Ecce Homo, stating that her point is 'not to use [these texts] as male paradigms or antimodels to be criticized and refuted' but 'to examine how dimensions of their work that might be called feminine tend to be either ignored or coded in reference to a more "masculine" and hierarchical framework'.²⁶ I prefer to let go of the tags 'masculine' and 'feminine' since they can only be applied as general rather than specific terms. Instead I adopt the term 'gendered self' which I describe below. I absolutely take into account the sex of the author but wish always to place her in a specific time and place and interrogate what that space represents for her as author and for us as readers in any given historical moment. Indeed, in the final part of this thesis, I focus on the writings of New Zealand writer Janet Frame, analysing in detail the various historical, geographical and social influences on her positioning as a 'post-colonial' white woman writer.

III. The Gendered Self

The notion of a 'gendered self' in autobiographies (a term that I have not seen used explicitly although it is implicit in many feminist analyses and taken-for-granted as a category) really hinges on the eternal question asked of and by feminists: the relationship between sex and gender, or what Judith Butler has termed 'the circular

²⁵ Marcus, p.220.

²⁶ Françoise Lionnet, Autobiographical Voices: Race, Gender, Self-Portraiture (Ithaca: Cornell UP - Reading Women Writing, 1989), p.19.

ruins of contemporary debate'.²⁷ Christine Battersby summarises: in English-language feminist theory, 'female' has always been equivalent to 'sex' (the biologically given) and 'feminine' to 'gender' (the culturally constructed).²⁸ Diana Fuss has argued that this traditional distinction puts essentialism (sex as biologically determined) and constructionism ('you aren't born a woman, you become one'²⁹) at two opposite ends of a scale, as mutually exclusive categories. However, this theoretical binarism is 'a largely artificial (albeit powerful) antagonism', untenable since much of the empirical basis of constructionist theory is in fact essentialist, drawing on biological evidence of behavioural characteristics linked to bodily chemicals and organs. The popular construction of femininity as passive, creative and intuitive for example, is directly and inextricably linked to biological descriptions of male and female: the male is inherently violent because of the levels of testosterone in his body. In this regard, Fuss has stated that 'essentialism underwrites theories of constructionism and [...] constructionism operates as a more sophisticated form of essentialism'.³⁰

Battersby thus contends that 'the sex/ gender distinction has (quite properly) come under question as it has been registered that the body (and hence also "sex") is not simply a primitive, non-mediated "given". The way bodies are ascribed to one of two sexual categories itself has a history; biology is itself socially constructed'.³¹ Judith Butler (1990) is perhaps the best-known deconstructor of the sex/ gender distinction, reasoning that 'if gender is the cultural meanings that the sexed body assumes, then a gender cannot be said to follow from a sex in any one way'. If gender is an unpredictable outcome of sex, if gender is not inextricably tied to sex, then it follows that sex and gender are not dependent on one another:

²⁷ Judith Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 7.

²⁸ Christine Battersby, 'Her Blood and Her Mirror: Mary Coleridge, Luce Irigaray and the Female Self' in Beyond Representation: Philosophy and Poetic Imagination, ed. by Richard Eldridge (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995) pp.249-272 (p.250).

²⁹ Simone De Beauvoir, of course was the originator of this phrase in her classic (1949) study The Second Sex (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984).

³⁰ Diana Fuss 'Essentialism in the Classroom' in Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference (New York: Routledge, 1989), pp.113-119 (p.119).

³¹ Battersby, p.2.

Taken to its logical limit, the sex/ gender distinction suggests a radical discontinuity between sexed bodies and culturally constructed genders. [...] Further, even if the sexes appear to be unproblematically binary in their morphology and constitution (which will become a question), there is no reason to assume that genders ought also to remain as two. The presumption of a binary gender system implicitly retains the belief in a mimetic relation of gender to sex whereby gender mirrors sex or is otherwise restricted by it. When the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that *man* and *masculine* might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and *woman* and *feminine* a male body as easily as a feminine one.³²

This claim is in contrast to Battersby's contention that although sex and gender are not so easily extricable one from another, this does not affect the terms 'female' and 'feminine' which remain distinguishable:

To be female is to be allocated to one of two sexes on the basis of the way one's body is perceived. To be 'feminine' is to possess characteristics of mind, behaviour, comportment or expression that are, in our culture, more standardly associated with females than males. As such, there is no contradiction at all in being a 'feminine' male. However, a 'female' male involves a category mistake.³³

Unlike Battersby, Butler prefers to see both sex and gender as constructs:

If the immutable character of sex is contested, perhaps this construct called "sex" is as culturally constructed as gender; indeed, perhaps it was always already gender, with the consequence that the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all. [. . .] It would make

³² Butler, p.6.

³³ Battersby, p.2.

no sense, then, to define gender as the cultural interpretation of sex, if sex itself is a gendered category.³⁴

Using Butler's notion then of 'gender trouble' and the sense that both sex and gender are reducible to gender (especially if sex and gender are recognised as culturally acceptable modes of performance) I will refer to a 'gendered self' in autobiography which can be male/masculine or female/feminine: what I mean by a gendered self is a *specifically located* (social, historical, geographical) construction of feminine and/ or masculine traits.

³⁴ Butler, p.7.

Chapter Three

The Divided Self:

Finding Signs of Fragmentation in the Unitary (Male) Subject

In the following two chapters I focus on three canonical texts written by men from three very different geographical locations, writing in three distinct historical periods: St. Augustine's Confessions (North Africa, 367 A.D.), Dante Alighieri's La Vita Nuova (Italy, 1292), and John Bunyan's Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners (England, 1666).³⁵ Since autobiographies by men are consistently referred to as paradigmatic of the genre regardless of differences in time and place, I ask whether in a feminist re-reading they continue to represent what has been claimed for them. This reading also to a large extent ignores time and place but focuses on the structure and content of the autobiographical material. In particular, I explore and critique the notion that the male subject of autobiography is 'unitary' and 'autonomous', setting up a series of counter-examples from each of the canonical texts. In this chapter I suggest that the representation of a 'unitary' self is simultaneously constructed and undermined both by the religious search that drives all three authors and by the structure of autobiography as literary text. In the next chapter, I will then move on to question the existence of an 'autonomous' male self in these texts by showing how the presence of the other (usually a woman but not necessarily so) is crucial to the man's ability to develop a self-identity in his text.

The Unitary Male Self

The notion of a 'unitary' self is one which at the very least needs substantiation by any critic or theorist who wishes to claim its presence. How do we define 'unitary'?

³⁵ Saint Augustine, Confessions trans. by R.S. Pine-Coffin (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961); Dante Alighieri, Vita Nuova e Rime ed. by Guido Davico Bonino (Milan: Mondadori, 1985); John Bunyan, Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners Introduction by W. R. Owens (London: Penguin, 1987).

Can *any* self display undisputable consistency and coherency over time? Is a 'unitary self' simply one which inhabits the same body throughout a lifetime? We know that bodies change, can become unrecognisable through age, disease, or plastic surgery. Perhaps it is for this reason that women are more readily described as 'divided': our bodies typically seen as more susceptible to observable physical and hormonal changes (menstruation, pregnancy, menopause). Is it the continuity of a given name attached to the same body that defines a 'unitary self'? Again, here, women's names in Western culture and religions have always been more mutable than men's. Indeed, the adoption of the husband's name corresponds to the woman's change of status. Perhaps finally the notion of a 'unitary' self is philosophic: 'I think therefore I am' (we know that women have not often been recognised as thinkers)³⁶. Here I investigate the possibility that no self is (or ever has been) 'unitary': in particular, that the concept of a 'unitary self' is contradictory to the autobiographical projects of the male authors under examination.

I. The Literary Text

The supposed unitary nature of the male self is challenged by the very structure of the autobiographical text which seeks to describe that self. A written description of the self requires *a priori* a division of that self into narrator and protagonist. This is particularly the case in religious conversion narratives where the narrator must describe the protagonist as a sinner in contrast to the saintly man he becomes after conversion: the expectation of the reader indeed is that as the narrative progresses the protagonist (sinner) will take on more and more of the characteristics of the narrator (saint). The two selves will ideally textually blend into one as the narration draws to a close: the autobiography at its close unifies what have for the duration of the text been two separate subjects.

³⁶ As Sidonie Smith wryly remarks, 'If the topography of the universal subject locates man's selfhood somewhere between the ears, it locates woman's selfhood between her thighs' (Subjectivity, Identity and the Body: Women's Autobiographical Practices in the Twentieth Century [Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1993], p.12).

I.i. narrator and protagonist in Dante's Vita Nova

Dante wrote the short but densely written Vita Nova between 1292-3, fifteen years before he wrote the masterpiece Divina Commedia. Vita Nova, is in many respects an introduction to the Commedia, beginning to explore themes and concepts that are developed in the later work and experimenting with poetic forms. Although a mixture of poetry, prose and proem (a preface or preamble to a book or speech), and hardly interpretable as a 'retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality', this work has been included by commentators such as William Spengemann in the canon of autobiography.³⁷ Dante begins this work with a highly suggestive metaphor:

In quella parte del libro de la mia memoria dinanzi a la quale poco si potrebbe leggere, si trova una rubrica la quale dice: *Incipit vita nova*. Sotto la quale rubrica io trovo scritte le parole le quali è mio intendimento d'assemblare in questo libello; e se non tutte, almeno la loro sentenza. (I: p.1)

In that part of the book of my memory before which there was little that could be said can be found a rubric which reads: *Incipit vita nova*. Beneath this rubric I find the words which it is my intention to copy into this book; and if I don't record all of them, at least I will copy down the substance of what is written.³⁸

Interpreting memory as a book is a typical medieval conception. This book opens at the end of childhood, since before that time it would be difficult to

³⁷ This much-quoted definition of autobiography is from Philippe Lejeune, 'The Autobiographical Pact' in On Autobiography ed. by Paul John Eakin, trans. by Katherine Leary (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 1989), p.4. Part Two of this thesis includes a discussion of this and other definitions of autobiography.

³⁸ This and subsequent translations my own, unless otherwise stated, with reference to Dante Gabriel Rossetti's 1862 translation, published in Dante's Vita Nuova Together with the Version of Dante Gabriel Rossetti ed. by H. Oelsner (London: Chatto & Windus, 1908) and Charles S. Singleton's 1949 translations published in his An Essay on the Vita Nuova (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1977).

remember. In this book is written the heading in red letters 'Incipit vita nova': 'Here new life commences'. The 'new life' suggests both the beginning of a life that it is possible to remember (it is therefore a 'new life' because consciously lived, ready for narration); it also suggests the 'new life' generated by the poet's love for Beatrice, which began when he was a mere nine years old and therefore coincided with the (medieval) end of childhood.

Memory is a book and Dante is a scribe: he will copy from this book and in so doing create the book we are at present reading. What are the implications of this conceit? In Dante's time, the book he is describing would be written, not printed, and this writing would be done in pen and ink by a scribe, one copy at a time. A scribe's life's work is to diligently copy books. Dante sets himself up as a scribe at his usual task. Before him is his text (*l'esempio*) and he must reproduce this text letter by letter (*assemblare*).³⁹ Whatever is written down for us here already exists as a book: this is a mere copy, pre-scribed in the book of memory. Just as St. Augustine describes a life which follows a providential pattern (everything that is to come is known and 'planned' by God), Dante's story of his life assumes a blueprint which predates the description (or copy) of that life. The emphasis in Dante's work is markedly different, however: he is not attempting to *transform* his life into a text but is going to *transpose* that life from one text to another.

In beginning his tale with the metaphor of the scribe Dante confuses the identity of the author-narrator-protagonist. The very term 'scribe' disrupts notions of originality and authorship. In telling us that the book we are reading is a copy, he underlines the possibility of imperfections and the intrinsic *difference* from the original. But what or who is the original? The immediate original is not the life itself but the book of memory which, as we have seen, begins its narrative some time after the life itself has already begun. If Dante is a man who exists outside the text, whose story will here be told? If his memory is the original book, who is the scribe? If the scribe is also the narrator then whose memory is this? A scribe would not normally be

³⁹ Charles S. Singleton draws attention to these terms in his (1949) An Essay on the Vita Nuova (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1977), p.27.

the author of the text he is copying: the book belongs to another subject, it cannot be the scribe's own. Moreover, as Charles Singleton points out, the scribe does not keep strictly to his role but takes far greater liberty. He will copy the substance ('sentenzia') but not the entire text. This is an important omission because no one other than the scribe has access to the original. The scribe thus assumes the role of editor.⁴⁰ At the end of the second chapter he says:

E pero che soprastare a le passioni e atti di tanta gioventudine pare alcuno parlare fabuloso, mi partiro da esse; e trapassando molte cose le quali si potrebbero trarre de l'esempio onde nascono queste, verro a quelle parole le quali sono scritte ne la mia memoria sotto maggiori paragrafi.

(II. p.3)

But to dwell on the actions and passions of youth might seem somewhat foolish, and so I will leave them; and passing over many things which might be taken from the original where these things too were born, I will come to those words which are written in my memory as larger paragraphs.

He chooses from the text of his memory (which itself is a limited text of his life) those paragraphs that strike him as more important: some words stand out more than others and for this he chooses them. Moreover, there are poems he has written that he has chosen *not* to copy down here. As Singleton remarks, 'this scribe, therefore, is not even giving all of that part of the original text of which he himself is the author.'⁴¹

⁴⁰ This concept has interesting parallels with contemporary debates surrounding the posthumous editing and publishing of papers. When New Zealand-born author Katherine Mansfield died in 1923 she left explicit instructions with her husband, John Middleton Murry, to 'publish as little as possible and tear up and burn as much as possible'. Murry then became the scribe/ editor for her texts but 'there is no evidence that Murry destroyed anything at all'. (C.K.Stead, 'Introduction' *The Letters and Journals of Katherine Mansfield* ed. by C.K. Stead [London: Penguin, 1977], p.10. Indeed Murray subsequently put together scraps and virtually illegible letters and lists that Katherine had written to create a whole: a *Journal* and a *Scrapbook*. This is considered a brilliant piece of 'editorial patchwork' but also a 'brilliant piece of editorial deception' (Ian A. Gordon, quoted in Stead, pp. 13-14). Murry puts together in Mansfield's name something that she had never envisaged as a published whole. He has then, very badly copied the text and instead of taking out the larger paragraphs, has included all the pauses and experiments between.

⁴¹ Singleton, p.29.

narrative voice

The identity of 'Dante' in this text is immediately complex and layered. But not only does the author confound expectations of the unitary male subject by complicating notions of text and authorship, he also splits his narrator into several different voices through the use of different narrative forms. The text is a weave of various writerly techniques: passages of prose which describe events and emotions; sonnets and canzone which repeat these emotions; prose passages which comment upon the poem and instruct the reader as to how it should be divided and why. Take the following extracts from three consecutive passages in Vita Nuova. The first is in prose:

Appresso di questa soprascritta visione, avendo già dette le parole che Amore m'avea imposte a dire, mi cominciaro molti e diversi pensamenti a combattere e a tentare, ciascuno quasi indefensibilmente; tra li quali pensamenti quattro mi pareva che ingombrassero più lo riposo della vita. (XIII: p.18)

After this vision I have recorded, and having written those words which Love had dictated to me, I began to be harassed with many and divers thoughts, by each of which I was sorely tempted; and in especial, there were four among them that left me no rest.⁴²

the second is taken from the lyric lines of verse:

Tutti li miei penser parlan d'Amore;
e hanno in lor sì gran varietate,
ch' altro mi fa voler sua potestate,
altro folle ragiona il suo valore [...] (XIII, p.19)

All my thoughts always speak to me of Love

⁴² The translation here is Rossetti's in Oelsner, p.49. The subsequent translations are from pages 51 and 53 respectively.

Yet have between themselves such difference
 That while one bids me bow with mind and sense
 A second saith, 'Go to: look thou above' [...]

the third is from the succeeding proem (or commentary):

Questo sonetto in quattro parti si può dividere: ne la prima dico e soppongo, che tutti li miei
 pensieri sono d'Amore; ne la seconda dico che sono diversi, e narro la loro diversitade [...].
 (XIII: 20)

This sonnet can be divided into four parts. In the first, I say and propound that all my thoughts
 concern Love; in the second, I say that they are diverse, and I relate their diversity.

Through this device the text takes on many tones although all are unified by the use of the first-person narrative voice: the first is the straightforward narrative style of prose in which something happens, there is a story to tell; the second dwells on the beauty, lyricism and sound of words whilst at the same time retelling the story; the third comments upon and didactically (almost obtrusively) explains what the poet is doing in the previous lines.⁴³

But the above technique has other effects. As we have seen, the protagonist of 'autobiography' is always a different subject from the narrator because of the distance of time that divides them. The movement is not only towards them becoming the same; it is a movement towards the present moment. To write an autobiography is to look back and tell 'a life' from memory. But rather than present a straightforward retrospective account, Dante includes poems he wrote soon after the event which caused him to write them. These poems are retrospectively selected and woven into

⁴³ This has the strange effect of making the poems both repetitive and refreshing. The reader comes to the poems already knowing the story they will tell, a replica of what a moment before was told in prose. The only difference is the choice of words and their form and this indeed is what distinguishes poetry from prose. Dante in effect de-mythologises poetry, showing the reader that it is another way of saying the same thing.

an account of Dante's life (rather like including diary jottings in an autobiography).⁴⁴ The narrator (as editor, scribe and commentator) thus copies poems that the protagonist has written earlier, introducing another narrative voice - the author of the poems. The scribe adds texts to the given text and in so doing continues to layer his own subjectivity: Dante the scribe brings in a commentator (who must be the author of the inserted poems) to explain the poems that the scribe has copied.

1.ii. narrator and protagonist in Bunyan's Grace Abounding

Just as Dante's text divides its narrator into disparate selves, so too Bunyan's 'spiritual autobiography' confounds even the purely textual expectations of unification, keeping both narrator and protagonist in a simultaneous tension from the beginning to the end of his narrative.

Bunyan called his autobiography/ confession/ testimony of 1666, Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners. The emphasis already announced in the title is that the very worst of men can receive an inversely proportionate amount of grace from God. Indeed, it is part of the didactic or sermon-like quality of Grace Abounding to present the man undergoing conversion as the most grievous sinner so that his wrestles with the Devil appear all the more threatening, and the arduous progress towards faith the more tortuous and dramatic.⁴⁵ Thus the difference and distance between the author's two selves is exaggerated.

However, this sinning self is not, as might be expected, confined to Bunyan's narrative of his life up to the point of conversion. About ninety percent of his biographical material is dedicated to life *after* conversion. Indeed, his greatest sin comes after he has decided to commit himself to God, when he succumbs to the Devil's suggestion that he should 'sell' his Saviour: 'this sin was bigger than the sins

⁴⁴ In Part Three, we will see that Janet Frame also includes poems written when she was a child in her autobiography.

⁴⁵ Bunyan's presumptuous title Chief of Sinners 'has often been taken to indicate a streak of spiritual egotism in his character' [W. R. Owens, Introduction Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners (London: Penguin, 1987), pp.vii-xxiii (p.xviii)]. However, as Owens points out, this is also the title that the apostle Paul adopts in his epistle to Timothy and in many ways we can see that Bunyan uses him as both a spiritual and literary role model.

of a country, of a kingdom, or of the whole world, no one pardonable, nor all of them together, was able to equal mine, mine outwent them every one (l.43; p.172). ⁴⁶

Bunyan's sins, coming after conversion, unlike St. Augustine's, are never actions, but thoughts. This internalisation, common to Puritan believers, forced the sinner to focus on the opposing elements of good and bad within (him)self, often resulting in Bunyan in a kind of internal dual between God and Satan. To discover the 'inner man' in the Puritan sense requires intensive self-examination. Many Puritans kept daily 'accounts' of their credit with God, going over the smallest and most insignificant details of the day to see exactly what their thoughts and motives were and if there were signs therein of God's grace or mercy. In Bunyan's peculiar yet typical model, each day, sometimes each minute, produced anguished self-reflection: 'I should be sometimes up and down twenty times an hour' (l.191; p.50).

Bunyan was by no means the only seventeenth century autobiographer to chronicle the fierce battles in his inner self and George Goodwin, in his poem 'Auto-Machia', describes a very similar experience:

I sing my SELF; my *Ciivil-Warrrs* within;
 The *Victories* I howrely lose and win;
 The dayly *Duel* , the continuall Strife,
 The *Warr* that ends not, till I end my life.⁴⁷

The Puritan faith in focusing so hard on this 'inner man' further encouraged a fragmented or divided self by promoting a perceived split between 'inner' and 'outer'. The 'outer man' is merely a shell, the body; it is what goes on in the mind, conscience, heart and soul of the believer that is crucial to (his) salvation. The outer man, even if 'holy' in behaviour and appearance, participating in religious rituals and enacting the

⁴⁶ The figures in brackets refer to the line number followed by the page. All subsequent references to Bunyan's Grace Abounding will be cited in this way and incorporated in the text.

⁴⁷ Quoted in Owen C. Watkins, The Puritan Experience (London: Routledge, 1972), p.12.

Word of God, was no insurance for the state of the soul.⁴⁸ Throughout his autobiography, Bunyan continues to distinguish between inner and outer selves. He describes an attack of consumption as being 'violently seized with much weakness in my outward man' (1.255; p.65) but later, when pondering his chances of salvation after nearly dying from this disease, exclaims: 'now was I sick in my inward man, my soul was clogged with guilt' (1.257; p.65).

Not even the protagonist (who is only one of two of the textual manifestations of the author) then displays a 'unitary' self. In Bunyan's tale, there is a further division between narrator and author. The narrator, far from standing on the solid ground of faith towards which the protagonist must inexorably move, turns out to be as doubting and uncertain as his former self. Just as Thomas De Quincey declares in his autobiography that he has successfully weaned himself off opium while the texts he publishes subsequently prove him to be more addicted than ever, the various postscripts added to Bunyan's text put in question his apparently successful conversion.⁴⁹ In these addenda, Bunyan relates how he was imprisoned, and what was said at his trial. Felicity Nussbaum argues that:

Each section of Grace Abounding culminates in a tentative resolution, but the various addenda [...] disclose that any resolution describes a fragile construct rather than a stable or unified converted identity. The converted "self" threatens to break apart at every turn.⁵⁰

She goes on to argue that these appendices suggest 'new risks that the conversion will be undone'. Importantly, 'The Conclusion' to Bunyan's autobiography seems to emphasise these oscillations as part of the lot of any man sworn to faith in the Puritan God. Bunyan confesses the persistently dual nature of his actions: 'I can do none of those things which God commands me, but my corruptions will thrust in themselves; when I would do good,

⁴⁸ The teachings of Luther were in many ways a reaction against Catholicism and Popery which in his eyes placed too high an emphasis on the outer man.

⁴⁹ Thomas DeQuincey, 1822 Confessions of an English Opium (Harmondsworth: penguin, 1971). Spengemann includes a detailed analysis of De Quincey's writing.

⁵⁰ Nussbaum, p.67.

evil is present with me' (1.6; p.83). However, this is no real cause for alarm, since his own failings encourage him to 'watch and be sober' (1.7; p.83) and to place his trust in God rather than rely on his own ability to know the truth and combat the Devil within him alone.

There are further divisions: this anguished, doubting protagonist is never reconciled to the author of the text. At the end of Bunyan's added sections are appended seven pages written by an anonymous author and included in the seventh edition of Grace Abounding published in 1692. Here we are told what happened to Bunyan 'where he left off', the time and manner of his death and burial, and given a short sketch of his 'true character'. What we are told here is that Bunyan wrote Grace Abounding while serving a twelve-year term of imprisonment for being a dissenting preacher. Furthermore, he refused to waiver in a public declaration of his faith when, after having been imprisoned for twelve weeks, he was given a second opportunity to retract and so be released. This Bunyan then holds so steadfastly to his beliefs that he is prepared to remain in prison for another twelve years in total. In contrast, the protagonist, as we have seen, is one who can oscillate in his faith as much as twenty times in one day.

Bunyan's faith then, and his personal interpretation of this faith, confound the reader's expectations of narrative closure (that protagonist will become narrator; the two selves become one), refusing to allow the text to impose a unity on a self that remains divided.

II Religious Perspective

There are various ways then in which the structure of the text itself imposes a division of the self. In the case of the authors I have chosen to re-read, religious perspective has much the same effect as this in-built textual structuring. What is often described as 'prototypical' of the autobiographical project in St. Augustine's Confessions is his perspective, as though he is standing outside himself looking down. As Ann Hartle explains, 'the self is seen only when it has been transcended [and] can only be seen

for what it truly is from above the self and thus from outside the self. This perspective on the self, on one's own life, is proper to God alone'.⁵¹ This description of Augustine's text underlines what has been seen as his 'unitary' perspective: the self is able to see itself as a complete whole and thus put this self down in words for the reader. All variants of the Christian faith have in a sense this quality of placing the believer outside (him)self so that he can observe his progress, just as God looks down from above and watches the individual fulfil his preordained destiny. This has consequences both for the sense of self of the narrator and (his) point of view. He must try to engineer himself into the transcendent position of God so that he too can look down on (as well as back upon) his life. However, there is an inherent tension in attaining this perspective. As Felicity Nussbaum remarks, 'self-knowledge allows us to identify a "self" or "character" that can be recognised or described; but, at the same time, only the Absolute Subject can know the "self". Thus, it is an impossible and even heretical task to compete with God's understanding of one's "interior"'.⁵² However, Augustine notably manages to achieve this perspective without literally taking up God's position. He looks into his soul for the first time and tells us: 'What I discovered was quite, quite different from any light we know on earth. It shone above my mind but not in the way that oil floats above water or the sky hangs over the earth. It was above me because it was itself the light that made me, and I was below because I was made by it' (VI, p.147). This perspective is complicated later when Augustine, on the brink of conversion, listens to the story of the Egyptian monk, Antony (who renounced all his possessions), and thinks: 'O Lord, you were turning me round to look at myself. For I had placed myself behind my back, refusing to see myself' (VIII, p.169). Augustine acknowledges that God was looking over him well before he was aware of it: 'You had mercy on me even before I had confessed to you' (III, p.62) and later he tells God, 'You were guiding me as a helmsman steers a ship, but the course you steered was beyond my understanding' (IV, p.84).

⁵¹ Ann Hartle, *The Modern Self in Rousseau's Confessions: A Reply to St. Augustine* (Indiana: U of Notre Dame P, 1983), pp. 92-3.

⁵² Nussbaum, p.62.

John Bunyan in Grace Abounding does not directly describe himself in the position of overseer and yet he, like Augustine, looks back on his earlier life for signs of God's mercy and evidence of His providential plan. He finds many examples: he was nearly drowned in a creek; he found an adder in his path and somewhat recklessly stunned it and plucked out the sting with his fingers; he was chosen to go and fight as a soldier but a friend asked to go in his place. This friend was shot in the head and died. Bunyan has been criticised for this capacity to rewrite God's mercy into his past: he 'ran the risk of being inaccurate when he attributed certain fortunate incidents of his youth to a providential care which he was not aware of at the time'.⁵³ It has also been argued that 'some of the incidents that Bunyan added to later editions of Grace Abounding suggest that isolated and forgotten incidents were recalled as he found that they could be related to his dominant theme'.⁵⁴ However, both religion and autobiography enforce such a reworking of events on the author. The Puritan faith *requires* a division of the self at many levels and precludes the successful unification of these selves by the subject alone. Those commentators who have condemned Bunyan for manipulating his story to fit an idealised pattern are virtually condemning the workings of memory which can only be an imperfect, distorted and fragmentary image of lived experience. As Roy Pascal comments in Design and Truth: 'even an inaccurate or treacherous memory is not a serious problem in autobiography because its purpose is not to reconstruct the past but to interpret it and thereby find a meaning in individual life'.⁵⁵ Conventions of faith can retrospectively structure the text in a general way, minimising the possibility for personal variations. How far Bunyan's own experience is moulded by the conventions of his faith or how far he moulds his text to fit that description are much in dispute. Paul Delaney declares that the influence of Bunyan's text 'worked mainly to blunt the autobiographical sensibilities of his less gifted fellows'.⁵⁶ Felicity Nussbaum more generously argues:

⁵³ 'Professor Talon' quoted in Owen C. Watkins, The Puritan Experience (London: Routledge, 1972), p.117.

⁵⁴ Watkins, p.57.

⁵⁵ Quoted in Watkins, p.226.

⁵⁶ Delaney, p.89.

It is not so much a question for these spiritual autobiographers of recording exactly what happened, but of attempting to fit lived experience and subjectivity within the parameters of credible frameworks. Such patterns may be thought of less as the natural expression of reality than as recognized codes pressed upon the real. [...] Especially in autobiographical texts, identities interact with generic conventions; identities are produced through genres, and autobiographical genres, through conceptions of identity.⁵⁷

Religion, like autobiography, allows a meaning and structure to be laid on life, imposing an illusory sense of unity both before and after that life is inscribed as text. In the now large body of criticism that exists on the literary genre of autobiography it has too often been taken for granted that the male narrator is *before he writes* per force a unitary subject. The canonical texts re-read here are examples of the extent to which a re-reading can provide an entirely different 'subject of autobiography' and thus have a profound impact on histories of the self in general.

⁵⁷ Nussbaum, p.65.

Chapter Four

Intimate Relations:

Re-thinking the autonomous subject

Having suggested how the male self of canonical autobiographies can be read as fragmented rather than unitary, I now go on to critique the claim that this male self is 'autonomous'. Returning to the notion of a 'different poetics' discussed in Chapter Two, feminist critics, in refusing to accept the 'universal' claims of what was in fact a specifically located male subject, defined women in contrast to men. In particular, in the late seventies, feminists queried the notion of 'autonomy' by contrasting it with the social and emotional 'dependency' of women. Nancy Chodorow was one of the first and most influential of 70s feminists to give a psychoanalytic basis to what had until then been observations:

From the retention of preoedipal attachments to their mother, growing girls come to define and experience themselves as continuous with others; their experience of self contains more flexible and permeable ego boundaries. Boys come to define themselves as more separate and distinct, with a greater sense of rigid ego boundaries and differentiation. The basic feminine sense of self is connected to the world, the basic masculine sense of self is separate.¹

Feminist critics of autobiography in the 80s took up this notion of the female self as 'connected to the world'. An influential article published in 1980 by Mary Mason on 'The Other Voice: Autobiographies of Men Writers' exemplifies this description of the female self as dependent on the other for its full (self)-realisation:

¹ Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering* (Berkeley: California UP, 1978), p.169. This passage is also quoted in Nancy K. Miller, 'Representing Others: Gender and the Subjects of Autobiography', *Differences*, 6 (1994), 1-27 (p.3).

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'. This recognition of another consciousness [...], this grounding of identity through relation to the chosen other, seems [...] to enable women to write openly about themselves.²

Sidonie Smith describes how discourses around women's bodies and their biological capacity to reproduce, have meant that woman is seen as 'affiliated physically, socially, psychologically in relationships to others', and quoting Susan Bordo, that 'her individuality [is] sacrificed to the "constitutive definitions" of her identity as member of a family, as someone's daughter, someone's wife and someone's mother'.³

Such descriptions rely on a dialectics of male as subject versus female as other. However, many feminists and theorists of 'othering' have been trying to dismantle this opposition, arguing that the borders between the two are by no means clear or fixed and that the status of the other is never permanent.⁴ My own perspective is to take up theorists who identify the other as inscribed within and therefore intrinsic to any discourse of the subject. I argue, as Paul Gilroy and Toni Morrison have done for the black self that the other is an intrinsic component of subject-ivity. This is to argue for presence rather than absence; to look at texts by male subjects not in order to say, 'There you see, she just isn't there!' but in order to say, 'She was there all the time . . . why has it taken us so long to find her?'

Paul Gilroy develops the concept of the 'Black Atlantic' in order to reaffirm the subjectivity of the black European. He argues that the white western concept of 'modernity' is based on the Atlantic, on the slave trade and 'black' economy that

² Mary Mason, 'The Other Voice: Autobiographies of Men Writers', in Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical, ed. by James Olney (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1980), p.210.

³ Sidonie Smith, Subjectivity, Identity and the Body: Women's Autobiographical Practices in the Twentieth Century (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1993), p.13.

⁴ See for example Trinh T.Minh-ha, "'Not You/ Like You": Post-Colonial Women and the Interlocking Questions of Identity and Difference', Inscriptions, 3-4 (1988), 71-77; Edward Said, 'An Ideology of Difference', Critical Inquiry, 12 (1985), 38-58; Homi K.Bhabha, 'Of Mimicry and Man: the Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse', October, 28 (1984), 125-133.

allowed the white man to see himself as a unitary, dominant and autonomous subject. Blackness is a necessary component of the white psyche.⁵ Toni Morrison similarly addresses the problem of the figure of the black American in American consciousness, first, as a black reader, and second, as a black writer. She tells how literary critics (both black and white) have consistently assumed that 'traditional canonical American literature is free of, uninformed, and unshaped by the four-hundred-year-old presence of, first, Africans and then African-Americans in the United States'.⁶ She says that her early assumptions as a reader were that blacks did not signify in the imagination of white American writers. But when she looks at the texts as a writer she realises that texts actually tell very different stories from what we as readers have been trained to see. Morrison had assumed that if the author of a text was not black, 'the appearance of Africanist characters or narrative or idiom in a work could never be about anything other than the "normal", unracialized, illusory white world that provided the fictional backdrop'. But then she makes a crucial realisation:

The fabrication of an Africanist persona is reflexive; an extraordinary meditation on the self; a powerful exploration of the fears and desires that reside in the writerly conscious. It is an astonishing revelation of longing, of terror, of perplexity, of shame, of magnanimity. It requires hard work *not* to see this.⁷

If the black American were truly absent from American history and Western philosophy, there would be no subject to speak of (there would be no subject to speak).

Carolyn Steedman makes a similar point in her article 'Modernity's Suffering Self'. The 'modern self' (in the sense of an 'individual' with 'character') so often described as coming into being in and through the eighteenth century novel, is defined first and foremost through his or her ability to empathise.⁸ This ability is dependent on

⁵ Paul Gilroy, The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness (London: Verso, 1993).

⁶ Toni Morrison, 'Black Matters' in Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination (London: Picador - Pan Macmillan, 1993), pp. 1-28 (pp.4-5).

⁷ Morrison, p.17; emphasis in text.

⁸ Carolyn Steedman, 'Modernity's Suffering Self'. (Paper presented to conference 'Autobiographies:

knowing about the suffering of others. The stories of suffering used in order to forge the subject of modernity are those of subordinates (most typically female servants). The 'life stories' of the lower classes (often officially required by the emerging administrative state, in order, for example, for the claimant to gain Poor Law settlement, and less officially through the servant's 'Character' or testimonial presented to prospective employers) constitute the raw material against which novelists such as Daniel Defoe in Moll Flanders and Mary Wollstonecraft in Maria, or, the Wrongs of Women are able to construct a sympathetic protagonist. The motif of survival is here a sinister one: the suffering of others (socially necessary poverty, misery and hardship) enables the survival of the moral sensibility of the bourgeoisie.

In the above theoretical positions which primarily address the categories of race and class, the subject of modernity, the subject of the text, and the author's own subjectivity, are described as being constructed on the body of the other. Such concepts can be used in order to deconstruct and reconstruct images and notions of the gendered self. We know that there always will be subjects and others but we cannot predict in what quantities they exist in any one person at any one time or place. Are feminists reinforcing the anachronistic status of the subject by making exclusive claims to alterity and fragmentation? If we take Morrison, Gilroy and Steedman seriously and use their insights to analyse the self narrated through autobiography, we should be able to find women inscribed everywhere as essential to the narrated subject-ivities of the European male canon. In other words, if the male self is dependent on inscribing the female self in order to achieve a notion of subjectivity, how then can that self possibly remain autonomous?

The Autonomous Male Self

In this chapter then I re-read the same canonical male texts investigated in the previous chapter, for signs of alterity rather than autonomy. At a general level, in each of the texts, woman is the medium through which the man comes to knowledge of God: the

protagonist of each autobiography places women in his narrative as the other against whom he measures his progress towards faith. However, at another level too, in all three texts, the other (most commonly woman) is fundamental to the author's growing sense of self. In other words, the male subjects of these texts construct a subjectivity through and against alterity as it has been claimed is women's prerogative. Since Augustine's, Dante's and Bunyan's texts all describe religious quests, it could be said that at a primary level the desire to describe the other (God or godliness) structures and organises the autobiography. St. Augustine addresses his Confessions directly to God and his reason for telling is not only to understand and see his own life better but to know God better, to see in his own life the pattern that God has preordained. Bunyan, on the other hand, a Puritan Protestant and dissenter, must find God within himself. His revelations are internal, dependent on his thoughts rather than the biographical events of his life. Dante, a medieval Italian poet, finds God neither in his life nor his self but in a woman, the divine Beatrice; it is in describing her beatitude that he hopes to convey to the reader the truth of eternal love.

Indeed, not only do they inscribe the other, but in so doing, each text presents a different form of alterity. Augustine eventually comes to see himself as standing *beside* his mother; Bunyan consistently locates women as directly *opposite* himself; whereas the women of Dante's text stand for or *take the place of* God or Godliness; they are an earthly substitute but they also stand *before* God, representing the ultimate mediating link on the path towards him. These varied forms of alterity can be used to complicate and question the relationship between self and other.

I. Augustine's Confessions: 'standing by' the other

In Augustine's text it is not difficult to sense an identity constructed on alterity since others are always present, whether his mother, his concubine, his friend, his son, a priest. Augustine indeed confesses his sin was to '[look] for pleasure, beauty, and truth not in [God] but in myself and his other creatures'.⁹

⁹ Saint Augustine, Confessions, trans. by R.S. Pine-Coffin (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961), Book I,

In her chapter on Augustine, Françoise Lionnet undertakes 'a feminist reappropriation of the covertly maternal elements of [...] the *Confessions*'.¹⁰ Nancy K. Miller, in focusing on 'Monica's importance as a mother to the literary structure of autobiography', similarly shows how St. Augustine has what can accurately be described as a non-individuated relationship with his mother, the saintly Monica.¹¹ It is Monica who continually attempts to convert Augustine to the Christian faith, and she who sees Augustine in a dream which then becomes central to the text. In this dream, Monica is standing on a wooden rule and coming towards her, bathed in light, is a young man. This man asks her why she is so sad and she says she is crying for the soul her son has lost. But he replies that if she looked carefully she would see that where she was standing on the rule, so also was her son. Augustine interprets his mother's dream as meaning that his mother would come to join him in his Manichean beliefs but she replies without hesitation, 'No! He did not say "Where he is you are" but "Where you are he is"' (III: XI; 68). Miller emphasises that this dream is essentially a dream of alterity. For while it is his mother who dreams it, it is Augustine who comes to acknowledge the truth of his movement towards her and their positioning side by side on the same rule. I would add here that the fact that mother and son are actually physically linked by the rule is also suggestive of Chodorow's description of the nature of femininity cited at the beginning of this chapter: girls 'define and experience themselves as continuous with others'.

Miller remarks too, that when Monica dies the biographical section of Augustine's autobiography stops soon after: 'With Monica's death, Augustine finally achieves separation from the mother, and in the process attains the lonely silhouette of the idealized solitary figure we associate with the heroic tradition of spiritual autobiography'.¹² However, there is a difficulty in this interpretation which Miller does

section 20; pp.40-1. Subsequent references will be abbreviated as (I:XX; 40-1) and included within the text.

¹⁰ Françoise Lionnet, 'Augustine's *Confessions*: Poetics of Harmony, or the Ideal Reader in the Text' in *Autobiographical Voices: Race, Gender, Self-Portraiture* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1989), pp. 35-66 (p.19).

¹¹ Nancy K. Miller, 'Representing Others: Gender and the Subjects of Autobiography', *Differences*, 6 (1994), 1-27 (p.9)..

¹² Miller, p.14. It would be extremely interesting to apply this notion of the 'idealized solitary figure'

not really tackle. If it is true that with Monica's death, the narrative linearity comes to an end, in what way can Augustine then be said to 'enter' the text? If the final third of his text is written without the help of his mother, it is also in this section that he inscribes himself as an autonomous subject, thinking out loud and conversing with the reader and his God. It could be argued then that it is the removal of the other that allows the birth into subjectivity. However, it is the linear, chronological narrative that is dependent on the presence of Augustine's mother: as we saw in Chapter Two, Estelle Jelinek has described this linearity as characteristic of the male text. With Monica absent, Augustine focuses instead on his inner being, the present moment and the general thoughts he has on the philosophical topics of time, memory and genesis.

While Augustine's mother is the means of his coming to faith, his long and anguished struggle to have faith is prolonged by his desire to lie with women. He confesses that at sixteen he 'ran wild with lust that was manifold and rank' (II:I; 43) and that 'this was the age at which the frenzy gripped me and I surrendered myself entirely to lust' (II: II, 44). He goes to Carthage to study 'in the midst of a hissing cauldron of lust' (III:I, 55). He even tells us that he gratified his carnal passions 'within the walls of [God's] church during the celebration of [His] mysteries' (III:III; 57). As a young man, Augustine lived with his mistress whom he had chosen 'for no special reason but that my restless passions had alighted on her', although adding, 'But she was the only one and I was faithful to her' (IV: II, 72). This woman bears him a child. Augustine remains deeply tormented. He is overcome by his desire to lie with women but cannot find 'continence', believing it to be in man's power (rather than God's) to renounce all bodily passions. Thus incapable of chastity, he makes a proposal of marriage and has to give up his mistress. He describes his ties to her poetically: 'this was a blow which crushed my heart to bleeding, because I loved her dearly' (VI:XV; 131). Ironically, Augustine, unable to live without lust, soon takes another mistress

to the 'man alone' theme popularised in New Zealand by the publication of John Mulgan's novel of that title (Auckland: Longman Paul, 1972). The notion that each country has its own specific notion of autonomy that might be conditioned by climate, vegetation and geography as much as social and political considerations, is a topic worth investigating and one that will be developed in the conclusion to this thesis.

after his long-term lover, respecting his desire for celibacy, returns to Africa with their son.

It is not until Book VIII that Augustine finally renounces his deep-seated desire for women's bodies. He is disarmingly honest about his previous attempts to find God: 'I had prayed to you for chastity and said "Give me chastity and continence, but not yet". For I was afraid that you would answer my prayer at once and cure me too soon of the disease of lust, which I wanted satisfied, not quelled' (VIII:VII; 169).

On the brink of resolution, women are, in effect, the final obstacle and, consequently, the key to his coming to selfhood. He thinks of all the things he has to give up, particularly his love for women but then has a vision of chastity, seeing a group of figures: 'And in their midst was Continence herself, not barren but a fruitful mother of children, of joys born of you, O Lord, her spouse' (VIII:XI; 176).¹³

Augustine's lust, his weakness, is transformed into the seeds of his faith: a faith that he has always yearned for and which his mother has always embodied.

You converted me to yourself, so that I no longer desired a wife or placed any hope in this world but stood firmly upon the rule of faith, where you had shown me to [my mother] in a dream so many years before. (VIII:XII; 178-79)

In Augustine's confession of his conversion it is clear that women are prominent as both obstacles to and facilitators of his coming to faith.

II. Bunyan's Grace Abounding: 'Standing opposite' the other

Whereas Augustine's early account of his life is characterised by his description of others, John Bunyan, in contrast, seems to stand out indeed as the 'autonomous male' of popular myth, retiring into his angst-ridden self: it is not in his mother, his lover or his friends that we will find examples of alterity in Grace Abounding to the Chief of

¹³ The role of women in dreams and visions is a theme worth exploring further. The women of Bedford are also central in a vision of Bunyan's; and Beatrice, of course, in Dante's Vita Nova, is a central figure in all his visions.

Sinners. While parents are notably absent, friends are introduced in order to be dismissed because their lives are too sinful and might lead him astray. However, on closer examination, we will find that 'others' are briefly present as catalysts to crucial 'turning points' along the long road to conversion: these others are almost always women. Bunyan describes his first conscious consideration of God in the fifteenth paragraph.¹⁴ He describes how he marries a woman whose only dowry was two religious books from her pious father. Indeed, it would appear that it was Bunyan's desire to compete with his wife's descriptions of this man as living a 'strict and holy life[...], both in word and deed' (15: 9) that spurred him to 'some desires of religion' and he begins to go to church twice a day (16: 10). The next turning point comes when a woman hears him swearing and 'though she also was a very loose and ungodly wretch, yet protested that I swore and cursed at that most fearful rate, that she was made to tremble to hear me' (26: 12). From that time forth, miraculously by his own account, he stops swearing and begins to speak more eloquently and fluently than before.

The pivotal turning point comes when 'Providence' sends Bunyan to Bedford:

I came where there was [sic] three or four poor women sitting at a door in the sun, talking about the things of God: and being now willing to hear them discourse, I drew near to hear what they said [...] but now I may say, *I heard, but I understood not*, for they were far above out of my reach, for their talk was about a new birth, the work of God on their hearts, also how they were convinced of their miserable state by nature [...]. They also discoursed of their own wretchedness of heart, of their unbelief, and did contemn [sic], slight, and abhor their own righteousness, as filthy, and insufficient to do them any good. (37: 14; emphasis in text)

Bunyan is profoundly touched by these women who displayed 'such appearance of grace in all they said' (38: 14). The nature of their conversation, their piety, and the

¹⁴ Bunyan's text, as was typical of Puritan autobiographies written at that time, is divided into short numbered sections. For ease of reference these will be shown in the text as (15: 9), the first number referring to the paragraph, and the second to the page number. The edition used is John Bunyan, Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners ed. by W. R. Owens (London: Penguin, 1987).

light of grace on their faces contrasts with his own ignorance of the new birth, the Word and promise. He is thereby made profoundly aware of the deceitfulness and treachery of his own heart (39: 15). It is their *difference* that causes him to ponder the state of his own soul; it is thus their difference that causes him to rethink his self-identity. Importantly, these women return to him as a vision which prefigures his entrance into the Church of God:

I saw as if they were set on the sunny side of some high mountain, there refreshing themselves with the pleasant beams of the sun, while I was shivering and shrinking in the cold, afflicted with frost, snow, and dark clouds; methought also betwixt me and them I saw a wall that did compass about this mountain. (53; 18)

Again, it is the contrast between the women and himself that is underlined. Once converted, it is a woman whom Bunyan chooses as the testing ground for his faith. His wife is pregnant and in great pain, having premature contractions. Bunyan asks God to stop her 'pangs' and 'by this [he] will know that God can discern the most secret thoughts of the heart' (240: 61). Her pain stops immediately.

However, while the grace-filled women of Bedford once caused Bunyan to look carefully into his inner being, and while his wife continues to be the embodiment of spiritual virtue, once converted to the faith, women (in the symbolic, general sense) can only be perceived as oppositional to his faith, temptresses who will lead him astray:

The common salutation of a woman I abhor, 'tis odious to me in whosoever I see it. Their company alone, I cannot away with. I seldom so much as touch a woman's hand, for I think these things are not so becoming to me. (315: 77)

Women then are oppositional to but fundamental to Bunyan's sense of subjectivity. When still a sinner, he perceived women as Madonna figures, shrouded in sunlight and grace who could bring him to communion with God. Once successfully

converted to the status of grace himself, he can see women only as a threat to this state, as temptresses or whores. Bunyan's textual use of women is to set them up as his total opposites in order to define his self more clearly.

III. Dante's Vita Nova: 'standing for' the other

The 'autonomous male self' in Dante's Vita Nuova is disturbed by the transcendental presence of Beatrice who everywhere gives the poet's life its meaning and is the impulse for his lyric poetry.¹⁵ That lyric poetry itself is constructed on the body of the absent other: expressing a desire for something that is unattainable and again disturbing notions of 'autonomy'.

In Vita Nova, the poet Dante first meets Beatrice at the age of nine, when she has just turned eight; the second meeting occurs nine years later. When Beatrice first greets Dante he is so moved that it is obvious to all who observe him that he is in love. But Dante is keen to hide the object of his love from others and even from the lady herself.¹⁶ There arises the opportunity to disguise the object of his desire. One day, in church, Dante sees Beatrice:

Io era in luogo dal quale vedea la mia beatitudine; e nel mezzo di lei e di me per la retta linea sedea una gentile donna di molto piacevole aspetto, la quale mi mirava spesse volte, maravigliandosi del mio sguardare, che pareva che sopra lei terminasse. [...] Allora mi confortai molto, assicurandomi che lo mio secreto non era comunicato lo giorno altrui per mia vista. E mantenevo pensai di fare di questa gentile donna *schermo de la veritade*. (V, 6-7; emphasis added)

I was in a position from which I could see my glorious lady; and between her and me in a direct line, a gracious and very attractive woman was seated, who looked at me many times, wondering

¹⁵ Dante Alighieri, Vita Nuova e Rime, ed. by Guido Davico Bonino (Milan: Mondadori, 1985).

¹⁶ Why he feels the need to hide this love has not been touched on by the critics I have read: perhaps because she was married, as the biographical details parallel to this book suggest (see footnote below). Perhaps it was not considered appropriate courtly behaviour to declare one's desires. See also R.P. Harrison's interpretation of Dante's dream, discussed below.

at my gaze which seemed to have her as its object. [...] This then comforted me greatly, reassuring me that for that day my secret was safe. Then it immediately came into my mind that I might use this courteous lady as a screen for the truth.

Dante managed this dissimulation so well that he kept his secret concealed for several years, even writing sonnets to that lady herself. Indeed, the lady functions as a cipher, masking the real object of his desire which is of course, the lady Beatrice. This 'donna schermo de la veritade' (woman as screen for the truth) then has to leave the city and Dante is obliged to write a sonnet mourning her departure. Soon after, travelling towards the city of his departed 'screen love', Dante has a vision and is told by the Lord of love that he will be provided with another screen lover to act again as surety or cover for his love for Beatrice. Dante immediately follows the Lord's directions, transferring the object of his desires (who is already the recipient of the original transference of his desire) to this new screen woman. However, once more, he performs this dissimulation so effectively that he is the victim of much disparaging gossip, so much so that Beatrice, the true object of his desire, evidently believing him to be a fickle lover (still unaware that he is in fact steadfastly devoted to herself) refuses to greet him: she has heard that this new object of desire is displeased by the poet's attentions. This refusal puts Dante into a literal fever whereupon he has another vision of the Lord of Love who counsels him, 'Fili mi, tempus est un pretermictantur simulacra nostra' ('My son, it is time for us to stop this counterfeiting') and he bids Dante to compose a poem declaring his love for Beatrice, though still not addressed to her directly ('which is hardly fitting') but which speaks of her in the third person.

It is clear, even from a superficial reading of the text, that whether Beatrice existed or not, in this text she comes to represent far more than just herself.¹⁷ The very

¹⁷ Dante scholars have long pondered whether Beatrice really did exist and whether Dante really loved her in the way he describes. None seem to have come up with a definitive reply. H. Oelsner, basing his evidence on the fourteenth century Boccaccio's comments, suggests that there was indeed a woman named Beatrice whom Dante knew but that she married Simone de'Bardi in 1287 and died in 1290. Dante, a few years after the death of this Beatrice, himself married and had several children: to his eldest daughter he gave the name Beatrice (Oelsner, Introduction to Dante's Vita Nuova together with the Version of Dante Gabriel Rossetti ed. by H. Oelsner [London: Chatto & Windus, 1908], p.xi).

name/ noun 'Beatrice', which Dante takes care to use to its full advantage, means 'one who bestows blessings and spiritual joy; a sentimental and intellectual inspiration' and 'beatitudine' describes 'the perfect state of the soul, in Paradise, when it looks upon God'.¹⁸ Beatrice is described in language that associates her with Christ and she transforms all she encounters with her transcendent grace. Moreover, Dante's 'love' relationship does not seem to be based on any direct physical or verbal contact: Beatrice always remains at a distance. Within the text she never speaks, and the only direct communication we are told she has with Dante is to greet him, and subsequently and more importantly, withhold her greeting. Even when Dante writes poems in praise of Beatrice's grace, he disguises the object of his love as another woman. Yet Beatrice has an overwhelming effect on the poet: he trembles in her presence, and is moved to tears by her grief; he takes to his bed and nearly dies when she refuses to greet him. Evidently, Dante wants to show us that Beatrice is more than simply the object of his desire.

Beatrice is continually deflected from being the direct and perceived object of the poet's desires. This is seen too in Dante's playful manipulation of the words 'Beatrice' and 'Primavera'. He describes how one day he sees coming towards him a very beautiful lady, whom he knows to be the object of desire of his *primo amico* and fellow *stilenovista*, the poet, Guido Cavalcanti. This lady's name is Joan, but since she is so beautiful, she is often called Primavera, meaning Spring. Then Dante perceives that Beatrice is following behind her. He interprets this imagery for us: that the lady named Primavera (which can be separated into the Italian words 'prima / verra', or 'the first will come') should come first is only fitting especially as her real name is Joan, or rather John (the Baptist) 'who went before the true light'.¹⁹ Beatrice is always seen behind another woman who screens the dazzling light of her presence, as if to prevent the poet from gazing on her and thus objectifying her. Even if the poet were to look on her the implication is that he would be blinded: thus Beatrice doubly resists

¹⁸ Translated from *Il Nuovo Zingarelli: Vocabolario della Lingua Italiana*, 11th ed. (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1991). Translation my own.

¹⁹ Oelsner, pp.120-1.

objectification. She embodies love, she is its subject, in contrast to these women who protect her from becoming an object of Dante's love.

This screening process, the protection of Beatrice through the deflection of the poet's desire is seen also in the figure of the 'veil' in the vision of Chapter Three of the Vita Nuova. Love appears, personified again as a lord, holding Beatrice in his arms, whose body is naked except for a crimson cloth that covers it. Love comes towards Dante smiling and then holds out the poet's heart and gives it to Beatrice, who, grimacing with fear, eats it. To get at the figurative sense of this dream, Robert Pogue Harrison guides us to the cloth that covers the body of Beatrice:

While it prohibits a view of her naked body, it also allows Dante to recognize the body as a body without violating a code of courtesy to which he was socially and ideologically bound. The cloth then, acts as a censor, or as a prohibition, but at the same time it acts as the very opposite of this. Insofar as it guards the presence of the naked body by veiling it, the cloth grants Dante the permission to look at the body and to see without seeing, so to speak.²⁰

Beatrice at once embodies and disembodies desire: the poet desires communion with his lady though to have her is to violate what she is. In this sense she is a supreme Virgin figure.

The fact that, in the poet's description of his vision, it is Beatrice who then eats Dante's heart is an interesting move: the poet, the speaking subject, writes of the object of his desire who never once speaks. This object of desire (her naked body seen yet not seen, known yet not known) appears in a dream of his own invention yet whose meaning is not clear to him. Love, personified as a Lord, is the subject of this dream, the bearer of knowledge that Dante does not possess. Dante is present in the dream, only as his disembodied heart, the physical and thereby mortal emblem of his love. Beatrice, representing eternal love, must consume his heart in order to carry it beyond

²⁰ Robert Pogue Harrison, The Body of Beatrice (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1988), p.23.

the grave, and in eating she is the active subject who contains the objectified, disembodied, temporal self within her own transcendent being.

Harrison suggests that it is the use of poetic language which is central to the creation of subjectivity within the text, arguing that 'the epideictic subject reappropriates itself - that is to say, constitutes its subjectivity - in the act of poetic praise itself'.²¹ Dante tells onlookers to his quivering state of desire that his own 'beatitude' lies in 'those words that do praise my lady'. Indeed the lyric poem is the manifestation of the mechanism of Dante's desire. Harrison argues that the love poem or lyric creates a tension between the poetic subject and (his) object of desire: 'a desire that experiences itself as lack, want, negativity, of non-achievement - in short, as a subjectivity defined by reference to some other transcendent term'.²² This 'lacking subject' then moves towards its fulfillment through the absorption or consumption of the other. The other is, in this case, a positive term, defining the subject in terms of its lack: the normative binary opposition between subject and other is thus overturned.

Re-reading these canonical autobiographies it would seem that, at least as far as the above texts have been interpreted by this reader, the unitary, autonomous (male) self has always been an illusion. Postmodern criticism has made us critically aware of this illusion. As I have shown, earlier writers may well have been keenly aware of their fragmented and non-individuated selves. Indeed, it can be argued that this awareness has always been one of the key motivations behind writing autobiography: to contain oneself as a whole only between the covers.

²¹ Harrison, p.35. Epideictic is one of the three main classes of oratory defined by classical rhetoricians following Aristotle and is 'used on appropriate, usually ceremonial, occasions to enlarge upon the praiseworthiness [...] of a person or group of persons, and in so doing, to display the orator's own talents and skill at rising to the rhetorical demands of the occasion.' (M.H.Abrams, A Glossary of Literary Terms, 6th ed. Fortworth Harcourt Brace, 1993), p.180.

²² Harrison, p.35. Harrison goes on to argue that the Vita Nuova is not a story about how the protagonist became its author (and it could be added therefore that in this sense it is not an autobiography). Rather, Vita Nuova is a narrative about how the 'new life' became a story in the first place, '[it is] a story of the genesis of narrative possibility' (p.94). In other words, the protagonist of this narrative is not the poet Dante but the poetic form itself.

Postscript

I will end with a final example, to offset the balance of reading 'femininity' into the male self of autobiographical texts, by reading so-called 'masculinity' into the female self. My example is taken from Liz Stanley's account of her mother's stroke in the final chapter of her book The Auto/biographical I.²³ As a result of this experience, Stanley noticed and wrote about the fact that there is no essential gendered self as such. She tells how her mother is able to exemplify at different times and in very different situations both the characteristics of the female 'non-individuated' self *and* the male 'unitary' self. Culling her conclusions from oral interviews conducted with her mother for another research purpose, Stanley records how, prior to the stroke, her mother 'held a view of her self as one shared in common with an age cohort centering on her family and friends, a decidedly non-unitary anti-individualist self'.²⁴ However, observing her in the aftermath of a massive stroke she notes that her mother had been 'transformed from someone with a socially constructed self, fully aware of its ontological symbiosis with other selves, to her present residual totally unitary and individualised self.' She goes on to conclude from this that what in Chapter Two of this thesis was referred to as a 'different poetics', 'ignores, silences, or otherwise denies the existence of the many "transtextual" autobiographies that exist: it has been seduced by a political rhetoric which is actually frequently belied by women's *and* men's autobiographical practices'.²⁵

Ultimately, these mis-readings are of vital importance since, as we have seen, histories of autobiography as genre are inextricably linked to histories of the self. As Derrida has noted, in French the language is more explicit, genre and gender being described by the same word.²⁶ It seems appropriate then that we should move from a consideration of the gendered self in autobiography to a consideration of autobiography as genre (and its continued connection with a notion of gender).

²³ Liz Stanley, 'Is there a Feminist Auto/Biography?', The Auto/biographical I (Manchester: Manchester U P, 1992), pp.240-256.

²⁴ Stanley, p.245.

²⁵ Stanley, p.247.

²⁶ See Laura Marcus, pp. 249-50.

PART TWO

Constructing the Subject: The Writer and Reader of Autobiography

Chapter Five

Autobiographical (P)acts: distinguishing between autobiography and novel

Discussions of the autobiographical genre are [...] inseparable from debates about factual and fictional discourse, authorial intention and reference.

Laura Marcus Auto/Biographical Discourses ¹

The binary opposition between fiction and fact is no longer relevant: in any differential system, it is the assertion of the space between the entities that matters.

Paul de Man ²

Laura Marcus identifies a set of distinct concerns in literary theories of autobiography emerging in the 90s: 'the nature and expression of subjectivity; the generic specificity of autobiography; the truth-status and referentiality of autobiography in relation to the fact-fiction dichotomy and the status of fictional entities.' ³ Liz Stanley suggests that women autobiographers in particular have an urgent interest in the definition of the genre:

There are good reasons for the excision of women autobiographers from the canon: a good many of them are dangerously ironic in their treatment of the genre, and they explicitly and artfully play with the conventions of genres, for part of the project which underpins their autobiographies is to recognise the necessary role that 'fiction', in the form of non-referential accounts of the self, has in autobiographical writing.⁴

¹ Laura Marcus, Auto/biographical Discourses (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1994), p. 229.

² Quoted in Linda Hutcheon, A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction (New York: Routledge, 1988), p.113. (Original reference is not given.)

³ Marcus, p.179.

⁴ Liz Stanley, The Auto/biographical I (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1992), p. 61.

In the following two chapters I use Janet Frame's autobiographies and early 'autobiographical' novels as case-studies which suggest important ways in which writers might deliberately play with conventions of the genre. Simultaneously, discussions of autobiography as genre feed back into my reading of Frame's texts, shedding new light on certain passages, themes and metaphors. For Frame as author, the distinction between autobiography and novel, fact and fiction is particularly urgent since it ultimately determines whether she is read as sane or insane and this in turn affects the plausibility of her identity as writer, which might even be seen as the *raison d'être* of her texts. As Laura Marcus suggests: 'there is still further work to be done on the ways in which women have used autobiographies to define, negotiate and contest their "professional" identities as authors'.⁵

Autobiography versus novel

In an inclusive sense, *fiction* is any literary *narrative*, whether in prose or verse, which is invented instead of being an account of events that in fact happened. In a narrower sense, however, fiction denotes only narratives that are written in prose (the *novel* and *short story*), and sometimes is used only as a synonym for the novel.⁶

M.H. Abrams A Glossary of Literary Terms

The literary terms 'autobiography' and 'novel' are often perceived as mutually exclusive: what the novel is, autobiography is not. Autobiography is based more emphatically on fact or reality, the novel on fantasy or imagination. Autobiography is a declared attempt to represent the life of the author; the novel may well represent that life to some degree, introducing characters who might be composites of aspects of the author's personality, but it makes no claims to correspond in any direct way to the author's life.

⁵ Marcus, p.269.

⁶ M.H.Abrams, A Glossary of Literary Terms, 6th ed. (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace, 1993), p.64; emphasis in text (used to direct reader to other terms defined in the glossary).

⁷ M.H.Abrams, A Glossary of Literary Terms, 6th ed. (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace, 1993), p.64; emphasis in text (used to direct reader to other terms defined in the glossary).

Whether or not the dichotomy between 'autobiography' and 'novel' was ever taken at face value is a question that needs to be investigated. It is clear, however, that in the last decade or two the terms upon which the dichotomy is constructed have been steadily questioned. It has been argued that the typical dictionary definition of autobiography, 'the history of a person's life as written by himself', is now obsolete and that 'not one term of it - "history, person, life, writing, or self - would seem self-evident to French intellectuals today."⁷ We can no longer speak confidently of 'biographical fact' and 'truth' and so it would seem that we no longer have solid grounds on which to distinguish autobiography from novel. Yet the perceived differences between the two categories persist in contemporary debates. As Paul de Man described in his influential article 'Autobiography as De-Facement':

Autobiography seems to depend on actual verifiable events in a less ambivalent way than fiction does. It seems to belong to a simpler mode of referentiality, of representation, and of diegesis. It may contain lots of phantasms and dreams, but these deviations from reality remain rooted in a single subject whose identity is defined by the uncontested readability of his proper name.⁸

The emphasis on appearance (*seems*) is important here: autobiography is suggestive of a different kind of reading from the novel, whether or not it is actually possible to state exactly where and how the two categories differ.

I. The Reader: the Autobiographical Pact

Philippe Lejeune, a theorist of autobiography since the early 70s, was able to shift the focus away from the *content* of the text (which begged questions about 'sincerity', 'authenticity' and 'resemblance') to the *intention* of the author. The key difference between autobiography and novel is that in autobiography there is a declared and therefore expected correspondence between the author and the subject described in

⁷ H. Porter Abbott, quoting Germaine Brée in his 'Autobiography, Autography, Fiction: Groundwork for a Taxonomy of Textual Categories' *New literary History*, 19 (1988), 597-615 (p. 598).

⁸ Paul de Man, 'Autobiography as De-Facement' *MLN*, 94 (1979): 919-30 (p.920).

that author's writing: it is immaterial whether that subject is an 'accurate' representation of the author. Lejeune describes this declaration as a 'pact' or contract between reader and writer which is made and confirmed by the author's signature. Thus, the name of the author on the cover of the book (the signature) corresponds to the name of both the narrator and protagonist of the book.⁹ Rousseau's The Confessions of Jean-Jacques Rousseau is particularly interesting in this regard. The narrator admits to having an unreliable memory, declaring 'if by chance I have used some material embellishment it has been only to fill a void due to a defect of memory. I may have taken for fact what was no more than probability'.¹⁰ He admits too that his account is inaccurate, weak on dates, inconsistent and embellished. He even confesses himself a liar: 'I learnt to covet in silence, to conceal, to dissimulate, to lie, and finally to steal'.¹¹ Yet he still insists that the reader believe the veracity of his account. Rousseau is thus credited with re-describing the nature of sincerity and authenticity in autobiography, showing that a more accurate representation focuses on the inner man and his feelings.¹² His tactics allow us to consider that both professed truth and falsehood can equally well express the identity of the author and as H. Porter Abbott has commented, 'as it is always symptomatic, autography, unlike factual writing, is in this regard always true'.¹³ Here, Lejeune's neat definition of the autobiographical pact lets us embrace the true and the false, the sincere and authentic, the deliberately misleading and manipulative as equally relevant to the genre of autobiography. For Lejeune, Rousseau's text, regardless of his confessions, must still be defined as autobiography: Rousseau the author, Rousseau the narrator, Rousseau the protagonist.

Conversely, James Joyce's A Portrait of the Artist as A Young Man, while seen by many as an 'autobiographical novel' (the events of the narrative and the character

⁹ Philippe Lejeune 'The Autobiographical Pact' in On Autobiography, ed. by Paul John Eakin, trans. by Katherine Leary (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1989), 3-30.

¹⁰ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, The Confessions of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, trans. by J.M. Cohen (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1953), p.17.

¹¹ Rousseau, pp.40-41.

¹² Ann Hartle, for example, identifies Rousseau's turn inward as a key marker of the 'modern self' in her The Modern Self in Rousseau's Confessions: A Reply to St. Augustine (Indiana: Notre Dame, 1982).

¹³ Abbott, p. 613. 'Autography' is a term coined by Abbott precisely to avoid problems inherent to the definition of autobiography.

of the protagonist in the novel seeming to correspond to biographical details and accounts of Joyce the author) cannot be defined as 'autobiography' since Joyce has not signed the contract: he names his protagonist Stephen Dedalus. According to Lejeune's pact this will have a profound effect on the way we read Joyce's text.¹⁴ There are of course complications and problems with such a rigid definition: what do we do with Gertrude Stein's Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas, for example? Here is a text, calling itself an autobiography whose title contradicts the tenets of autobiography: how can Stein write an autobiography about anyone but herself? Moreover, in telling the life of Toklas, Stein posits Toklas as narrator giving the impression that, apart from the anomaly of the front cover, inside this text functions as autobiography: Toklas the narrator describes Toklas the protagonist. And yet Toklas, after the first couple of pages ends up talking only of Stein through a narrative style so intrusively Stein's own. Lejeune's pact, while not able to accurately describe Stein's text as autobiography, does help us to pinpoint where her art lies.¹⁵

1.1 reading against the contract

The most intriguing outcome of the contract is that once the intention of the author is established, the reader is then prepared and inclined to read against the author's declaration; to judge to what extent the author keeps to his or her side of the bargain:

An autobiographical fiction may be found "accurate", the protagonist resembling the author; an autobiography may be found "inaccurate", the protagonist presented quite different from the author [...]. Here we can see the importance of the contract which in effect determines the attitude of the reader: if the identity is not affirmed (as is the case in fiction), the reader will

¹⁴ James Joyce, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man. (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth, 1992).

¹⁵ Gertrude Stein, The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas 1933 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966). There are numerous other complications of course. What happens, for example, when the protagonist shares only the first name with the author? In Marcel Proust's Remembrance of Things Past the protagonist is simply Marcel. A similar problem is found in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's Rousseau juge de Jean-Jacques. Here, as Michael O'Dea has discussed (in 'Fiction and the Ideal in *Rousseau Juge de Jean-Jacques*', French Studies, 40 [1986], 141-50) the author introduces two separate characters, Rousseau, the main speaker, and Jean-Jacques, the subject of discussion. Both characters of course share part of Rousseau's name and yet are also distinguished from each other by these names. O'Dea argues that there is a constant tension in the identification of both Jean-Jacques and Rousseau with their author and thus the text can be read as autobiography but at the same time we need to hold these two characters separate since one is judging the other.

try and find resemblances, in spite of the author: and if it is affirmed (as is the case in autobiography), he will tend to want to find the differences.¹⁶

We do not then take the author's association with or dissociation from narrator and protagonist at face value. We will tend to read *against* autobiography, looking for signs of embellishment or inaccuracies: and against fiction, looking for evidence of the author's 'real, lived' life. Here I use readers' reactions to Janet Frame's autobiography and novels to show how 'reading against the contract' might work in practice.

1.ii reading fiction as autobiography

Janet Frame was born in Dunedin in 1924 and is still living and writing in New Zealand. She is often described as New Zealand's 'greatest living writer' and has won all the major literary awards that country has to offer. She has more recently enjoyed an 'overseas' reputation since her autobiographical trilogy was made into an internationally acclaimed film by the New Zealand director Jane Campion, taking its title, *An Angel at My Table*, from Frame's second volume of autobiography.¹⁷ Since the publication of the autobiographies and especially since the release of the film, it has become virtually impossible to read any of Frame's fictional texts without reference to this larger 'Frame'. As Jane Unsworth has argued:

Frame occupies a place in popular consciousness which is largely dependent upon her own life experience as opposed to her work. In conversation I have found that she is most easily identified as 'that woman who was in psychiatric hospital in the 1950s.' Interestingly I have also found that many people respond very positively to the mention of Frame without necessarily having read any of her work. They assume the quality and integrity of her writing

¹⁶ Philippe Lejeune, *Le Pacte Autobiographique*, (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1975), p.26. This and subsequent translations from this text are my own.

¹⁷ *An Angel at My Table*. Dir. Jane Campion. Prod. Bridget Ikin. Hibiscus Films. 1990; Janet Frame, *To the Is-Land: Autobiography 1* (London: Flamingo-HarperCollins, 1993); *An Angel at My Table: Autobiography 2* (London: Flamingo-HarperCollins, 1993); *The Envoy From Mirror City: Autobiography 3* (London: Flamingo-HarperCollins, 1993). All subsequent references to these books will be shown, respectively, in the text in parentheses as *Is-Land*, *Angel* and *Envoy*.

because they respond personally to representations of her autobiography. The woman and her work seem to have become integrally linked in popular readings.¹⁸

However, even before the autobiographies and film compounded this tendency, Frame's early novels, in particular, have often been read autobiographically. This autobiographical reading is encouraged in her first novel by two factors at least. First, in the novel's implied 'realism'. Owls Do Cry (1957) is set in her home town of Oamaru (thinly disguised as 'Waimaru' in the text) and illustrates the effects of a consumer mentality on poor families who have no access to the goods they are encouraged to want, and details such unmapped local landmarks as the town rubbish dump.¹⁹ Second, the specific nature of New Zealand society (a very small population whose 'reported speech' communications system seems to work as efficiently as any media networks) has meant that any similarities between Frame's life and the story she tells in her novel have quickly been transmitted outside Oamaru to other readers in other towns. Owls Do Cry portrays events, surroundings and characters which seem to 'match up' to the events, surroundings and characters of Frame's own experience. The Withers family of the novel seems to mirror the Frame family, with epileptic Toby a thinly disguised version of Janet's brother George, and Chicks a similarly convincing representation of her sister June (also known as Chicks). It is clear that the protagonist Daphne (in Frame's own words a 'sensitive' and 'poetic' person) could be considered a version of the author 'Janet Frame'. Frame, in her autobiography, however, has stressed the 'fictional' content of the novel: 'I began to think, in fiction, of a childhood, home life, hospital life, using people known to me as a base for the main characters' (Angel, p.143).

Daphne Withers is ostracised from a society which has its values in material goods rather than the creative treasures of the mind. She cannot fit in, is hospitalised: the events seem to match up to what was known of Janet Frame's life. This

¹⁸ Jane Unsworth, 'Why does an author who apparently draws so much on autobiography seem committed to 'alienating' the reader? A reflection on theories of autobiography with reference to the work of Janet Frame', in The Uses of Autobiography, ed. by Julia Swindells (London: Taylor and Francis, 1995), 24-30 (p.25).

¹⁹ Janet Frame, Owls Do Cry (London: The Women's Press, 1985).

verisimilitude coupled with the symbolism that pervades much of the novel tended to leave the first critics somewhat confused. A 1957 review in the New Zealand Listener (a popular weekly television and radio magazine) argued:

At least, in *The Lagoon* [Frame's first published collection of short stories], however wildly the imagination soared, we knew always what was image and what was fact.

That I think is the core of the difficulty of *Owls Do Cry*: it is full of superb and triumphant realism, and at the same time it is a work of an unbridled and richly-endowed imagination.²⁰

The implication is that a book should either be fact or fiction: a mixture of the two may mark the text as 'difficult' or even a failure. This review caused a spate of letters to appear in the Listener in the following weeks. G.W. Turner argued that the reader's confusion as to whether he [sic] was dealing with 'fact or fancy' was in fact intentional on the part of the author and meant 'that the story has relevance to all of us.'²¹ Anton Vogt on the same letters' page argues that Frame's novel is '*most extraordinary for illuminating the commonplace*. The "sensibility" and sense of social "realism" are complementary, not opposed'.²² However, W.H. Oliver is unconvinced and replies in the following week:

Mr. Vogt should know there is a difference between an accident in real life and in fiction. In the former case we must believe it happened because we either saw it or reliable people told us about it; in the latter case we have only the author's word for it and we have a right to suspect her of contrivance if it fits too neatly into her symbolic structure.²³

²⁰ Davil [sic] Hall, 'Vigour and Power' New Zealand Listener, 31 May, 1957, p.12. [A reviewer named David Hall subsequently went on to review other Frame novels.]

²¹ G.W. Turner, New Zealand Listener, 14 June, 1957, p. 11.

²² Anton Vogt, New Zealand Listener, 14 June, 1957, p. 11; (emphasis in text). Most of these contributors were well-known as academics or commentators. Michael King describes Vogt as 'poet, teacher, performer' and adds 'He had emigrated in the early 1960s, releasing a stream of invective against the country's xenophobia, welfare-state mentality and inability (then) to tolerate diversity and eccentricity; especially its inability to tolerate Anton Vogt, who was colourful, clever and exuberant'. Michael King, Being Pakeha (Auckland: Hodder and Stoughton, 1985), p.168.

²³ W.H. Oliver, New Zealand Listener, 28 June, 1957, p. 11.

However, the reader can take the identification of real life with novel, protagonist with author, devastatingly far, as Frame recounts in her autobiography:

(When [Owls Do Cry] was published, I was alarmed to find that it was believed to be autobiographical, with the characters actual members of my family, and myself the character Daphne upon whom a brain operation was performed. Confronted by a doctor who had read the book, I was obliged to demonstrate to him the absence of leucotomy scars on my temples. Not every aspiring writer has such a terrifying but convincing method of displaying to others 'proof' that she has been writing fiction.) (Angel, p.143)

Frame's second novel, Faces in the Water, anticipates some dispute as to whether we should consider her novel a fictional or a factual account. In a disclaimer before the front cover of the book she states: 'Although this book is written in documentary form it is a work of fiction. None of the characters including Estina Mavet, portrays a living person.'²⁴ However, we might be cautioned when reading such a statement, as Peter Mack has argued: 'we should see the disclaimer as a therapeutic space (of doubtful authorship) at the edge of the text in which writers can undo the purposes of their writing and air their anxieties about their place on the fold between the "real" lives of their acquaintances, and the interpretive lives of their readers.'²⁵ Frame further stresses the 'fictional' content of the novel in her autobiography, where she tells us that 'the fiction of the book lies in the portrayal of the central character, based on my life but given largely fictional thoughts and feelings' (Angel, p.70). As an example of how she invents these feelings she tells us that she based them on the feelings she imagined those around her to have: 'When one day a fellow patient, seeing workmen outside digging drains, said to me "Look,

²⁴ Janet Frame, Faces in the Water. (London: The Women's Press, 1980). The spelling of the protagonist must here be a mistake, since she is called Istina throughout the novel. The disclaimer on the inside cover of all fiction typically announces: 'resemblance to actual persons living or dead is purely coincidental'. This phrase, for example, appears on the bibliographic information page of Janet Frame's Owls Do Cry. Interestingly the information on the inside covers of the three volumes of autobiography reads: 'the Author [sic] asserts the moral right to be identified as the author of this work'.

²⁵ Peter Mack, "'Thou Art not He nor She": Authors' disclaimers and attitudes to fiction', The Times Literary Supplement, 15 December 1995.

they are digging our graves," I knew she believed this. Her words are an example of the words and behaviour I used to portray Istina Mavet' (Angel, p.70). In Angel Frame also tells us that it is in her novel that she has described in detail the surrounding events she experienced in the several mental hospitals where she was a patient during the eight years of her life from age twenty-one to thirty. She says that in this work of fiction she writes 'factually of my own treatment and my thoughts about it'. What is immediately striking, apart from the apparent contradictions, is that the first 'fictional' text gives us a disturbingly vivid and 'realistic' picture of madness and its institutionalisation; the second 'autobiographical' account barely skims the surface of those eight years. We can discover the origins of this 'novel' in Frame's third volume of autobiography where she tells us that she was advised by her psychiatrist to write down her earlier experiences in psychiatric institutions as a form of therapy.²⁶

Dr. Cawley's view, supported no doubt by his assessment of our interviews of many months, was that I genuinely needed to write, that it was a way of life for me [. . .]. It was his opinion also that as I was obviously suffering from the effects of my long stay in hospital in New Zealand, I should write my story of that time to give me a clearer view of my future.

(Envoy, p.128)

It is hardly surprising then that Faces is almost invariably read not only autobiographically but *as though it were* autobiography. Examples abound: in her third volume of autobiography, Frame reports early reviewers reactions to her novel: 'I was amused by the *Manchester Guardian*'s comment, "Surely the use of the first person was a mistake. A woman who has been what this woman has been would never be able to remember and write about it in this way." It was assumed that the character of Istina Mavet was a portrait of myself' (Envoy, p.138). Donald Hannah, in one of the few articles that have been written on this book, concludes his discussion of whether *Faces* is a 'case-study or work of fiction': 'Istina Mavet, the main person

²⁶ This is discussed at greater length in Chapter Six.

in *Faces in the Water* is, of course, Janet Frame herself under another name'.²⁷ This comment is illustrative of the kinds of comments contemporary critics still make, despite the impact of postmodern theory on literary criticism. The identification of author with protagonist assumes both a fixed external reality (the author) and the author's unproblematic correspondence to the protagonist even when the status of this text as autobiography does not bear the author's signature. Given Lejeune's pact, 'Istina Mavet' is explicitly, emphatically not 'Janet Frame,' yet we still might sympathise with Hannah's understanding that author and protagonist are embroiled in more complex ways.²⁸

I.iii reading autobiography as fiction

If we are inclined to read fiction for signs of the author's autobiography, when reading autobiography we will tend to test the author's capacities for representing that life: is that really how it was? Surely Frame is exaggerating when she tells us that her earliest memories are of voices talking: 'so far above me, to and fro, to and fro between tall, tall people' when she was just *three weeks* old? (*Is-Land*, p.14).

When a known author like Frame finally publishes her autobiography the reader may well feel qualified to judge the authenticity of her text. The extent to which the reader does this will be related to the amount of 'autobiographical space' that pre-dates the publication of novel and/ or autobiography. This term ('l'espace autobiographique') is introduced and discussed by Lejeune:

²⁷ Donald W. Hannah, 'Faces in the Water: Case-History or Work of Fiction?' in *The Ring of Fire: Essays on Janet Frame*, ed. by Jeanne Delbaere (Sydney: Dangeroo, 1992), 74-81 (p.74).

²⁸ Of course Frame would not be the first to have a first-person narrative read as autobiography. Indeed, authors may choose to write in the first-person in order to create an illusion of intimacy and confession. Phillip Roth, for example, deliberately plays with the reader's will to identify author with protagonist. The reader is titillated by the ambiguous referential status of 'the "I" [...] who tells us secrets - sexual secrets, hate secrets, love secrets, family secrets, tribal secrets, the stuff of shame, embarrassment, humiliation and disgrace' (Roth, quoted in Augustus M. Kolich, 'Does Fiction Have to be Made Better than Life?', *MFS*, 29 [1983], 159-74 [p.160]). Gerard Genette similarly describes the difficulty of distinguishing fact from fiction in Proust's *In Remembrance of Things Past*, arguing that the art of the author is to hold the reader continuously in a kind of 'tourniquet' or 'whirligig' (the translation is De Man's) between fiction and autobiography (Paul De Man, 'Autobiography as De-Facement', *MLN* 94 [1979], 919-30 [p.921]).

If the autobiography is a first book, its author is therefore unknown, even if he describes himself in the book: he lacks, in the eyes of the reader, the sign of reality that is in the anterior production of other texts [...] indispensable to what we call the "autobiographical space".²⁹

In Frame's case the extensive amount of 'autobiographical space' that pre-empted her own attempt at self-representation has left critics dissatisfied with the 'Janet Frame' of her autobiography. Frame wrote her first volume of autobiography at the age of fifty-eight. By this time she had already published ten novels, four collections of short stories, a book of poetry and a children's book. Moreover, her 'life story' had gone before her: most New Zealanders knew of Frame as the woman writer who spent eight years of her life in a psychiatric hospital and who was saved from further incarceration and an imminent leucotomy by the publication of a collection of short stories. Furthermore, in 1977 Patrick Evans, an early scholar of Frame's writings, included a two-page biographical chronology of the main 'events' in Frame's life in his book Janet Frame.³⁰

Frame's three volumes of autobiography, To the Is-Land (1983), An Angel at My Table (1984), and The Envoy From Mirror City (1984), have arguably made Frame a household name in her country and a recognised literary figure abroad.³¹ Yet while the autobiographies have received popular acclaim in and out of New Zealand, among some literary critics there is a strong sense that the literary product of the autobiographies is inferior to that of her novels: the style is disappointingly straightforward; the content what you would expect of any mediocre autobiography (tales of family, childhood, growing up, the naming of places and people); the tone surprisingly 'domestic'; the style less poetic, too direct, often culminating in long lists

²⁹ Le Pacte Autobiographique, p.41.

³⁰ Patrick Evans, Janet Frame (Boston: Twayne-World Author Series, 1977), pp.13-14.

³¹ These three volumes have since been published as one volume, An Autobiography (Auckland: Random House, 1994), which includes photographs of family life that were not included in the original texts. The effects of collecting together in one volume what was originally conceived as three separate books bounded by covers, with their own beginnings and endings is not negligible (particularly since the 'trilogy' form of autobiography seems particularly prevalent in New Zealand). The addition of photographs also problematises the discussion of the autobiographical pact in strict linguistic/ textual terms since the photograph is a different kind of gesturing outside the text to a 'historical reality'. Paul John Eakin provides a fascinating discussion of the implications of photography as autobiography in his analysis of Roland Barthes' Camera Lucida in his Touching the World: Reference in Autobiography (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992), pp.17-18.

of nouns. An example from both fiction and autobiography describing a similar occasion might help to illustrate what these critics have perceived as a change in style, tone and content. In Frame's fourth novel, Scented Gardens for the Blind (1963), often considered one of her more difficult and obscure (and therefore more authentic?) works, the narrator Vera describes a childhood friendship:

When I was a child, in this very town, I had a little friend on stalks, and she was called Poppy; she was velvet, and we walked together to school every day, and put our hands through the hedges and fences, cadging flowers, a red and pink and yellow stained assortment juicy and warm in our hands. ³²

In her first volume of autobiography, To the Is-Land, Frame again describes a childhood friend called Poppy:

One day I found a friend, Poppy, whose real name was Marjorie. She had lank brown hair, an ugly face with a wide red mouth, and her father whipped her with a narrow machine belt, which made cuts in her skin. [...] Poppy taught me how to cure warts by squeezing the juice of the ice plant over them. (Is-Land, p.53)

Is it the realism of the second passage that puts off her critics, the finicky attention to detail (her 'real name was Marjorie'), the over-directness, the telling too much?³³ Is it the metaphorical language of the first that appeals ('a friend on stalks', 'she was velvet') and which seems to be the voice of the 'real Frame'? For many Frame scholars, Frame's previous fictions described unconventional, creative, unpredictable protagonists in a language which embodied all these characteristics:³⁴ tempting then

³² Janet Frame, Scented Gardens for the Blind (London: The Women's Press, 1982), p.9.

³³ This example does not really illustrate what some have called Frame's 'indiscretion'. Many readers (particularly those of Frame's generation) were shocked, for example, at her graphic description of burying her used sanitary towels in the cemetery, or describing the brown stain on her dead father's underpants. A friend, in response to an earlier version of this chapter replied in writing: 'the quandary posed to me is that Frame, who is known to be extremely sensitive, and private in her real life, does not in her writing seem to be reticent or private at all; in fact reveals things that make me cringe at her courage. Or is it her cruelty?'

³⁴ While numerous articles have been written on Frame's various novels, only five book-length studies exist on her work, one of which is a student's guide. Feminists now seem to be the scholars most interested in her work, despite Frame's own resistance to being categorised in anthologies according to

to associate the protagonists of Frame's fiction with the author, tempting to imagine the author as as unpredictable and uncanny as her narrator. If this is done, a superficial reading of her three volumes of autobiography tends to render the author/narrator/ protagonist much 'flatter' characters by comparison.

Gina Mercer, surveying critics' responses to the autobiographies as generally disappointed admits that she shares their disappointment: Frame is not 'noisy enough'.³⁵ Susan Ash similarly complains that the autobiographies offer 'no narrative surprises, no hidden frames [pun intended?], no shifty narrators, no apparent narrative ambiguities, no apparent resistance to speaking authoritatively'.³⁶ Ash wants to detect in Frame's voice her usual irony but cannot place it. Frame herself expresses a similar dissatisfaction with her volumes of autobiography, saying that she found the process of writing them "'conservative", "frustrating" and "restricting"'.³⁷

Both Mercer and Ash go on to suggest that the narrator/protagonist of Frame's autobiographies has been deliberately crafted to produce a counter reading of herself. This allows them as critics to re-interpret the narrator and protagonist of the autobiography as a complex, 'round' character (like the author of the fiction they have come to know and love). I find I too have the same desire: to discover complexity and subterfuge in the autobiography. However, I look to the text itself, which at once coaxes us into its 'straightforward' narrative form while continuously highlighting the ambiguities and complexities of autobiography as genre.

her sex . Gina Mercer's Janet Frame: Subversive Fictions, published in 1994, is the most recent work. Susan Ash has written a PhD dissertation entitled Narrating a Female (Subject)ivity in the Works of Katherine Mansfield, Robin Hyde, Janet Frame, and Keri Hulme (English Dept, University of Otago: Feb 1990). She is in the process of writing a book-length study on Frame. Tessa Barringer has published several articles on Frame in JNZL and is in the process of finishing her dissertation on Frame in the Department of English at the University of Otago. Her thesis draws in particular on the psychoanalytic theories of Lacan and Kristeva, .

³⁵ Gina Mercer, "'A Simple Everyday Glass": the Autobiographies of Janet Frame', Journal of New Zealand Literature, 11 (1993), 41-8 (p.43).

³⁶ Susan Ash, "'The Absolute, Distanced Image": Janet Frame's Autobiography', JNZL, 11 (1993), 21-40 (p.22).

³⁷ Quoted in Mercer, Everyday Glass, p.44.

II. The Writer: Autobiographical Acts

I have not made my book more than my book has made me.

Montaigne ³⁸

From the above discussion it should be clear how the *reading* of a text might be influenced by its status as autobiography or novel. Now I want to look at the implications for the *writing*: what different effects might the decision to write an autobiography rather than a novel have on both the author (in the act of writing) and the protagonist inscribed by that act of writing?

II.i writing produces the self

Many commentators on autobiography have noted the active component writing plays in the construction of the self. Autobiography simultaneously invents, contains, shapes and unifies the self in and through the text. In his ground-breaking 1960 study, Design and Truth in Autobiography, Roy Pascal intimated early signs of the poststructuralist/ postmodern notion that there is no self as such outside the text when he suggested: 'the object [of autobiography] is not so much to tell others about oneself as to come to terms with oneself, not necessarily explicitly and morally, but simply by grasping oneself as a whole'.³⁹ Later he expresses another postmodern notion, that autobiography is not simply referential: 'The act of writing it is a new act of the man, and like every significant new act it alters in some degree the shape of his life, it leaves the man different'.⁴⁰ Similarly James Olney, introducing an important (1980) collection of essays on autobiography, tells us:

So far as the finished [autobiography] is concerned, neither the *autos* nor the *bios* is there in the beginning, a completed entity, a defined, known self or a history to be had for the taking.

Here is where the act of writing [...] assumes its true importance: it is through that act that the

³⁸ Quoted in Roy Pascal, Design and Truth in Autobiography (London: Routledge, 1960), p.195.

³⁹ Pascal, p.59.

⁴⁰ Pascal, p.183.

self and the life, complexly intertwined and entangled, take on a certain form, assume a particular shape and image.⁴¹

Elizabeth Bruss, in her influential study of 1976, Autobiographical Acts: the Changing Situation of a Literary Genre, combined linguistic theory with literary theory and situated the author's words as speech acts, as being defined and given meaning in the context in which they were produced.⁴² Focusing on four autobiographies (by Bunyan, Boswell, De Quincey and Nabakov) from the seventeenth to twentieth centuries she shows how each autobiography can be read as a radically different act with its own particular set of intentions and formal improvisations. She moves 'from a static to a dynamic conception of the field in order to show how the communicative unit not only states but performs'.⁴³ Similarly, Barthes had stated earlier 'it is language which speaks, not the author. [...] To write is [...] to reach that point where only language acts, "performs", and not "me"'.⁴⁴

The notion that writing produces the self can be considered in relation to a comment Janet Frame reportedly made to the New Zealand critic Patrick Evans, who in 1977 had prepared a mini biography of her to accompany his survey of her fiction to date.⁴⁵ This appeared five years before Frame published her first volume of autobiography although she had written a short piece called 'Beginnings' for Charles Brasch, the editor of the New Zealand literary journal Landfall, as early as 1965.⁴⁶ Given the little that had been written about her life, Evans seems to have produced a remarkably 'accurate' account, detailing events that Frame too chooses to focus on in her own narration of her life story. Perhaps it was this that she found disturbing: soon

⁴¹ James Olney, 'Autobiography and the Cultural Moment: A Thematic, Historical and Bibliographical Introduction' in Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical, ed. by James Olney (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1980), pp.3-27 (p.22).

⁴² Elizabeth Bruss, Autobiographical Acts: the Changing Situation of a Literary Genre (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1976).

⁴³ James Olney, 'Autobiography and the Cultural Moment'.

⁴⁴ Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author' (1968), in Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader, ed. by David Lodge (London: Longman, 1988), pp.166-72 (p.168).

⁴⁵ Evans, Janet Frame, pp.13-14.

⁴⁶ Janet Frame, 'Beginnings', Landfall, 73 (1965), 40-47. This article, along with other articles by established New Zealand writers commissioned by Brasch for Landfall is reprinted in Beginnings: New Zealand Writers Tell How They Began Writing, ed. and with an Introduction by Robin Dudding, (Wellington: Oxford UP, 1980).

after the publication of his book, Frame wrote Evans an accusatory letter, demanding: 'Who do you think you are? One of the Porlock people perhaps?'⁴⁷

This phrase is an extremely rich one for interpretation, directly associating Frame with Coleridge, who in an introductory paragraph that accompanies the publication of his masterpiece 'Kubla Khan', describes it as only a 'fragment' of a longer poem that came to him while deep in a drug-induced sleep.⁴⁸ Coleridge claims he dreamed visions and the accompanying descriptive passages, awoke and for three hours steadily wrote down all that he could remember from these dreams. Most unfortunately this flow was interrupted by a knock at the door: it is a man come on business from the neighbouring village of Porlock. The man keeps him for an hour and when Coleridge returns to finish off his poem, he can still see the visions but the words are no more:

To his no small surprise and mortification, that though he still retained some vague and dim recollection of the general purport of the vision, yet, with the exception of some eight or ten scattered lines and images, all the rest had passed away like the images on the surface of a stream to which a stone had been cast, but, alas! without the after restoration of the latter. [...] Yet from the still surviving recollections in his mind, the Author has frequently purposed to finish for himself what had been originally, as it were, given to him. [...] but the to-morrow is yet to come.⁴⁹

This poignant tale which accompanies the poem has become a kind of mythic biography in itself and suggests many more interesting parallels with the mythology that surrounds Frame, often of her own creating. But most interestingly perhaps, Frame suggests that she was dreaming, composing, or dare I say it, *framing* her own

⁴⁷ Personal communication from Patrick Evans in an interview with him by this author (Christchurch, New Zealand, 12 April, 1996).

⁴⁸ We return to Coleridge (and his interpretation of fancy and imagination) in the next chapter.

⁴⁹ Samuel Taylor Coleridge: The Complete Poems, ed. by William Keach (London: Penguin, 1977). This prose introduction was added to the poem when it was first published in 1816 and has had an enormous influence on the way it has been read. When the poem was first written in 1797/8, a note at the end of the manuscript read: 'This fragment with a good deal more, not recoverable, composed, in a sort of Reverie brought on by two grains of Opium, taken to check a dysentary, at a Farm House between Porlock and Linton, a quarter of a mile from Culbone Church, in the fall of the year 1797' (quoted in Keach, notes to above edition) .

life when she was rudely interrupted by the knock of another. Patrick Evans is the man from Porlock. This man not only takes away her material but also imposes a shape on her life that she will have to repeat or undo in her own writing: she is not free to start with a blank literary slate. Frame's multiplication of this man into one of many further suggests that she sees *all* literary critics as potential 'Porlock people'.

II.ii the author is dead

If we take the notion that writing produces the self to its extreme, we can argue that the writer does not exist outside the text which describes him or her. Roland Barthes in his much celebrated and contested 1968 article, 'Death of the Author', describes how the author's relationship to the text is cut off once that text undergoes a reading; the meaning of the text is produced in the process of reading. This notion is of course a direct attack on traditional literary criticism which tended to bring on the author to explain the text:

The image of literature to be found in ordinary culture is tyrannically centred on the author, his person, his life, his tastes, his passions, while criticism still consists for the most part in saying that Baudelaire's work is a failure of Baudelaire the man, Van Gogh's his madness, Tchaikovsky's his vice. The *explanation* of a work is always sought in the man or woman who produced it, as if it were always in the end, through the more or less transparent allegory of the fiction, the voice of a single person, the *author* 'confiding' in us.⁵⁰

Taking up Barthes' notion of 'the death of the author', I will now turn to Frame's apparent desire to cut herself as author out of the equation author=narrator=protagonist.⁵¹ In the following examples Frame attempts to cut

⁵⁰ Barthes, p.168; emphasis in original. It is interesting to note Barthes' reference to Van Gogh: Frame notoriously describes in *Angel* how her psychology professor John Forrest likened her madness and genius to 'Van Gogh' (p.79). This is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Seven.

⁵¹ It should be noted, however, that the 'author' in question is far from being a stable, fixed entity, but is a mythologised and contradictory figure. Frame's reclusiveness is legendary in New Zealand yet she has given numerous interviews and attended award ceremonies; friends, critics and psychologists vehemently defend her sanity yet others suggest that there may well have been some medical or psychiatric grounds for her long stay in psychiatric institutions. As we have seen, a conception of Frame as author/person is inevitably superimposed on her texts; conversely a reading of her texts compounds the image of Frame as author/person.

herself off from her texts, leaving them to speak for themselves without her own life story being brought in to comment on or explain them.

Patrick Evans focuses on this aspect of Frame in a speech given to an International Conference on Janet Frame held in 1992 in the town where she was born.⁵² Whether the allusion to Barthes' article 'Death of the Author' is intended or not, Evans' speech is entitled 'The Case of the Disappearing Author'. As already intimated, Evans has had a tortuous relationship with the subject of his texts. Frame has refused to meet him and he describes a body of 'sixty janissory matrons' who guard access to her home and life (although the very number of these mythical matrons should again alert us to the fact that Frame is willing to make connections of her own choosing).⁵³ He tells us:

Over the years [Janet Frame] has turned me into a sort of critical paparazzo, faint but following, always trying for that special, authentic shot as I stumble through the shrubbery of her life. [. . .] The more a critic like me tries to find, in his simple-minded way, some kind of origin for her writing [. . .] the more the writing is pulled back into historical time, the very tar from which she wishes to extract it.⁵⁴

Frame's infamous reluctance to talk outside her texts is more profound than a common desire to be left in peace. Evans has described this tendency astutely as 'a first step of historical severance'.⁵⁵ I use this statement to mean that she is severing herself as author/ figure/ persona from the body of her work. The author is different from both the narrator and protagonist of Lejeune's triad because she is rooted in history: she exists outside the text. Autobiography, through the author's signature

⁵² The inaugural conference of the Association of New Zealand Literature was held on 28-30 August, 1992 in Dunedin. The subject was the work of Janet Frame. Papers presented at the conference are collected in a special issue of the *Journal of New Zealand Literature* (11: 1993). As Chris Prentice describes in the Introduction to this issue, the audience was made up of 'academics involved in scholarly work on Frame's writing, enthusiastic general readers of her work, and even those whose primary interest was a sense of involvement or contiguity with the more broadly 'cultural' phenomenon of "Janet Frame"' (p.1).

⁵³ Personal correspondence with Patrick Evans. Tessa Barringer comments on the gendered nature of much of Evans' language (as critic of Frame) in her forthcoming PhD thesis. Thanks to Chris Prentice for drawing my attention to this point.

⁵⁴ Patrick Evans, 'The Case of the Disappearing Author', *JNZL*, 11 (1993), 11-20 (pp. 16-17).

⁵⁵ Evans, 'Disappearing Author', p.17.

which connects her to the text, simultaneously gestures inside and outside the text. Non-autobiographical texts (that is, those that are not underwritten by the triad's common signature) do not have to do this, although as we have seen, 'reading against the contract' means that the reader will gather up extra-textual information about the author to check off against the narrator/ protagonist of fiction. Frame, in cutting the links between her life and her texts is refusing to allow them to be read autobiographically. However, paradoxically, it is this very severance, her reluctance to speak, to identify herself, that then becomes her identity, and one that is so powerful it will inevitably be read into all that she writes.

III. Severance from History

Yet if Frame is so keen to sever herself from history, why then does she write an autobiography? Why indeed has she now *authorised* Michael King (who in 1996 published his biography of the 'founding father' of New Zealand literature, Frank Sargeson) to write the official story of her life? ⁵⁶ There is no simple answer here though several have been proffered. As we have seen, typically critics have resolved their discomfort with the ordinariness of Frame's autobiography by reading into it an ulterior motive: an effort to inscribe herself as ordinary on a New Zealand consciousness that wants to view her only as 'madwoman/genius.'⁵⁷ Susan Ash argues that in her autobiography Frame sets herself up as a kind of 'privileged interpreter' in an attempt to fix her identity in a permanent and stable way against the identity that has been given to her by critics and psychiatrists. Gina Mercer likewise argues that 'it was timely for Frame to provide a counter to the various tales, myths and fantasies which had been generated around her life story'.⁵⁸

In the next chapter I conclude that Frame's autobiography persistently draws attention to the complex and intertwined relationship between autobiography and

⁵⁶ Michael King, *Frank Sargeson: A Life* (Auckland: Viking, 1995).

⁵⁷ There is not the space here to go into this double definition but the argument has been well outlined by Jane Ussher in *Women's Madness: Misogyny or Mental Illness?* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991). Christine Battersby's *Gender and Genius: Towards a Feminist Aesthetics* (London: The Women's Press, 1989), however, questions many of the gender assumptions that this debate contains.

⁵⁸ 'Everyday Glass', p.43.

fiction, and is thus very far from telling a 'straight' autobiography. However, here I want to focus on the relationship between author, narrator and protagonist and the distinction I have outlined between autobiographical pact and autobiographical act.

IV. Reading Frame without her: the Birth of Janet Clutha

Woman autobiographers subvert the 'autobiographical pact' by including problematic or ambiguous signals which trouble rather than confirm the distinction between autobiography and fiction, or by making the 'proper name' ambiguous.

Laura Marcus, Auto/Biographical Discourse ⁵⁹

Frame's autobiographies can be read as an attempt to 'fix' herself in historical time. This is a corollary to her attempt to disassociate herself as author from the narrator/protagonist of her texts. This is indeed a paradox: Frame as author divorces herself as subject from her writing and yet simultaneously writes the story of her life which directly links her writing (both autobiography and novels) to her life. Just as she openly divorces herself from history she inscribes herself within it.

Shortly after writing the 'therapeutic' Faces in the Water, Janet Frame changed her name to Janet Clutha. It is ironic that she should have such an appropriate name by birth: so much of her art, her persona, so many of the characteristics I have touched on here could be well described by the word 'frame'; the art of 'framing.' ⁶⁰ To frame a work of art is to contain it, present it, determine its reception, delineate the boundaries between inside and outside: what is art and what is not art. Yet the 'frame' can also simultaneously gesture to what is not contained within it: in a film, the viewer is often aware that there is a 'beyond the frame', parts of bodies, bits of scenery that the viewer can not momentarily see but can imagine. Here then the frame is metonymic, standing for the viewer's picture of the whole.

⁵⁹ Laura Marcus, Auto/Biographical Discourse, p.280.

⁶⁰ Tessa Barringer in a forthcoming article 'Frame[d]: the Autobiographies' (JNZL) uses Derrida's elaboration of the word 'frame' or 'parergon' and Trinh Minh-ha's Framer Framed to discuss at a sophisticated theoretical level the implications/ appropriateness of the name 'frame' to Frame's project.

It is both ironic and characteristic that Frame should have made this reverse move: changing her real name rather than inventing a pen-name. (Her literary forefather's given name was Norris Davey, which he changed to Frank Sargeson when he first began publishing.) Frame continues to use her birth-name (after her legal change of name) as the signature for all her subsequent writing. 'Janet Frame' is now obsolete inasmuch as the name no longer refers outside the text to a person with that name. Does this then disrupt the mechanism of 'naming' so crucial to Lejeune's pact?

Furthermore, what does the choice of the name 'Clutha' suggest? The Clutha flows from the centre of the South Island into the Pacific Ocean on the south east coast just south of Dunedin, the town in which Frame was born and where she attended Teacher Training College. It is uncannily suggestive that she should change her name from the static, rigid, unifying 'Frame' to the fluid, meandering and branching 'Clutha'. Frame gives a clue to her intentions:

After spending a year confined in the city, studying, writing, conscious always of boundaries of behaviour and feeling, in my new role as an adult, I now came face to face with the Clutha, a being that persisted through all the pressures of rock, stone, earth and sun, living as an element of freedom but not isolated, linked to heaven and light by the slender rainbow that shimmered above its waters. I felt the river was an ally, that it would speak for me.

(*Angel*, p. 34)

Whereas the family-inherited 'Frame' bounded her, closed her in, stopped her voice, the river 'speaks for her', substitutes its name for hers, stands for 'Janet Frame'. Now I make Frame's name-change speak for me by using it as a tool to bring together two seemingly contradictory perspectives: Lejeune's pact with its acknowledgement of the essential role of the author, and Barthes' apparently opposing claim that the author is dead. The severance of her historical, given name, 'Janet Frame,' (with its patronymic reference to generations, time and place) from her self and its transference to her texts alone allows us to have it both ways: the gesture to a

historical reality outside the text is there, but in practice it 'signifies nothing', it refers to a past that has passed.⁶¹ Instead, we can focus on the text.

If we do this (as Barthes recommends) but bear in mind what 'Janet Frame' stands for we can read the autobiographies as a *textual contract*, reading the signature that is common to author, narrator and protagonist, and knowing that it implies a specific mode of reading: autobiography, not fiction. But we can also read that signature as a flourish which applies to no person, no thing, no history, other than that which it creates for the complicit reader in the text. Thus the reader holds on to a sense of 'the real' outside the text whilst simultaneously aware of the representative nature of reality within the text. In other words, the textual contract provides a means of having our cake (there is a historical reality) and eating it (a text is pure representation).

⁶¹ These notions of history, time and past are discussed in depth in the next chapter.

Chapter Six

Making a Textual Contract:

the interwoven relationship between history and fiction

Both history and fiction are language games deployed in different contexts.

History is a method rather than a truth - words create the history. The strategy of postcolonial writing is to collapse the binarism and deploy a method which doesn't do away with history but which emphasises its provisionality.

Bill Ashcroft, 'Against the Tide of Time'¹

Inherent in any attempt to define autobiography is a gesturing towards the outside of the text, to the author who has a life 'history' independent of that text. This overt and inscribed link between the actual lived history of the author and the representation of that life as text is the fulcrum of the technical distinction between autobiography and novel. I now want to consider the arguments raised by philosophers for maintaining or blurring the distinction between history and fiction to see what light such debates might shed on my own attempt to distinguish between autobiography and novel. Once more, Janet Frame's autobiographies are the focus of analysis since her writing continually highlights history and fiction as conceptual categories and suggests some of the complexity inherent in the relationship between them that philosophers have been seeking to unravel for centuries.

i. 'fiction is more real than life'

Although we insist on differentiating kinds of texts according to a subjective and undefined 'truth-value' (a 'history' text is different from a 'fictional' text for this very reason) most of us are instinctively aware that history and fiction are intertwined in

¹ Bill Ashcroft, 'Against the Tide of Time: Peter Carey's Interpolation into History' in Writing the Nation: Self and Country in Post-Colonial Imagination, ed. by John C. Hawley (Amsterdam: Rodopi - Critical Studies 7, 1996), pp. 194-212 (p.207).

complex ways. It is clear on nearly every page of Frame's autobiographies that fiction interacts with, informs and changes her everyday life: each volume is sprinkled with songs and poetry and references to literature. When her sister Myrtle dies in a tragic drowning incident, for example, Janet finds comfort in the anthology of poems she is reading at school whose poets represent her experience of grief and console her more directly than can friends or family. When she leaves home to go to Dunedin to train as a teacher, she finds it difficult to make friends and 'fit in':

I did not realize the extent of my loneliness. I clung to works of literature as a child clings to its mother. I remember how *Measure for Measure*, the deeply reasoned play crammed with violations of innocence, with sexual struggle and comment, with long discussions on life, death and immortality, won my heart and persisted in my memory, *accompanied* me in my daily life.²

Of course such examples could likely be found in any autobiography and they perhaps seem too commonplace to be worth mentioning but I use them to illustrate how non-straightforward the relationship between the recordable, remembered events of everyday life and their transformation into fiction is. Having a life story to tell is a product of various constructed and remembered narratives, of which both history and fiction are products, distinguished only by the issue of truth-claims. To this extent, fiction itself shapes everyday life and we instinctively understand this but go on defining 'fiction' against 'history' all the same.

The sense of fiction being more real than life is underscored in Frame's novel about her experiences in various psychiatric institutions which she wrote at the request of her London psychiatrist. Patrick Evans has argued that Frame's writing hinges on her attempt to make sense out of an unreal world. This is a crucial insight and reverberates with much of the text of *Faces in the Water*.³ In one memorable scene, the protagonist, Istina Mavet, is seated with the other patients of Lawn Lodge

² *An Angel at My Table: Autobiography 2*, (London: Flamingo-HarperCollins, 1993), p.23; emphasis in text. All subsequent references to this book will be shown in the text in parentheses as *Angel*.

³ Janet Frame, *Faces in the Water*, (London: the Women's Press, 1980). All subsequent references to this book will be shown in the text in parentheses as *Faces*.

to watch a screening of the Marx Brothers' 'A Night at the Opera'. Mavet (like Frame) loves the cinema and is delighted at the prospect of seeing these 'crazy flylike brothers' transform the brown mottled wall of the prison-like hospital. Suddenly, through fantasy, the world begins to look real again. The film puts the patients back in touch with reality. But inevitably the film breaks down and Mavet reacts badly, madly, lost again in a world she can make no sense of. In fact, the collapse of fantasy puts her into a crisis as the real world presses down on her once more: 'I have a taste in my mouth of musty cloth and I am picking at the sore on my hand that grows a scab each day like the cover of a well with myself oozing out of it. Where's the doctor with divining twig to find if I have any self left?' (*Faces*, p.118). It is not just Mavet who is disturbed by the breakdown of the normality of fantasy and there are similar reactions of despair and displacement from other patients in the room; anguish that the fantasy, so much more solid and real than anything or anyone they encounter at the Lodge, refuses to solidify, remains trapped in time and motion on screen:

Someone rushes cursing to the wall and begins to pummel it, like the knocking, in fairy stories, at the doors of secret rooms that open and are piled high with treasure. The sound garbles and complains, there is restlessness and irritation that the dim figures [...] do not burst from their pallor into a decisive black and white and thereby take charge of all spheres of derangement, vacillation and confusion. (*Faces*, p.119)

The patients want the figures, like those in Woody Allen's film *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, to walk out of the screen, onto the table and into their lives, rescuing them from the horror of everyday life.

ii 'truth is stranger than fiction'

Frame's own tendency to transform real life through fiction is obviously intensified by her experience in psychiatric institutions and this is paralleled by Mavet's experience where the world she now inhabits conforms so little to 'normality', where none of the rules for living everyday life work or fit: men walk round and round a

paddock wearing a path in the grass; breakfast is the best meal of the day because it means no Electric Shock Treatment; knives are meticulously counted after every meal; patients go to bed at four o'clock in the afternoon; the Matron's festive cry of 'Happy Christmas' cannot be differentiated from her more threatening and frequent command, 'Treatment Everyone!'

Frame's language and use of metaphors continually highlight this misfit between expected behaviour in the real world, the normal use for things, and their application to the world she finds herself in. Electricity in the outside world means comfort and convenience. In Mavet's world (and this is the 'real world' of the psychiatric hospital) electricity means Electric Shock Treatment. Her fear of EST is transferred to a general fear of electricity and she contrives ways of protecting herself against it (behaviour which would be interpreted as absolutely irrational in the 'normal outside world'). Mavet in fact takes rational safety precautions against the (real) threat of electricity, putting on heavy woollen socks to protect her when the electric shock treatment is applied. She asks, 'What safety measures must I apply to protect myself against electricity? And I listed the emergencies - lightning, riots, earthquakes [...]. But it would not come into my mind what to do when I was threatened by electricity' (*Faces*, p.18).

In the real world, the one safety precaution we most associate with electricity is to keep it far from water. However, in Mavet's unreal world the reverse is true: water will be her protection against electricity. Just before she is due for EST treatment she fills up a bath and climbs in. However, her scheme fails and she is taken for treatment anyway: the dangers of water and electricity are irrelevant to the hospital staff who scarcely count these patients as human beings. With such descriptions we too experience Mavet's 'schizophrenic' sense of the unreal. But we are even more dramatically jolted when Mavet superimposes the real world on her own, blurring the two, refusing to see herself outside the rules and regulations of the unreal 'real' world. She directly and ingenuously asks the reader: 'How can I get to school by nine o'clock if I am trapped in the observation dormitory waiting for E.S.T' (*Faces*, p.20). Mavet continually draws us to the world of the other patients, showing us how their

madness, in a sense, is their insistence that their daily lives still maintain a connection with reality, that is with the norms that hold outside the hospital. She tells us how one patient insists on putting on her pants before EST in case her legs kick up and flash at the doctor (p.21). This sense of dignity is certainly not instilled by the hospital which often does not provide enough pants to go round in the morning. Mavet tells us explicitly that the only way to cope with the world of madness is through fiction: 'when you are sick you find in yourself a new field of perception where you make a harvest of interpretations which then provides you with your daily bread, your only food' (*Faces*, p.30).

A doctor's admonitory 'If you can't adapt yourself to living in a mental hospital how do you expect to be able to live "out in the world"?' is replied to in the text by a heavily ironic 'How indeed?' (*Faces*, p.42). We realise of course that there is little correlation between this hospital and the outside world. This is compounded by Mavet's telling us towards the end of the novel, when she is due to be released, how she is made to fill toothpaste tubes:

I filled the tubes, rolling the ends to seal them, and I was thankful that even if the secret of tomorrow, of the people of Ward Two, of my own fears and distortions, were hidden from me, at least I surely knew something that would help me to "take my place in the world" - I knew how toothpaste came to be put in tubes! (*Faces*, p.228)

Mavet's difficulties in distinguishing real from unreal, fact from fiction, are compounded by the mental institutions' classification of wards. Mavet knows that beyond the respectable, pristine public face of 'Ward Seven' there is always the reality of 'Ward Four-Five-and-One'. At Treecroft she has an underlying sense of foreboding and the conviction that all is not what it seems. She deeply distrusts the orderliness and apparent normality of Ward Seven, the presentable face of the mental hospital where the 'best' patients stay who are likely to be sent home in the near future. Here the furniture is newer, the paint fresher, the general atmosphere more sanitary and sane, there is a 'garden of blown roses and orange-scented arum lilies that grow wild,

surrounding a sun-dried lawn with a weeping willow tree in the center. [...] The air [is] peaceful. There [are] no screams protests moanings; no sound of scuffles as a patient [is] forcibly persuaded to obey orders' (*Faces*, p.66).

But Mavet can only experience Ward Seven as a 'cover-up' for the wards that lay threateningly beyond, notably Ward Four-Five-and-One where the inmates have EST every day and where the patients with tuberculosis are cordoned off. Most revealingly, Mavet declares, 'In my mind I dare not contain an image of both Ward Seven and the Four-Five-and-One T.B. wing' (*Faces*, p.75). The two wards cannot rationally co-exist: one cannot remain sane and think that two such separate worlds can inhabit the same building. And yet the underside, the shadow of the 'other' real/unreal world is always present in her mind. She describes the desperate sense of foreboding and danger she experiences at Treecroft, in Ward Seven, where everything is so pleasant on the surface, and wants to warn the other patients of the 'reality' they find themselves in:

I tried to say beware the room is laid with traps and hung with hooks. For there was growing in my mind a dread which was not diminished but increased by the sight of the garden, the weeping willow the apparently contented patients roving freely across the sun-baked lawn. I marveled that Mrs. Ogden seemed so untroubled. How could she not know about the danger? Why did she not beware, surround herself with all possible safety measures, move lower down in her bed and draw the bedclothes up for protection? (*Faces*, p.67)

When Mavet returns to Ward Seven after EST she cannot forget what she has seen and is attacked increasingly by disquiet: 'I had seen, as it were, the sliding panels, overheard the sinister conversation' (*Faces*, p.78). When she progresses (regresses) first to Ward Four-Five-and-One and then to the worst ward in the building, euphemistically called 'Lawn Lodge', her sense of reality undergoes a massive shock. A sense of reality is, after all, founded on confirmation through recognition and repetition: the knowledge that the sun will rise every day, that the people you have talked to today will be those you can talk to tomorrow, that society is

based on agreed codes and modes of behaviour. Lawn Lodge leaves Mavet with nothing to hang on to: it is like walking into a foreign country where no one knows you or has heard of you: you could be anyone, your identity is undetermined, it is for you to reinvent yourself. Of course, even in a foreign country you have recourse to correspondence with friends who once knew you and who expect to see you again, for whom you need to keep up a sense of your common self. Lawn Lodge deprives its occupants of any reference to outside normality:

Four-Five-and-One had oppressed with its desolation; here in Lawn Lodge I was so shocked that for a time I felt emotionally blindfolded, trying to find my way among unrecognizable feelings and being given no help by former familiar landmarks that seemed now to have their shape disguised, to be deliberately pointing me to confusion. (*Faces*, p.92)

Frame's texts (whether novel or autobiography) continually confuse the real and imaginary, just as her own life, particularly her experience of institutionalisation, confuses the two. She experienced the world of mental institutions as a kind of fiction and herself as living out a given narrative. There is a strong sense throughout her writing that she sees herself as living in a text, or a story. In *Faces*, Frame criticises the tendency to make madness into a romantic narrative, arguing that 'there is an aspect of madness which is seldom mentioned in fiction because it would damage the romantic popular idea of the insane as a person whose speech appeals as immediately poetic' (*Angel*, p.112). Robin Hyde, a New Zealand author who spent three years in a psychiatric hospital after attempting suicide, observed, 'twice I've been within paper-thinness of [...] becoming what is called a certified lunatic, a term which has always seemed picturesque as well as quaint.'⁴ In *Faces*, Frame uses intensely poetic and lyrical language to describe the harsh reality of a deeply conformist society that defines anyone who steps marginally outside its narrowly defined borders as mad.

⁴ Robin Hyde, *A Home in This World* (Auckland: Longman Paul, 1984), p.60. Hyde was born two decades earlier and died in 1939 at the age of thirty-three. She is often studied together with Mansfield, Frame and Keri Hulme as one of New Zealand's greatest women writers.

iii. madness, philosophy, literature

The status and significance of the 'madness' of the author/ protagonist/ narrator certainly complicates the distinction between autobiography and novel, fact and fiction, documentary and fantasy in Frame's texts. As we have seen, Faces in the Water is a first-person account of what it means to be defined and treated as schizophrenic (although it is never clear whether we should conclude that the narrator/ protagonist *is* schizophrenic).⁵ Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida have discussed the impossibility of naming and speaking madness and whether 'fictional' writing can somehow overcome this impossibility.⁶ Applying this debate to Frame's texts, we might conclude that Faces in the Water manages to convincingly convey the reality of madness via the fictive strategies of metaphor.

Foucault describes madness as the other to reason in his Madness and Civilization. If madness is not reason it follows that there can be no reasonable or readable text which can express madness. Derrida has interpreted Foucault as suggesting that madness can only be made present metaphorically, through pathos. There is an inherent opposition between logos and pathos. Logos signifies the word, reason, order, system, society, the Father. Pathos is antithetical to this: it describes a quality in speech or events that excites pity or sadness. It is nebulous and unquantifiable: an emotion, not a thing; subjective, not objective.

The silence of madness, [Derrida] writes, is not said in the logos of the book but rendered present by its pathos, in a metaphorical manner. In the same way that madness, inside of thought, can only be evoked through fiction [...]. How does the pathos of figurative language relate to the silence of madness? In what way can silence be conveyed by literature? Why is it to literature that the task of "saying madness" is entrusted? ⁷

⁵ Janet Frame, Faces in the Water (London: The Women's Press, 1980). All subsequent references to this book will be shown in the text in parentheses as Faces.

⁶ Michel Foucault, Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason, trans. by Richard Howard (New York: Random House, 1965); Jacques Derrida, (1964) 'Cogito and the History of Madness', in Writing and Difference, trans. by Alan Bass (Chicago: The U of Chicago P, 1978), pp. 31-63

⁷ Shoshana Felman, 'Madness and Philosophy or Literature's Reason', Yale French Studies, 52-4 (1975-7), 206-228 (p.219; emphasis in text).

Can fiction in some way overcome the impasse of giving a voice (a readable, reasonable text) to the mad? Does the fact that, in her novel Faces in the Water, Janet Frame writes out her own direct and personal experience of madness (and I use this word in the sense of a social, cultural, historical and institutional construction of madness) in the fictional words of others, in any way challenge and overcome this notion of a 'reason-able' text?

Frame's novel can be read as describing the pathos of madness through figurative language, exposing the impossibility of naming madness without reducing it to the 'other' of reason. The novel can be read as a 'fictional account' which breaks the silence of the mad, by giving the mad a voice whilst framing this voice all the time as fictional. The words are thus always metaphors for something else: they do not directly describe their object and yet they suggest a sense of what madness is. As Shoshana Felman interprets Foucault, 'the requirement of literarity par excellence' is 'the search for metaphor and for a maximum of resonance'.⁸

Janet Frame's second novel and Foucault's Madness and Civilisation were both published in the same year, 1961, albeit in two cities at opposite ends of the world (Christchurch and Paris). Both texts contain remarkably similar descriptions and analyses of how the mad are constructed as marginal in discourse and excluded from 'normal' society. Foucault provides a philosophical analysis of the history of 'madness' as discursive concept in Europe from 1500 to 1800; Frame's novel, narrated in the first person, describes and enacts what incarceration in a psychiatric institution in New Zealand in the 1940s and 50s felt like; what a particular historical construction of madness meant personally for one defined as 'mad'. Her novel can be read on the one hand as an extension of Foucault's historical analysis into the present day, but it is also far more than just a 'case study' which bears Foucault's analysis out. It constitutes in itself a sophisticated and disturbing commentary on and analysis of the social and structural conditions that lead to the diagnosis and condition of madness (and specifically 'schizophrenia').⁹ Derrida, in his paper 'Cogito and the History of

⁸ Felman, p.226.

⁹ Jennifer Lawn has also placed Foucault and Frame alongside each other. In 'Docile Bodies: Normalization and the Asylum in *Owls Do Cry*' (Journal of New Zealand Literature 11 [1993], 178-187), she uses Daphne's plight in Frame's first novel to illustrate Foucault's analysis of how

Madness' which, as its title suggests, is in direct dialogue with Foucault, comments that :

In writing a history of madness, Foucault has attempted [...] to write a history of madness *itself. Itself. Of madness itself*. That is, by letting madness speak for itself. Foucault wanted madness to be the *subject* of his book in every sense of the word: its theme and its first-person narrator, its author, madness speaking about itself. Foucault wanted to write a history of madness *itself*, that is madness speaking on the basis of its own experience and under its own authority, and not a history of madness described from within the language of reason, the language of psychiatry *on* madness.¹⁰

Of course Derrida realises 'the expression "to say madness itself" is self-contradictory. To say madness without expelling it into objectivity is to let it say itself. But madness is what by essence cannot be said'.¹¹

Both Foucault and Frame are acutely aware of the difficulty of communicating madness in a written text (submitting it to the order of logos). Istina Mavet, the narrator and protagonist of Faces recognises the impulse to impose a grid of normality onto the other patients she observes and describes:

I could not presume to change the thoughts and feelings of my fellow-patients when they were known only to themselves. What was inside their minds? Although I might have dreamed of removing their stained skin and of putting teeth in their toothless gums, in the end perhaps what I might have put in place of their secret thoughts and feelings, the so-called "ordinary normal" thoughts, would have been of less value to the sum of truth than the solitary self-contained worlds they had created for themselves. (Faces, pp.169-70)

Both Frame and Foucault use metaphor and reason, figurative language and analysis or explanation in their texts on madness. But while Foucault as philosopher

'normalizing impulses' in (psychiatric) institutions operate.

¹⁰ Derrida, pp. 33-4; emphasis in text.

¹¹ Derrida, p.43.

and historian inevitably *describes* madness, albeit in metaphorical and figurative language, Frame as novelist *performs* it. While her text is still inescapably bound to the logos and while she is evidently in control of her narrative, the text nevertheless conveys the pathos of madness: performs madness without being it. The irony is that while Foucault as philosopher can tell us how to speak madness ('madness. . . is for Foucault [like pathos] a notion which does not elucidate what it connotes, but rather, participates in it: the term madness is itself pathos, not logos; literature, and not philosophy'¹²), as philosopher he can only elucidate. Frame, on the other hand, as novelist, holds the ambiguous position of both speaker and spoken (narrator and protagonist/ sane and insane) which allows her to expose the impossibilities of defining and describing madness whilst simultaneously drawing us into the realm of the mad. As narrator and protagonist she teeters between subjectivity and objectivity and while the characters of her novel are inevitably 'others', she frequently identifies herself as 'one of them'. Shoshona Felman argues that 'the communication between thought and madness cannot be direct but necessarily must pass through fiction'.¹³ Frame's novel, in its very fictionality, which simultaneously speaks a lived experience (in its ambiguity between autobiography and novel) gives a voice to the mad (to herself as mad) which enables philosophy and madness, rather than cancelling each other out, to be able, finally, to communicate with one another. Yet fiction is not outside language but always within it. Does fiction then operate within a different discourse that somehow has privileged access to madness?

In his Madness and Civilisation Foucault systematically outlines the discourses that have defined 'the mad' in various historical periods from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century. Beginning with the 1500s he attempts to 'return, in history, to that zero point in the course of madness at which madness is an undifferentiated experience, a not yet divided experience of division itself'.¹⁴ While once upon a time there was no such linguistic category as 'the mad', over the centuries a series of discourses accumulated which defined and demarcated the mad as essentially the

¹² Felman, p.224.

¹³ Felman, p. 222.

¹⁴ Foucault, Madness, p. ix.

opposite of the reason-able. In the Middle Ages, the mad were integrated into the community; there were no distinctions between the mad and the physically sick; no finer distinctions within the category of madness. Foucault describes how slowly but surely the mad began to be considered a threat to the 'normality' of society, and asylums were built to contain them (as opposed to prisons which had not differentiated the mad from the bad). With the building of asylums and their gradual metamorphoses into retreats, then specialist clinics, an entire discursive system is born: psychiatric institutions require superintendants, matrons; mental illness requires electric shock treatment or therapy depending on whether the malady is interpreted as being physical or psychological.

The combination of statements on pathology, mental illness, deviance and normality form a 'discursive system' which spontaneously sets up certain textual boundaries.¹⁵ Through this eruption of elements within parallel discourses, the mad are established as a group that can be identified, contained and acted upon. A wall is gradually built up between the sane and the insane, us and them. As Foucault describes it, 'a sensibility was born which had drawn a line and laid a cornerstone, and which chose - only to banish'.¹⁶ Those who find themselves on the wrong side of the dividing line can only be defined in the negative (irrational, insane, immoral, diseased, sick, defective, cretinous, disabled). The consequences of being defined as other are severe and the means of unsticking the label virtually impossible.

The figurative or discursive line between 'them' and 'us' (what Foucault terms the 'caesura that establishes the distance between reason and non-reason') is compounded and reproduced by the physical frontiers or walls that must be crossed for the sane to enter into the world of the mad.¹⁷ In Faces in the Water, Frame often uses literal geographical distance and physical exclusion to underline a more profound social, linguistic and psychological exclusion. The narrator, Istina Mavet,

¹⁵ An interpretation of Foucault's notion of 'discourse' was outlined in the Introduction to this thesis.

¹⁶ Foucault, Madness, p.64.

¹⁷ John Conolly, an eminent English psychiatrist of the early Victorian period, commented on taking up his job as superintendent of a large asylum in 1839: 'When the superintendant of such a large and peculiar institution opens the door which leads from his own comparatively quiet apartment to the extensive wards occupied by the patients of whom he has assumed the charge, he has a strange consciousness of passing from ordinary life into a new world, to which nothing in the outside world has a resemblance'. Quoted in Elaine Showalter, The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture 1830 - 1980 (London: Virago, 1987), p.45.

confined for many years to life in a mental hospital, describes her experience of madness:

I was now an established citizen with little hope of returning across the frontier; I was in the crazy world, separated now by more than locked doors and barred windows from the people who called themselves sane. (*Faces*, p.105)

Here Frame underlines that the mad are separated from the normal not just by the walls of an institution. In the following example, Istina is about to board the train that will take her to Cliffhaven, the mental hospital. She remembers how she once looked with pity upon the 'loonies'. Now, by implication, those on the platform must see her getting on the train as 'one of them':

As the train halted, I watched the faces of the people staring from the carriages and I wondered if I had any distinguishing marks of madness about me, and I wondered if the people understood or wanted to understand what lay *beyond* the station, *up* the road *over* the cattle stop and *over* the winding path and *behind* the locked doors of the stone gray building. (*Faces*, p.58; emphasis added)

Physical separation is established using a series of prepositions ('beyond', 'up over', 'behind') and this literal distance expresses the gap between the normal and abnormal, us and them. The use of the adjectives 'winding', 'locked' and 'stone gray' gives a sense of finality to this distance.

As we saw earlier, even within the hospital there are further hierarchical divisions among these 'others' which correspond to the numbers of the wards. Ward Two seems to be a metaphor for those who are unable to fit in anywhere and are literally and physically placed outside the world. Mavet glimpses them through a fence in the yard:

Who were they? Why were they in hospital? Why were they so changed from people that you see walking and talking in the streets of the World? And what was the meaning of the gifts or rejects which they threw over the park and yard fence - pieces of cloth, crusts, feces, shoes - in a barrage of love and hate for what lay beyond? (*Faces*, p.46)

'They' are so far beyond this world that even Mavet cannot make sense of their meanings (although her question 'Why were they in hospital?' never assumes their inherent madness). Throwing rubbish over the fence is the only means they have of crossing the boundary.

Physical separation means being placed on one or other side of the boundary. Istina Mavet, moving backwards and forwards in time and in and out of hospitals, finds herself as narrator negotiating both sides of the boundary. When she is first released from the hospital and passes the station where she had once got off to go to Cliffhaven, she can put herself in the spectator's position, a subjectivity which unavoidably objectifies those she observes. When the train stops and is switched to a siding, waiting and waiting as if abandoned, she is reminded once more of the hospital and the people there, and asks herself:

Did their life in a siding give right of way to more urgent traffic? And what was its destination? (*Faces*, p.61)

At this point, Mavet, outside, can identify the mad as others ('they') while remaining highly sensitive as to what that othering means.

The above passages are reminiscent too of Frame's second volume of autobiography, *An Angel at My Table*. Here Frame passes the station to Seacliff mental hospital where she was a patient on and off for eight years. Noticeably, although she is the spectator and is also empowered to speak to the reader as 'I', the third person 'she' forces itself into her thoughts and the text:

I saw the few *parole* patients waiting on the platform to watch the train go by. I *knew*; you see. Inwardly I kept describing myself in the words that I knew relatives and friends now used, "She's been in Seacliff. They had to take her to Seacliff." And I thought of the horror in mother's voice when, years ago, the doctor had suggested that Bruddie should go there, and mother had replied, "Never. Never. No child of mine will ever go to that place." But I was a child of hers, wasn't I? Wasn't I? ¹⁸

In describing herself through this she, Frame is identified, even through her voice as subject, as one of the other patients. Here, as author, narrator and protagonist, in control of her experiences and her text, she could evidently afford to describe herself as subject, the patients as others. But she chooses to look at herself through the eyes of others, thus implicitly taking up her given position as other, rather than objectifying the other patients with her gaze.¹⁹ Her final repeated plea 'Wasn't I?' safely and definitively set in the past, directly questions her subjectivity and selfhood. Was she her mother's child? - but more importantly, *was she*? Madness takes away the certainty of the verb 'to be'. The use of 'parole' also likens her situation to prisoners or those awaiting judgement. Frame's narrator/ protagonist at once identifies the discursive practice of othering while refusing to bow to the dictates of 'othering' that such a discourse requires.

Elsewhere Frame's text highlights the fragility of the boundary between us and them. That this boundary is erected through discourse makes it simultaneously all-powerful while in place but also extremely fragile: a slip of the tongue (literally) and you could end up on the wrong side. When a group of ladies from an institute come on a regular 'charity' visit, Mavet thinks:

¹⁸ Janet Frame, *An Angel at My Table: Autobiography 2*, (London: Flamingo-HarperCollins, 1993), p.74; emphasis in text. All subsequent references to this book will be shown in the text in parentheses as *Angel*.

¹⁹ Tessa Barringer makes a similar observation in a forthcoming article 'Neither One Nor the Other: *Faces in the Water*' in the *Journal of New Zealand Literature*. Using Trinh Minh-ha's discussion in 'Outside In Inside Out' to describe this constant drifting between identification as 'us' or 'them': 'As both outsider looking in and insider looking out, [Frame] occupies the hazardous territory where the doubly exiled walk. Neither one of "us" nor one of "them", she is "not quite the Same, not quite the Other, she stands in that undetermined threshold place where she constantly drifts in and out". Thanks to Tessa for letting me see this article prior to publication.

It was not difficult to imagine "The Ladies" themselves clinging to their bags, sitting all day in the hospital sewing room or wandering in the park or yard; sometimes it seemed they came to visit us because they had a secret affinity with us. (*Faces*, p.163)

This seems to be the case in Mavet's strange relationship to Sister Bridge, whose recognition of her affinity with Mavet's condition causes her to be hostile and almost sadistic towards her. Mavet narrates:

Since the day when I observed Sister Bridge and unintentionally surprised her into self-consciousness, she had been antagonistic towards me, almost afraid of me. Sometimes it seemed as if we shared a dreadful secret; sometimes I had the fantastic idea that we were two hawks in the sky, distant from each other as opposing winds, who had both swooped at a precise moment upon the same corpse and, on beginning to scavenge it, had found it to be composed of decaying parts of our two selves. (*Faces*, p.152)

As often in *Frame*, the name 'Bridge' is ironic and accurate: the matron should act as a link between the two worlds of the mad and the sane, tending and perhaps eventually curing the mad and sending them out into the sane world. And yet, simultaneously, she herself, living with the mad, is in danger of crossing over to their side.

It is not because the person has essential behavioural characteristics that puts her or him on the wrong side of the fence; it is how society, institutions and psychiatrists choose to define and read those characteristics.²⁰ The same behaviour in the wrong time or place could result in the classification of a 'normal' person as 'mad'. D.L.Rosenhan in a 1973 study 'On Being Sane in Insane Places' provides a classic

²⁰ The reduction of patients to the status of animals can be seen as not only the inevitable outcome of this discursive division of 'them' and 'us' but part of its very process. *Frame* takes this notion to an extreme in her novel *Intensive Care* (Auckland: Random House, 1995), where in a post-nuclear world society divides people into 'human' and 'animal': all those with the slightest physical or psychological defects may be classified as animal, which means they will be put in cages, used for experimentation, or eaten (which is of course what we actually do to animals). Importantly, however, in *Frame*'s novel it is possible to identify the discursive practices in a pre-nuclear world which would lead to such extremes later: the division is a logical extension of the euphemistic 'intensive care' which doctors, nurses, psychiatrists in hospitals and institutions give to the 'sick': a means of keeping them out of society's way, and storing them until they die 'peacefully' alone. As Foucault says, 'madness borrowed its face from the mask of the beast' (*Madness*, p.72).

example of this phenomenon.²¹ He sets up an experiment wherein eight 'sane' people get admitted to twelve different psychiatric hospitals as 'schizophrenics'. They are admitted, in a strikingly similar way to Janet Frame (as she tells the story in Angel), by 'performing' the classic symptoms of schizophrenia. Thus they tell the admittance staff: 'I keep hearing strange noises like "empty", "dull" and "thud"'. As soon as they are admitted they cease to behave 'abnormally' in any way. However, once inside the institution, behaviour considered perfectly normal on the outside is interpreted as evidence of abnormality. One 'patient', utterly bored by his days spent in the institution, walks up and down the corridor: his behaviour is interpreted by staff as nervousness. Similarly, another (pseudo) patient's regular note-taking is seen as 'pathological'. All but one of the patients were labelled 'schizophrenic' and none was released before seven days and some were not released for well over a month; on release they were described as having schizophrenia 'in remission'.

Rosenhan's study shows that there is a great overlap between the behaviour of the 'sane' and the 'insane'. Istina Mavet sees herself as a 'sane person caught unwillingly in the revolving doors of insanity' (Faces, p.127). Once she has had her first bout of EST, she recognises that, rather than *performing* the symptoms of madness, she is in fact *becoming* mad: 'I who had learned the language, spoke and acted the language' (Angel, p.95). As Tessa Barringer argues, the slipperiness of this boundary means that:

[I]n the hospital [...] the distinction between inside and out, though strictly enforced, is always already compromised; it is a paradox that generates fear and confusion not only in the bewildered minds of the in-mates but also in the staff who must police its impossible boundary. And it is a confusion which spreads beyond both hospital and text to unsettle those of us who would like to believe we are safe.²²

The reader is implicated as standing precariously on this slippery boundary: which side are we on? In reading Istina's narrative, do we become one of them, or does she

²¹ D.L. Rosenhan, 'On Being Sane in Insane Places', Science 179 (1973), 250-8.

²² Barringer, p.3.

become one of us? Ultimately, the title of Frame's novel (its central metaphor) points to this slippage: the faces in the water are the faces of the mad which we can choose to ignore as they float or drown, but those faces (like Narcissus') are also our own:

We all see the faces in the water. We smother our memory of them, even our belief in their reality, and become calm people of the world; or we can neither forget nor help them. Sometimes by a trick of circumstances or dream or in a hostile neighbourhood of light we see our own face. (*Faces*, p.150)

As Foucault tells us: 'water and madness have long been linked in the dreams of European man'.²³ Frame, however, tells us explicitly what she means this metaphor to represent. Brenda, one of the patients Istina befriends, was once a fine pianist but has a leucotomy and her character is transformed. Afterwards, she talks constantly to her brother who she imagines to be following her, and will bend down and carefully extract faeces from inside her pyjama trousers. Often, the other patients ask her to play the piano for them, something she is still able to do but as a shadow of her former self. Mavet comments:

Listening to her, one experienced a deep uneasiness as of having avoided an urgent responsibility, like someone who, walking at night along the banks of a stream, catches a glimpse in the water of a white face or a moving limb and turns away quickly, refusing to help or to search for help. *We all see the faces in the water.* We smother our memory of them, even our belief in their reality, and become calm people of the world; or we can neither forget nor help them. (*Faces*, p.150; emphasis added)

It seems incredible that Mavet has such a sense of responsibility towards the other patients especially after her own traumatic experiences of institutional life. Her use of 'we' ('we smother our memory of them, we can neither forget help them') when she could so easily have said 'you' or 'they', thereby excluding herself from this

²³ Foucault, *Madness*, p.12.

responsibility is startling. When Mavet is finally released from hospital she cannot forget these faces in the water.

Why Frame might have chosen to detail those years as fiction is not necessarily because she was afraid of direct associations being made between herself and Istina Mavet or of being re-classified as mad or schizophrenic (as was clear in Chapter Five, such associations get made anyway). But perhaps Faces in the Water is called fiction rather than autobiography for a more salient reason. The hospital's refusal to see Janet Frame as an individual with her own story to tell, results in her telling the story of all those that got left behind.

It is the emphasis on those she leaves behind in the closing pages of this work of fiction that must make the reader think twice about cast-iron and oppositional distinctions between fiction and autobiography. In this work of so-called fiction, Frame presents us with an analysis of how the mentally disturbed, ill or even deranged were treated and abused by the suffocatingly conformist society of New Zealand in the 1940s and 50s. It is clear that this text is based on Frame's own experiences but it is equally clear that the purpose of such a text is not to tell the history of the author's life. Inevitably it shows how Frame, always an observer of others, at times managed to imagine others' suffering around her more than she could understand or contemplate her own. Indeed, it is through fiction, through imagining these feelings, that she is released into telling the story of her own life; a life, however, that depends on and is determined by fiction. It is remarkable that in her autobiography, Frame skims the surface of those years in mental institutions: but perhaps now we can see that they cannot have a place in her autobiography. Because her autobiography is deliberately constructed as the text of the life of a writer, not of a would-be schizophrenic. Frame leaves it to her fiction instead to reveal the narratives of society.

Derrida has discussed autobiography elsewhere as 'put[ting] one's name on the line'.²⁴ This thin and unstable line hovers between the real and the unreal, fiction and

²⁴ Jacques Derrida, (1982) 'Otobiographies' in The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation: Texts and Discussions with Jacques Derrida ed. by Christie Mc Donald (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1985), 1-40, (p.7).

autobiography. Janet Frame's writing makes us aware that that line must also hover, for any would-be autobiographer, between madness and sanity.

iv. history refigures time

The French philosopher Paul Ricoeur, in his three-volume Time and Narrative (1984-8), describes the 'interwoven relationship between history and fiction', arguing that the tendency to force history and fiction into two separate categories belies their fundamental interdependence on each other.²⁵ This is not simply to state that the two categories blur into one another, nor that there are elements of fiction in any autobiography and that the characters and events of fictional texts must contain a degree of resemblance to the author and the author's experiences, but to state two things in particular. First, that the structures of narrative (the sense of a story, of something to be told) underpin both fiction and history;²⁶ and second, that thinking historically requires a high degree of inventiveness. This is to say then that whilst it may be necessary to maintain history and fiction as two distinct and separate categories in order that we can talk meaningfully about them, it is impossible to define them against each other, to describe history as what fiction is not or vice versa.

The main tropes through which Ricoeur draws the two categories into this interdependent relationship are 'narrative' and the 'refiguration of time': history and fiction are both narratives which seek to refigure time. Hayden White has argued:

Historical stories and fictional stories resemble one another because whatever the differences between their immediate contents (real events and imaginary events, respectively), their ultimate content is the same: the structures of human time. Their shared form, narrative, is a function of this shared content. There is nothing more real for human beings than the experience of temporality.²⁷

²⁵ Paul Ricoeur, Time and Narrative, trans. by Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer, 3 vols (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1984-88). See for example Time and Narrative Volume 3, Chapter 6 (pp.142-156) although this concept is defined throughout Volume 1.

²⁶ Patrick O'Donnell suggests: 'Even though most historians will readily agree that the writing of history is a narrative activity, many still insist on differentiating the empirical content of history - its facticity - from the rendering of history by means of the strategies of narrative' (Editor's Preface, 'Special issue: Narrative and History' Modern Fiction Studies 42 [1996], 255-7 [p.256]).

²⁷ Hayden White, 'The Metaphysics of Narrativity: Time and Symbol in Ricoeur's Philosophy of

A successful narrative, be it 'imaginative' or 'historical' must represent time in a plausible and recognisable (that is, human) way. It is impossible to escape the strictures of time whether writing science fiction or biography: without time there is no narrative, and subsequently, no meaning. Even when we are not writing chronologically, we still maintain a sense of time which is inherent to the narrative/story/plot.

Although Ricoeur does not directly address the nature of autobiography as genre in this context, he does state in a footnote: 'I ought not to avoid referring to [autobiography] in the context of the refiguration of time performed jointly by history and fiction. It is actually the only place that can be assigned to autobiography by the strategy operating in Time and Narrative'.²⁸ He argues that rather than simply re-collecting/ re-presenting the past, the historian *refigures* time. 'Time' is an abstract concept and yet we talk about it as if it were a fact, an objective given. We can do this because we have the invention of 'historical time' which mediates between 'Universal time' (the sun rising, the leaves changing colour, the rings of a tree) and our experience of 'lived time'. Before the invention of historical time (hours, days, dates), the personal experience of time must have been highly subjective: we say even now that time passes quickly or slowly. Universal time is predictable: we know that it is a repeated pattern, that every day the sun will set, but if we have no watch or sundial we don't experience this passing of time in any objectively measurable, quantifiable way.

The arbitrary nature of this 'historical time' and its lack of fit with cosmological time (why we need a leap year, for example) is well illustrated by Nabokov's words in his 'revisited' (1947) autobiography, Speak, Memory:

Among the anomalies of a memory, whose possessor and victim should never have tried to become an autobiographer, the worst is the inclination to equate in retrospect my age with that

History' in The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1987), 169-184 (pp. 179-180).

²⁸ Ricoeur, Vol. 2, p.183.

of the century. This has led to a series of remarkably consistent chronological blunders in the first version of this book. [...]

All dates are given in the New Style: we lagged twelve days behind the rest of the civilized world in the nineteenth century, and thirteen in the beginning of the twentieth. By the Old Style I was born on 10 April, at daybreak, in the last year of the last century, and that was (if I could have been whisked across the border at once) 22 April in, say, Germany; but since all my birthdays were celebrated, with diminishing pomp, in the twentieth century, everybody, including myself, upon being shifted by revolution and expatriation from the Julian calendar to the Gregorian, used to add thirteen, instead of twelve days to the 10th of April. The error is serious. What is to be done? I find '23 April' under 'birth date' in my most recent passport, which is also the birth date of Shakespeare, my nephew Vadimir Sikorski, Shirley Temple and Hazel Brown (who, moreover, shares my passport). This, then, is the problem. Calculatory ineptitude prevents me from trying to solve it.²⁹

In this example, the ancient calendar introduced by Julius Caesar (where every fourth year lasted 366 days instead of 365) is replaced and corrected by the calendar in current use, originally introduced by Pope Gregory the XIII, with very significant consequences. The historical truth-fact of date-of-birth is exposed as not only ambiguous but also accidental, the *real date* being almost impossible to resolve. Nabokov's listing of others (family and famous people) with whom he shares his birthday also highlights how such artificial inventions as the calendar cause us to identify arbitrarily with others with whom we believe we share 'historical' characteristics.

Through such temporal devices as calendars (which Nabokov reveals to be invented props), documents, archives and the conceptual props of successive generations, 'axial moments', and 'traces,' we construct a sense of progression, of time passing and time past. An 'axial moment' is an event considered so pivotal that it is perceived as having changed the course of history: other events are then measured in relation to this moment. Ricoeur gives as example, 'thirty years after the storming

²⁹ Vladimir Nabokov, Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), p.10.

of the Bastille';³⁰ a 'trace' is a piece of historical evidence such as a document which we interpret as somehow representing the past, being evidence of the past, almost in a sense standing in for the past.³¹ The invention of historical time allows us to measure time and to speak about it. We are able to place ourselves on a continuum, compare our lives with those who went before us, even to an extent immortalise ourselves by looking back to our 'forefathers' in one direction and towards our children (and our relatives' children) in another. The narrative structures (or ways of refiguring time) that we have invented for putting ourselves on this historical continuum are the same structures that we use to refigure time in fictional narratives.

Bearing this perspective in mind it is fruitful to look at the extraordinary opening passage of Frame's first volume of autobiography, To the Is-Land, which is a self-contained chapter and is set off from the rest of the book in form and style.

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 towards the Third Place, where the starting point is myth.³²

Here there is the sense of historical time as a continuum: the first place interpreted as 'before birth'; the second place as 'the living present' that constitutes a life; and the Third Place an after death zone, suggesting the cyclical nature of Universal time. Here truth and the historicity of time seem inextricably linked. Truth, facts and memories can only be associated with the trajectory of a life from birth to death: before and after all is either darkness or myth. Yet we need a sense of this before and after in order to validate the truth, facts and memories of what comes in between: the continuum of history validates our sense of who we are. As Bill Ashcroft has argued:

³⁰ Ricoeur, vol 3, p.108.

³¹ See Ricoeur, vol 3, pp. 104-126 passim for a discussion and definition of these terms.

³² Janet Frame, To the Is-Land: Autobiography 1 (London: Flamingo-Harper Collins, 1993), p.9. All subsequent reference to this book will be shown in the text in parentheses as Is-Land.

'clearly what it means to have a history is the same as what it means to have a legitimate existence: history and legitimation go hand and hand'.³³

v. imagining the past

Secondly, how the historian uses or interprets historical time will depend upon how he or she relates to the past. The past is evidently not transparently and unproblematically available. For a start, much of our access to the past depends on fallible memory and unreliable, subjective documentation. We cannot remember everything that has ever happened, not even to ourselves. As St. Augustine articulated many centuries ago, the memory inevitably becomes too big to be remembered, a 'vast, immeasurable sanctuary', parts of which must be overlooked. This then becomes a prodigious philosophical problem: the individual is more than he himself can know, 'the mind is too narrow to contain itself entirely. But where is that part of it which it does not itself contain? Is it somewhere outside itself and not within it? How, then, can it be part of it, if it is not contained in it?'³⁴ Second, the process of recording what we can remember is no more transparent or accurate. Audre Lorde noted the combined hazards of the mechanics of memory and of writing when she remarked: 'The act of writing seems impossible to me sometimes, the space of time for the words to form or be written is long enough for the situation to totally alter, leaving you liar [sic] or at search once again for the truth.'³⁵ Linda Hutcheon likewise laments 'the paradox of the *reality* of the past but its *textualised accessibility* to us today'.³⁶ Andreas Huyssen further articulates the problem in his 1995 book Twilight Memories:

It does not require much theoretical sophistication to see that all representation [...] is based on memory. Re-presentation always comes after, even though some media will try to provide us with the delusion of pure presence. But rather than leading us to some authentic origin or

³³ Ashcroft, 'Against the Tide of Time', p.95.

³⁴ Saint Augustine, Confessions, trans. by R.S. Pine-Coffin (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961), p.216.

³⁵ Audre Lorde, 'The Cancer Journals' (Oct 5, 1978), in The Audre Lorde Compendium: Essays, Speeches and Journals (London: Pandora, 1996), p.40.

³⁶ Linda Hutcheon, A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction (New York: Routledge, 1988), p.114.

giving us verifiable access to the real, memory even and especially in its belatedness, is itself based on representation. The past is not simply there in memory, but it must be articulated to become memory. The fissure that opens up between experiencing an event and remembering it in representation is unavoidable. Rather than lamenting or ignoring it, this split should be understood as a powerful stimulant for cultural and artistic activity.³⁷

Here Huyssen crucially suggests that remembering is in itself a *creative* activity, thereby undermining the notion that historical texts are non-imaginative. Paul Ricoeur tells us that while we are inclined to discuss 'history' as something real and transparent the paradox is that the past no longer is - it has vanished - so to describe it is to narrate something that is no more. How do we do this? What mechanisms are needed? Even though the past may be backed up with documents, eye-witness accounts (apart from the obvious and relevant question of just how reliable such accounts themselves are) we still have to imagine ourselves into the past, one way or another. It doesn't just exist out there for us to tell.

Using Plato's dialectic of 'leading kinds', Ricoeur outlines three broad ways of imagining the inhabitants of the past: as 'the same', as 'other' or as 'analagous'.³⁸ If we see those who lived in the past as essentially the same as ourselves, we understand that the past persists in the present and leaves 'traces'. It is only a re-enactment of the past that is necessary to bring it into the present.³⁹ Alternatively, if we see those who lived in the past as 'other' we place a temporal distance between the past and the present, exoticising the past. We have no empathy with the past: it is not like the present. The historian who interprets the past in this way would be a kind of 'ethnologist of past times', emphasising difference rather than similarity.⁴⁰ Some historians, however, see the past as analagous to the present.⁴¹ They notice

³⁷ Andreas Huyssen; Twilight Memories: Making Time in a Culture of Amnesia (New York: Routledge, 1995), pp.2-3.

³⁸ See Ricoeur, vol 3, pp.142-156 passim.

³⁹ Ricoeur offers the example of R. G. Collingwood's The Idea of History (Oxford: Oxford U P, 1946) in this category (Ricoeur, vol 3, p.144).

⁴⁰ Ricoeur here cites the French historians Paul Veyne and Michel de Certeau (vol 3, p.149).

⁴¹ This category is based on Aristotle's definition in his Rhetoric (vol 3, p.152)..

resemblances and similarities. The past then 'takes the place of' or 'stands for' the present.⁴²

Each mode of looking back requires imagination: the past no longer exists. The voice-over of Jean-Luc Godard, in his film- 'autoportrait' JLG/JLG, comments:

le passé

n'est jamais mort

il n'est

même pas

passé⁴³

Here Godard puns on the 'past' spoken as a fixed real identifiable event and 'passed', time passing, time gone. (In French it is the same word, *passé*; in English the words 'past'/'passed' are homonyms.) The solidity of the word and its referent coupled with the inherent transience and elusive nature of time are superbly captured here. Augustine, musing on the nature of time, remarks, 'I can confidently say that I know that if nothing were going to happen, there would be no future time; and if nothing were, there would be no present time. Of these three divisions of time, then, how can two, the past and the future, be, when the past no longer is and the future is not yet?'⁴⁴

The past is not simply there before our eyes; we must imagine it, whether we believe that the inhabitants of the past were like us or completely different. The creative effort that is required to conjure up the past suggests that our 'will to history', the need to see life as part of a continuous narrative, is itself the stimulus for creating fictional narratives. Alfred Hornung comments:

⁴² Ricoeur places the historian Hayden White's theory of tropes in this category - the notion that we must prefigure the past in order to designate it (vol 3, p.152). See White's Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1978).

⁴³ Jean-Luc Godard, JLG/JLG: Phrases (Paris: P.O.L., 1996), p. 77.

⁴⁴ Augustine, p.264.

There is a temporal and experiential gap between now and then; [...] the recovery of the past is ultimately not possible, for we are forever removed from the singularity of the original experience. Every mental activity in connection with those experiences is necessarily affected by *fantasy as the mediator between unconscious and conscious, between past and present stages*.⁴⁵

To return to Frame, An Angel at my Table begins with a passage similar in form, style and positioning in the text, to the passage 'In the Second Place' quoted above. What these passages suggest (at the very least) is an interest in the mechanisms of truth, memory, narrative, history and fiction. Moreover they function as 'bookends' which prop up the autobiography inside:

The Stone

The future accumulates like a weight upon the past. The weight upon the earliest years is easier 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 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.

(Angel, p.11)

This passage is deeply resonant of one of the famous opening paragraphs of Karl Marx' The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, in which he analyses Napoleon III's *coup d'etat* of December 1851:

Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living. ⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Alfred Hornung, 'Fantasies of the Autobiographical Self: Thomas Bernhard, Raymond Federman, Samuel Beckett', Journal of Beckett Studies, 11-12 (1989), 91-107 (p.99; emphasis added).

⁴⁶ Karl Marx, (1852) The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, 3rd revised ed (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1954), p. 10.

Where Marx's theory of history depends on the notion of the inescapable influence of the past on the present, the notion that the past determines the present, Frame in a complex inversion here focuses on the 'weight' of the future on the past. In this passage that serves to both introduce, comment upon and contain the 'expected, straightforward' autobiography that is to follow, Frame ruminates on her relationship to past time. The past is imagined through its future: a tense to be understood in grammatical terms perhaps as the 'future perfect'. For example, the sentence 'In five years' time I will have lived in Oamaru for ten years' is to look into the future and imagine looking back in the past. However, writing the narrative of a life from the perspective of the future (which is the author's actual present) enables the author to look back into the past, imagining her future when in fact she is writing already from that described future. Looking back on childhood in autobiography is to look back knowing what happens next: the past is informed by its own future. As Frame says in the same volume, the 'invasion of the "future" is inevitable in writing autobiography, particularly after one leaves childhood and the circle of being fills time and space and the lives of others, separated now from oneself and clearly visible' (*Angel*, p.143). In this sense it is impossible to recapture the past as it was. For Frame, the 'earliest years' are the most easily remembered. Returning to Ricoeur's terminology, perhaps this is because it is easier to see oneself in childhood as 'other', as different from one's present state and therefore easier to look upon, examine and describe.⁴⁷

'The years following childhood' on the other hand 'become welded to their future'; this past is 'the same', indistinguishable from the present. The author is too much like the protagonist to describe their differences and is thus unable to separate time into a continuum of past-present-future: each tense has an impact on the other. 'Those frail, bloodless sprouts of another, unfamiliar time' are perhaps a reference to the future that informs all autobiographies but is so little acknowledged: the inexorable movement towards death.

However, childhood is often described in autobiography as 'the same', when 'one's present interpretive perspective conditions and colours the story of one's

⁴⁷ Augustine, similarly expressing his self in the past as other, comments: 'I remember myself and what I have done, when and where I did it, and the state of my mind at the time' (*Confessions*, p.215).

past'.⁴⁸ This present perspective could be: a religious philosophy of life; a certain philosophical and political analysis of one's surroundings; or a traumatic childhood experience which inverts the equation and becomes 'how one's past may condition and colour one's present'.⁴⁹ It is difficult to read the child protagonist of De Beauvoir's Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter (1958), for example, without reference to the woman who wrote The Second Sex nine years earlier (1949).⁵⁰ Much of her description of early childhood seems to be informed by the philosophical analysis of woman as the 'other' to man that she developed much later in life. She seems almost to be translating her early experiences into evidence of an early awareness of this binary system of classification (subject/other, male/female, good/bad) and many of her memories have what could be called this 'retrospective focus'. The following paragraph is an example:

[The] ability to pass over in silence events which I felt so keenly is one of the things which strike me most when I remember my childhood. The world around me was harmoniously based on fixed coordinates and divided into clear-cut compartments. No neutral tints were allowed: everything was in black and white; there was no immediate position between the traitor and the hero, the renegade and the martyr: all inedible fruits were poisonous; I was told that I 'loved' every member of my family, including my most ill-favoured great-aunts. All my experience belied this essentialism. White was only rarely totally white, and the blackness of evil was relieved by lighter touches; I saw grays and half-tones everywhere. Only as soon as I tried to define their muted shades, I had to use words, and I found myself in a world of bony-structured concepts. Whatever I beheld with my own eyes and every real experience had to be

⁴⁸ Mark Freeman, Rewriting the Self: History, Memory, Narrative (London: Routledge, 1993), p.22.

⁴⁹ Freeman, p. 22. Freeman looks at Sylvia Fraser's autobiography: My Father's House: A Memoir of Incest and Healing. Here Fraser tells how it wasn't until she was in her mid-forties that she realised she has been sexually abused by her father. Until this realisation, her life had been something of a mystery; with this 'new knowledge' she can now look back on her life as if for the first time, seeing things she hadn't seen before and allowing her past to become absorbed into her present instead of blocking it. This psychotherapeutic side to autobiography is of course heavily influenced by the Freudian belief that a painful event must be remembered in order to be healthily forgotten.

⁵⁰ Simone De Beauvoir, Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963); The Second Sex (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984).

fitted somehow or other into a rigid category: the myths and the stereotyped ideas prevailed over the truth: unable to pin it down, I allowed truth to dwindle into insignificance.⁵¹

It remains an unanswerable question, however, whether indeed such childish observations developed into the mature realisations of The Second Sex, or whether, having come to such conclusions as a mature woman, De Beauvoir wanted to impose a philosophical coherency on her life's experiences.

Hayden White, discussing Ricoeur's 'philosophy of history' emphasises how a narrative understanding of time is common to both 'historical' and 'fictional' accounts:

To experience time as future, past, and present rather than as a series of instants in which every one has the same weight or significance as every other is to experience "historicality." This experience of historicality, finally, can be represented symbolically in narrative discourse, because such discourse is a product of the same kind of hypotactical figuration of events (as beginnings, middles, and ends) as that met with in the actions of historical agents who hypotactically figure their lives as meaningful stories.⁵²

A 'hypotactic style' is one which uses words like 'when', 'then', 'because' and 'therefore' and phrases such as 'in order to' to express the temporal relations between sentences.⁵³ The mechanisms of narrative are fundamental to telling stories, whether they be historical or fictional.

In To the Is-Land, in a chapter headed 'Imagination', Frame elaborates her understanding of historicity and its relationship to writing autobiography:

Where in my earliest years 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, 'sacks on the mill and *more on still*,' the adolescent time now became a whirlpool, and so the memories do not arrange themselves to

⁵¹ De Beauvoir, Memoirs, p17.

⁵² White, p. 179.

⁵³ See M.H.Abrams, A Glossary of Literary Terms, 6th ed. (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace, 1993), p.204.

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 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 notes of sound or colours or liquids or ideas that the writer, trying to write an autobiography, clings to in one moment only. (*Is-Land*, p.161)

Here it is as though the autobiography's narrative 'will to history' works against the whirlpool of memories that swirl in a disorderly fashion. Lived time is experienced as circular and chaotic, not linear and ordered: the order is imposed afterwards by both writer and story-teller in order to create a narrative that can be made sense of, recognised. In another passage that appears in *Angel* within the narrative body (rather than outside as the passage 'The Stone' gave the impression of being), Frame elaborates:

The process of the 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.
(*Angel*, pp.143-4)

vi. The Envoy From Mirror City

I now want to explore the possibilities of a new understanding of the 'inextricable relationship' between narrating the past and narrating fiction by focusing on the complex metaphor Frame invents and uses for the title of her third volume of autobiography: *The Envoy From Mirror City*.⁵⁴ This metaphor, like the titles of her previous volumes of autobiography, *To the Is-Land* and *An Angel at My Table*, is

⁵⁴ Janet Frame, *The Envoy From Mirror City: Autobiography 3*. (London: Flamingo-HarperCollins, 1993). All subsequent reference to this book will be shown in the text in parentheses as *Envoy*.

richly suggestive of multiple, deferred and accumulated meanings.⁵⁵ Each metaphor is built on throughout the autobiographies, described, repeated, glossed. It is in Ibiza that Frame most elaborates 'mirror city':

As I sat at my table typing, I looked each day at the city mirrored in the sea, and one day I walked around the harbour road to the opposite shore where the *real* city lay that I knew only as the city in the sea, but I felt as if I were trying to walk behind a mirror, and I knew that whatever the outward phenomenon of light, city, and sea, the real mirror city lay within as the city of the imagination.

(*Envoy*, p.66)

Mirror City then is the raw material of life worked on by the imagination. The 'envoy' has to journey to mirror city and return:

The self must be the container of the treasures of Mirror City, the Envoy as it were, and when the time comes to arrange and list those treasures for shaping into words, the self must be the worker, the bearer of the burden, the chooser, placer and polisher. And when the work is finished and the nothingness must be endured, the self may take a holiday, if only to reweave the used container that awaits the next visit to Mirror City. These are the processes of fiction.

(*Envoy*, p.155)

An 'envoy' is literally a messenger or representative. Indeed both these possible meanings sum up the ambiguities inherent in both novel and autobiography: the author as 'messenger', mediating, going-between, negotiating fact and fiction, reworking and reshaping; and the text as 'representative', a reflection of reality and one that can *stand for* (or represent) other realities. These two meanings are also indicative of Coleridge's distinction between Fancy and the Imagination in the

⁵⁵ I discuss the multiple meanings of 'To the Is-Land' in the next chapter of this thesis. Unfortunately, I have not had the time or space to go into the metaphor 'An Angel at My Table' here: suffice to say, it is taken from a French poem by Rainer Maria Rilke, one of Frame's favourite poets. I will be exploring this metaphor and the impact of Rilke on Frame's work, in more detail in subsequent research.

thirteenth chapter of his Biographia Literaria which Frame quotes from at length in her second volume of autobiography:

The most magical word to me was still *Imagination*, a glittering noble word never failing to create its own inner light. I was learning much about its composition from the University Studies of the 'set book', Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*. I learned by heart the passage,

The Imagination then I consider either as primary or secondary. The primary Imagination I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I Am. The secondary Imagination I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the *kind* of its agency, and differing only in *degree* and in the *mode* of its operation. It 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 . . . Fancy, on the contrary, has no other counters to play with, but fixities and definites. The Fancy is indeed no other than a mode of Memory emancipated from the order of time and space; while it is blended with and modified by that empirical phenomenon of the will, which we express by the word Choice. But equally with the ordinary memory the Fancy must receive all its materials ready made from the law of association. Good sense is the body of poetic genius, Fancy its drapery, Motion its life, and Imagination the soul that is everywhere and in each; and forms all into one graceful and intelligent whole.

(Angel, pp.29-30)

M.H. Abrams in his classic study of The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition (1953) proposed that before the Biographia Literaria there were principally 'two common and antithetic metaphors of mind'.⁵⁶ These were 'comparing the mind to a reflector of external objects' (which can implicitly be translated by 'mirror') and comparing the mind to 'a radiant projector

⁵⁶ M.H.Abrams, The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition (New York: Norton, 1958), p.vi.

which makes a contribution to the objects it perceives' (implicitly translated by 'lamp').⁵⁷ The metaphor of the mind as lamp was the prevailing romantic conception of the poetic mind. In Frame's metaphor of the envoy from mirror city, however, the two metaphors seem to be inextricably linked:

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. (Envoy, p.19)

Before Coleridge wrote his Biographia, Fancy and Imagination had been seen as virtually synonymous: unlike the faculties of reason, judgement and memory, they would reorder objects perceived by the senses into a new combination. The Biographia, however, relegates these attributes to Fancy alone. Fancy is a mechanical process which receives the elementary images, the 'fixities and definites' which come to it ready-made from the senses and, without altering the parts, reassembles them into a different spatial and temporal order from that in which they were originally perceived.⁵⁸ Fancy is 'passive', a 'mirrorment . . . repeating simply, or by transposition'.⁵⁹ Imagination, on the other hand, 'dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create [...] It is essentially *vital*'.⁶⁰ While Fancy is a mechanical sorting machine, the Imagination is a vital, organic, living and growing plant which generates and produces a new form of its own.

Frame is immediately taken with Coleridge's distinction:

I was fascinated by the implied gap, the darkness, the Waste Land between Fancy and Imagination, and the lonely journey when the point of Fancy had been passed and only

⁵⁷ Abrams includes as epigraph to his book a verse from W.B. Yeats (also a favourite of Frame's): 'It must go further still: that soul must become/ its own betrayer, its own deliverer, the one/ activity, the mirror turn lamp.'

⁵⁸ See M.H. Abrams 'Fancy and Imagination' in A Glossary of Literary Terms, 6th ed. (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace, 1993), pp.63-4.

⁵⁹ Coleridge quoted in Abrams, The Mirror and the Lamp, pp.168-9.

⁶⁰ Coleridge quoted in Abrams, Glossary, p.63; emphasis in text.

Imagination lay ahead. It became my goal, a kind of religion. No-one had ever forbidden association with or frowned on, Imagination.

(Angel, pp. 29-30)

Frame's distinction between autobiography and fiction or autobiography and poetry is very similar to Coleridge's distinction between Fancy and the Imagination. In her view, autobiography seems to be very much the lesser work of art, just as Fancy was the lesser faculty for Coleridge. Autobiography is a mirror, little being done with the given material of the author's life, except the act of representation, a 'mirrorment', while fiction is the place of transformation and Imagination:

My only qualification for continuing this autobiography is that although I have used, invented, mixed, remodelled, changed, added, subtracted from all experiences I have never written directly of my own life and feelings. Undoubtedly I have mixed myself with other characters who themselves are a product of known and unknown, real and imagined; I have created 'selves'; but I have never written of 'me'. Why? Because if I make that hazardous journey to the Mirror City where everything I have known or seen or dreamed of is bathed in the light of another world, what use is there in returning only with a mirrorful of me? Or, indeed, of others who exist very well by the ordinary light of day?

(Envoy, pp.154-5)

At the end of her third volume of autobiography, tempted to continue in chronological order with the next chapters of her life and produce perhaps a fourth volume, Frame pleads with the Envoy to let her continue writing about 'how I made friends and wrote books, how I went north to live by the sea, how I moved to other cities with other clouds and skies' but the Envoy insists that 'there is much to do' and then asks her, 'what is that city shining across the valley?' While Frame replies that it is of course Dunedin, the city where she was born, the Envoy disagrees: 'You say its Dunedin? It's Mirror City' (Envoy, p.191). Frame's future as a writer lies not in describing the city of her birth but in transforming that city into the Mirror City of her

Imagination. She clearly sees her work as half-done if all she has achieved is to describe what she sees, to reflect the world without transforming it, returning 'only with a mirrorful of me'. Dunedin, London, Ibiza, Auckland, are sparkling cities full to the brim with raw material: memories, objects, perceptions, thoughts and ideas, characters, stories told. But it is only in making the 'hazardous journey to Mirror City' that the Envoy can transform this essence, recreate it, make a new whole. While autobiography is equivalent to Fancy ('A truthful autobiography tries to record the essence. The renewal and change are part of the material of fiction' [Envoy, p.167]), the novel is equivalent to Imagination:

'Putting it all down as it happens' is not fiction; there must be the journey by oneself, the changing of the light focussed upon the material, the willingness of the author herself to live within that light, that city of reflections governed by different laws, material, currency. Writing a novel is not merely going on a shopping expedition across the border to an unreal land: it is hours and years spent in the factories, the streets, the cathedrals of the imagination, learning the unique functioning of Mirror City, its skies and space, its own planetary system, without stopping to think that one may become homeless in the world, and bankrupt, abandoned by the Envoy. (Envoy, p.155)

The Envoy has to transform the material of everyday experience. Indeed, Frame seems to conclude that she should not continue writing her autobiography because the events of her recent past are too close to be properly transformed by the light of mirror city (referring back to Ricoeur's terminology, Frame sees the recent past as 'the same' as the present). The events of her life must first be used as as fodder for fiction before they can be returned to and used for autobiography, having been already saved and put to their maximum use by the Imagination. Otherwise events will always be relegated to mere 'fancy', trapped in their verisimilitude, not transformed, recreated as a new organic whole:

In writing this autobiography I have been returning each year of my life to collect the treasures of my experience, and I have set them down in their own home, their own place. In trying to secure and bring home to their place the treasures of my recent past I find that, like [my niece] Pamela with her playhouse of fantasy, carpeting her floor with old treasures, pouring her teas out of cups and saucers removed from their home but transformed in their new setting, I prefer to take my treasures to my home, my playhouse, Mirror City. I have the pressure of the Envoy to do this, and even as I write now the Envoy watches hungrily as I continue to collect the facts of my life. And I submit to the Envoy's wishes. I know that the continued existence of Mirror City depends on the substance transported there, that the waiting Envoy asks, 'Do you wish Mirror City to thrive? Remember your visit there, that wonderful view over all time and space, the transformation of ordinary facts and ideas into a shining palace of mirrors? [...] Take care. Your recent past surrounds you, has not yet been transformed. Do not remove yet what may be the foundation of a place in Mirror City.'

(*Envoy*, p. 190)

And yet Frame also insists that it is the events and stories and tales of ordinary lives which must be the basis for fiction:

In my memory I hold this sheaf of papers labelled *The Return*; some pages are faded, some still starkly printed. [...] The visit to Willowglen was urgent. My brother had written that the house had been broken into several times: the new pair of double blankets had been stolen, he said. Other possessions were missing. I could feel the intensity underlining the reference to household goods and I knew with the wonder of recognition that I still had my passport to Mirror City, that it was my true home no matter how small my talent might be, how clumsy my sentences; each day and night I was in touch with the unalterable human composition that is the true basis of fiction, the great events of everyone's life and death - the returns, the losses, the gains, and now, anticipating my visit to my old home, the long pursuit of a flight from the dead and the goods of the dead. The news that Kaiapoi blankets, soft white woollen blankets never known but now precious, had gone or been stolen, encompassed a cry to bring back the dead. (*Envoy*, p.179)

I do not want to say anything conclusive about Frame's autobiographies or her fiction - I can only mention that her texts seem to me to be continually aware of the overlaps and distinctions between narrating what has happened and what is imagined, and the relationships between them. Perhaps my inability to come to conclusions is not surprising. Paul Ricoeur (one among many) has spent three hefty volumes trying to pull apart and push together again the categories of 'history' and fiction. Even he, after so much effort, admits:

The relation between fiction and history is assuredly more complex than we will ever be able to put into words.⁶¹

Returning to the discussion between Derrida and Foucault we could argue that limits are put on our ability to think through such a relationship by the words themselves: our language restricts us to stating and re-stating what is already known, what Foucault has described as 'the will to truth'. Words function within a discourse which is defined and controlled by the society within which it operates: at a given place in a given time there is only so much that can be said and what is said will always inevitably confirm the truth that the language of that society adheres to. The possible ways of interpreting the world are contained within language and their power is such that it is almost impossible to identify what they are. The paradox for Foucault is that 'because of the nature of the will to truth it will never be recognized as all-pervasive in discourse [...]. The will to truth having imposed itself on us for so long, is such that the truth it seeks to reveal cannot fail to mask it.'⁶²

Janet Frame, like Coleridge, Foucault, Derrida and Ricoeur has begun to put down what Ricoeur terms 'the relation between fiction and history' in words (which has here been linked to the relation between madness and civilisation, fact and fiction, the real and unreal, fancy and imagination, novel and autobiography). As readers we

⁶¹ Ricoeur, vol 3, p.154.

⁶² Michel Foucault, (1970) 'The Discourse on Language' in The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language (New York: Pantheon, 1972, pp. 215-237 (p.219).

can only continue to notice the ambiguities, contradictions and revelations that such linguistic distinctions confer. Until a new discourse erupts, we will not be able to do away with them altogether.

PART THREE

Specifying Difference:

Local and National Influences on a Sense of Self

Chapter Seven

'Not Even a Creviced "I"': Janet Frame's Search for a Place to Belong

My previous community had been my family. In To the Is-Land I constantly use the first person plural - we, not I. My time as a student was an I-time. Now, as a Seacliff patient, I was again part of a group, yet more deeply alone, not even a creviced 'I'. I became 'she', one of 'them'.

Janet Frame, An Angel at My Table¹

If we use the text as a frame of reference within which to investigate the construction of subjectivity, we can contemplate the prominence or importance of certain organising principles in the written construction of a life: what the author constitutes as the *principal* differentiating category of subjectivity within his or her autobiography (be it race, class, gender or sexuality, for example) will depend on a variety of factors and rarely remains fixed. Subjectivity is both an *expressed* and a *received* position, dependent in the real world on the subject's understanding, interpretation and performance of who she is and on the 'interlocuter's' perception and reception of that self. As we have seen in the two preceding chapters, within a text, subjectivity is dependent on both the author's construction of self and the reader's interpretation of self.

There are, evidently, numerous differences, or ordering categories which structure our subjectivities. Some will have overriding importance, others will vary given different experiences and social situations. Difference itself is highly selective in what it tells us about ourselves. Although the categories 'provincial' or 'sane' can have lasting repercussions for those who are named by them, they are rarely used in

¹ Janet Frame, Autobiography 2: An Angel at My Table, (London: Flamingo - Harpers and Collins, 1993), p.70. All subsequent references to this book will be shown in the text in parentheses as Angel.

the way that race, class and gender have been systematically used in the twentieth century to define subjectivity, to distinguish one person from another, and to describe similarities. Similarly, what Rita Felski describes as 'the accidents of personal history' are rarely taken into account in such categorical descriptions.² Nonetheless, these 'accidents' (disfigurement, divorce, widowhood, childlessness, might be included among these) can have a huge impact on our sense of self-esteem or access to power structures.³

In order to describe and interrogate the different category options an autobiographer might have, and whether she does indeed order her narrative to fit with these, I borrow the terms 'specificity' and 'singularity' from Elspeth Probyn. She describes specificity as 'zones of possible forms of belonging' which might include being lesbian, being Welsh, being woman.⁴ She then asks how our specific experiences become 'singular', that is, how we make such experiences meaningful to ourselves in our lived, everyday realities:

The movement from specificity to singularity can be understood as processes that render the virtual actual - the ways in which the general becomes realized by individuals as singular. [...] Specificity can be understood as the necessary zones of difference, but these zones, be they of race, class, sexuality, or gender, are the points from where we depart in order to live out our singular lives.⁵

Here I examine Frame's lived interpretation of those broader social specificities repeatedly identified by this century's social analysts and commentators as structuring our feelings and giving reduced or increased accessibility to sets of recognised experiences and readings. How does she experience the relationship between these

² Rita Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics* (London: Hutchinson Radius, 1989), p. 59.

³ As James Atlas records in 'Confessing for Voyeurs: The Age of the Literary Memoir is Now', *New York Times Magazine*, 12 May 1996, pp.25-27, not only do autobiographies often focus on such personal 'accidents' they also 'dwell on the sordid aspects of their subjects', what Joyce Carole Oates has termed 'autopathography' (p.26).

⁴ Elspeth Probyn, *Outside Belongings* (New York: Routledge, 1996), p.22.

⁵ Probyn, *Outside Belongings*, pp.22-23.

specific categories and the more singular life experiences, those ‘accidents of personal history’ which might temper her sense of belonging to such categories? Frame can be described variously as: a New Zealander whose ambivalent sense of identity can be linked to the nation's own insecurities as independent ‘dominion’; as a poor white whose family's poverty and nomadic mobility is dictated by her father's job on the railways; as the inmate of psychiatric hospitals for eight years as a classified ‘schizophrenic’; as a woman who has a failed love affair, miscarriage and remains childless, a ‘spinster’. But her fit with such categories is offset by her own peculiar family and personal circumstances: the death of her twin sister at birth and the subsequent death of her two sisters when teenagers; her mother's passionate love of language; her brother's epilepsy; her mop of frizzy red hair and her decaying teeth; and her own overwhelming desire to be a writer.

I suggest that Frame's position within the broader socially-constituted categories (race, class, gender, nationality) continually slips and slides over the boundaries of containment so that she is never consistently, completely or unproblematically ‘poor’, nor ‘white’, nor ‘woman’, nor ‘colonial’; that her inability to ‘belong’ to these categories is exacerbated by her singular experiences and that her subsequent ‘longing to belong’ is in effect the ordering imperative behind her writing. I conclude that Frame's autobiography can be read as wholly successful in creating its own category of specificity or belonging within which Frame in her very singularity or difference is the occupant *extraordinaire*, the subject. Yet it is a category (*mirror city*) which includes within it the absolute necessity of negotiation, of moving between (*to the is-land*), of enriching one category with the experience of another: her own strategical category of belonging (which is arguably the only one available to her) forces open coagulating, categorical, uniform and unifying descriptions and definitions of the self. Here then I focus on Frame's longing to belong, the categories that she at various moments desires to be part of, aligns herself with, tries to manoeuvre herself into, to ‘get in’.

The desire to belong is typical of those who sense they belong outside, what Elspeth Probyn has aptly described as 'outside belonging'. Observing the peculiar 'balcony architecture' and subsequent social character of Montreal summers, where life is lived outside, for all to see, on the balconies of flats and houses around the city, Probyn remarks:

The experience of quite literally living on the outside during the summer months [...] inspires a mode of thinking, about how people get along, how various forms of belonging are articulated, how individuals conjugate difference into manners of being, and how desires to become are played out in everyday circumstances. It lends an urgency to questions about the materiality of cultural locality and revitalizes that staple of cultural studies inquiry: How do individuals make sense of their lives? ⁶

I am interested then in which categories Frame considers available to her, which ones she rejects, which ones she is accepted into and where she finally decides to 'belong', where, to use one of the predominant metaphors of postcolonial literature, she eventually and finally claims as 'my place'.

I. Outside Belonging

Following the publication of Colin Wilson's The Outsider, there was some prestige in being 'outside,' quite unlike my experience in New Zealand when the prestige lay in being 'inside,' although when one had the prestige of being 'outside' one is then 'inside' the 'outside.

Janet Frame The Envoy from Mirror City ⁷

Frame certainly articulates a general sense of exclusion throughout her three volumes of autobiography. The early chapters of her first volume, To the Is-Land, are

⁶ Probyn, Outside Belongings, p.5.

⁷ Janet Frame, Autobiography 3: The Envoy from Mirror City, (London: Flamingo - Harpers and Collins, 1987), p 122. All subsequent references to this book will be shown in the text in parentheses as Envoy.

concerned with difference, or what it is that singles the young Janet out from the groups to which she at one time or another desires to belong and those she chooses to remain outside of.⁸ This is vividly expressed in her description of 'peer groups' at school. Frame is included in a group of top scholars, winning prizes for best speeches and essays, being the captain of the netball team, but she is envious of another group:

A selection of four or five girls, who were not, however, among the top scholars, maintained a *concentration of power and privilege* through sheer personality and so were less likely to suffer the taunts directed at other pupils. This group was *the core* of the class with their activities at home and at school *the source* of most of the class interest and news; the rest of us *moved on the outside* in more or less *distant concentric circles*, looking *toward* the group whose power, in effect, surpassed even the glory of the scholars who, after all, were sometimes known contemptuously as 'swots'.

On the rim of the farthest circle from the group which was my usual place, I found myself with a tall, asthmatic girl, Shirley's friend.⁹

That Frame, despite her own description of herself as 'swot' and despite the ample evidence which suggests she did extremely well at school both academically and in sport, still perceives herself and positions herself 'on the rim of the farthest circle' from the centre is both intriguing and typical.¹⁰ To any observer looking at her

⁸ It is interesting to note that Jane Campion's film version of Frame's three autobiographies, the internationally successful *An Angel at My Table* (Dir. Jane Campion. Prod. Bridget Ikin. Hibiscus Films. 1990), begins with a sequence of scenes that show the young Janet 'belonging' to various groups: the family, the classroom, her sisters and then moves on to a sequence of scenes where she is excluded: being investigated for 'nits' at school and classified as dirty, being branded a liar in front of the class after being caught handing out chewing gum bought with money stolen from her parents, being excluded from a skipping game. All these scenes are to be found in Frame's texts, but in a different order. Campion organises them, it seems to me, as sets of inclusive and exclusive groupings. See also Laura Jones' *An Angel at My Table: The Screenplay from the Three-Volume Autobiography of Janet Frame* (Auckland: Random, 1990).

⁹ Janet Frame, *Autobiography 1: To the Is-Land*, (London: Flamingo - Harpers and Collins, 1987), p.117; emphasis added. All subsequent references to this book will be shown in the text in parentheses as *Is-Land*.

¹⁰ Ruth Brown also notes that a school teacher of Frame's, Sheila Levy, whose class made a documentary about their famous ex-pupil's life in Oamaru, chooses to focus on Frame as high-achiever and imaginative but well-adjusted schoolgirl (in contrast to Jane Campion who chooses to represent Frame as mad genius in her film *An Angel at My Table*): 'We see images of neatness and conforming activities which exist, apparently, in happy conjunction with an imaginative inner life. There is a suggestion of continuity between the past when Janet was house-captain, captain of a netball team and prefect, and present when she is a successful writer and an illustrious old girl of the school.' (Ruth Brown, 'Aspects of Frame: the Unravelling

school record it would seem that Frame was a high achiever, a success, certainly 'in', and she recognises this contradiction between her outward and inward selves when she describes her interview for teacher training college: 'I was a house captain, captain of the B basketball team, conductor of the house choir, leader of the sixth-form jazz band, a good student [...]. I think [the interviewer] was impressed, probably seeing the bouncy, sporting, uncomplicated schoolgirl which I was not (I the shy, poetic, timid, obedient)' (*Is-Land*, p.167). Frame's pervading sense of exclusion from all the subject positions that might ordinarily be available to her, leads her on a search for a 'home' or a place to belong that will both centre her experience and acknowledge her difference. As Probyn puts it:

["Belonging"] captures more accurately [than "identity"] the desire for some sort of attachment, be it to other people, places, or modes of being, and the ways in which individuals and groups are caught within wanting to belong, wanting to become, a process that is fueled by yearning rather than the positing of identity as a stable state.¹¹

I.i. Being Woman

At my age then, in my early thirties, most women would have the help of a mate, husband, companion. I know also that there are no 'most women' and not to be one, through disinclination or disability even is not to be a personal failure: the failure lies in the expectations of others.

Janet Frame, *Envoy* ¹²

Gender is simultaneously a social and a self-positioning: it is not a fixed category. All subjects are dispersed and multi-articulated. Nevertheless, gender as a position is certainly operative and observable. In writing and in being written, subjects slip between positions. In reading a life through the lens of gender, what happens to our

of a Mad Myth' *Aspects of Commonwealth Literature*, vol 3, ed. Liz Gummer (Collected Seminar Papers no.46), Institute of Commonwealth Studies, University of London, 1993: pp. 42-47), p.44.

¹¹ Probyn, *Outside Belongings*, p.19.

¹² p.135.

reading of the self, especially when 'gender' itself is considered as a historically and culturally specific and situated category? How does a woman like Frame, who can't take on the expected gender roles (wife, mother, lover, housekeeper, carer) and is marginalised in many other ways, position herself as woman?

Perhaps the most immediate route to a sense of gendered subjectivity, is to look at Frame's relationship to her mother. Lottie Frame takes on a complex role in Frame's autobiography: she is simultaneously admired and despised, loved and rejected by her children and by the author in particular (and by implication, the sympathetic reader). On the one hand she embodies the 'feminine', living out the various roles of woman, as mother, wife, daughter, homemaker, housekeeper, carer:

Mother in a constant [sic] state of family immersion even to the material evidence of the wet patch in front of her dress where she leaned over the sink, washing dishes, or over the copper and washtub, or, kneeling, wiped the floor with oddly shaped floorcloths [. . .] : an immersion so deep that it achieved the opposite effect of making her seem to be *seldom at home, in the present tense, or like an unreal person with her real self washed away.*

(*Is-Land*, p.11; emphasis added)

The young Janet rejects this version of the feminine, seeing it as depriving her mother of her true being: as living in another world, being so immersed in her duties that she never discovers herself in the present tense. Already, in this opening chapter of the first volume of autobiography, Frame's writing betrays a desire for home/ place as belonging and an explicit rejection of her mother's role as mother as a means of achieving this.

And yet the other side of this mother is Lottie C. Frame, the local poet, a woman who loves the sound of words, who goes into ecstasies over the mention of 'Fleet Street, London', who composes recipes, sings songs, invents stories, who never stops marvelling at the world and who rejects the expected roles for women established within her own family:

We [...] watched [Aunt Maggie] knit cable stitch, a supreme accomplishment that divided the world into those who could and those who could not knit cable stitch. [...] Mum, not interested in sewing and knitting, and, in the shadow of Dad's accomplished sisters, not trying to compete, continued with her practice of her religion and her writing of songs and poetry and letters to the paper about the government. She no longer played her accordion.

(*Is-Land*, p.60)

Frame's mother oozes a contentment with her lot which irritates both Janet and her father (who each reject their own positions and yearn to be something other than who they are):

I had begun to hate her habit of waiting hand and foot, martyrlike upon her family. When I was eager to do things for myself, mother was always there, anxious to serve. I now felt the guilt of it, and I hated her for being the instrument of that guilt. 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, who sometimes tried to taunt her to show anger or accepted selfishness or any unsaintly feeling that might bring disapproval from the Christ she tried so hard to please.

(*Is-Land*, pp.159-60)

And yet, on the other hand, Janet imagines her mother longing for a different state, to be other than where she is but never allowing herself to accept the possibility. Perhaps projecting her own desire for freedom, for escape from the drudgery of home that deprives her of self (rather than the imagery of home as belonging, a place for the self), Janet watches her mother gazing out of the dark house, through the kitchen window onto the sundrenched 'flat' below:

If you looked from the cool and often cold world of the house you'd see, down on the flat by the creek and beyond it, a world where the sun stayed late, in summer until the evening; and

perhaps if you looked out, as mother did, when the day and working energy were fast being spent, you might feel 'down on the flat' to be an unattainable world of sun.

When I pleaded for mother to come down on the flat in the sun she said in the tone she used for talking of publication, the Second Coming, and, now, the white fox fur as a twenty-first birthday present, 'One of these days.'

She added, inserting the biblical language that made the 'flat' seem more distant and dream-like, 'One of these days "in the cool of the evening" I'll come and sit under the pine trees in the sun.'

(Angel, pp.52-3)

The repetition of 'one of these days' echoes the sense of eternal tomorrow, the empty circularity and predictability of desire. Lottie continues to resist crossing the threshold of the house to venture outside where her daughter so longs for her to be, her true self, stripped of her roles within the family. However, Janet realises that she too is guilty of forcing her mother to continue in her maternal/wifely role. When Lottie falls ill and has to stay in hospital, her daughter discovers:

Why, she was a person such as you meet in the street. She could talk and laugh 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. [...] What had we done to her, each of us, day after day, year after year, that 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.

(Angel, p.105)

Not until Janet returns to the house on her way up north to begin her life as a writer in Frank Sargeson's army hut (a place where she will begin to feel her sense of 'belonging' as a writer) does she finally persuade her dying mother to picnic with her 'on the flat':

And so, late one afternoon, we made chive sandwiches and filled a thermos with tea; and carrying a rug and cushions we set out for 'the flat' [...]. Feeling the warmth of the sun, I wriggled like a lizard come out to bask. [...] But mother was restless. What if the phone rang? Surely we wouldn't hear it, down on the flat? What if 'your father' came home and found no dinner prepared? Besides, she had meant to phone the weekly order at the grocer's [...]. Our picnic was too soon over. [...] Together we climbed the path up to the house; and already the sun had gone down on the flat, the driveway was growing dark, darkened more quickly by the presence of the pine trees, and we were once again where the frostbound hill leaned over the house, gripping it with a claw of everlasting winter.

(Angel, pp.153-4)

It is Janet who is released by the trip down to the flat, wriggling like a lizard come out to bask. And Janet too will succeed in bringing her writing outside, far from the confines of home and hearth; something her mother yearns for (Fleet Street, London) but never achieves.

And yet, on another level, Lottie succeeds where her daughter fails, embodying the feminine, being a mother in a way that Janet could never be and at the same time, being herself, a mother in her difference. Frame expresses this most poignantly in her description of her first meeting with her maternal grandmother. In meeting her mother's own mother, of whom she has been told many wonderful tales and whose arrival has been eagerly anticipated by Lottie, Janet is forced to distinguish her mother from other mothers (forced to realise, in other words, the singularity of her mother's mother-ness within the specific category of 'mother') and whereas her maternal grandmother fails to fit the superlative category of motherhood that her daughter has modelled for her grandchildren, Lottie surpasses even her own standards of mothering:

Was that *really* Mother's mother? we wondered. Mum's eyes were full of tears again. She knew that we knew now that her own mother had not been so perfect, after all, that she was

just like all the mothers around, other mothers that we knew, those that whipped and shouted and wouldn't let anyone walk on their clean, polished floors; thin mothers with no lap and no titties; all the other mothers except our own who was soft and went on about nature and God but who would never be cruel to anything or anyone, and 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, for the little green birds, the wax-eyes, came always and planted their tiny feet in twig shapes in the palm of her hand.

(*Is-Land*, p.73)

I.ii. The Not So Poor ¹³

Frame's perceived inability to fit the feminine norm is closely linked to the family's economic capacity for the signifiers of such femininity. Class and gender are indeed often inextricably linked and Carolyn Steedman's *Landscape for a Good Woman* is a clear indication of how a mother's yearning for 'the things of the earth' (she wanted 'a New Look skirt, a timbered country cottage, to marry a prince'¹⁴), is translated into a structure of feeling, a 'proper envy' which her daughter inherits. Steedman in effect describes her working-class British girlhood as a pervading sense of exclusion, of 'being cut off from what others enjoy'.¹⁵ Frame, too, describes a longing for the commodities which will make her 'fit in' and as so often in the text, it is her frizzy untameable hair that must bear the brunt of her inability to do so:

¹³ *The Not So Poor* is the title of an autobiography written by Mary Isabella Lee (ed. Annabel Cooper: Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1992). Her writing was a direct response to her son, New Zealand Labour politician, John A. Lee's autobiographical novel, *Children of the Poor* (London: T. Werner Laurie, 1934), in which he scandalised the nation by graphically detailing the poverty he grew up in in the 30s, his mother's prostitution and his own illegitimacy. Annabel Cooper and Maureen Molloy contend that John Lee's novel was a political move to incite public opinion to vote Labour by proving that despite his mother's own 'good' attempts to provide for her family she was thwarted by the social and economic structures in place. Mary Lee, however, was not impressed with her son's account and, determined to undo the image of herself and her family as victims of poverty, replies with her own autobiography which demonstrates how she managed, despite everything, to provide for her children. (See Annabel Cooper and Maureen Molloy 'Poverty, Dependence and "Women": Reading Autobiography and Social Policy' forthcoming).

¹⁴ Carolyn Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman: A Story of Two Lives* (London: Virago, 1986), p.9; and p.7.

¹⁵ *Landscape*, p.18.

I felt desolate at school. I longed for impossible presents, a doll's house, a sleeping doll, birthday parties, pretty dresses, button-up shoes, patent leather, instead of the lace-up leather shoes with their heavy soles and heel and toe plates, hair that fell over my face so I could brush it away, saying, 'My hair's always getting in my eyes . . .' instead of frizzy red hair 'up like a bush' with everyone remarking on it. (*Is-Land*, p.82)

The family's financial economies mean that the adolescent Janet can not buy sanitary towels and the home-made bundles of cloth she is taught to use place her femininity, on the sensual levels of both smell and sight, as highly undesirable, something she wishes to banish and conceal (that indeed society *requires* to be hidden). Her mother's outright refusal to buy her the much coveted corset and brassiere now talked of urgently by the 'Group' ('I'll not have you putting restrictions on your body') causes Janet to lament dramatically, 'O blind Mother, she did not even notice how tight my tunic had become across my developing breasts (*Is-Land*, p.138). This is the same tunic made for her by an aunt and worn every day throughout her school years. These material deprivations are closely linked to Frame's sense of belonging:

There were the usual worries about money and an increasing worry for me about my school tunic [...]. And there was a feeling of being nowhere, not being able to talk about life at home, and seeing the apparent confidence and happiness of the other girls in the class, particularly those in the Group, all of whom returned to school. (*Is-Land*, p.123)

Clothes throughout the autobiographies are crucial symbols of wealth, femininity and belonging. Just as Steedman and her mother learn, through the magazines of the 1960s, that 'the goods of [the] world of privilege might be appropriated, with the cut and fall of a skirt, a good winter coat, with leather shoes, a

certain voice; but above all with clothes, the best boundary between you and a cold world', ¹⁶ so Frame comments that as a young girl in New Zealand in the mid-30s:

Appearance had always been important, and the appearance of others, their particular clothes, had brought a sense of comfort or loss. My father's change of suit color as his change of his brand of tobacco (for he *wore* his tobacco like his clothes) could bring panic to his children. During the depression days my father's suit was gray, and I do remember a search lasting hours up and down Thames Street to find a shop that sold a reel of gray cotton to match the thread of Dad's suit. After the depression, when he changed to navy blue, our shock and feeling of strangeness were similar to our feeling when Mother cut her hair or put in her false teeth. 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. (*Is-Land*, p.171)¹⁷

There is a strong contrast between the luxury of clothes bought to enhance your looks and those that become a 'second skin', an enforced identity, because they are literally the only clothes you have and 'use is everything'.

Commentators on Frame's work and life have noted that her sense of economic deprivation in comparison to others seems exaggerated: she was growing up in the 1930s, during what was a severe economic depression throughout New Zealand, many of the male breadwinners laid off work. In Frame's story, her father always has work. Moreover, the family owned a car, the 'grey Lizzie Ford', at a time when cars were by no means available to all families. But it is significant that Frame should emphasise her sense of deprivation. Retrospectively, she acknowledges that there were many around her who were worse off:

¹⁶ *Landscape*, p.38.

¹⁷ In a short story 'My Father's Best Suit', in her first book, published in 1951, *The Lagoon and Other Stories* (Christchurch: Caxton, 1961; pp.75-8), the protagonist's father is distressed because he has a hole in his one best suit and the cotton bought to mend it is the wrong colour grey.

Although we girls often felt our life had a *tragedy* and *difference* compared with the apparent life of others of our age, toward the end of my years at school I emerged from a shocked concentration on the turmoil of being in Oamaru, the state which received so much blame for so much that had happened to us, to a realization that many other girls had not even reached high school because their parents had not been able to afford it or made the sacrifices to afford it as our parents undoubtedly did. I thought of the family of seven children up Eden Street who went barefoot, not always by choice, and of how I'd seen them running to school on a frosty morning, their feet mottled blue with cold; and of the family in Chelmer Street who lived only on soup made from pork bones from the bacon factory. And nearer home, as *I seemed to awaken from a long, troubled family sleep*, I was suddenly aware of other girls with 'funny' uniforms that were flared without the regulation pleats. (*Is-Land*, p.169; emphases added)

When she discovers another family, remarkably similar to her own (creative, clever and versatile, issuing their own family magazine, yet poor), rather than perceiving her 'fit' with this group, their many similarities in the deprivations they suffered and in 'the closeness, the almost island state of the family', Frame can only position herself outside, envious, longing to be inside. Her description of this family's home is reminiscent of a Dickensian novel with Frame the street urchin, staring in through the frost patterns on the window pane of a large house at the warm glow inside of a family sharing tea and warmth and love: 'I cherished the memory of the glimpse of their big dining-room table with everyone sitting around it, all drawing, working things out, reading, writing, in a quiet harmony of brown and gold, with no sudden disastrous crevices of being, no epileptic fits, no alarm, confusion, crying, fear. Or so it seemed to us' (*Is-Land*, p.170). Here it is clear that the singularities of the Frame family experience ('I seemed to awaken from a long, troubled family sleep') complicate her perception of possible identification with specific categories.¹⁸ She is

¹⁸ In a paper presented to a conference on 'Lives, Stories, Narratives' at Monash University in July 1997, Kay Torney argues most interestingly that 'Frame's autobiographical persona represents the simple fact of her existence, much less any personal success, as having been achieved at the cost of endless death, by murder, misadventure or exploitation, of siblings, grandparents, parents, pets, fellow patients. Her work

unable to identify with anyone outside her family because she experiences her family life as extraordinary, as marked by its irrevocable difference. The 'epileptic fits, crying, confusion, fear' cause these 'sudden disastrous crevices of being' where it is impossible to perceive oneself as 'like' anyone else.

1.iii. The Whiteness of Race

The book that everyone was talking about in our house was Uncle Tom's Cabin, by Harriet Beecher Stowe, and I was being called Topsy because my hair was frizzy.

'Who are you?' they'd ask me, and I learned to reply 'I'm the girl that never was born pras I grew up among the corn. Golly. Ain't I wicked!'

Janet Frame, Is-Land ¹⁹

Whiteness as a category has, until recently, rarely been explored. In a recent study, Richard Dyer focuses on 'white' as a racial category and argues that it is fundamental that it is always recognised as a specific category rather than masquerading as the universal signifier of being human.²⁰ It is interesting that on a superficial reading, white as category seems to be missing from Frame's perception of her self but does in fact pervade the text. Her sense of herself as white is complicated by her own singular appearance and experiences as well as her position as a colonial New Zealander. Indeed, Frame's whiteness, and her inability to fit this category unproblematically, comes into focus only when she describes difference, the 'blackness' of others. In the first chapter of To the Is-Land, Frame begins the story of who she is by delineating, as so many autobiographers do, her ancestry.²¹ Her description of her paternal grandmother is puzzling:

repeatedly shows the central character's fear that she has metabolised these deaths for her own "nourishment", and the dreadful effects of that experience, which appear in the text as gaps, losses, mindlessness.' (Quoted from the abstract.)

¹⁹ p.15.

²⁰ Richard Dyer White (London: Routledge, 1997).

²¹ James Olney in his essay 'The Value of Autobiography for Comparative Studies: African versus Western Autobiography' (William L. Andrews, ed. African American Autobiography: A Collection of Critical Essays [Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1993], pp.212-223) makes the observation that whereas white people have followed a tradition of 'autoautography' naming and describing themselves through their own actions and immediate relationships, black people follow a tradition of 'autophylography', listing

[Grandma Frame's] skin was dark, her black hair frizzy, and although she talked in Scottish, the songs she sang were of the American Deep South. [...] I assumed that Grandma Frame was African and had been a slave in America, that her real home was 'Virginny,' where she longed to return; for you see I knew about slaves. (*Is-Land*, p.15)

The young Janet is convinced for a while that her paternal grandmother is black. A little later, we learn that 'Mother had told us how she had been "brought up among the Maoris" because her mother had step-sisters and brothers who were Maori' (*Is-Land*, p.67). From an early age, Frame obviously identified strongly with both African and Maori cultures, believing them at some level to be her own inheritance. And yet no reviewers or commentators on Frame's life or writings that I have come across (nor Frame herself) seem to have dwelt on this identification - an odd discrepancy since so much debate (in New Zealand and Australia in particular) has been centred around the 'authenticity' of claims other authors have made to 'belong' to ethnically and racially marginalised cultures.²² Critics have somehow been blind to these references and failed to investigate further. If Frame's ancestry were discovered to be African, Frame could be accused of downplaying this inheritance in her writing and we might wonder why she would do this (although in so doing she avoids falling into the trap of claiming authenticity, and its associated privileged

generations of predecessors as essential components of their autobiographical identity:

For the life-portrait that the African autobiographer executes is not the portrait of 'moi, moi seul', where the subject makes a claim of absolute uniqueness and imagines that his experience is unrepeatable; instead the African autobiographer executes a portrait of 'nous, nous ensemble' and the life shared by the group now - by the phyle - is one lived countless times before, shaped by the ritual stages of birth and naming, initiation, marriage, parenthood, eldership and death that have given form to the life of this people for as far back as the legendary, mythic memory of the people extends. Thus even memory, the chief faculty of the man who would write his own life, is not a personal faculty but a collective one for the African autobiographer' (p.218).

I find this generalisation suspect, especially since Olney does not appear to take gender into account.

²² In 1984 the New Zealand author Keri Hulme received the Pegasus Award, a one-off award which was ear-marked for a Maori writer. New Zealand's then foremost literary critic, C.K. Stead, questioned the definition of a Maori writer in this context: no literature in Maori had at that point been published; all Maori writers therefore wrote in English; the works entered for the prize could thus only be considered 'Maori' by virtue of the racial antecedents of the authors. Stead then comments that 'Of Hulme's eight great-grandparents only one was Maori.' ('Keri Hulme's *The Bone People*, and the Pegasus Award for Maori Literature' *Ariel*, 16[1985], 101-108 [p.103].) Much subsequent discussion of Hulme's novel has been interested in the 'authenticity' of her Maori background, especially as it relates to the themes of Maori spirituality in the novel.

access to truth through experience: terms she persistently strives against in all her writings). But whatever her actual racial genealogy, Frame is certainly here acknowledging her own early identification with both her grandmother as a symbol of blackness and the history of slavery that blackness connotes, and her own symbolic identification as black through her frizzy, untamable and 'different' hair.

As we saw in Chapter Four, Toni Morrison, the African-American Nobel Prize-winning novelist and literary critic, in her series of lectures on 'Whiteness and the Literary Imagination' explains how she had once assumed that if the author of a text was not black, 'the appearance of Africanist characters or narrative or idiom in a work could never be *about* anything other than the "normal," unracialized, illusory white world that provided the fictional backdrop.' But then she makes a crucial realisation:

The fabrication of an Africanist persona is reflexive; an extraordinary meditation on the self; a powerful exploration of the fears and desires that reside in the writerly conscious. It is an astonishing revelation of longing, of terror, of perplexity, of shame, of magnanimity. It requires hard work *not* to see this.²³

The subject of the text, the author's own subjectivity, are constructed on the body of the other. If the black American woman were truly absent from American history and Western philosophy, there would be no subject to speak of (there would be no subject to speak). Morrison's early assumptions as a reader were that blacks did not signify in the imagination of white American writers. But when she looks at the texts as a writer she realises that texts actually tell very different stories from what we as readers have been trained to see: 'Writers are among the most sensitive, the most intellectually anarchic, most representative, most probing of artists. The ability of writers to *imagine what is not the self*, to familiarize the strange and mystify the

²³ Toni Morrison, Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination [1992] (London: Picador-Pan McMillan, 1993), pp.16 and 17.

familiar, is the test of their power.’²⁴ The test of a writer is the extent to which he or she can imagine herself as other than she is.

Time and again, Frame makes direct associations between the appearance and feel of her hair and the connotations of such hair with blackness, slavery, difference. She is called Topsy after the black heroine of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s Uncle Tom’s Cabin and learns to recite Topsy’s words in her Southern American dialect on call for visitors (as in the epigraph at the beginning of this section). Later in Is-Land, when Frame is too old to ‘play’ such roles without giving some thought to their broader significance, she realises that her hair, far from being a singular characteristic that might be admired, is perceived as undesirable, incorrect, even to be feared, and should therefore be changed, controlled, managed. Her hair, in short becomes a direct representation of otherness about which people around her consistently articulate their feelings:

My frizzy tangle of red hair, [...] seemed to alarm everyone the way it naturally grew up instead of down, causing people to keep asking, ‘Why don’t you straighten it? Why don’t you comb it flat, *make it stay* flat, put oil on it or something; *no one* else has hair like yours.’ And no one had, except Fijian and African people in faraway lands. At school I was now called *Fuzzy*.

(Is-Land, p.138; emphasis in text)

Throughout history, hair has taken on cultural significance as a symbol of difference and has been employed to represent idealised versions of class, race and gender both by the dominant and oppressed. Freud has focused on hair as fetish: an idealised symbol of women's sexuality.²⁵ Kobena Mercer has drawn attention to the role of hair-styling in black resistance history: in the 60s the ‘Afro’ hairstyle figured as a sign of black power, the ‘natural’ African look celebrating a return to origins rather

²⁴ Morrison, p.15; emphasis added.

²⁵ See for example, On Sexuality: Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality and other Works (Harmondsworth: Penguin -Pelican Freud Library , vol. 7, 1977), pp. 66 and 68.

than denigrating them. However, as Mercer points out, such hairstyles were far from natural, requiring grooming with a special 'pick' comb and moreover, they had no equivalents in Africa, where they were supposed to come from:

As organic matter produced by physiological processes human hair seems to be a 'natural' aspect of the body. Yet hair is never a straightforward biological 'fact' because it is almost always groomed, prepared, cut, concealed and generally 'worked upon' by human hands. Such practices socialize hair, making it the medium of significant 'statements' about self and society and the codes of value that bind them, or don't. In this way hair is merely a raw material, constantly processed by cultural practices which thus invest it with 'meanings' and 'value'.²⁶

Hair is 'as visible as skin colour, but also the most tangible sign of racial difference.'²⁷ In a world where degrees of ethnicity (decided by a combination of physiological and cultural elements) determine status and power, hair has a key role to play:

[Unlike the] less easily changeable elements of status symbolism such as the shape of one's nose or the shade of one's blackness [...], hair functions as a key 'ethnic signifier' because, compared with bodily shape or facial features, it can be changed more easily by cultural practices such as straightening. Caught on the cusp between self and society, nature and culture, the malleability of hair makes it a sensitive area of expression.²⁸

Frame's naturally frizzy hair gives her the 'Afro' look: what will later be seen as a threatening symbol of willful difference. Just as many black people straightened their hair to iron out this difference in the 'conk' style of the 40s, Frame is exhorted to resort to any method to get her hair to look like white woman's hair.²⁹ Robert Young's

²⁶ Kobena Mercer, 'Black Hair/ Style Politics', *New Formations*, 3 (1987), 32 - 54 (p.34).

²⁷ Mercer, p.35.

²⁸ Mercer, p.36.

²⁹ Mercer argues, however, that this straight style should not be simply interpreted as appropriation of white style by blacks: she argues that all black hairstyles are an aesthetic response to racism and a form of resistance which in turn would be appropriated by white culture. Far from imitating white styles, black

analysis of Colonial Desire confirms that in 'apartheid South Africa, a test of true whiteness was whether a pencil, when placed in a person's hair, would stay put or drop to the floor.'³⁰ Frame, on the cusp of whiteness and blackness in this way, is outside a culture which would allow her to style her hair to her own advantage as an expression of self-determined identity, as Mercer argues black people have done throughout history.

Fascinatingly, Frame tells us that she was helped to cope with such abuse, demands and her own painful self-consciousness of this excessive hair (which, as we have seen, is also linked to her awareness of her woman's body which is literally bursting out of her school tunic) by a Chinese man her father befriends while in hospital with appendicitis. Frame's previous contact with and perception of Chinese people is typical of the colonial West's depiction of the 'Far' East, so vividly described by Edward Said in Orientalism.³¹ At school Frame had been taught about 'The Yellow Peril' and told of 'Eastern races and their evil designs on the West' and is yet aware of the amount of damage such perceptions can cause: 'Although we children had once chanted rhymes after all strange people, I remembered an elderly Chinese man walking by one day and our chanting at him and the baffled expression on his face when he looked at us, and I felt uneasy, as if I had done something I couldn't undo' (Is-Land, pp.137-8).

The Chinese patient Frame's father befriends brings the family a beautiful 'budding and blossoming' plant, a narcissus:

We kept the plant on the sewing machine near the dining-room window, in the light, and whenever I looked at it I was aware of a new kind of beauty, a delicacy, which I tried to take and keep, for, in a way, my awareness of it helped to efface my growing consciousness of my

hairdressers re-defined straight hair, dying it red to emphasise the artifice, the styling common to all hair-styles in effect. It is perhaps a further irony that Frame's hair is naturally frizzy *and* red.

³⁰ Robert J.C. Young, Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race (London: Routledge, 1995), p.141.

³¹ Edward Said, Orientalism (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

body, the now-too-tight tunic often dirtied with cow muck and byre mud, the cobble-mended stockings coarse and thick, my frizzy tangle of red hair. (*Is-Land*, p.138)

The delicacy and fragility, the ‘new kind of beauty’ of this plant (which not uncoincidentally is a narcissus, appropriately suggestive of ‘excessive or erotic interest in oneself and one’s physical features’³²) somehow enables Frame to overcome her embarrassment at her visible difference and excess: her female body (controlled and tamed by her tunic and her family’s poverty) and her racialised hair. As so often in Frame’s autobiographies, clothes and hair as symbols of identity and difference are simultaneously linked to gender, race and class.

Frame’s sense of herself as white is complicated both by her own peculiar appearance and her parent’s unusual (for the time and place) non-racist beliefs:

Mother, like the mother bird of the world, sprang always to defend all races and creeds (not quite; she condemned Roman Catholics) and colors as if they were her own ‘yongkers’ (our word for baby birds); while Dad, too, was without prejudice except toward the ‘toffs’ of the world and royalty. (*Is-Land*, p.137).

However, at school the teacher pronounces the desirability of the ‘purity of race’:

Intermarriage of race, she said, produced an inferior ‘type,’ citing the intermarriage of the Maoris and the Chinese. She spoke with pride of the ‘purity’ of the white race. Also at that time, by some subtle transmissions within the community, people who were Jewish were now identified as such and often spoken of in a slighting way. The word *nigger* was accepted as a description of African races and as a name for black cats, a color for shoe polish and items of clothing. And those people who were known to be ‘half-caste’ were spoken of as unclean. (*Is-Land*, p.137)³³

³² OED.

³³ The rest of the quote reads: “This increased attention to “purity of race” had come to our town no doubt by way of Nazi Germany and the British Empire, and there was much talk at school of eugenics and the possibility of breeding a perfect race. Intelligence tests became fashionable, too, as people clamoured to find themselves qualified for the “perfect race” and to find others who were not so qualified.”

Frame thinks the word *half-caste* is 'related to Dad's fishing casts and cast sheep and the worm casts on the front lawn after the rain' and yet in many ways she experiences herself as half-caste, a misfit, between two 'pure' races, black and white.

I.iv. Complex Coloniality: Being Pakeha

. . . what great gloom

Stands in a land of settlers

With never a soul at home.

Allen Curnow, 'House and Land'³⁴

A sense of being neither one thing nor the other is compounded by a sense of being neither here nor there: Frame's perception of her whiteness is complicated by her ambiguous positioning as 'colonial'. Historians have suggested it is 'impossible to do justice to the complexity of New Zealand feelings about the Motherland, Empire, and Commonwealth' and Janet Frame's autobiographies highlight just how complex such feelings can be.³⁵ As a white New Zealander of European descendants she can be categorised as belonging to the 'colonisers' who stole land from the Maori inhabitants in the mid-nineteenth century. The Maori chiefs signed the infamous Treaty of Waitangi in 1840 which they believed gave them rights to land but through a (deliberately) inaccurate translation they gradually lost much of their land to the Europeans.³⁶ Today the Maori people make up only 12% of the population (ranking

³⁴ In *An Anthology of Twentieth Century New Zealand Poetry*, ed. by Vincent O'Sullivan, 2nd edn. (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1976), p.115.

³⁵ W. David McIntyre, 'Imperialism and Nationalism', in the *Oxford History of New Zealand Literature*, ed. by Geoffrey W. Rice, 2nd edn. (Auckland: Oxford UP, 1992), pp. 337-347 (p. 337). McIntyre is here reporting and paraphrasing a comment of Keith Sinclair's.

³⁶ On 5 February, 1840, the Treaty of Waitangi was signed. It is widely agreed that this year marks the beginning of the colonial period *per se* although the treaty itself was a muddled agreement, few knowing exactly what had been agreed. The problem was largely one of text and language. Firstly, there were several texts produced and it was not known which was the authoritative text. The second was a problem of translation. The Maori chiefs who had been invited to sign the treaty were read a translation of the text that in some instances contained translations that could have been misinterpreted by the Maori, and in other instances, were translations differing widely from the original English document so that it was obvious the English translator was doing his best to transform the text into an acceptable document for the Maori, while the document that the chiefs signed was, of course, the English version. A controversial item in the text was the 'pre-emptive' clause which gave the Queen the right of first refusal over any land that the Maoris wished

as the highest percentage, however, of the unemployed, the badly-housed and badly-paid, and the imprisoned).

Frame's somewhat confused sense of herself as white can be closely linked to the emerging sense of New Zealand as a bicultural society, made up of Maori and Pakeha. Indeed, although the 'Maori renaissance' was initiated in the 80s (the period when Frame was writing her autobiographies), as we have seen, racial issues in general were of prime concern in the period Frame was growing up. Indeed, on one of the children's pages of the local newspaper (where a letter written by Frame is also published) there is a letter from 'Muriel May' condemning Pakehas for calling Maori 'niggers'. However, the tone and content of her argument is revealing of the times:

I am more than considerably surprised at the so little respect New Zealanders have for the Maoris. I do not really know why this is so, as they are a great intellectual people, their language is the most beautiful I have ever heard, they are artistic and very musical, and they have extraordinary talents, among them being the ability to master practically every profession of the white man. [...] Until white people condescend to accept their coloured brother nations as equals, we cannot expect peace to be attained.

The editor's considered reply is no less typical:

[The Maori is a splendid type, physically and mentally, and this fact is recognised by all people who have had actual contact with them. The slurring inflection to which you refer reflects the unfortunate mentality of the person who uttered it. Gross ignorance should always be regarded with pity rather than anger.]³⁷

to sell. This was to be widely manipulated by English prospectors later. A third clause, again an obvious appeasement for the Maori, promised them the rights and privileges of British subjects. However, as has been shrewdly pointed out, it 'ignored the fact that British subjects were not normally subject to a pre-emption clause; and wisely it made no mention of the obligations of British subjects.' (J.M.R.Owens, 'New Zealand Before Annexation' in *The Oxford History of New Zealand*, p.52.) See also D.F.McKenzie, 'The Sociology of a Text: Oral Culture, Literacy and Print in Early New Zealand' in the *Social History of Language* ed. by Peter Burke and Roy Porter (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987), pp.161-197.

³⁷ *Otago Daily Times*, 28 December 1936, p.13. An analysis of these children's pages and more examples of Frame's own letters are discussed in the final section of the next chapter.

'Pakeha' is a Maori term, which probably came into use in the early nineteenth century when the Maori first confronted white Europeans. To them, it meant simply, 'not Maori'. It became an official term in 1840 when the Treaty of Waitangi was signed and Queen Victoria was called 'pakeha' in the Maori version.³⁸ 'Pakeha' has now been reinstated as a term that white New Zealanders of European origin have claimed as their own, fuelled by the success of Michael King's autoethnography Being Pakeha, a Penguin bestseller in the mid-80s.³⁹ Importantly, King describes his book as 'selective and ethnic autobiography, a book about belonging and not belonging'. His professed aim was to find answers to the questions: 'Who was I, who was my family, where did we come from and where did we belong? What did it mean to be Pakeha in New Zealand?' and he concluded that his identity as a New Zealander was constituted on his knowledge of and interaction with Maori people: 'One essential ingredient of Pakeha-ness as far as I am concerned, is contact with and being affected by Maori things: Maori concepts, Maori values, Maori language.'⁴⁰ A new term, 'pakehatanga' ('Maoritanga' means Maori culture), made a fledging appearance as a result of the book but with little success.

The voluntary adoption of the term 'pakeha' was a unique and significant claim for white ethnic identity: no other similar term exists in other settler societies.⁴¹ For King and others who choose the term, 'pakeha' legitimates white Europeans as 'a *second indigenous New Zealand culture*', an implicit apology but also denial of the pakeha's role as colonising/ immigrant/ imposter culture.⁴² Such claims to legitimacy are revealing: in identifying as 'pakeha', white New Zealanders are not only expressing sympathy with the Maori as legitimate inhabitants of the land, they are also attempting to resolve a crisis of identity precipitated by the Maori renaissance of

³⁸ Avril Bell 'Being Pakeha: the Politics of White Settler Identity in Aotearoa/ New Zealand' (Paper presented by visiting New Zealand academic to the Sociology Seminar Series 'Culture, Communication and Identity' at the Open University, 24 August 1995.)

³⁹ Michael King, Being Pakeha: An Encounter with New Zealand and the Maori Renaissance, 3rd edn (Auckland: Hodder and Stoughton, 1988).

⁴⁰ Being Pakeha, p.7 and p.19.

⁴¹ Avril Bell made this point in her presentation cited above.

⁴² Being Pakeha, p.19.

the mid-80s.⁴³ To claim a pakeha identity is a specific form of 'me too-ism', asserting a right to belong, a claim to authentic ethnicity. As Jonathan Lamb interprets: 'The tyranny of an origin at once spurious, obscure, guilt-ridden and unjust is manifested curiously among Pakeha writers and critics as problems of self, of morality, of belonging, of history, and of language.'⁴⁴

The assertion of authenticity or the right to belong is clear in many of the autobiographical pieces solicited by King for his later collection Pakeha: the Quest for Identity in New Zealand (indeed such motivation is evident in his chosen title).⁴⁵ Nearly all the contributors define themselves in opposition to both Maori and British cultural identities. Vivian Hutchinson, ex-journalist and consultant on employment issues suggests:

I'd offer the opinion that it is unlikely that many people in this country can define themselves without the First People appearing in the wings of that definition somewhere. Not that I think there is anything wrong with that [...]. It's very much easier to define your identity when you are faced with a striking difference in attitudes, beliefs and protocols such as we find between the two dominant races here in Aotearoa.⁴⁶

Lynda Dyson, in a review of King's collection, makes the astute point that:

It is as if by assuming a *pakeha* identity white New Zealanders are able to effect a 'de-centring' of their Western identity through a disavowal of privilege. This strategy becomes almost credible in the context of the nation's peripheral role in global culture and politics, enabling the *pakeha* to claim 'minority' status alongside the Maori.⁴⁷

⁴³ This is widely thought to have been initiated by Donna Awatere's claims to 'Maori sovereignty' in an influential document of that name (Auckland: Broadsheet, 1984). The adoption of the term 'pakeha' by white European New Zealanders has also enforced a homogenisation of the term 'Maori' which originally referred to a diverse group of people, who were more specifically described by canoes or 'iwi' (tribe).

⁴⁴ Jonathan Lamb, 'Problems of Originality: or, Beware of Pakeha Baring Guilt', Landfall, 159 (1986), 352-359 (p.353).

⁴⁵ Pakeha: The Quest for Identity in New Zealand, ed. by Michael King (Auckland: Penguin, 1991).

⁴⁶ Vivian Hutchinson, 'The Planetary Pakeha' in Pakeha, ed. by King, pp.129-145 (p.135).

⁴⁷ Lynda Dyson, Review of Michael King's Pakeha: The Quest for Identity in New Zealand, forthcoming in Bronz (British Review of New Zealand).

The only writer in the collection who seems aware of this danger is the historian, W.H. Oliver:

I find it understandable that Maori should claim special status as tangata whenua [the people of the land], though I do not agree with them. I find it impossible to sympathise with Pakeha who make a similar special claim in terms of place of birth. They lack the experience of deprivation which makes the Maori claim an understandable political position.⁴⁸

Throughout King's collection, pakeha is also defined against British and European culture. Paul Spoonley, a sociology lecturer writes:

Why do I call myself a Pakeha? First of all, it clearly says what I am not. I am not a European or even European New Zealander. I am a product of New Zealand, not of Europe. I am not English, despite immediate family connections with that country. Nor am I Maori or one of the other ethnic groups that exist here.⁴⁹

In the need to assert a distinct national identity over and against a British one, the book is scattered with startling general condemnations of stereotyped British behaviours that a British person might find hard to recognise:

Once I was in a jam and asked a British friend to lend me her watch for an hour, during which I'd have been about fifteen metres away. She wouldn't do it - 'Watches are personal'. I felt embarrassed, as if I'd witnessed something dishonourable. I haven't got a single native-born friend who would react that way.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ W.H.Oliver, 'Belonging to the Land' in Pakeha, ed. by King, pp. 92-104 (p.92)

⁴⁹ Paul Spoonley, 'Being Here and Being Pakeha' in Pakeha, ed. King, pp. 146-156 (p. 146).

⁵⁰ Lyndsey Head, 'Culture on the Fault Line', in Pakeha, ed. King, pp.23-34 (p.34).

Christine Dann declares that Pakeha are in fact distinct from the British because they are emotional and sensuous,⁵¹ whereas Lesley Max is dismayed at the formalities inherent to British culture: 'Long-term colleagues addressed one another on a Mr/Mrs basis. Homes were fortresses guarding privacy. At a dinner in Richmond the polite murmur of conversation (sans politics, sans sex, sans religion, sans anything personal) rarely drowned out the muted clack of cutlery on crockery'.⁵² None seem to have made the more sophisticated move that Claudia Bell makes in her Inventing New Zealand: Everyday Myths of Pakeha Identity, suggesting that the 'characteristics' of pakeha identity so proudly defined against the British and Maori (such as mateiness, generosity, informality) are as much cultural constructs and stereotypes fulfilling particular historical and political needs as the image of the dependent colonial country they are striving against.⁵³

Even so, white New Zealanders can hardly be described as 'colonials' in the way that the Raj in India could: a visiting power whose troops and government are brought in to control and manage a population. In New Zealand, the Europeans arrived, not, ostensibly, to control the indigenous population but in search of a better life. New Zealand offered a Pacific paradise, a new home and a fresh start, closely allied to other 'settler colonies' of what has been termed the 'white diaspora'.⁵⁴ The Australian scholar Meaghan Morris has commented that:

Dominion subjects are the "whingeing whites" of international cultural studies. Dubiously postcolonial, prematurely postmodern, constitutively multicultural but still predominantly white, we oscillate between identities as coloniser and colonised.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Christine Dann, 'In Love With the Land' in Pakeha, ed. King, pp.46-60 (p.58)

⁵² Lesley Max, 'Having it All: The Kibbutznik and the Powhiri' in Pakeha, ed. King, pp. 79-91(p.86).

⁵³ Claudia Bell, Inventing New Zealand: Everyday Myths of Pakeha Identity (Auckland: Penguin, 1996).

⁵⁴ This term comes from Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures (London: Routledge, 1989), p.19. The authors use this as a comparative term which includes the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, which can in turn be compared to countries of the 'Black diaspora' (without explanation 'black' is capitalised whereas 'white' is not) and those which bridge these groupings, for example the West Indies.

⁵⁵ Quoted in Lynda Dyson, 'Post-Colonial Anxieties and the Representation of Nature and Culture in *The Piano*' Sites, 30 (1995), 119-30 (p.122).

Indeed, to an extent, the white settlers of New Zealand can be described as sharing many 'structures of feeling' in common with the once colonised peoples of countries as diverse as India, Pakistan, Singapore and Malaysia.⁵⁶ The postcolonial, like the postmodern, is a category which is infamously difficult to pin down. As Benita Parry has argued, 'there is a constant slippage between significations of an historical transition, a cultural location, a discursive stance, and an epochal condition'.⁵⁷ In cultural and literary studies the postcolonial more often refers to a set of discursive practices which provide insights into the make-up, operation and 'imagining' of certain nations, helps us to understand how and why nations represent themselves in certain ways.⁵⁸ Here I will use both the historically-formulated notion of postcoloniality and the discursive theoretical practice of postcolonial theory to interrogate New Zealand's national identity, arguing that the historical conditions can set up certain binaries within the cultural imagination (authentic/ artificial; here/ there; inside/ outside; sane/ mad). These oppositions can be read at all levels of national public and private discourse: in the newspapers, in autobiographies, in novels.

II. A Sense of Place

Such feelings can be traced in the dominant metaphors employed by postcolonial writers of fictional literature. One such metaphor has been identified as 'place' which is associated with a sense of displacement or homelessness which is itself linked to

⁵⁶ It is difficult to define Raymond Williams' much-used term, 'structures of feeling'; the sense of the phrase is cumulative throughout his writing. However, see his essay 'Structures of Feeling' in Marxism and Literature (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1977), pp. 128-35. Laura di Michele has usefully noted that Williams first uses the phrase in his 1954 Preface to Film where it describes a 'general or shared culture' and goes on to elaborate that in Williams' Border Country 'structure of feeling' is 'construed in the interconnections between the characters and the various situations they are in; it also shows how the "structure of feeling" can be used by the narrator to explain a specific sensibility and mentality, to reconstruct the culture of a period.' ('Autobiography and the "Structure of Feeling" in Border Country' in Dennis L. Dworkin & Leslie G. Rowan, eds. Views Beyond the Border Country: Raymond Williams and Cultural Politics (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 21-37 (p. 22).

⁵⁷ Benita Parry, 'The Postcolonial: Conceptual Category or Chimera?' The Yearbook of English Studies, 27 (1997), 3-21 (p.3).

⁵⁸ The concept of 'imagining' nations of course refers to Benedict Anderson's Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism, revised ed. (London: Verso, 1991).

notions of identity and self. Settlers typically migrate great distances to lands geographically and temperately very different from their own, bringing with them a vocabulary which has been developed to describe the flora and fauna and experiences inherent to the mother tongue of the mother country. This vocabulary is inadequate for the the new land, where unnamed animals, trees, birds and places have to be named (typically with the imported names from home). There is a constant misfit between name and place, an overwhelming sense of the difference of the new place from the old and the settler's constant displacement and the corresponding sensation of homesickness. As a second or third-generation settler, there is a bizarre sense of nostalgia for a place never visited but which is prevalent in every aspect of the culture. Indeed, a New Zealander either 'at home' or overseas is neither here nor there. Third generation 'pakeha' New Zealand historian and biographer Michael King describes 'an appetite to visit the places to which I was connected but had never seen.' This longing for 'home' can only be satisfied by going to Europe and the first sense on arrival is of recognition:

And there, suddenly, was England; and equally suddenly, a sense of excitement. Subdued light, spacious parks, rivers with punts, hedgerows, and then row upon row of terraced houses; each aspect known to me from film, television, books, or hearsay, and yet each revealed with the full freshness of first sighting. In spite of all my preconceptions, my stern patriotism [for New Zealand], the feeling was one of *deja vu*. [...] It was odd to be in a foreign country in which so much was already known to me.⁵⁹

However, so often in autobiographies by New Zealanders, the 'Big OE' (Overseas Experience) is a fundamental turning point on the journey to self-identity, which here is synonymous with national identity. This is not the reason for leaving ('Just like the rest of my wingless-but-will-fly compatriots I suspect I wasn't sure why I was going') but it is the inevitable effect.⁶⁰ Jim Traue, going to the States in his

⁵⁹ Michael King, *Being Pakeha*, p.158.

⁶⁰ Christine Dann, pp. 50-1. This phrase is a play on the word 'kiwi' to define a New Zealander which

mid-thirties to learn his trade as a librarian believes 'it did as much as anything experienced in New Zealand to help me understand the distinctiveness of the New Zealand experience and to find myself imaginatively as a New Zealander'.⁶¹

It is the ultimate confrontation with the mother country, the so-called origin, that finally enables a New Zealander to relish their difference: 'I felt more, not less, a New Zealander. I became more deeply conscious of my roots in my own country because I had experienced their absence.'⁶² It is this journey which resolves the schizophrenic sense of being neither here nor there because it clarifies belonging by confirming what one is not.

As Ashcroft et al explain in The Empire Writes Back, there is a 'special post-colonial crisis of identity' which is 'the concern with the development or recovery of an effective identifying relationship between self and place'⁶³ and the New Zealand poet Alan Curnow suggests that a writer must discover 'self in country and country in self'.⁶⁴ Indeed, in many 'postcolonial' and/or 'settler' autobiographies, the emphasis on 'my place' sounds suspiciously like protesting too much. In Australia, Sally Morgan's autobiography entitled My Place initiated debate around the nature of an 'authentic' Aboriginal culture. Morgan, an Aboriginal, was effectively claiming Australia as her home, whilst problematising her own identity within that space. The dedication reads: 'To my family: How deprived we would have been if we had been willing to let things stay as they were. We would have survived, but not as a whole people. We would never have known our place.'⁶⁵ As Michael King says, 'My place is New Zealand. New Zealand is my place'.⁶⁶ It is clear that a problematic sense of

derives from the nearly extinct indigenous wingless birds.

⁶¹ Jim Traue 'A Citizen of the Polis with a Library Card and Borrowing Rights', in Pakeha ed. by King, pp. 61-70 (p.65).

⁶² King, Being Pakeha p.171.

⁶³ Ashcroft et al, pp.8-9.

⁶⁴ Quoted in Lamb, 'Problems of Originality' p.355.

⁶⁵ Sally Morgan My Place (South Fremantle, W. Australia: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1987).

⁶⁶ Being Pakeha p.172. Similarly, a letter to the New Zealand Review of Books points out the magazine's 'careless error' in referring to the author's anthology of nineteenth century verse as 'The New Land' when the title is, in fact, 'The New Place': 'The title was deliberately chosen. When I was a boy growing up on Banks Peninsula, we never spoke of "Smith's Farm", "our farm" or "Granny's house". It was always "Smith's place", "our place", "Granny's place". Blanche Baughan's poem, 'The Old Place', summed up the end of an era and the poetry of settlement. When the new place becomes the old place, then settlement has truly taken place.' Harvey McQueen, New Zealand Review of Books, June 1997, p.2.

belonging is inherent in such a statement. The very act of claiming rights to a place suggests outside belonging. As Elspeth Probyn suggests, 'if you have to think about belonging, perhaps you are already outside'.⁶⁷ Indeed, while it is hard to imagine a white middle-class Englishman saying 'My place is England. England is my place', it is not difficult to imagine Meera Syal, a contemporary British Indian woman writer, asserting/ protesting her belonging-ness and claiming England as her own.⁶⁸

Gaston Bachelard has theorised a 'poetics of space' which can be applied to Janet Frame's descriptions of various places, houses and niches where she manages to discover this sense of belonging, this 'my place'. For Bachelard, a series of domestic places (the house, cellar, attic; drawers, chests and wardrobes; nests, shells, corners; inside and outside) are all images of what he calls 'felicitous space' because they confer intimacy and protection and, most especially, because they are the sites of poetic day-dreaming.⁶⁹ In posing first of all 'the problem of the poetics of the house', Bachelard asks,

How can secret rooms, rooms that have disappeared, become abodes for an unforgettable past? Where and how does repose find especially conducive situations? How is it that, at times, a provisional refuge or an occasional shelter is endowed in our intimate day-dreaming with virtues that have no objective foundation? [...] On whatever theoretical horizon we examine it, *the house image would appear to have become the topography of our intimate being* [...] There is ground for taking the house as a *tool for analysis* of the human soul. [...] Not only our memories, but the things we have forgotten are "housed." Our soul is an abode. And by remembering "houses" and "rooms" we learn to "abide" within ourselves.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Probyn, *Outside*, p.8.

⁶⁸ A paper presented to a conference on 'Representing Lives, Women and Auto/Biography' at Nottingham Trent University (23-25 July, 1997) discusses this aspect of Syal's novel (often read autobiographically): Sarah Lawson Welsh, '(Re)Constituting Complex Subjectivities: The Uses of Autobiography in Meera Syal's *Anita and Me* (1996) and Moniza Alvi's *The Country at My Shoulder* (1993) and *A Bowl of Warm Air* (1996).

⁶⁹ Gaston Bachelard, (1958) *The Poetics of Space*, trans. by Maria Jolas (1964), (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), p.xxxv.

⁷⁰ Bachelard, pp. xxxvi-ii; emphasis (where underlined *and* italicised) added.

Throughout the three volumes of Frame's autobiographies, home/place is a crucial signifier of belonging, closely associated with a sense of self and identity. As a very young girl, Frame finds a childhood shelter: 'On our first week in our Glenham house on the hill, I discovered a place, *my place*. [...] I knew that this place was entirely *mine*'.⁷¹ The volumes end too, with a metaphoric exploration of place through Frame's conceit of the 'mirror city'. Indeed, as we will see, 'mirror city' is the home she invents for her writing self, thus inscribing her special form of belonging. Frame's autobiographies are so full of place as signifier of belonging that this can be read as the *raison d'être* of the writing itself: to give Frame a place to be.

That Frame perceives something in common with other 'postcolonial' countries or the colonised populations of such countries is clear from her description of the relationships she first develops on arriving in London. She is befriended by an Irishman, Patrick Reilly, who sees in her a fellow-sufferer: 'as a colonial, he said, I would understand what the English had done to Ireland'.⁷² Later, she meets Nigel, a black Nigerian who 'was one of the few I had met in London who knew facts about New Zealand'.⁷³ However, she becomes painfully aware of her own prejudiced colonial background when she can find nothing to say about Africa. She is perceptive in describing where they differ as victims of colonisation:

We shared much. We were both 'colonials' with a similar education [...]. He too had read of other places, other worlds with a mantle of invisibility cast upon his own world. I was more favoured, however, in having my ancestors placed most among the good, the strong, the brave, the friendly, in the position of the patronizing disposers, the blessed givers.

(*Envoy*, p.34)

⁷¹ *Is-Land*, p.18; emphasis in original.

⁷² *Envoy*, p.23.

⁷³ *Envoy*, p.32.

She comments on Nigel's suit, his briefcase, his appearance, to all intents and purposes, that of an Englishman. But Frame sees this as unsuccessful, a 'false uniform', an imitation of the English that does not succeed because in attempting to change his appearance, his appearance itself (his black skin) becomes more incongruous. She notices, rather, that the insides of his hands are pink, like rose-buds. They are 'much more English than his English clothes', suggesting that rather than conscious imitation, the colonised person can prove himself to have his own 'English' qualities that, ironically, an Englishman himself could never have. This reflection makes her consider that she, too, is wearing a false uniform in her writing, adopting the 'word-clothes' of Keats: 'no doubt, like Nigel, in time, once I felt safe in my new world I would discard my false uniform - already my handbag was more a burden than a joy'.⁷⁴

Adopting her own false uniform, in her first attempt to get her work published while in London, Frame disguises herself as a West Indian writer:

I was much influenced by West Indian writers and, feeling inadequate in my New Zealandness (for did not I come from a land then described as 'more English than England'?) I wrote a group of poems from the point of view of a West Indian new arrival and, repeating the experiment that Frank Sargeson and I had made with the *London Magazine* when I pretended to be of Pacific Island origin, I sent the poems to the *London Magazine* with a covering letter explaining my recent arrival from the West Indies. The poems were returned with the comment that they were 'fresh, original' [but] did not quite come up to the standard of English required. (*Envoy*, pp.28-9)

She explains this as: 'In a sense my literary lie was an escape from a national lie that left a colonial New Zealander overseas without any real identity.'⁷⁵

Frame also talks of literature, in a broader sense, needing a home. She remembers the year 1945 as special not only because of the war and the bomb but

⁷⁴ *Envoy*, p.33.

⁷⁵ *Envoy*, p.29.

'two or three other events bringing those dreamed-of planets and stars within the personal world of myself and many others in New Zealand.' These events were 'the publication of *Beyond the Palisade*, poems by a young student at the University, James K. Baxter, *A Book of New Zealand Verse* edited by Allen Curnow, and a collection of short stories edited by Frank Sargeson, *Speaking for Ourselves*'.⁷⁶ On reading this literature, Frame is shocked to discover that 'there was such a creation as New Zealand literature; I chose to ignore it, and indeed was scarcely aware of it. Few people spoke of it, as if it were a shameful disease'.⁷⁷ It is interesting that she should immediately liken the marginalisation of her country to the marginalisation of her illness. Indeed, Margaret Atwood has described the postcolonial/ settler sense of being neither here nor there as a condition of madness: 'A person who is "here" but would rather be somewhere else is an exile or a prisoner; a person who is "here" but *thinks* he is somewhere else is insane.'⁷⁸

Frame goes on to describe the thrill of reading about a landscape she could recognise, had lived in,

[in] poems about Canterbury and the plains, about 'dust and distance,' about our land having its share of time and not having to borrow from a northern Shakespearian wallet. I could read, too, about the past, and absences, and objects which only we could experience, and substances haunting in their unique influence on our lives.⁷⁹

Frame's experience of cultural displacement is by no means unique. Again, in King's collection, *Pakeha*, many of the contributors mention this 'dissonance between what I read on the page and what I "read" in person as somehow a defining sense of being Pakeha'.⁸⁰ Poignantly, Pat Rosier, co-editor of New Zealand's feminist

⁷⁶ *Angel*, p.67.

⁷⁷ *Angel*, p.67.

⁷⁸ Margaret Atwood, *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1996), p.18.

⁷⁹ *Angel*, p.68

⁸⁰ Dann, p.48.

magazine Broadsheet tells how Frame's first novel had the same impact on her that Sargeson's writing had on Frame:

As a young adult I read Janet Frame's *Owls Do Cry*. Here was a real, serious book - literature even - that was set here, in New Zealand. [...] I recognised so much: the way they dressed and talked; the father worked in the railways like mine; people outside the family were strange and mysterious, as I experienced them. Here in print was life with moods, atmospheres and places I knew. Reading *Owls Do Cry* was a revelation that showed me glimmers of my own *colonial identity confusion*. I was in 'my place', but it was a place that hadn't counted, hadn't figured in the world of books that enriched my life.⁸¹

In the first and only edition of Sargeson's Speaking For Ourselves, his Foreword reads thus:

Apart from two or three exceptions, all the writers represented in the book are New Zealanders living in their own country. And that is to say they are living in a country which so far can't exactly be described as over-generous in its encouragement of its own writers. Nor do I need to remind readers that our population isn't very large. And in such circumstances it is surely quite remarkable that so many writers exist, who can achieve what I may perhaps be allowed to describe as a very decent competence in the craft of modern short-story writing.⁸²

John Thomson comments that Sargeson's collection was the first anthology of New Zealand short stories, collecting writers 'for their fellow countrymen and not exploiting the country's exoticism for the benefit of English readers'.⁸³ Frame's reaction to the collection is revealing in the terms this chapter has set out: 'The stories [...] overwhelmed me by the fact of their *belonging*. It was almost a feeling of having been an orphan who discovers that her parents are alive and living in the most

⁸¹ Pat Rosier, 'Reading the World' in Pakeha, ed. by King, pp.105-116 (p.107; emphasis added).

⁸² Frank Sargeson, Speaking For Ourselves (Christchurch: Caxton, 1945).

⁸³ John Thomson, 'Bibliography' in the Oxford History of New Zealand Literature in English, ed. by Terry Sturm (Auckland: Oxford UP, 1991), pp. 603-709 (pp. 625-26).

desirable home - pages of prose and poetry.’⁸⁴ This metaphor is complex: the stories belong, they have a place. Without an accepted canonical /Leavisite tradition, they were homeless. But then the subject of the metaphor changes almost unconsciously, imperceptibly: it is the author who is the orphan, not the literature. Janet Frame has been looking for her ‘place’ as a New Zealand writer, seeking an identity and a family. She has been training herself to find a place for her ideas to ‘come home to’.⁸⁵

The need for New Zealand literature to find a home is paralleled by Frame’s search as an author for both a physical home and home for the literary muse. Towards the end of her final volume of autobiography Frame is in a dilemma. Should she stay in London where she has made literary and publishing contacts, where she has received expert counselling at the Maudsley and the liberating disclosure that she had never suffered from schizophrenia, or should she return to New Zealand, the place of her birth but where she has experienced so much personal hardship including the tragic deaths of two sisters and her own eight-year long incarceration? She is prompted into a decision by the news of her father’s death: she is the sole executor of her father’s estate, her epileptic brother having been made legally incapable of handling the affairs of the property. She decides to return to New Zealand, realising that her reasons for leaving New Zealand in the first place were not literary ones (as they were for many previous New Zealand writers who could not get published even within their own country ⁸⁶). Frame retrospectively declares that she left the country in order to re-construct an identity for herself. Having been through all the necessary steps to establish this identity she concludes that the time is right to ‘come home’, New Zealand being her ideal literary base:

⁸⁴ *Angel*, p.68; emphasis added.

⁸⁵ I have extracted this notion from Frame’s comment earlier in the same volume: ‘A state of restlessness can be infectious and any departure from an artist’s planned routine can be a trigger to anarchy as the ideas, looking in, find nowhere to come home to’ (*Envoy*, p.81).

⁸⁶ Frank Sargeson, the ‘founding father’ of New Zealand letters, is a notable exception. He never had a reputation ‘overseas’ and Frame indeed recalls, ‘I was strongly influenced in my decision [to return to New Zealand] by remembering, from time to time, Frank Sargeson’s words to me, “Remember you’ll never know another country like that where you spent your earliest years. You’ll never be able to write intimately of another country.”’ (*Envoy*, p.166). Katherine Mansfield, as short-story writer and Dan Davin as writer, editor and critic, are among the better known New Zealand-born writers who remained in England, and successfully established literary reputations.

Europe was so much on the map of the imagination (which is a limitless map, indeed) with room for anyone who cares to find a place there, while the layers of the long dead and recently dead are a fertile growing place for new shoots and buds, yet the prospect of exploring a new country with not so many layers of mapmakers, particularly the country where one first saw daylight and the sun and the dark, was too tantalizing to resist. Also, the first layer of imagination mapped by the early inhabitants leaves those who follow an access or passageway to the bone. 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. (*Envoy*, pp. 165-66)

Again, this passage is reminiscent of a similar perception of her native Canada made by Margaret Atwood:

Canada is an unknown territory for the people who live in it, and I'm not talking about the fact that you may not have been on a trip to the Arctic or Newfoundland, you may not have explored - as the travel folders have it - This Great Land of Ours. I'm talking about Canada as a state of mind, as the space you inhabit not just with your body but with your head. It's that kind of space in which we find ourselves lost.

What a lost person needs is a map of the territory, with his own position marked on it so he can see where he is in relation to everything else. Literature is not only a mirror; it is also a map, a geography of the mind. Our literature is one such map, if we can learn to read it as *our* literature, as the product of who and where we have been. We need such a map desperately, we need to know about here, because here is where we live. For the members of a country or culture, shared knowledge of their place, their here, is not a luxury but a necessity. Without that knowledge we will not survive.⁸⁷

⁸⁷ Atwood, *Survival*, pp.18-19.

Frame chooses New Zealand, this geographical and literary periphery, as the ideal place for her fiction simply because it is less explored, less known and therefore there is more scope for the imagination, more likelihood of describing and inventing scenes and experiences never before written down. New Zealand then becomes a 'blank slate' much as Frame wanted the writing of her life to be.⁸⁸ That the writer is 'mapmaker' is particularly suggestive, outlining shapes and contours, representing the real at the same time as 'making' something new, providing a means of navigating the country, finding a way to its heart, representing identity. The first map of a country is its first image and while it is now clear that mapping is by no means such a precise and objective science, the first map contains so many more possibilities than any subsequent: you have no idea what it will look like, it provides access to a place no one has seen from above, visually, as a whole, before.

Frame could have even been thinking of one of New Zealand's first mapmakers, the nineteenth-century British literary critic, novelist and painter Samuel Butler. In a particularly apposite article, E.S. Schaffer describes Butler's early excursions into the New Zealand landscape and his subsequent mapping of what he found there:

The best known of his maps is undoubtedly that of Erewhon, the imaginary country, the utopia, 'nowhere' spelt (nearly) backwards, in the novel of that title (1870). This map is not wholly imaginary, however, but is let into and superimposed on the real map of New Zealand at the time (1861-64) he went out to the colony as a sheep farmer and carried out explorations in order to stake out a claim for land. Butler himself is given credit in New Zealand exploration literature for having extended the mapping of the new country, and having come very near to discovering the major pass across the country, Arthur's Pass.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ As discussed in Part Two in her description of Patrick Evans as 'one of the Porlock people' after he wrote an early biographical outline of her life.

⁸⁹ E.S. Schaffer, 'Samuel Butler's Fantastic Maps: *Erewhon*, the "New Jerusalem", and the Periplus of Odysseus' in *Word and Image*, 4 (1988), 510-522 (p. 511).

Butler's 'imaginary' map of Erewhon is based on the Rangitata Valley in the North Island, 'the "feigned" features depart as little as possible from the actual, and the routes as little as possible from Butler's own travels'.⁹⁰ However, once Butler goes 'over the range' and begins to describe and map a second range of mountains, he visualises an actually unexplored New Zealand. Butler maps his utopian nowhere on a land that he has physically explored but then goes on to imagine a landscape beyond the confines of his own explorations.

The times and places that constitute Butler's map become ever more complicated, Frame's evocation of 'layers of mapmakers' having a particular resonance, since Butler also overlays his travels into Italy onto New Zealand. He likens his own vision of utopia to that of the Franciscan monk, Bernadino Caimi (1481) who wanted to reproduce the Holy Land in his home landscape, the Alpine Valleys of the Piedmont, and thus built a monastery there. Subsequently Caimi and others draw many maps and reproductions of this displaced Holy Land. Schaffer comments that 'while Butler did not himself make a map of the Sacro Monte he was clearly attracted by the similarity of the vision to his own erewhonian map, the superimposition of one mental country on another'.⁹¹ In Butler's imposition of an imaginary landscape on a landscape he actually explored (effectively blanking out the physical space that is New Zealand) and the further superimposition of an Italian vision of Utopia upon his own, the historical connection between mapping and the literary imagination is clear, and Frame's expression 'Europe was so much on the map of the imagination' takes on a fresh resonance. The challenge for Frame is both to 'map' New Zealand, describing and outlining its features, marking out the possible terrain and to 'put it on the map', contributing to that first layer of imagination:

I knew that I must have been one among thousands of visitors to London who had stood by the withered sedge, remembering Keats, experiencing the excited recognition of suddenly inhabiting a living poem, perhaps reciting it from memory, and then, as if rejecting a worn-out

⁹⁰ Schaffer, p.513.

⁹¹ Schaffer, p.516.

gift, with a sense almost of shame, banishing the feeling, then, later, going in search of it, reliving it without judging, yet aware that too often everyone must tread the thousandth, millionth, seldom the first early layer of the world of imagination. Yet only the first day and night in earth could ever be thought of as the first layer on which the following secondary makers wove the shared carpet that in the peculiar arithmetic of making allows no limit of space for the known and unknown works of past and present and those, unfashioned, of the future. Looking down at London I could sense the accumulation of artistic weavings, and feel that there could be a time when the carpet became a web or shroud and other times a warm blanket or shawl: the prospect for burial by entrapment or warmth was close. How different it appeared to be in New Zealand where the place names and the landscape, the trees, the sea and the sky still echoed with their first voice while the earliest works of art uttered their response, in a primary dialogue with the gods. (*Envoy*, p.28)

The unmapped physical space that is New Zealand is then also the space where images resonate with their original intensity, where language functions in a kind of Edenic arcadia where everything is heard and understood for the first time, not worn out with interpretation and repetition.

III. Belonging Outside/ Performing Belonging

In an adolescent homelessness of self, in a time where I did not quite know my direction, I entered eagerly a nest of difference which others found for me but which I lined with my own furnishings; for, after all, during the past two years I had tried many aspects of 'being'.

Janet Frame, Is-Land⁹²

Having examined a range of normalised categories (gender, class, race, nationality) to which Frame should belong but from which she felt herself to an extent excluded, I now turn to her search for alternative categories to belong to.

⁹² p.136.

Frame has always perceived herself as 'different' but she gradually learns that this very difference might constitute a category to which she could belong. At times she is variously described as 'brilliant' (a judgement of her piano-playing that 'pleased, confused and frightened me with an intrusion of public opinion and expectation'); as 'shy' ('I seized this [...] as a welcome, poetic attribute and made shyness a part of my personality'); as 'imaginative'; and as 'original': ⁹³

'Jean's so original,' the teacher said one day, causing me once again to feel trapped by the opinion of others. I did not think of myself as original: I merely said what I thought. Yet an acknowledgement of an apparent 'difference' in my thinking seemed to fit in with the 'difference,' as I thought it to be, of my life at home [...] and when the idea of 'difference,' given to me by others in a time when I did not know myself and was hesitant in finding out, for I was not an introspective person, was reinforced by Miss Gibson's remark to Isabel, 'You Frame girls think you're so different from everyone else,' I came to accept the difference, although in our world of school, to be different was to be peculiar, a little 'mad.' (*Is-Land* p.136)

Early on, Janet identifies certain kinds of difference as highly glamorous and desirable. The Frame girls' first family friend is described thus:

Marguerite overwhelmed us with her difference, her different mannerisms, speech, vocabulary, clothes, her parents, her house, even her religion, Roman Catholic, which meant that she attended a different school and was taught by nuns. A born actress, she took advantage of her *glamor*, insisting, truthfully or not, that she was really Spanish.

(*Is-Land*, p. 102; emphasis in original)

At junior school there is a girl in Janet's class named Shirley Grave who, rather than being admonished for gazing absentmindedly out of the window, is described by the

⁹³ *Is-Land*, p.134; and p.144.

teacher as 'dreamy' and 'poetic'. Frame is envious of this description and desperately tries to emulate the girl's behaviour so that she too will be considered a poet, a category she overwhelmingly longs to belong to. When Shirley's father dies, rather than a sense of pity for her loss, Janet only envies her this extra qualification for being a poet. The author's self-mocking humour is obvious here: 'I was overcome with envy and longing. Shirley had everything a poet needed plus the tragedy of a dead father. How could I ever be a poet when I was practical, never absentminded, I liked mathematics, and my parents were alive?' (*Is-Land*, p. 115).

Frame has a distinct image of what a poet should look, be and sound like and is conscious that she is lacking many of the prerequisites. She goes about becoming a poet then, not just by writing poems but by performing the entire repertoire of the poetic persona:

I perceived that in a world where it was admirable to be brave and noble, it was more brave and noble to be writing poems if you were crippled or blind than if you had no disability. I longed to be struck with paralysis so that I might lie in bed all day or sit in a wheelchair, writing stories and poems. (*Is-Land*, p. 98)

In the same self-deprecating, ironic yet humorous tone, Frame tells how she won a prize for a poem that contained the word 'dream' - a word she has deliberately placed in the poem because she understands it to be 'poetic'. After this success, she continues to collect 'poetic' words and string them together, winning prizes for such poetry and thus, in her own analysis, becoming a poet by imitation:

I began to collect other words labeled 'poetic' - *stars, gray, soft, deep, shadowy, little, flowers* . . . some having begun as words in my poem but being used, in the end, because they were the words of 'poetry,' and because poetry emphasized what was romantic (dim, ineffable, little, old, gray) I felt that I was well on the way to becoming and being known as 'poetic and imaginative.' (*Is-Land*, p. 116; emphasis in text)

The medical diagnosis of Frame as suffering from schizophrenia is undoubtedly precipitated by her studied performance of all the relevant symptoms. After six weeks in hospital she is released but keeps in contact with the young psychology professor whose concern has put her there in the first place. Mistakenly, he tells the impressionable young woman that her schizophrenia linked her in his mind to artists such as Van Gogh, Hugo Wolf and Schumann. Desperate to cultivate her artist's persona, Frame pounces on the category of schizophrenic:

I built up a formidable schizophrenic repertoire: I'd lie on the couch, while the young handsome John Forrest, glistening with newly-applied Freud, took note of what I said and did, and suddenly I'd put a glazed look in my eye, as if I were in a dream, and begin to relate a fantasy as if I experienced it as a reality. (*Angel*, pp. 78-79)

The unsuspecting John Forrest is thoroughly duped by his 'textbook schizophrenic'. Reading up about the symptoms of schizophrenia, Frame discovers a case history of a woman who was afraid (as she was) of going to the dentist and 'on exploration in the Freudian manner, it was discovered that *fear of the dentist* was common in those suffering from schizophrenia [...] being interpreted as *guilt over masturbation* which was said to be one of the causes and a continued symptom of schizophrenia!' (*Angel*, p. 80). Ironically, it is through her research into schizophrenia that Frame learns about masturbation ('And of course I tried it. And childhood was suddenly long long ago, for I knew, and I couldn't return to the state of not knowing'). Even though her sex manual, *Meeting and Mating*, informs her that masturbation is 'acceptable in both men and women with no need for guilt', for John Forrest she turns on her schizophrenic paranoia:

A few weeks later I said to John Forrest, 'It's awful, I can't tell you, for years I've been guilty about it. It's . . . it's . . .'

He waited expectantly.

'It's masturbation, worry over masturbation . . .'

'It usually is,' he said, and began to explain, as our book had explained, how it was 'perfectly alright, everyone did it.'

The pattern of that 'little talk' was so perfect that I imagine (now) a fleeting triumph passing over John Forrest's Freud-intensive face: here was a textbook schizophrenic.

(Angel, p. 81)

However, evidence that Frame's schizophrenia is performance is by no means a straightforward indication of mistaken diagnosis. One of the symptoms of schizophrenia is indeed, the performance of symptoms of schizophrenia. Frame's input into the above dialogue is strikingly reminiscent of the strategies employed by schizophrenics. The celebrated 60s psychiatrist R.D. Laing records the 'case study' of his patient, Joan, who admits: 'We schizophrenics say and do a lot of stuff that is unimportant, and then we mix important things in with all this to see if the doctor cares enough to see them and feel them.'⁹⁴ Frame acknowledges this when she comments: 'that the idea of my suffering from schizophrenia seemed to me so unreal, only increased my confusion when I learned that one of the symptoms was "things seeming unreal". There was no escape' (Angel, p.78). She then distinguishes her performance from actual manifestations of the disease:

In spite of my pretence at hallucinations and visions I was growing increasingly fearful of the likeness between some of my true feelings and those thought of as belonging to sufferers from schizophrenia. I was very shy, within myself. I preferred to write, to explore the world of the imagination, rather than to mix with others. I was never withdrawn from the 'real' world, however, although I was convincingly able to 'use' this symptom when the occasion required.

(Angel, p. 80)

⁹⁴ R.D. Laing, (1959) The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), p. 164.

The dictionary definition of schizophrenia is 'a mental disease marked by a breakdown in the relation between thoughts, feelings, and actions, frequently accompanied by delusions and retreat from social life'. Frame is certainly retreating from social life but this is perhaps more likely evidence of an impending nervous breakdown than schizophrenia although in his earlier Politics of Experience, Laing writes: 'It seems to us that *without exception* the experience and behaviour that get labeled schizophrenic is [sic] *a special strategy that a person invents in order to live in an unlivable situation.*'⁹⁵

R.D. Laing's analysis of schizophrenia in The Divided Self, could well apply to the protagonist Janet Frame: 'The schizophrenic is often making a fool of himself and the doctor. He is playing at being mad to avoid at all costs the possibility of being held *responsible* for a single coherent idea, or intention.'⁹⁶ When Frame first seeks help at various psychiatric clinics in London, she comments: 'my feelings were that everything [Dr Portion] said was out of tune, prompting me to select from my repertoire the more striking examples of behaviour guaranteed to command attention, with the result that he suggested I enter a North London hospital' (Envoy, pp.123-4).

Importantly, in Frame's case, her schizophrenia can be interpreted as a manifestation of her desire to belong. On her first release from Seacliff as a classified schizophrenic, Frame recounts:

I was taking my new status seriously. If the world of the mad were the world where I now officially belonged (lifelong disease, no cure, no hope) then I would use it to survive. I would excel in it. I sensed that it did not exclude my being a poet. It was therefore with a feeling of loneliness but with a new self-possession [...] that I took a taxi. [...].(Angel, p.75)

Madness provides a strategy for fitting in, for in some oblique way becoming accepted as the writer she longs to be. At the Maudsley Clinic in London she finally

⁹⁵ R.D. Laing, The Politics of Experience (New York: Ballantine Books, 1967), pp.114-5; emphasis in original.

⁹⁶ R.D. Laing, The Divided Self p. 164; emphasis (where underlined *and* italicised) added.

discovers Dr. Cawley, a doctor who acknowledges writing as a legitimate category of work, encouraging her to shed her mantle of schizophrenia and adopt the 'word clothes' of the writer. Frame experiences this immediately as a loss, and once more uses the vocabulary of clothing as metaphor for identity-categories: 'Perhaps I remember so vividly Dr Miller's layers of clothes worn against the winter season because I myself had suddenly been stripped of a garment I had worn for twelve or thirteen years - my schizophrenia. [...] I could never again turn to it for help. [...] The loss was great' (Envoy, p. 116).

In fact, Frame is able finally to shrug off the label of schizophrenic imposed both by herself and others only through telling the story of her life. Telling that story to the various psychiatrists leads them to believe she was never schizophrenic, and indeed she has the term officially removed from her medical records. But more importantly, it is a psychiatrist who tells her that it is legitimate to want to be a writer and that she should indeed write in order to overcome the effects of many years in gruesome institutions. Writing out the story of those years is a process of picking through the various categories of belonging that have been opened and closed to her and claiming her own place definitively as that of writer, a category of belonging that includes difference: 'It was best for me to escape from a country, where, since my student days, a difference which was only myself, and even my ambition to write, had been looked on as evidence of abnormality.'⁹⁷

The tension between obeying a given code of behaviour and thereby fitting in, *having a temporary home*, feeling safe, but ever more conscious of the gap between her own instinctive desires and her performance of belonging, is typical of the life Frame describes throughout her three volumes of autobiography. Indeed, we will see that it is the resolution of this tension which brings closure to the narrative.

Throughout these autobiographies then we can see a collusion of Frame's search for an identity with her nation's own problematic sense of identity. Using Janet

⁹⁷ *Angel*, p186.

Frame's three volumes of autobiography as case study, I have traced examples of a sense of self that might be related to, or put in an illuminating juxtaposition with, the historically problematic sense of national identity of New Zealand. Indeed, the popularity of Frame's autobiographies in her own country, their very positive international reception and Jane Campion's award-winning film interpretation can, to a degree, be put down to the collusion of Frame's 'puzzling' out of her identity with New Zealand's struggle for a national identity.⁹⁸ That the individual's story might represent or mirror the nation's is a phenomenon that novelists and memoirists have been elaborating for some time. The central character of Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Children, Saleem Sinai, shares his birthday, August 15, 1947, with 'the very instant' that India gained independence: their fates are aligned and Saleem's individual story is allegorical of the nation's. Saleem laments, 'I had been mysteriously handcuffed to history, my destinies indissolubly chained to those of my country.'⁹⁹ Julia Swindell makes the interesting point that in memoirs individuals have continually claimed to speak for the history of a nation via the stories of their lives. She uses Churchill's renowned pronouncement, 'Only history can tell the whole story and I shall write the history', by way of example and goes on to ask how far autobiography in general is caught up in the promotion of the self, aggrandising claims being made about the relationship between the individual and the social structure.¹⁰⁰ (This argument is similar to the analysis of the history of autobiography as closely bound to histories of

⁹⁸ A term used by Michael Billig and cited by Stephanie Taylor and Margaret Wetherell in 'Doing National Construction Work: Discourses of National Identity', SITE 30 (1995), 69-84. This article is an analysis of New Zealanders conversations about their national identity based on Billig's notion of 'active puzzling'.

⁹⁹ Salman Rushdie, (1980) Midnight's Children (New York: Avon Books, 1982), p.3. Linda Hutcheon adds a further gloss to this conceit in her A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction (New York: Routledge, 1988): 'Saleem Sinai would like to reduce history to autobiography, to reduce India to his own consciousness, but the fact that he never can or will is underlined by the constant presence of Tristram Shandy as a parodic intertext [. . .]. The autobiographical memoir has a long history in fiction, as a form of asserting the primacy of individual experience (Watt 1957), but this novel, by trying to make that individual experience the source of public history as well, subverts both this traditional inscription of male subjectivity and, at the same time, the traditional notion of history as non-contradictory continuity' (p.162).

¹⁰⁰ Julia Swindell, 'The First person, Suspect' (Plenary address to conference on Representing Lives: Women and Auto/Biography held at Nottingham Trent University, 23-25 July, 1997). In this sense, articulation of the first-person becomes indistinguishable from self-interest. Swindell argues that leaders typically use memoirs to consolidate their world view. Such autobiography relies on accumulating power and authority no one individual should claim in a democratic society. She cites Margaret Thatcher's memoirs as an example: as icon, Iron Lady and Britannia, she paints herself as the democratic 'I', adopting the stance of a military rather than political leader.

the self discussed in Part One of this thesis.) Likewise, Helena Grice describes how Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictée* represents the collusion of the female body with a nation's story: the 'ravaged, ruptured and invaded body' of the protagonist's mother is metonymic of the 'colonisation and bifurcation' of Korea into North and South. Cha includes illustrations of the female body in parts as well as including a map of Korea divided.¹⁰¹

IV. To the Is-Land

In Frame's autobiographies, the collusion of self with nation as place is underscored by the recurring motif 'to the is-land'.

'I read a story, To the Is-Land, about some children going to an Is-land.'

'It's I-land,' Myrtle corrected.

'It's not,' I said. 'It's Is-Land. It says,' I spelled the letters, 'I-s-l-a-n-d. Is-land.'

'It's a silent letter,' Myrtle said. 'Like knee.'

In the end, reluctantly, I had to accept the ruling, although within myself I still thought of it as the Is-Land. (*Is-Land*, p.41)

Frame's continual fascination with words (their construction, de-construction, meaning and possible mis-meanings) is clear in this extract and has been discussed at length by other Frame critics.¹⁰² Here Frame publicly accepts the conventional

¹⁰¹ Helena Grice 'Writing Self, Writing Nation: Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictée*'. Paper presented to conference on *Representing Lives: Women and Auto/Biography* held at Nottingham Trent University, 23-25 July, 1997.

¹⁰² Peter Gibbons, for example, touches on this theme: 'Frame's story is about words, their appearances, their sounds and the relationship between people and words.' He gives more examples of Frame's focus on words in her autobiographical writing in the chapter entitled 'Non-Fiction' in *The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature in English* ed. by Terry Sturm (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp.27-104 (p.97). A wonderful example of Frame taking spelling and pronunciation to a comic-tragic extreme can be seen in the following rewrite of the Lord's Prayer extracted from her novel *The Rainbirds*. The protagonist, Godfrey Rainbird, presumed dead, has come back to life and is facing the consequences of living in a world that had learnt to live without him:

'Our after which rat in heaven; hollowed be thy mane; thy dingkum come; thy will be done on thear as it is in heaven; give us this day our daily dread and frogvie us pur press-stares as we frog-view those who press-stare against us; and deal us not into tame pitton but relived us from veil for thine is the dingkom, the prow and orgly for veer, and veer, mean.' *Yellow Flowers in the Antipodean Room* (New York: George Braziller, 1994), p.163. (First published as *The Rainbirds*, 1969).

pronunciation of the word 'island' but maintains her own understanding of the word in private so that it continues to resonate with alternative and precious meanings for her.¹⁰³ However, in this most public and widely read text, Frame insists on her childhood (mis)pronunciation (by inserting a hyphen) both for the title of the volume 'To the Is-Land' and the second chapter of this volume, 'Towards the Is-Land'. In visually mis-pronouncing the word, Frame opens it up for a rich mine of meanings, all of which are pertinent to her own specific situation and perception. The deliberate and repeated visual mispronunciation of the word 'island' as *is-land* is particularly fortuitous as a metaphor for complexities of belonging, forcing the reader to take on board simultaneously the compound sense of island as the space where identity ('I'), place ('island'), and being in time ('is') coincide. The *is-land* is a space which confers belonging, where the wandering 'I' finally comes to rest 'at home'.

First and most obviously perhaps, the correction of the 'I' to 'is' is to slide from the first-person pronoun, that primary indicator of identity and authority to the third person form of the verb 'to be'. This slippage is in fact central both to structural linguistics and the study of autobiography. As Laura Marcus has observed, 'these include the categories explored by Emile Benveniste, in his Problems in General Linguistics, of person and temporality, pronouns and tenses in narrative.'¹⁰⁴ Benveniste distinguishes between the enunciation and the enunciated; between the act of speaking (the utterance) and what is said (the uttered). This is in fact, to distinguish the two 'I's of autobiography: 'the subject of the enunciation (the present "I" of the narration) and the subject of the utterance (the "I" whose history is being recounted and who exists at a temporal as well as ontological distance from the narrating self)'.¹⁰⁵ This slip from timeless (because overseeing) enunciatory subject to enunciated other situated in time, is a slippage which aptly describes the process of writing autobiography. As soon as the author writes 'I' she is simultaneously

¹⁰³ This is typical of Frame's social strategies: as I mention in the next chapter, Myrtle puts pressure on Janet to change the word 'touch' to 'tint' in her sister's first poem. Frame obeys her sister at first but then changes it back to her own word.

¹⁰⁴ Marcus, p.190.

¹⁰⁵ Marcus, p.190.

describer and described, subject and other, I/ she. Furthermore, the 'I' of autobiography is always simultaneously the 'is': the written 'I', whilst ostensibly being a retrospective account of the self, is being created in the moment of its writing, it is the present state of being. What is most intriguing is that Frame's mispronunciation of the word is the phonetically logical one: if we had never seen the word written down, only heard it, we would have no reason to presume the silent 's', and without the 's', the word might very well have a different significance for us. 'I'-land is suggestive of Donne's timeless (if phallogentric) 'no man is an island'. In that phrase, island resonates with I-land: solitary, independent, ('unitary', 'autonomous') the epitome of the self read into the canon of Western autobiography. The morpheme 's' changes everything.

In the slippage 'I/is' is encapsulated both the notion of Frame herself as an island (I-land) and the literal meaning of the word island which can refer to both New Zealand and Britain. Frame rehearses the sense of 'is-land' as coincidence of time and place throughout the autobiography. The phrase 'to the is-land' begs the question, towards which island?: Britain (the colonial mother country) or New Zealand (birthplace/ home)? Indeed the intimate relationship between New Zealand and Britain has often been underscored by (colonial) commentators in reference to the geographical and temperate similarities (even 'island mentality') that the islands share.¹⁰⁶ The ambiguity of the referent 'island' forces a sense of movement in either direction: towards home or away from home? Yet, as we have seen, the notion of 'home' is itself highly ambiguous for a post-colonial, particularly since first and second generation New Zealanders still refer to Britain as 'home'. Frame's father surprises her by referring to her planned trip to Europe as 'going home'. She is startled:

I had never heard him call the northern hemisphere *home*; he had usually laughed at people who still talked of the United Kingdom as *Home*; I had heard him say scornfully, "Home, my

¹⁰⁶ See for example, Colin McGeorge, 'Learning about God's Own Country' New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies, 18 (1983), 3-12.

foot. Here's home right here. [...]” During my stay I heard him repeat several times, ‘Janet’s going home, you know.’ I found myself acquiring a prestige which almost covered my identity as the ‘mad niece’. I was now the ‘niece who is going overseas, *home*.’

(Angel, pp.188-189; emphasis in original).

In this sense then, ‘to the island’ sums up a postcolonial’s problematic search for an identity: the movement towards the geographical and cultural island is synonymous with a movement towards autonomous identity (to the I-land).

The title of the second chapter of To the Is-Land, lengthens the preposition *to* in the book’s title and becomes, ‘Towards the Is-Land’, thus emphasising a sense of movement but also simultaneously non-arrival, perpetual motion: ‘those who have suffered [seasickness] will know, the abiding dream is for the ship to stop moving, for the sick passenger to be put ashore at some island, any island, any land that happens by as if land ever happened by in search of a lone castaway.’¹⁰⁷ This can be linked once more to Elspeth Probyn’s notion of ‘belonging’:

It seems to me that the processes of belonging are always tainted with deep insecurities about the possibility of truly fitting in, of even getting in. [...] Belonging is an inbetween state. [...] While belonging may make one think of arriving, it also marks the often fearsome interstices of being and going, of longing, of not arriving.¹⁰⁸

That the categories through which we make sense of our lives are neither fixed nor stable is intrinsic to the movement of Frame’s autobiography which is always heading towards the is-land: ‘All writers - all beings- are exiles as a matter of course. [...] Their work is a lifelong journey towards the lost land. . .’¹⁰⁹ As we saw in Frame’s descriptions of the ‘Mirror City’ the Is-Land she is working towards, where she has the most exhilarating sense of ‘finding her true self’, is the world of fiction,

¹⁰⁷ Envoy, p.15.

¹⁰⁸ Outside, p.40.

¹⁰⁹ Envoy, p.166.

the timeless, spaceless place of the imagination, a place you can never arrive at, only move towards.

Frame rehearses the sense of 'is-land' as present tense and state of being throughout the autobiographies. The second chapter of Is-Land is a brief account of her family's history before she came into the world:

[O]n 28 August 1924, I was born, named Janet Peterson Frame, with ready-made parents and a sister and brother who had already begun their store of experience, inaccessible to me except through their language and record, always slightly different, of our mother and father, and as each member of the family was born, each, in a sense with memories on loan, began to supply the individual furnishings of each Was-Land, each Is-Land, and the hopes and dreams of the Future. (Envoy, p.13)

Frame here clearly states that the is-land is the place of the present and she simultaneously draws our attention to the unreliability or variability or subjectivity of recounting past events and the impact of various separate lives on each person's interpretation of their own life. This state of being in the 'is'-land can be negative: time is arrested so that there is no sense of movement, change or hope. Such is the sense of 'is'-land that Frame and her fellow patients experience in Seacliff, the psychiatric hospital: 'Many patients confined in other wards of Seacliff 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.'¹¹⁰

We wonder whether the Is-land is not merely the present but could perhaps be linked to T.S. Eliot's 'Quick now, here now, always', that spiritual 'still point' where 'here and now cease to matter',¹¹¹ where:

¹¹⁰ Angel, p.69.

¹¹¹ All quotes taken from T. S.Eliot (1944), Four Quartets (London: Faber and Faber, 1959): 'Burnt Norton', V:18; and IV:17; 'East Coker', V: 27.

Time past and time future

What might have been and what has been

Point to one end, which is always present. ¹¹²

Even more powerfully, the Is-Land is a sense of being, of certainty, of identity finally realised. And this is the mission of these three books, to bring Janet Frame home, to a place where she belongs.

Time, in fact, collapses into space: island becomes is-land, resonating with Ashcroft et al's analysis of postcolonial literatures. This links the metaphor of 'to the is-land' to the concepts of history and fiction discussed in Part Two of this thesis:

In much European thinking, history, ancestry, and the past form a powerful reference point for epistemology. In post-colonial thought, however, as the Australian poet Les Murray has said, 'time broadens into space.' [Postcolonial literatures] deliberately set out to disrupt European notions of 'history' and the ordering of time.¹¹³

and Ashcroft elsewhere comments:

The crucial ambivalence of postcolonial history lies in the fact that Time and Space become inseparable. Many postcolonial writers [...] convert images of time into images of place in order to permit the reader to "see through the language of time." [...] The importance of the link between time and space to settler cultures is the experience of *spatial dislocation* which disrupts the smooth trajectory of sequential history. Place becomes the traumatic site of cultural reconstruction which involves a conflict with many inherited assumptions, including a received sense of historical time. ¹¹⁴

¹¹² *Quartets*, 'Burnt Norton', I:14.

¹¹³ Ashcroft et al, p. 34.

¹¹⁴ Bill Ashcroft, 'Against the Tide of Time: Peter Carey's Interpolation into History' in *Writing the Nation: Self and Country in the Post-Colonial Imagination*, ed. by John C. Hawley (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996): pp. 194-212; (209; emphasis added).

Finally, the collapse of 'T' into 'is' is a summary of the aims of Frame's autobiography: to find a home, or, to appropriate the Maori, a *turungawaewae* ('a place to stand, a sense of belonging, a home marae'¹¹⁵). In Maori language, having a home is an essential constituent of belonging: and a sense of belonging translates as (national) identity.

Yet home for Frame is not a physical space but an imaginary, literary one: 'Now that writing was my only occupation, regardless of the critical and financial outcome, I felt I had found my 'place' at deeper level than any landscape of any country could provide.'¹¹⁶ She explains: 'it was my insistence on bringing [the world of literature] 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?'¹¹⁷ In her fictional writing we see how Frame succeeds more and more in 'bringing this world home'. We see how she has made fiction her home. Any suffering becomes material for fiction and therefore a way of supporting and overcoming circumstances and the sense of not belonging, of being outside, that she often feels. When she first arrives in London to find the hostel she had carefully booked from abroad has no record of her letter (and therefore *no place* for her), her panic subsides when she thinks of the importance of 'the perennial drama of the Arrival and its place in myth and fiction'. She is proud to be able to place her own experience and subsequent interpretation among them, having 'the thrilling sense of being myself excavated as reality, the ore of the polished fiction'.¹¹⁸

Just as telling her story has provided Frame with an identity, so, it has been argued, the only way for a once colonised nation, or a nation once tied to the Mother country, to forge its own identity is to start telling its own story, the stories of its inhabitants: definitively here and not there, writing *back* and not *to* the Empire. In this sense then, 'to the island' sums up a postcolonial's problematic search for an identity

¹¹⁵ A *marae* is Maori for 'the open space in front of a meeting house; sometimes refers to a village around a meeting house'. The translations are Michael King's from the glossary in his appendix 'Taha Maori: Things Pakeha Ought to Know' in *Being Pakeha*, pp.204- 224 (pp. 210-212).

¹¹⁶ *Envoy*, p.167.

¹¹⁷ *To the Is-land*, p.148.

¹¹⁸ *An Angel*, p.19.

(to the I-land). Frame moves throughout the autobiography towards becoming a (unitary, autonomous) self, achieving selfhood when she is ready to move from an externally imposed notion of difference as Other (exotic and strange, that which must be changed until there is no sign of difference, only likeness), to an internally imposed celebration of difference where she as agent situates herself as the Subject of difference.

Chapter Eight

Instructing Autobiography: the local writing culture and Janet Frame's *To the Is-Land*

This chapter explores the notion that the practice of writing autobiography is a historically and culturally specific act: far from being a unique text that is the product of an individual's uniquely remembered and recorded experiences, an autobiography participates in and conforms to an extended network of social and textual rules and expectations within the broader society. Even before we are taught to write, we receive instruction in the appropriate (and available) ways to tell our stories. Whereas many commentators and critics of autobiography have attempted to define the conventions of the genre (as I outlined in Part Two), few have attempted to look outside the actual text of the autobiography to the conventions of writing autobiography that precede the text. Carolyn Steedman is a notable exception. As she says:

What I think is most badly needed for a new historical account of autobiographical practice in Britain from 1600 to the present day, is a conceptualisation of habits of self-narration as taught and learned activities. A new account [...] that would pay some detailed attention to the way in which practices of writing are recommended, prescribed and actually made matters of instruction in different historical epochs.¹

Steedman's article obviously focuses on a different time and place but the above insight can be applied to New Zealand in the period Frame was writing: from the

¹ Carolyn Steedman, 'The Peculiarities of English Autobiography: An Autobiographical Education, 1945-1975' in Plurality and Individuality: Autobiographical Cultures in Europe (Proceedings of an International Research Workshop at IFK Vienna, 21-22 October, 1994), ed. by Christa Hammerle (Vienna: IFKA Materialien, 1995), 86-94 (p.87).

1930s onwards. Here then, I examine a range of influences on Frame's writing which might suggest the extent to which writing autobiography can be seen as a practice that is historically and culturally *instructed*: within families; through institutions of education and religion; and by the broader writing cultures that appertain to any one society at any one time, such as newspapers, books and journals.

In tracing some of the influences on Frame's autobiographies which are specific to her upbringing, we see once again the tension between fitting in (being a recognised representative of a group) and standing outside (being different). Some influences (like her mother's Christadelphian faith) have the effect of making Frame an outsider to commonly held assumptions in her community; others such as her schooling, would have been shared by many other New Zealand children growing up in the 1920s and 30s.

The material discussed in this chapter is a direct result of research I undertook on Janet Frame while a Visiting Fellow at the University of Otago in Dunedin, New Zealand. In particular I was keen to find the children's pages of the local newspaper which Frame had contributed to throughout her childhood (and refers to in To the Is-Land) in the hope that I might find some early insights into her later writing or seeds of the internationally acclaimed writer she has become. As far as I am aware, I am the first researcher into Frame's writings to find and incorporate such material in commentary on her life and work.² What struck me (and I had not anticipated this) was the similarity of the poetry and letters Frame contributed to those letters and poems contributed by other school children on the same pages. Many of the letters were as good as Frame's, discussing the same issues, making the same references, using the same style and tone, the same poetic vocabulary and metre. My immediate reaction then was that although Frame's contributions read in isolation from their

² Since my arrival at Otago in February, 1996, Heather Murray has published a series of letters and comments on these children's pages in KITE (Newsletter of the Association of New Zealand Literature), issues 10 and 11 (Dunedin: University of Otago, 1996) and Michael King is researching Frame's contributions to 'Dot's Little Folk' for his forthcoming authorised biography on Frame (interview with King by this author, London, 12 June 1997).

historical and cultural context seem idiosyncratic and evidence of her unusual imagination (as they are, for example, when she quotes her own early poetry in her autobiography), when seen in context (on a page full of letters written by children of the same age, often from the same town, always from the same region) they are typical. This led me to think about the role that the editors of such pages (one among many of the potential influences on a writer) might have in shaping the writing sensibilities of their young prodigees.

In thinking through the implications of these discoveries I have been interested in how autobiographies which spend time focusing on the formative years (as most do) can suggest the extent to which children in any period or place are taught not only what to write but how to write about themselves, thus the extent to which their writing conforms to a standard (sometimes explicit, often implicit); to what extent a writer strains against these conventions (consciously or unconsciously); and how these standards differ between times and places (in this case, for example, New Zealand in the 1920s and 30s (the childhood of the author in question, Janet Frame) and England in the 1990s (the time and place of my reading of this childhood).

Considering the construction of the child's self in and through writing is not of interest simply for understanding the adult self: histories of the canon of autobiography, even in its many re-writings by contemporary feminists who have forced more traditionalist scholars to take on board the writings of women, blacks, and the working-class (to name only the most fashionable categories), have rarely taken into account what Carolyn Steedman identifies as the greatest statistical category of them all, children's writing. She estimates that:

Out of all the continuous, first-person prose narrative produced in any one day in British society, the vast majority of it would come from children, writing in their news books or

diaries in the primary school, and in all the forms of creative writing encouraged in the lower secondary school.³

I want to add a different slant to Steedman's focus on the childhood creation of the self: the material that we learn in primary and secondary school already shapes our understanding and description of ourselves by normalising certain writing (and thinking and being) practices.

The point is this: if you are in a classroom surrounded by children who every day recite poetry out loud; if your friends accost you in the street and recite the latest poem they have memorised;⁴ if your mother peers off into the dusk naming poets; if your English teacher reads for hours from Tennyson's *Idyll of the King* 'as if it were her personal poem' and gazes 'toward the classroom door as if toward a lake, [...] as if the jeweled sword Excalibur [...] had been a part of her life';⁵ if you and your sisters for entertainment in the evening compose poems to be sent off to (and published in) the children's pages of the local newspaper; if your mother's poems are published weekly in the local magazine; then it is quite likely that you will see reading and composing poetry as perfectly normal. If you are a 'sensitive' child obsessed with words you may well aspire to becoming a poet yourself. The inclusion of poems in an autobiography of your childhood is thereby a far more *ordinary* act than it might seem to an English reader schooled to believe that Tennyson is useful only for passing your 'A' levels.

³ Steedman, 'The Peculiarities of English Autobiography', p. 93.

⁴ Frame's friend Poppy recites Keats' *Ode to a Nightingale*, which Janet has heard read out in class and found boring in its self-occupied detail. Poppy transforms it: 'She spoke with passionate intimacy as if the poem were directly related to her, as if it were a milestone in her own life. [...] The words swept out of Poppy like a cry of panic. Why? The poem seemed to be so unrelated to her, the "commercial girl" with the short-handtyping and double-entry bookkeeping; yet she had proclaimed the poem and its content to be her very own.' Janet Frame, *Autobiography 1: To the Is-Land*, (London: Flamingo - Harpers and Collins, 1987), p.121. All subsequent references to this book will be shown in the text in parentheses as *Is-Land*.

⁵ *Is-Land*, pp.92-3.

In the analysis that follows I discuss the influences of home, school and society on Frame's preparation as writer by following up leads from her autobiography. I thereby focus on the conventions for thinking about and expressing the self in language that she is taught by her mother, the school curriculum and the local newspaper. I highlight the tension created in the young Janet by her interpretation of these conventions: her intense desire to conform, to be part of a recognised and lauded group as well as her desire to break free from the perceived restrictions. As a consequence, I will suggest ways in which Frame's view of the world and her expression of it are both *specific* and *representative*, but always emphasising that her way of seeing is a historically and culturally instructed one.

Influences

i. Lottie Frame

In the previous chapter I looked at Frame's mother as gender role-model for her daughter. Here I focus on the direct impact Lottie Frame made on her daughter's writing. Once again, Janet Frame will describe this impact as both restrictive and liberating.

Frame's mother was a poet: she would compose and recite poems although it is unclear when she managed to read them (Frame depicts her as too busy doing housework to sit down and read). She regularly had poems published in local magazines and newspapers: when Frame was three her mother published weekly in the *Wyndham Farmer* and 'soon became known, with pride, as Lottie C. Frame, the local poet' (*Is-Land*, p.26). As early as they could speak, the Frame children would copy their mother's habit of composing poems and telling stories. On journeys in the 'gray Lizzie Ford' to the rivers and seas in the south, they told stories, 'following the example of Mother, who also composed poems and stories while we waited for the billy to boil over the manuka fire':

The poems that Mother recited to us on those picnics were prompted by the surroundings - the lighthouse at Waipapa, the Aurora Australis in the sky. 'Look, the Southern lights, kiddies.'

The lighthouse on the rocky shore
 the seagulls' lonely cry
 and day departing leaves behind
 God's picture in the sky.

(Is-Land, p.19)

It was on one of these expeditions that the three-year old Janet composed her first short story, the much-cited 'Bird, Hawk, Bogie' which in 1978 became the title of the first collection of critical essays written on Frame.⁶ In her first autobiographical sketch, first published in 1965, Frame wrote:

Once upon a time there was a bird: One day a hawk came out of the sky and ate up the bird.
 The next day a big bogie came out from behind the hill and ate up the hawk for eating the bird.⁷

⁶ Jeanne Delbaere, ed. Bird, Hawk, Bogie: Essays on Janet Frame. (Aarhus, Denmark: Dangeroo Press, 1978). This title is itself borrowed from Robert T. Robertson's article, 'Bird, Hawk, Bogie: Janet Frame, 1952-62' (pp. 15-23) which is the first in the collection. Robertson argues that 'in a provincial society, the hawk is the society; in a colonial provincial society, the hawk is both the society and untamed nature; and the bogie is the art which eats up both for eating up the bird of inspiration or imagination in an unimaginative society' (p.18). He suggests that Frame's early enunciation of this fable guides the development of her subsequent writing. The collection of essays entitled Bird, Hawk, Bogie is now published as The Ring of Fire: Essays on Janet Frame, ed. by Jeanne Delbaere (Sydney: Dangeroo P, 1992) and includes new essays.

⁷ Janet Frame, 'Beginnings', Landfall, 73 (1965), 40-47 (p.42). This was one in a series of short autobiographical pieces, each with the same title, commissioned by Charles Brasch, the editor of the New Zealand journal of literature and criticism, Landfall. The various pieces were subsequently put together in a single collection edited by Robin Dudding entitled Beginnings: New Zealand Writers Tell How they Began Writing (Wellington: Oxford UP, 1980). It is interesting to note that Brasch to some extent dictated the content of such autobiographical writings by suggesting that writers trace their beginnings as writers. This very early precursor to Frame's three-volume autobiography is very much a condensed version of the story of her life she tells in her longer piece: the themes, episodes and style have to a large extent been outlined here.

She comments, 'as I still write stories I'm entitled to study this and judge it the best I've written. [...] 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.' And indeed, this story is exemplary in its narrative economy: there is a plot, a hierarchy, cause and effect, suspense, reasoning and the three central nouns (bird, hawk, bogie) are satisfyingly poetic in sound and rhythm and their potential for symbolic representation vast.

In To the Is-Land, Frame more directly acknowledges her debt to her mother in the composing of such stories and poems. Any situation was an excuse for a poem or story. She tells how, on a camping trip to Rakaia,

[Mother] sat there reciting poetry, making up humorous rhymes about Dad and the salmon he would catch and the ones that would get away and about the time Dad and Jimmy Peneameane caught a salmon that vanished,

One day when Jim and I went up
to the house for a bite and sup,
someone stole into the shed
where we were to lay our head.
Someone stole our salmon,
someone stole our salmon.

Or she sat staring beyond the willows to the raging green (snow-fed, kiddies) Rakaia and talked of her 'girlhood' and its perfection. (Is-Land, pp. 103-4)

The children rely on Lottie's stories to transform the drudgery of their often hard existence. When the family have to move into badly insulated temporary accommodation, a row of railway huts, the children anticipate 'the glories of Outside' with these expectations 'intensified by mother's ability to pluck poetic references from those many rooted in her mind'. Great expectations which inevitably, 'began to die

with the first touch of the Southland blizzard' (Is-Land, p.20). Indeed, Lottie's most enduring talent is her capacity to transform everyday objects into exciting and magical adventures:

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 a 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. (Is-Land, p. 12)

This ability is indeed passed on to her daughter and it could be argued that Frame's skill as a writer lies precisely in her ability to notice, name and thus transform the ordinary. As Mark Williams puts it so well, in his chapter 'Janet Frame's Suburban Gothic', Frame 'shares Joyce's ability to capture in language the numinous quality that attaches to things in moments when they reveal their "whatness", their essential nature, to the rapt observer'.⁸ Gaston Bachelard makes a similar point, drawing on the poet Rainer Maria Rilke's Fragments From an Intimate Diary:

One very dark night, Rilke and two friends perceive "the lighted casement of a distant hut, the hut that stands quite alone on the horizon before one comes to fields and marshlands." The image of solitude symbolized by a single light moves the poet's heart in so personal a way that it isolates him from his companions. Speaking of this group of three friends, Rilke adds: "Despite the fact that we were very close to one another, we remained three isolated individuals, seeing night for the first time." This expression can never be meditated upon

⁸Mark Williams, 'Janet Frame's Suburban Gothic', in Leaving the Highway: Six Contemporary New Zealand Novelists (Auckland: Auckland UP, 1990), pp.30-56 (p. 36).

enough, for here the most commonplace image, one that the poet had certainly seen hundreds of times, is suddenly marked with the sign of "the first time," and it transmits this sign to the familiar night.⁹

Frame's capacity to mark an image with the sign of 'the first time' or, in Mark Williams' words, to spot the numinous (that is the divine, or spiritual) quality of an ordinary thing, is again directly influenced by her mother's own peculiar brand of sectarian religion.

ii. Words as occasions: the Christadelphian influence

Lottie Frame was a Christadelphian, a name intended to signal the difference from and alternative to the Christian religion, which was seen to embrace a great deal which was in fact anti-Christian.¹⁰ This sect, established by an Englishman in New York around 1848, founds its teaching on the application of Hebrew prophecy and the Book of Revelation to current and future events. It is a radical Millennialist sect, believing that Christ will return to earth and rule for a thousand years and only those who have heard the Christadelphian faith and believe and Jews will be saved and rise up from the dead. The church's teaching evidently had an impact on the Frame children's writing from a young age. Janet's younger sister, Isabel, here reports the death of her older sister Myrtle (aka 'Good Queen Charlotte') to the children's page's editor of the local newspaper:

⁹ Gaston Bachelard, (1958) The Poetics of Space, trans. by Maria Jolas (1964), (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), p. 36. Rilke, not coincidentally, was a favourite of Frame's and a great influence on her poetry and writing - as is evidenced in the title of her second volume of autobiography, 'An Angel at My Table', which is from a French poem of Rilke's (and quoted as the epilogue). There are many interesting overlaps between Bachelard's development of 'poetics of space', where he often draws on Rilke as example, and my own reading of the influence of Rilke on Frame's writing. Of particular interest is the confluence of the symbol of the hut in Rilke's poetry, Bachelard's analysis of 'the hut' as a form of refuge and Frame's use of the 'hut', not only as the space in Sargeson's garden where she begins her career as a writer but also its symbolic significance to Daphne in Frame's first novel, Owls Do Cry. These will be explored in further research.

¹⁰ Very little has been written about the Christadelphians (except for their own pamphlets and books). My sources, apart from Mark Williams' comments in the chapter cited above, are Bryan R. Wilson, Sects and Society: The Sociology of Three Religious Groups in Britain (London: Heinemann, 1961); the New Encyclopaedia Britannica, vol. 3; and the New Catholic Encyclopaedia vol. 3.

Dear Dot, - I am sorry to say that we lost our sister, Good Queen Charlotte, in March. We do miss her so much. But we are going to see her when she wakes again. ¹¹

As Janet remembers in Is-Land:

Mother explained that when you died, you died, staying in your grave until the Second Coming and the Resurrection and Judgment Day. [...] At the Resurrection, Mother said, all would be as they were just before they died and would then be judged as worthy or unworthy, and if they were found unworthy, they would be struck dead again forever. (Is-Land, pp. 86-7)

The Christadelphian is a non-hierarchical church, which does not distinguish between clergy and laity and has no central organisation. Worship takes place in a rented hall or private home. Frame records that many such meetings took place in their family home.¹² With no minister or priest to lead, the only authoritative creed the religion accepts is the Bible, with particular emphasis given to the Book of Revelations. Again, Frame records that:

I had been impressed [...] by the tales Mother told us in our Sunday Bible reading when we sat around the big kitchen table and pored over the red-letter Bible while she explained that a poor man might come to the door and be refused food or even have the dogs 'sooled' on to him, and lo! he would turn out to be an angel in disguise or even Christ himself. Mother warned us to be careful and not to laugh at people whom we thought were strange or 'funny' because they too might be angels in disguise. (Is-Land, p. 34)

This Christadelphian image of the 'angel in disguise' would very probably have been memorably confirmed for Lottie the poet in the final line of William Blake's well-

¹¹ 'Dot's Little Folk', Otago Daily Times, 2 August 1937, p.15.

¹² See Is-Land, p. 70.

known poem 'Holy Thursday' in Songs of Innocence: 'Then cherish pity, lest you drive an angel from your door'.¹³

This notion perhaps explains the family's tolerance to those that might normally be considered outsiders. Most interestingly and convincingly, Mark Williams argues that the Christadelphian religion draws on a long-buried history of working-class culture:

It was part of a protracted working-class resistance over the first half of this century to the mass culture that grew up with the wireless and the development of a consumer society and to the manufactured 'popular' culture for working people. Frame's mother belonged to the literate, book-loving, working class with its own distinctive culture, rooted in nonconformity and with links to social radicalism, though not revolutionary in the Marxist sense. At the heart of this working-class experience lies the desire not to escape the constraints of poverty by economic self-improvement - by becoming middle-class - but rather to deny to the upper classes the exclusive right to cultural significance which they maintain for themselves. Frame's mother saw no contradiction between being poor and loving poetry.¹⁴

Indeed, as we saw in the previous chapter, both Frame's parents exhibit a rare creativeness and energy in entertaining their children, playing musical instruments, reciting poetry, entering recipe and short-story competitions, doing crosswords and generally encouraging reading and writing as desirable leisure pursuits. Many commentators, and perhaps Frame herself, have tended instead to focus on the insular nature of the Frame family, which can also be put down to religion, since 'basic to Christadelphian social teaching and practice is the exhortation to be separate from the world, to love not the world or the things which are in the world.'¹⁵ However, Williams, from a New Zealand Christadelphian home himself, prefers to emphasise

¹³ William Blake. A Selection of Poems and Letters, ed. by J. Bronowski (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1958), p.34.

¹⁴ Williams, p.33.

¹⁵ Wilson, p. 281.

the communal and historical sense of belonging to an established tradition and culture that membership of the Christadelphian church gave to the Frame family:

A network of relations connected the family to cultural traditions and memories that were not peculiar or self-engendered. These traditions and memories were, however, opposed to the dominant cultural forms that merged between the wars and which consolidated in the post-war period.¹⁶

He contends that Frame's separation from the family and her entry into a world indifferent, even hostile to her family traditions, precipitated the crisis in her early adulthood.¹⁷ Williams also goes on to suggest the influence Lottie's Christadelphian religion might have had on her daughter's writing:

In Frame's work the debt to the Christadelphians is registered chiefly in her essentially religious sense of the commonplace and in her sense of the body as the only realm of the real. In her novels language is not a means beyond the body towards spiritual apprehension. It is a means towards the discovery of the wonder and terror that lie *within* the actual.¹⁸

It is Frame's capacity to highlight the 'wonder and terror within the actual' which is the hallmark of her writing. In particular, the events in Frame's life that she deems important enough to share with her readers would not typically be seen as events at all: her memorable moments are clustered around words. Her recall of these 'events' is often through citing poetry and songs. Scattered everywhere in the text, these verses become Frame's mnemonics: she uses language itself to trigger off her past

¹⁶ Williams, p. 34.

¹⁷ An interesting comparison could be made between Frame's mother's pursuit of sectarian religion and its impact on her daughter's writing and the evangelical Old Testament mother of Jeanette Winterson's autobiography, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (London: Pandora, 1985).

¹⁸ Williams goes on to argue how the themes common to much of Frame's fictional writing 'show surprising common ground with Christadelphian doctrines: mortalism, apocalypse, election, resurrection, literalism' (p.32).

experiences. Indeed, what she tells us of her past is based almost entirely on her understanding and feeling for words, or as she puts it 'poems remembered as if they, too, had been *present occasions*' .¹⁹ The feeling and sensations of childhood are typically recollected through memories of poems:

I remember my special feeling for the sky, its faraway aboveness, up there where my mother and father lived, and the way I was filled with longing for it, a kind of nostalgia shared by my brother and sisters some years later when we discovered an old schoolbook with a poem that began:

On his back in the meadow a little boy lay
with his face turned up to the sky
and he watched the clouds as one by one
they lazily floated by. . .

We lay together in the long summer grass, looking up at the clouds, reciting the poem, and knowing that each was feeling the same homesickness and longing for the sky.

(*Is-Land*, p.19)²⁰

For Frame, writing her autobiography means tracing the impact of words on her self, her life. Her first meeting with a word and its subsequent inclusion in her vocabulary corresponds to a new way of seeing, relating to and often bearing (in the

¹⁹ *Is-Land*, p.17; emphasis added.

²⁰ Richard N. Coe in *When the Grass Was Taller: Autobiography and the Experience of Childhood* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1984) focuses on the use of grass and sky as symbols of childhood and couples this with the use of poetry in autobiographies about childhood. See especially the chapters 'Inventories of a Small World' (pp. 205-239) and 'Childhood as Mythology and Poetry' (pp.274-292). Carolyn Steedman also looks at the importance of the smallness of the child in relation to the adult world and makes a fascinating link between this and the development of national identity: 'people have bodies, and the "nationness" described [...] is to do with some irreducible facts about bodies: that they are small to begin with, and that they grow bigger; that children know this, and that the adult whom the child becomes, remembers it.' 'Inside, Outside, Other: Accounts of National Identity in the Nineteenth Century' *Journal of the History of the Human Sciences* 8 (1995), 59-76 (p.73).

sense of 'putting up with') the world. A word can take on the autobiographical status of an epiphany for Frame: while St. Augustine remembers his life as a sinner through a series of often dramatic events (stealing pears from an orchard; copulating in a church), Frame remembers her child's view of the world almost entirely through words and the sense she made of them then and makes of them now. In a brilliant technical sleight of hand which points to her larger design in writing autobiography, Frame tells us:

I remember learning to spell and use three words: *decide*, *destination* and *observation*, all of which worked closely with *adventure*. I was enthralled by their meaning and the fact that all three seemed to be part of the construction of every story - everyone was *deciding*, having a *destination*, *observing* in order to decide and define the destination and know how to deal with the *adventures* along the way. (*Is-Land*, p.43; emphasis in text)

Whether the schoolgirl would have appreciated the meta-fictional uses to which these words could be put is unlikely, but we sense that they were an event in her life (an 'occasion' as she puts it) which she stores up to put to later use. Importantly, reading, or the discovery of these words, is synonymous with living: *the words are life*. In this sense there is a breakdown between signifier and signified: the world (a life, the past) is only the language that describes it. As she describes in *Is-Land*, on reading her friend Poppy's edition of *Grimm's Fairy Tales* for the first time, the impact is immediate: 'suddenly the world of living and the world of reading became linked in a way I had not noticed before' (*Is-Land*, p.54). The mechanism is perhaps similar to one Bruno Bettelheim describes in his *Uses of Enchantment*: as children we use fairy tales as an unconscious means of interpreting the strange and complex world around us.²¹ As Carolyn Steedman comments in the *Tidy House*, 'the particular advantage of the fairy tale [as opposed to other forms of children's literature] is that it

²¹ Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment* (Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1978).

provides an *abstract* mirroring of a child's real circumstances.²² Janet Frame, commenting on the impact of Tales From Grimm on her childhood (an impact retold in the discovery of Poppy's copy in Is-Land, and the girls' discovery of the book on the rubbish dump in Owls Do Cry) looks back to the centrality of that book to her childhood:

I found the book so satisfying, I think now, in the convention of its story-telling, the journeys, meetings, the matter-of-fact descriptions of marvels, the talking animals and trees, and in the way the stories had their heart in a family - brothers, sisters, mothers, father, rich and poor, whose goodness and wickedness had been found out and described without fear. Any act was possible. Anything could happen. Nothing was forbidden.²³

As we shall see, in this early discovery of stories, what delights Frame as reader will later tantalise her as writer: the need for conventions, rules, structure and the contradictory desire for freedom. It is in breaking rules that the imagination really takes flight; but breaking rules brings ostracisation, loneliness, exile.

iii. New Zealand poetry: the Georgian tradition

Janet Frame's ability to transform the ordinary into the magical can be traced back to her mother's religion. Similarly, her early attempts at poetry follow the structure and vocabulary of her mother's poems, as do her sisters'. Isabel and June's early attempts at writing can be found alongside Janet's in the 'Dot's Little Folk Pages' of the Otago Daily Times (which I discuss later in this chapter).

Lottie's poetry comes out of an established New Zealand tradition which was extremely popular at the time Janet was growing up. Georgian poetry was typically *about* provincialism and could be seen as the poetry of the periphery. Lawrence

²² Carolyn Steedman, The Tidy House: Little Girls Writing (London: Virago, 1982), p.141; emphasis in original.

²³ Janet Frame, 'Janet Frame on *Tales From Grimm* ' Education (published in Wellington), 24 (1975), p.27.

Jones, in his useful historical chapter, 'Until the Walls Fall Down: the New Zealand Writer and Society, 1932-63', which identifies 'poetic phases' in New Zealand and covers the period from Frame's childhood, enables us to link Lottie's poetic perception to the 'Georgian' sonnet form and her daughter's discomfort, even scorn, of this form of poetry to her historical position as a 'second-generation Provincial writer'.²⁴ To this generation, Georgianism was 'immediately to be associated with falsity, unreality, and sentimentality' and this perception was a direct outcome of the critiques of 'the first-generation Provincial writers who had made "Georgian" a pejorative term'. Jones lists various descriptions of Georgian poetry: 'a medium of escape, a sanctuary for day-dreams'; 'that unfortunate tradition in which any sentimental rhapsodising over love, flowers or sunsets seems to pass for poetry'.²⁵ In particular, such poetry is criticised for being devoid of feeling and written to form. Jones uses a poem published by Frame's mother (which in itself is a defence of this criticism) as an example of exactly that kind of poetry:

CRITICISM

I should not choose to criticise
 A poet of the sunset skies,
 Who has an aching in his throat
 When gazing where the lillies float
 Their golden bowls on quiet pools.
 I leave the satire for the fools
 Who care not for the poet mind,
 Nor seek anew delight to find.
 Enough for me to ruminate
 On poems happy or sedate.

²⁴ Lawrence Jones, 'Until the Walls Fall Down': unpublished paper to be part of a forthcoming book. Many thanks to Lawrence Jones for letting me see this.

²⁵ Jones, p.2.

I thank the mind behind the hand
Which poet hearts all understand.²⁶

He comments that 'behind such poems is an understanding of the appropriate language, form, and subject matter for poetry, as set and accepted as the standard ingredients for scones or the standard materials for making miniature model ships'.²⁷ Importantly, the Georgian sonnet and its rhapsodies on the accepted poetic themes of nature, love and beauty, has often been seen as a peculiarly New Zealand form. Coupled with this Georgian tradition is another, equally derided tendency to turn to 'New Zealand' themes. Allen Curnow, a much-respected New Zealand poet (and a 'first-generation Provincial writer'), is seen as initiating this critique. In the Introduction to his anthology of New Zealand verse, he recounts that an important impulse behind compiling this anthology was to rescue New Zealand poetry from the terrible image it had given of itself to the world in a previous collection (edited by Quentin Pope and published in 1930) entitled *Kowhai Gold*. 'Kowhai' is the name of a plant indigenous to New Zealand; 'gold' of course immediately signals a preference for the kind of Georgian sonnetry discussed above. Curnow equates this anthology with Georgian poetry, ashamed that the selected poems and poets make Georgian poetry look like 'the language of most New Zealand poets'.²⁸

The impact of the Georgian tradition can be seen everywhere in New Zealand society: in the school curriculum, the School Journal, the children's pages of the local newspapers and particularly in Lottie C. Frame's poetry. Schoolchildren almost instinctively (although in fact this 'intuition' was the result of much specific training) knew what a poem should sound like, how it should be constructed, and thus, extrapolating, what the appropriate 'poetic' words were. This is illustrated beautifully in the dialogue Janet records between herself and her elder sister Myrtle (at school

²⁶ Quoted in Jones, p.4 and taken from The New Zealand Mercury 3 (1936), p. 8.

²⁷ Jones, p.4.

²⁸ Quoted in Jones, p.3.

longer than she). Janet lets Myrtle read a poem she has composed for homework. The first line (and thus the rhythm, sound, form and content) had been dictated by the teacher:

The writing of that first poem sparked my first argument over writing as an art, for when I read my poem to Myrtle, she insisted that the words 'touch the sky' should be 'tint the sky':

When the sun goes down and the night draws nigh
and the evening shadows touch the sky
when the birds fly homeward to their nest
then we know it is time to rest.

When rabbits to their burrows run
and children have finished their daily fun,
when the tiny stars come out to peep,
then we know it is time to sleep.

I disagreed with Myrtle, who then insisted that there were words and phrases you had to use, and when you were writing about evening shadows, you always said 'tint,' just as you said that stars 'shone' or 'twinkled' and waves 'lapped' and the wind 'roared.' In spite of Myrtle's insistence, I preferred 'touch' to 'tint' but in deference to her obvious wisdom and wider knowledge I changed the word to 'tint' when I took the poem to school but later, when I wrote it in my notebook, I reverted to 'touch the sky,' having my own way.

The poem, the usual kind of child's poem, was a success only in its predictability . . . the class was able to guess the last line of each verse and so join in with the words.

(Is-Land, p.83)

This experience typically shows the tensions Frame was subject to in her writing career (as was perhaps any child at school): the teacher's first line enabled her to write

her first poem (which might never have been written without it) but it also constrained her to a rigid pattern and vocabulary. The ideas in and theme of the poem are also to a large extent pre-determined by that first line. However, notably, Frame strains against the conventions and privately keeps her preferred word.

In another example, Frame again starts with a literary convention and then completely transforms it to fit her own literary interpretation of the world. She recounts how she began to write a diary:

Agreeing with the convention and aware that diarists began 'Dear Diary;' yet thinking such a form of address to be absurd, I compromised by writing 'Dear Mr Ardenue,' Mr Ardenue being pictured as a kindly old man with a long, gray beard and 'smiling' eyes, who ruled over the land of 'Ardenue, which I celebrated in a poem. (*Is-Land*, p.144)

Frame accepts the convention ('Dear Diary') and then transforms it, using the notion of audience ('Dear') to create an imaginary figure ('Mr. Ardenue') and peopling her diary (which conventionally is a record of actual characters, places and events known, visited, witnessed or experienced by the writer and written down shortly after those events take place) with the most extraordinary fantastical characters, 'mostly invited there to satisfy my strong attraction to ordinary everyday objects that might in the end become extraordinary : *The Dishes I Washed*. That was how they were known and how they were greeted in each entry of my diary' (*Is-Land*, p.145).²⁹ Like the poem she changes only in her notebook, however, such strong-willed challenges to the conventions are kept private. As we saw in the previous chapter, Janet Frame desperately wanted to be accepted and included in a group, identified as 'imaginative'

²⁹Other characters in her diary show a humorous attempt to represent the tradition of Georgian poetry she has witnessed in her mother and her friends: 'There were also *The Little Golden Ladies of New Zealand*, installed in Ardenue under the continued influence of Mother's poetic interests and the fondness of her and her poetic friends (she corresponded with one or two people who wrote poetry) for writing of *Kowhai Blossoms*. Indeed, one of Mother's friends had lately published a book of poems entitled *Kowhai Blossoms*. [...] My own *Little Golden Ladies of New Zealand* were some fallen kowhai blossoms that I saw in an Oamaru garden' (*Is-Land*, p. 145).

and 'poetic'. Ironically, she didn't realise that conforming to the group's mores would strip her of both imagination and poetry.

When Frame finally establishes herself as a writer, she is critical of such calls to creative conformism, exemplified in her well-known division of the world into 'this' world and 'that' world where *this* world is the world of the conformist and *that* world is the domain of the true artist: poetry that is written to conform to a certain form and style with no originality or sense of feeling is not art. This distinction leads to her conflictual feelings towards her mother: on the one hand, her mother gave her the world of imagination, poetry and language but on the other, her mother's own understanding of this world was that it fitted a certain pattern which, ironically, Frame interprets as stultifying the imagination.

The tension between obeying a given code of behaviour and doing what instinctively feels right but is seen as 'different', even wrong, is typical of the life Frame describes in her autobiography. At first she is glad of the rules, of a mould to fit into: to be a poet, or indeed a schizophrenic, is to have an identity, to belong to a group - there are guidelines of expected behaviour to follow which ease the pain of being your self. When Frame is determined to be a poet, she tries to establish first what poetry is, and second what a poet should be like so that she can practise and perform the perceived characteristics. At first, she believed that she only had to repeat a word often enough and her poem would take on the quality of that word. Believing true poets to be dreamers she 'wrote a poem about dreams, believing that if I used the word *dream* repeatedly, in some way I would be creating dreams' (*Is-Land*, p.115). Her belief that naming is synonymous with being is again indebted to her mother's sense of wonder in the actuality of a word: her habit, for example of reciting long lists of proper names for their cadences as if the sound in itself was a kind of magic (which it was):

With [...] drama Mother spoke of *Dr Emily Seideberg McKinnon*, which must have impressed me even during my first few days of being, for her lifelong repetition of names important to

her - Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Harriet Beecher Stowe, John Greenleaf Whittier, William Pember Reeves . . . Michael Joseph Savage - never failed to awaken a sense of magic. (*Is-Land*, p.14)

Janet, like her mother, also specialises in evocative and extremely precise lists. One paragraph in *Is-Land* begins 'Swamp red, beastie gold, sky gray, railway-red, railway yellow, Macrocarpa green, tussock gold, snowgrass-gold, penny-orange orange, milk-white snowberry white[...] These colours filled my seeing and our excitement at the prospect of living *Outside* ' (*Is-Land*, p.20).³⁰

Despite the praise of her poetry by the establishment (schoolteachers and prize-givers), Frame still suspects that good writing is something quite different from her efforts at sonnetry. When her English teacher, Miss Farnie, and the other students unanimously praise Elizabeth Goudge's *Towers in the Mist* Frame feels:

an uneasiness, almost a disappointment, that Miss Farnie, with all English literature to reveal to us, thought so highly of a book where the writing reminded me of L. M. Montgomery and the Anne books, lacking a solidity, a factual concreteness in the midst of the misty vagueness. Certainly it was gentle writing, with all the green and gold and little old men and women, the dreams, and most of the vocabulary that I still thought necessary to poetry.

But Miss Farnie was a teacher of her time . . . (*Is-Land*, p.148)

Frame eventually of course, overcomes her need to be accepted as a poet by writing poems typical of the day. She says of her poems which were published and praised in the local newspaper that:

I was not ashamed of them as I am now. I was humanly naive and ungrown, using to describe a dire event the latest 'poetic' words in my vocabulary . . . *the words ruled*, you see; they held

³⁰ See also similar lists of animals and vegetation on p. 39.

the keys of the kingdom, and I did not realize until I had spent a few more years growing and observing that the kingdom which glorified these words was as much a prison as my gray serge tunic and knotted tie and lace-up black shoes. (*Is-Land*, p.153; emphasis added)

Frame is evidently developing her own resistance to the popular sentimental romanticism of poetry. At the same time, we can see that the very popularity and accessibility of this poetry meant that children throughout New Zealand had a technical and instinctive appreciation of poetry and a desire and ability to write it: the abundant citations of poetry in Janet Frame's *To the Is-Land* owe much to this tradition. We should be grateful for this since it makes available to us poems published and unpublished that Frame had written as a child. Her first volume of autobiography is then not just a recollection of childhood but a manifestation or repetition of the written experience of childhood. Part One of this thesis made reference to Dante's inclusion of poems written soon after the event that inspired them in his 'autobiography' *Vita Nuova*. This technique disrupts the simplified notion of autobiography as a tale remembered by a 'narrator who is 'distant' from the protagonist and adds an interesting slant to Ricoeur's notions of the past as 'same' or 'other' discussed in Part Two.

iv. The School Journal

Taken as a whole the history of education in New Zealand has been more concerned with politics and administration, with schools built, grants granted, and people appointed, than with what exactly was taught to children in schools. [...] There is still a great deal to be done in charting the way in which social attitudes and values have been reflected in and transmitted by schooling. [...] Such research is not easy for the textbooks, maps, pictures, charts, and exercise books on which it largely depends are hard to come by and their analysis is problematic to establish and tedious to pursue.

Colin McGeorge, 'Learning about God's Own Country'³¹

The School Journal was issued to all primary and secondary schools throughout New Zealand from 1907 to the 1940s: it was a small A3-sized magazine of between thirty to fifty pages issued in three parts (for the different age groups) and containing short stories, poetry, puzzles, and articles on history and biology illustrated with line blocks and some photographs. The Journal was intended as a supplement to the school curriculum, designed to bring a sense of educational continuity and stability to the many New Zealand school children forced to move around the country (because their fathers worked on the railways, for example). Indeed, the Journal had been published and issued by the Government as a response to complaints and questions in Parliament 'about the lack of uniformity in textbooks'.³² By 1914 its use in state schools was compulsory: 'It was in constant use, not only as a source of information, but for spoken and "silent" reading, comprehension and spelling. It is estimated that at least one-eighth of school time was occupied with the use of the Journal.'³³

Up until the late twenties, the Journal tended to be nothing less than a 'heavy barrage of imperialist propaganda'. This is not surprising, since the year the Journal appeared, 1907, New Zealand was granted Dominion status and Edwardian imperialism was in full flood. During the thirties such material began to be replaced by material of a clearly internationalist and even pacifist outlook.³⁴ However, since Frame probably began reading her sister's Journal before she had one of her own (in the late twenties) she was still subjected to 'an average of about thirty percent of the space of the Journal devoted to imperial, military and other "patriotic" topics'.³⁵ She recalls:

³¹ Colin McGeorge, 'Learning about God's Own Country' New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies, 18 (1983), 3-12 (p. 3).

³² E. P. Malone 'The New Zealand School Journal and the Imperial Ideology' New Zealand Journal of History, 7 (1973), 12-27 (p. 12).

³³ Malone, p.13.

³⁴ Malone, p.12.

³⁵ Malone, p.14.

My reading was limited to schoolbooks, including the *School Journal*, and the new comic cuts. [...] Much of the *School Journal* dealt with celebrations of the British Empire, with articles and photographs of the royal family, chiefly the two little princesses, Elizabeth and Margaret Rose. There was a description too, of their life-size dolls' house, with photographs. In contrast to the factual prose of the school journal and the praise of the Empire, the king, the governor general, the Anzacs at Gallipoli, Robert Falcon Scott at the South Pole, the poems were full of mystery and wonder, with Walter de la Mere and John Drinkwater, Christina Rossetti, as the editor's first choices followed by Alfred Noyes and John Masefield, to give the rollicking touch. One poem that I liked at once was 'Meg Merrilees.' 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. (*Is-Land*, p.43)

As well as observing that Georgian sonnetry was rife in the *School Journal* too, we notice Lottie's ever-present impact as poet and Christadelphian (the 'angels in disguise'). However, it is also interesting to notice to what extent the *Journal* might mirror other nationalist fascinations and preoccupations of the period. For example, the bee is predominant as both symbol in the poetry and short stories of the *Journal*, as well as a topic for nature studies and homilies. Bee imagery is likewise prominent in Frame's writing and could be traced to the more obvious literary sources such as Ariel's song in *The Tempest*. Indeed, the epigraph to Frame's first novel *Owls Do Cry* reveals the origin of that title:

Where the bee sucks, there suck I;

In a cowslip's bell I lie;

There I couch when owls do cry [...] ³⁶

³⁶ Janet Frame, *Owls Do Cry* 1961 (London: Women's Press, 1985).

Yet there in the *School Journal* in almost every issue, and often three or four times in different places, are bees! Drawing on a Victorian teacher's note book, Colin McGeorge interprets the origins of this phenomenon:

For nineteenth century writers of school texts and teachers' manuals, the natural world was endlessly morally instructive. The bee was a popular nineteenth century symbol of industry and order, but Walker outdid its other admirers with his list of its virtues. Bees are industrious, loyal to their sovereign, clean, home-loving, sympathetic, peaceful, habitual early risers, and fond of fresh air. [...] Bees provided perhaps the best example of the prime Victorian virtue of economic prudence and persistent hard work.³⁷

In reaction to the predominance of imperialist themes and the focus on flora and fauna from another time and place, the New Education of the early twentieth century demanded that school work should deal with the child's life and surroundings. Thus, a range of supplementary readers dealing with local material were introduced. By 1905 the whole of the primary school syllabus could be covered using only local texts. As the Preface to the Southern Cross Readers put it:

The Southern Cross readers are designed to provide the public schools of New Zealand with reading lessons that will stand in more direct relation to life and its surroundings in our own land than the lessons of foreign "readers" do.

Our seasons and climate, our plants and animals, our social and political conditions, our landscape and physical surroundings and the starry firmament above our heads, are all widely different from those of the mother country. This being the case, it is surely fitting that our changed conditions should be reflected in the reading lessons which form so important a

³⁷ J. Walker *The Handy Book of Object Lessons from a Teacher's Notebook*, London: Jarrold c. 1875 quoted in Colin McGeorge, 'The Presentation of the Natural World in NZ Primary Schools: 1880-1914', *History of Education Review* 23 (1994), 32-45 (p.35).

factor in the education of the young. [...] The reading books in current use deal with a world to which the young in our land are strangers. It is one of the chief aims of the present series to correct defects of this kind by bringing the mind of the young into more direct contact with the facts of life and of nature as we know and have experience of them here.

The publishers hope that the lessons will help to foster the growth of national patriotic sentiments, which are slow in appearing in all new countries.³⁸

It is clear that such readers and the School Journal played a crucial role in establishing a sense of national (and the correlative), personal identity and worth although, as Mc George's article amply illustrates, much of the local material tended to focus on New Zealand either as a picture postcard or as the mirror image of Britain. He suggests that 'the New Zealand material reflects a groping towards a national self-image, not an assertion or celebration of it'.³⁹ However, Frame suggests that such Readers prompted her towards a sense of interiority, a movement often seen as defining the Western Enlightenment sense of self: ⁴⁰

Something new, a silent time of deeper thinking, had entered my life, and I associate it with those afternoons of silent reading, the very name of the activity puzzling me, when the silence was so full of inner noise that I could not make myself interested in the Whitcombes Readers. (Is-Land, p.50)

The school syllabus also includes regular singing from the Dominion Song Book, made more poignant when sung together with the National radio station which would be broadcasting to all New Zealand schools simultaneously. This sense of national togetherness, of being pulled together by the poignancy of a Maori song

³⁸ Quoted in McGeorge, 'Learning about God's Own Country', p.4.

³⁹ McGeorge, 'Learning about God's Own Country', p.8.

⁴⁰ See, for example, Carolyn Steedman, Strange Dislocations: Childhood and the Idea of Human Interiority, 1780-1930 (London: Virago, 1995) for an unusual analysis of the relation of this interiority to childhood.

using strange and wonderful words, instigates a feeling which Frame later indentifies as deep sadness (others might view it more cynically as latent patriotism).⁴¹

Colin McGeorge comes to the following important conclusion:

So children learned something of their country's geography and wildlife and they gained some general notions about New Zealand which enabled them to think very well of themselves, but they were left without a personal history. The textbooks told 'our nation's story' or the tale of 'our race and empire'; history was '1840 and all that' and it was about famous people, not one's parents and grandparents. Perhaps the final legacy of the school account of New Zealand is the growing harvest of local histories and genealogical researches as people themselves write the sort of history they want and need.⁴²

Perhaps the School Journal and the local readers did indeed provide Frame with a sense that her country had a distinct flavour of its own which must and could only be described by someone who lived in it and experienced it as 'the world', the centre, rather than the periphery. Such early attempts at 'authentic' local material, which as McGeorge notes is really a groping towards national identity, could certainly only have been a further impetus to 'telling it like it was', to naming the wonder and awe of the actual, rather than looking elsewhere.

v. 'Dot's Little Folk': nursing children's writing

While the school syllabus might have given formal instruction in what and how to read and write, there were plenty of other informal local outlets which functioned as training grounds for budding writers, young and old. While Lottie was being published in The Wyndham Farmer, the Frame children were being published regularly on 'Dot's Little Folk' pages. Many local newspapers had children's pages, encouraging children of any age to send in letters and poems which would nearly

⁴¹ See Is-Land, p.51.

⁴² McGeorge, 'Learning about God's Own Country', p.11.

always be published and often receive a personal comment from the editor of that page, encouraging, correcting or commenting upon the content, form and style. These pages effectively instructed the children in what sort of poems and letters were acceptable, and gave them a very early notion of readership.

As Frame recounts in her autobiography, around 1936 (when she was twelve):

Whatever the reasons, the children of the town and the province and the country began not only to perform and dream of performing their dances, songs, piano music, violin music, drama, but also to write their own poems and stories, encouraged locally by the children's pages in the newspapers - in Otago by Dot's Page for Dot's Little Folk, of the *Otago Daily Times*. (Is-Land, p.98)

Indeed, the 1930s have been described as the 'golden age of children's journalism' in New Zealand, and in 1936, 'Dot's Little Folk' celebrated its Golden Jubilee, having received over ten thousand children's letters.⁴³ The proliferation of children's pages (and thus of children's published writing) was short-lived, however: none of the children's pages survived the Second World War intact, owing to paper shortages, the popularity of radio, and the improvement in the printing and distribution of books.

But today they are still remembered with affection by many, and an increasing number of our writers record a tribute to them in their autobiographical writings. For a lonely child deprived of writing aimed solely at them - and even in affluent middle-class houses there was a dearth of lively, non-moralistic writing for children - the newspapers offered a special, intimate relationship, where skills might be tested in a welcoming environment.⁴⁴

⁴³ Heather Murray, 'Dot's Little Folk, and Other Children's Pages' in Kite 10 (Newsletter of the Association of NZ Literature), April 1996 (p.10).

⁴⁴ Murray, 'Dot's Little Folk', p.10.

Ruth Park (a New Zealand novelist contemporary with Janet Frame) describes such children's pages as 'a stimulus to young writers, a conveyor of entertainment and current information, and a showplace for their literary and artistic work'.⁴⁵ Surprisingly perhaps, the immense popularity of children's pages and their importance for many would-be writers has been little researched to date although there are signs that an interest in this field is developing.⁴⁶

The editors of these pages were literary role models. The identity of 'Dot' remained a mystery until the editor of the Otago Daily Times wrote a letter to the little folk on his deathbed confessing that Dot was in fact himself, William Fenwick, a married but childless man. Bill Pearson, erstwhile contributor to such children's pages acknowledges that 'these kindly nurses of young talent served a valuable purpose in the New Zealand of that time, especially for isolated young writers in small towns'.⁴⁷ And Ruth Brown, acknowledging the central role of the editor writes:

I recall the first verse of a contribution I sent (I hope no later than 1950):

Steve was a donkey
Who carried heavy loads
Up the highway, down the street
And back and forth the roads.

There was a *generosity* in encouraging children to write (even drivel like that) that seems irretrievably lost - a generosity perhaps connected with the conviction that while the person and his/her writing are both important, the former is more so. Janet Frame grew up at a time

⁴⁵ Quoted by Heather Murray, Kite 10, p.11.

⁴⁶ Bill Pearson comments in a letter to Kite 11, responding to Heather Murray's piece on 'Dot's Little Folk' in the previous issue: 'No doubt one day someone will write a study of this part of our literary history' (p.2) and Dennis Mc Eldowney in the same issue writes that 'Jill Holt [...] on the staff of the Auckland College of Education and review[er of] children's books in The Listener has been working on children's pages' (p.2).

⁴⁷ Kite 11, p. 2.

when regardless of family traumas, the state (after 1935) acknowledged in various ways that she *mattered*, and dear old William Fenwick reinforced that.⁴⁸

Brown's gratitude to these editors for convincing her that she mattered (and her acknowledgement of the State's role in this) is similar to Carolyn Steedman's observation in an autobiographical piece that the British State's gift of orange juice and milk to school children in the 1950s were concrete evidence that they were worth keeping and looking after, and this literally enabled them to survive as selves:

This overt intervention in our lives was experienced by me as entirely beneficent, so I find it difficult to match an analysis of the welfare policies of the late Forties [...], which I know to be correct, with the sense of self that those policies imparted. If it had only been philanthropy, would it have felt like it did? I think I would be a very different person now if orange juice and milk and dinners at school hadn't told me, in a covert way, that I had a right to exist, was worth something.⁴⁹

The children's pages served several purposes: they were interesting and entertaining of course but also often didactic and moralistic. Perhaps the most important effect of these pages and their editors' efforts was simply that children were encouraged to write, their efforts stimulated by personal response and encouragement, competitions and points for letters printed (which could be accumulated for book prizes) and, not least, publication. As Linda Burgess recounts,

Seeing my words in print had given me the buzz that never diminishes. [...] Looking back over those years of contributing to the Pixie Pages [the children's pages of the New Zealand Woman's Weekly], it is amazing how vividly I remember - nearly 40 years on - exactly where

⁴⁸ Kite11, p.3.

⁴⁹ Carolyn Steedman, 'Landscape for a Good Woman' in Past Tenses: Essays on Writing, Autobiography and History (London: Rivers Oram Press, 1992), pp. 21-40 (p.36).

many of my contributions came on the page. I remember my pleasure when a teacher at school who didn't even know me commented on one of my contributions in the playground: '*I see you're in the Woman's Weekly again this week, Linda!*'⁵⁰

For Janet Frame, writing was from the beginning synonymous with excitement and anticipation: she tells how she looked forward to Monday mornings when she 'cycled down on Dad's bike to buy the meat and the paper [...] and when I'd bought the paper, I'd sneak a glance inside the back page to see our letters or poems and Dot's remarks.' She was doubly excited when, on at least two occasions, her poems were singled out as the 'Poem of the Week', 'a place normally reserved for poems by "real" poets' (*Island*, p.123). Ruth Brown tells how the *New Zealand Farmer's Weekly* had two pages for children at the back: 'we could send stories, poems or drawings and get "points". When you got 100 points you were sent a postal note or a book token' and Linda Burgess adds 'I still remember how long it took the 2 or 3 points you were given for each contribution to add up to the 50 required to win a book. [...] I remember how each acceptance confirmed my ambition - *When I grow up I want to be an author.*'⁵¹

However, editors such as Dot had an influence that went far beyond simple encouragement: to a large extent they taught children what and how to write about themselves and their surroundings.

Firstly, the form of these letters was often overtly specified by the editors of the children's pages. Frame, as always, is both drawn into such conventions and repelled by them. In order to become members of Dot's Little Folk, children had to write a first letter formally requesting membership, which had to conform to a very specific format:

⁵⁰ *Kite* 11, p. 3.

⁵¹ *Kite* 11, p. 3.

Dutifully, we children wrote our letter in its conventional form, 'Dear Dot, Please may I join your happy band of little folk. I am so many years old, etc. ending with 'Love to all the Little Folk and your own Dear Self.'

In spite of the embarrassment of the effusiveness of 'your own dear self,' I wrote my letter. (*Is-Land*, p.98)

A further formal requirement was that contributors should be known by a pen-name, perhaps to encourage them to write freely of their experiences without friends or family knowing. Janet Frame asked to be known as 'Golden Butterfly',

an unoriginal name that, already taken, Dot changed to Amber Butterfly. The others, except Chicks, who was given the name she asked for, Dancing Fairy, also had their chosen names changed - Bruddie's Sergeant Dan (after the Royal Mountie on the Creamota Packet) became Sergeant Dick, Myrtle's Good Queen Bess was changed to Good Queen Charlotte, and Isabel's Apple Blossom to Apple Petal. (*Is-Land*, p.98)

If we were in any doubt as to Amber Butterfly's identity, we find 'proof' in a couple of lines written to Dot's Little Folk: 'Amber Butterfly (Jean Frame, 56 Eden Street, Oamaru) would like to correspond with any Little Folk in New Zealand or overseas who are interested in writing poems.'⁵² It is amusing when reading through pages of 'Dot's Little Folk' how many writers call themselves 'butterfly' or 'fairy' (at a glance I spot, 'Sweet Pea Butterfly', Fairy Fox' and 'Pale Snow Flakes', all from Oamaru, the Frame's home town): the influence of 'Georgian sentimentalism' is rife to the extent that the children readily name themselves through its symbols and imagery.

Aside from these formal 'entry requirements', it is clear that the editor played a key role in shaping the content and style of the children's writing. Dot encourages and instructs in her brief comments, as helpful and critical as any future editor of a

⁵² 'Dot's Little Folk' *Otago Daily Times*, 24 August 1936, p.15. Subsequent reference to letters to 'Dot's Little Folk' will be shown in the text as *ODT* followed by the date.

writer's novels. This editor is unmistakably conforming to the 'Kowhai Gold' notion of good poetry when 'she' changes Janet's 'gay' blackbird to 'blythe' blackbird. Janet is annoyed, 'for I thought "blythe" too clumsy. I remember my irritation over the change of my chosen word, just as I remember Myrtle's pressure to change "touch" to "tint" (*Is-Land*, p.147). In another comment, Dot tactfully includes the highest praise with strong corrective advice, as Frame records in her autobiography:

Thank you for the poems, Amber Butterfly. They show poetic insight and imagination. I'm making 'Blossoms' a poem of the week. I just wonder, though, if flowers, even poetically, dream of moons. Write again soon and do not mind my friendly criticism.

The honest narrator recalls her reaction: 'My reply to Dot began, "Of course I do not mind your criticism[...]" It is obvious that I did mind it'. Yet at the same time, 'this was the first time anyone had told me, directly, that I had imagination. The acknowledgement was an occasion for me' (*Is-Land*, p.162). Again we see how the utterance of a word ('imagination') takes on the status of an *occasion* for Frame.

On finding Amber Butterfly's letters to Dot dispersed from 1935 to 37 in Monday's edition of the *Otago Daily Times* there is ample evidence of Dot's (well-meaning) criticism, although the following example seems to express the children's pages' editor's own *lack* of imagination and her rigid adherence to the conventions of both Georgian sonnetry and 'correct' grammar.⁵³ Janet, mimicking the themes that she sees published weekly on these pages, and picking up her cue directly from a poem she has read the previous week, writes:

Dear Dot - In the last week's page I read the poem about the wind and enjoyed every word of it, as the subject is one which I shall always love. I have made up a poem in which I try to describe the glories of the wind. It is called, "A Treasure."

⁵³ I found no more letters after this date: my time at Otago was short and I had a lot of ground to cover. There are certainly other letters by Frame and her sisters still waiting to be found.

The wind it roars across the sea;
 If I had ways to fly,
 We'd have such fun the wind and me,
 The dashing wind and I.
 (QDT, 15 February 1937, p.13)

Dot's studied and balanced reply is:

[Thank you Amber Butterfly. I am delighted to think that you have made so pleasing a poem.
 There is something wrong with the last two lines in the first verse, but probably you will be
 able to discover what it is for yourself. - DOT.]

Here, evidently, grammar is the problem. Four months earlier Dot had corrected another poem of Janet's, this time for metre. The theme of Janet's letter was why 'people used to run away from good homes to become sailors' and she includes a poem on the subject:

...
 The longing in me seems to be,
 Upon the waves to ride,
 To sail across that lovely sea,
 Across that expanse wide.
 (QDT, 5 October 1936)

Dot mercilessly replies, 'I like the poem, Amber Butterfly, though the last line does not scan very well.'

Dot's criticisms or encouragement often have a direct impact. On 11 May 1936, Janet's youngest sister June (age eight) writes a letter about her kitten, Blue Eyes. Dot is enthusiastic: 'How lovely to hear about the darlings, Dancing Fairy!' and

suggests, 'Please tell me more about Blue Eyes.' Sure enough, the next week June dutifully pens her letter beginning 'I am going to tell you more about Blue Eyes' and thus follow three short sentences detailing his antics: Dot has successfully coaxed her young apprentice into writing another letter.

That other children contributing to children's pages all over the country were following similar (implicit) instructions is evident in the following contribution to another children's page, which conforms in content, vocabulary, theme and structure to virtually every poem (here I am making an informed guess) ever published on such pages in this period:

My first poem to the Pixie Pages had been about Spring. I was 8 and [...] I showed a neat appreciation of rhyme, rhythm, repetition and the run-on line:

Spring is here
 Spring is here
 The gayest, the brightest
 Months of the year.⁵⁴

Spring was also the favourite topic of Frame, each adjective thoroughly reminiscent of the Kowhai Gold collection :

Dear Dot. - The mist of the mornings, the pearly webs, and the melodious song birds send forth a cheerful welcome to spring, as she walks across the green meadows with fun-loving lambs gambolling joyously at her feet. Many people are glad because winter has gone. I am glad to see the green freshness of everything, but do you not think there is beauty even in the crisp hardness of the frost? Here is a poem I made up. It is called " Spring Beauties".

⁵⁴ Linda Burgess, 'The Sunshine Lady and Me: Writing for the Womans Weekly' in Kite 11, November 1996.

The sun shines on the mountains,
 The snowy peaks of white,
 They're stately in the sunshine -
 Oh, what a lovely sight! (ODT, 30 August, 1937, p.17)

The poem predictably goes on to laud lillies, sunsets, Nature, the seasons, but above all, the spring. As the astute but probably not sarcastic Dot replies: '[You herald the spring in a way that has been popular for centuries, Amber Butterfly - by writing a poem to it! - DOT]'

The tone and style of many of Janet's letters suggest the extent to which such children's pages really were places where children could serve apprenticeships in writing. Here Frame practices a style, laced with rhetorical questions, inverted word order, and repeated nouns, that now sounds so distant from her internationally renowned voice:

One night I went outside, and who should be staring me in the face but the moon. Of course, it drew my attention for a while, you may be sure. Some say that the moon consists of hundreds of countries, others say that it consists of merely mountains. Whoever to believe, I do not know, but it must be something that we see so often in the moon.

(ODT, 16 March 1936)

Dot, quite rightly, alights on the moon as an appropriate topic for the kinds of poems she likes to print (and the kind that Frame is only too happy to write): '[I like the description of the moon, Amber Butterfly. Why not try to put that description into verse too? - DOT.]'

Taking up Dot's advice, soon after Frame dutifully describes the moon in a poem, staging a dialogue between a child and an owl about the moon and the mushrooms. The owl tells:

The moon peeps from a starry sky,
 She's going to the ball,
 She sweeps majestically on high
 Through a starry-spangled ball,
 She looks upon the leafless trees,
 The seeds the farmers sow,
 It is a secret this - she sees
 The white-tipped mushroom grow.

At other times, Janet's letters take on a didactic tone, as though she wants to instruct the other 'little folk' in the wonders of the knowledge she has recently acquired, as well as perhaps straining to prove what a good student she is. She appears to have been an avid reader of the school text books, especially those focusing on natural history, able to describe animals from the hippo to the tuatara in precise detail:

Dear Dot,- This week I shall tell you about the hippopotamus, or river horse as it is often called. Though very repulsive to look at, this animal is interesting. There are two things which it is chiefly noticeable for - its huge bulk and its fondness for water. Strangely enough, this animal is a strict vegetarian. (ODT, 6 September 1937)

Frame's letter is crammed so full of 'interesting facts' from the hippo's 'favourite haunts' to his 'strong tusks' and 'wide nostrils' that Dot is moved to reply, 'Knowing so much about the animal, Amber Butterfly, you will be more than usually interested when you see a hippopotamus. I wonder when that will be?-DOT]'. Dot's reply is perhaps an indication of how difficult it must have been to write a meaningful reply to every child's letter.

In another letter:

Dear Dot,- The other day I was reading a very interesting book dealing with the animals of New Zealand. In it were some very interesting facts. [...] A large mammoth elephant was found in Northern Siberia embedded in the ice, and in the act of eating green foliage. This proves that ice conditions must have come very suddenly.

(ODT, 9 August 1937)

Janet seems able to find almost any subject worthy of the Little Folks' patient attention, adept at picking out 'interesting facts'. It is clear that her mother played an influential role in getting the children excited over such facts. Janet writes a detailed letter about 'Mr Clement Wragge, the famous astronomer' who used to lecture about 'those very interesting celestial bodies - the sun, moon, and stars' when her mother was a young girl (ODT, 23 August 1937).

Another letter to Dot is a story about treasure, a theme which will be familiar to readers of her first novel, Owls Do Cry.⁵⁵ The story can only be one that Janet has heard or read, the latter being likely when we suspect the outright copying from an Enid Blyton novel; the vocabulary, tone, style and subject-matter so foreign to her own:

Ronnie and Nellie were terribly upset. They had lived at Thistlehurst since their parents had gone abroad a year ago, and they had grown to love it. "Oh well, run and play," said Aunt Emily, trying to speak without that queer little catch one gets when about to cry.

(ODT, 18 January 1937)

At other times, Frame enters the 'debating arena', donning her thinker's cap and proposing an appropriate philosophical question for other Little Folk to think about and respond to:

⁵⁵ The novel is subtitled 'Talk of Treasure' and has as its central theme the contrasting values of the 'treasure' rejected by society and literally found on the rubbish dump, such as Tales From Grimm (symbolically of course representing the world of literature and imagination); and the conventional treasure of money, consumer goods, houses, cars, and wives.

Dear Dot,- An incident occurred the other day which brings to my mind a question. The incident was: A friend of mine one day decided to secure an autograph of a famous comedian. She expected to find him laughing merrily, but, to her surprise, his face was serious and no trace of a smile was on it. You may be able to guess the question. Does a comedian pretend to be comical just to amuse his audience, or does he live a life of complete happiness?

(ODT, 21 September 1936)

The next week, really getting into the swing of the debating mode, she discusses at length two poems by Wordsworth and concludes:

Nature can be in two moods. That is what I think of it. Some of the other Little Folk may have different opinions. This may well do for a debate: Has Nature two moods, or has she only one? Well, Dot, I think I shall close, with love to every Little Folk and yourself.

(ODT, 28 September 1936)

If Janet's letters are sometimes didactic, even dull, in tone, her younger sister Isabel's are quirky and original. Perhaps if she had not died so young, she too would now be a famous writer? The first letter I uncovered from Isabel to Dot shows an unusual grasp of narrative: the ability to construct a story around a mundane, everyday experience. The following letter also reveals (as do all the Frame girls' letters) the importance of each others' company for constructing such narratives:

Dear Dot,- I haven't written to you for a long time, but I am going to tell you about a cows' meeting. One day when my two sisters and I were up the hill at the back of our place there were three cows and a calf all standing in a row except the calf. One of my sisters leant over the calf's back and said, "Now, ladies and gentlemen, we . . ." but did not finish it, for one of the cows looked at the others, and they all went away. Love to you and to your Little Folk.

APPLE PETAL [Oamaru]

[How charming, Apple Petal! I have greatly enjoyed hearing about it. Please write me another letter soon as refreshing as this one. - DOT.]

(ODT 22 July 1935)

Isabel's next letter again shows the influence of her sisters on shaping her imagination and vocabulary, and of her mother in providing the 'educational' information and background, and rendering the whole experience riveting, but it is Isabel who puts the story together in this letter. The detail, the staging and description but above all, the sense of narrative, are certainly the marks of a writer :

Dear Dot, - My two sisters and I had a very interesting walk the other afternoon. We saw the most wonderful little creatures - black ants. What we think was the queen ant carried dead ants in her mouth and buried them. We also saw the ants carrying white eggs as big as themselves. When coming home we saw what we took for clothespins, hundreds of them, all along the fence. On our coming close up, there was a scuttle, and the sky up above us was simply black with birds which had flown off the fence. Mother said they must be migrating birds, for they flew in an easterly direction. Well, I must close now, with kind regards to your Little Folk and your own dear self. APPLE PETAL (Oamaru).

[What an interesting walk, Apple Petal. I am glad you wrote about it. Yes, they probably were migrating birds. I like to think they looked like clothespins. - DOT.]

(ODT, 30 March 1936)

However, it is the following memorable example that I think most convincingly shows Isabel's blossoming talents (as well as emphasising once again, the role of the sisters (Janet quite possibly being the unnamed 'doctor' of this story) in providing the material and perhaps even the structure for such well-told stories):

Dear Dot, - Everyone knows that a butterfly cannot fly without that golden dust on her wings. One day our cat saw a butterfly and put her paw on its wings. My sister ran inside and got a

little bit of cornflour and put it on the butterfly's wings. When this had happened, the butterfly warmed herself in the sunshine and then settled on my sister's shoulder and flew away, as if saying, "Thank you for helping me to fly." I think I will close now, with kind regards to your Little Folk and your own dear self. APPLE PETAL (Oamaru).

[That is the prettiest operation I have ever heard of, Apple Petal. How glad your sister must have been to be able to play the part of doctor so skilfully! - DOT.

(ODT 11 May 1936)

Perhaps encouraged by Dot's enthusiasm the previous week, Isabel puts together another charming tale:

Dear Dot, - I am going to tell you something that our cat Fluff did. Mum gave our cat and her kittens a piece of meat each. While the kittens were eating theirs, their mother, having had enough, tried to hide what was left, lest her kittens should eat it and be sick. Mum watched her pull a piece of paper from under the washhouse door to cover it. While the kittens were sleeping Fluff called them in her own language to come to their supper. Well, I must close now, with kind regards to your Little Folk and your own dear self.

APPLE PETAL (Oamaru).

[What a sensible mother, Apple Petal! How well she knew what was best for her kittens' welfare. - DOT.]

(ODT 18 May 1936)

If we can accept that children's pages such as *Dot's Little Folk* played an important role in shaping childhood narratives, we perhaps would not expect them to have a lasting impact on the narratives of these same writers into adulthood. But this is precisely what we can observe if we compare a story Janet writes about in a letter to Dot in 1937 with a later version of the same story that appears in her autobiography in 1984:

Dear Dot,- I wish to tell you of an experience I had in Rakaia. We were canoing near the river, just about three yards away. One day we decided to go for a walk. We packed lunch and tea, having decided to stay all day. My father, who goes in for fishing, led us to a spot where he could fish. By teatime we found he had not brought enough tea with us. My mother sent my sister and I back to the camp for tea, which we were to bring with us. On arriving at the camp, we packed more tea, and I went down to the river to fetch a drink of water. I noticed as I was getting the water that the river was deeper and more muddy than before. Presently I saw a tree being carried downstream by the water, which was by now a raging torrent. The river was in flood. We hurried back and warned the others who, having discovered that the river was flooded, had begun to get ready to warn us. We, however, got there first, and warned them. As we were leaving the place the river came over its banks. Had we been longer we could have been washed away. Don't you think that was exciting, Dot? I shall close, with more about Rakaia next time. Love to all, including yourself.

AMBER BUTTERFLY (Oamaru).

(ODT 30 September 1935)

Dot's reply is crucial in this context:

[I certainly do think it was exciting, Amber Butterfly. What a good thing that it happened in daylight, and not when you were fast asleep in bed.]

Dot's words evidently had an impact. In the subsequent re-telling of this same story in To the Is-Land, forty-seven years later, Frame tells it like this:

During the night, when the rain up-country made the river rise to within a few feet of our tent and we were forced to get up in the dark and move the tent to higher ground, we felt we had experienced the adventure of our lives, the kind of adventure that other children with their many holidays seemed to take for granted. (Is-Land, p.104)

Whether this a conscious embellishment is unimportant: evidently Dot's preferred version convinced the young Janet and it became the narrative that was told, the adventure at Rakaia. The connection between letter, autobiography and the oral re-telling of a story is captured by Frame in the subsequent paragraph: 'having our new friend, Marguerite, we had a chance to tell again the story of our adventure, reliving the water rising, the escape, the magpies, the water biscuits . . .'. According to this version, the camping trip at Rakaia is told and re-told to Marguerite and thus becomes fodder for a re-telling here to Dot. Or does Janet feel confident to embellish the story once she's tried it out on Dot, or did the Frame children never recount this story to Marguerite at all? Is it just remembered as a narrative that was re-told? Are the stories that an adult narrates those that she or he has already narrated (especially as written narrative) somewhere else? I am thinking here of a remark an academic made at a conference when, shortly after finishing her autobiography she discovered an old school exercise book with 'creative' writing' samples in it. She was amazed at how many of the stories she had remembered and told in her adult memoir had already been written down as stories there.⁵⁶

Dot, and all the other children's page editors of the period certainly have a lot to answer for, and on the pages of 'Dot's Little Folk' there are years of fascinating research for anyone who wants to make the connections between childhood, adulthood, writing and identity. It also becomes abundantly clear from such explorations into newspapers, school journals and family background that no story is ever written on a blank slate: we have been given detailed instructions and started rehearsing our stories way before we even dream of writing *The Story of our one and only lives*.

⁵⁶ Suzanne Bunkers, during a presentation/ discussion of her new book *In Search of Susanna* (Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 1996) at the conference 'Memory, History and Critique: European Identity at the Millenium', University for Humanist Studies, Utrecht, Holland, 19-24 August, 1996.

Conclusion

In difference is the irretrievable loss of the illusion of one.

Donna Haraway, Symians, Cyborgs and Women ¹

Reading autobiography critically, as I have done throughout this thesis, means an awareness of the tensions and contradictions between specificity and representativeness: either she speaks for me, I can relate to or identify with her life and her telling of that life, or, that is not what it was like for me at all. Experience is what constitutes the context, the life out there, the *hors-texte*, which precedes putting the life to paper. Yet experience itself is mediated, nebulous, transitory. To a large extent, there is no life, there can only be traces of a life and the conviction that we 'experienced' certain events. Transferring that experience to paper is no less straightforward. Yet these difficulties are rarely taken into account when using autobiography to come to generalised conclusions about the self. The overall project of this thesis has been to show how the self narrated through autobiography inevitably negotiates a space that incorporates both text and context. What precisely is the link between an author's life and a text that purports to tell the story of that life and what slippages between the two might occur: what gets 'lost in translation'? ²

Using the writings of Janet Frame as a case study through and against which to measure questions relevant to a contemporary understanding of autobiography as genre has had its own inherent contradictions and difficulties. On the one hand, the main theme of the thesis has been a plea for specificity: each narrative construction of the self must be *located*, examined as the unique expression of a unique individual. On the other hand, it makes an implicit gesture towards representativeness: this unique self is representative of other selves in similar situations. In outlining the construction of self in Frame's texts there has always been the danger of allowing her to speak for all subjects in marginalised positions. Gayatri

¹ Donna J. Haraway, 'Reading Buchi Emecheta: Contests for "Women's Experience" in Women's Studies' in Symians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature (London: Free Association Books, 1991), pp.109-124 (p.124).

² This phrase is borrowed from the title of an autobiography by Eva Hoffman, Lost In Translation (London: Minerva, 1991).

Spivak points to this problem and cites herself as an example of being held up as a spokesperson for the 'third world': 'The authenticity of the margins [...] is undermined by the fact my own class in India does not particularly like what I'm doing.'³ Spivak, who inhabits a very specific and privileged position as postcolonial feminist theorist and whose voice is often heard over and above other Indian women's voices, is nevertheless seen as speaking for all Indian women, whether or not they share her perspective and perceptions. It is assumed that Spivak experiences the world *as* an Indian woman and that this experience is shared to a degree by *all* Indian women. It is of course self-evident that India is a large country with a complex caste system and religious beliefs: it seems obvious that Spivak's experience must be utterly different from a woman begging for money on the streets of Delhi, for example. Yet, even if there were aspects of their background in common, could we then conclude something about their common experience of that background? Donna Haraway argues that 'women do not find "experience" ready to hand any more than they/we find "nature" or the "body" preformed, always innocent and waiting outside the violations of language and culture. [...] Experience [is] one of the least innocent, least self-evident aspects of historical, embodied movement.'⁴

I see this as the general dilemma posed by feminist and postcolonial theories: how do we reconcile the need to identify a common experience among women, which is essential for political activism, and the opposing (and equally political) need to accentuate the differences between women? Judith Butler's warning is appropriate here: 'Feminist critique ought to explore the totalizing claims of a masculinist signifying economy, but also remain self-critical with respect to the totalizing gestures of feminism.'⁵ Such gestures, as Spivak's example illustrate, imply that all women are oppressed in the same way and to the same degree. Yet, the alternative emphasis on difference suggests that no category is meaningful: we cannot talk of women, class, race, gender or sexuality without performing these totalizing gestures. There is then the danger of a banal form of relativism where such

³ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Political Commitment and the Postmodern Critic', The New Historicism ed. by H. Aram Veesser, (New York: Routledge, 1989): pp. 281-2.

⁴ Donna J. Haraway, p.109.

⁵ Judith Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (New York: Routledge, 1990), p.13.

categories no longer have relevance as ways of interpreting behaviour and we can only speak of the individual. The concept of 'locating the self' adopted in this thesis has been an attempt to avoid such relativism while continually questioning the actual make-up of any given term for describing the self at any given moment.

Having outlined the pitfalls of a reliance on 'experience', Haraway argues for an appropriate feminist methodology:

Women's studies must negotiate the very fine line between appropriation of another's (never innocent) experience and the delicate construction of the just-barely-possible affinities, the just-barely possible connections that might actually make a difference in local and global histories. Feminist discourse and anti-colonial discourse are engaged in this very subtle and delicate effort to build connections and affinities, and not to produce one's own or another's experience as a resource for a closed narrative. [...] 'Our' writing is also full of hope that we will learn to structure affinities instead of identities.⁶

Locating the self can be seen as this process of building connections and affinities: there is no self outside its precise location. That location is determined by a series of categories that are in constant flux and must be continually questioned and described. Linda Hutcheon emphasises that postmodern theory does not (as many anti-theoretical commentators claim) do away with the subject. Rather ,

[postmodernism] radically problematizes the entire notion of subjectivity, pointing directly to its dramatized contradictions. [...] As Derrida insists: "The subject is absolutely indispensable. I don't destroy the subject: I situate it" [...] And to situate it, as postmodernism teaches, is to recognize differences - of race, gender, class, sexual orientation, and so on. To situate is also both to acknowledge the ideology of the subject and to suggest alternative notions of subjectivity.⁷

⁶ Haraway, p.113.

⁷ Linda Hutcheon, A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction (New York: Routledge, 1988), pp. 158-9.

In Part One I suggested that feminist commentators on autobiography, really up until the last decade, were making the totalizing gestures Judith Butler cautioned against: reading autobiographies by women as revealing certain ahistorical and acultural truths about women in general. The 'female self' derived from such readings was typically fragmented and dependent on others. This self was entirely contrary to the autonomous and unitary male self that had been identified by countless (non) feminist commentators in men's autobiographies previously. I identified this as a failure to specifically locate the self in time and place, or to use Foucauldian terminology, to identify the discursive field within which that self was located. I chose then to look at examples of men's writing which undermined their common interpretation as always representing an 'autonomous, unitary' self, showing, on the contrary, not only that they displayed characteristics typically identified with women autobiographers, but that within these characteristics there were interesting differences. Whereas both feminist and non-feminist commentators had defined female subjectivity as being necessarily constructed in and through others, in my reading of male subjectivity constructed through this same sense of dependency on others, I did not take this notion of alterity for granted. Rather, the possibility of different forms and levels of alterity was explored, described through various prepositions. Thus St. Augustine was described as standing *beside* his mother, Bunyan as standing *opposite* or in opposition to women in general, and Dante's Beatrice as standing *in for* God.

This critical examination of traditional commentary on autobiography set the scene within the thesis for an approach that carefully locates the self, not coming to prior conclusions but attempting always to investigate the discourses at work in any one time at any one place. As an extension of this methodology, and as a next step in this research, it would be extremely interesting to investigate whether the characteristics traditionally identified as male within autobiography (autonomous, unitary), take on a different significance when transposed to a different geographical, cultural and social location, for example. Thus, the 'idealized solitary figure' which readers of St. Augustine's Confessions have seen as paradigmatic of the genre could be linked and compared to the 'man alone' popularised in New Zealand by the publication of John Mulgan's (1972) novel

of that title⁸. Here the protagonist Johnson is forced to fend for himself during the great depression of the thirties, and then to disappear into the native bush as a fugitive: himself versus the elements. Mulgan has explained that in the thirties, 'the majority favoured a doctrine that every man's duty was to look after himself. This, of course, was the fine old flavour of the pioneers.'⁹ As one New Zealand commentator remarked, writers up until 1950 examined the society they depicted primarily through 'the isolated individual, isolated in every sense, who may or may not explode into violent gestures under the distorting weight of a society he does not understand.'¹⁰ John Mulgan's novel gave this 'Man Alone' pattern its name, although he didn't necessarily determine or influence it, other writers developing the theme before his novel was published.¹¹ The picture of New Zealand that emerges via this Man Alone theme is of a 'narrow, materialistic, puritanical society with a great deal of latent animosity and violence'.¹² The picture of the male self is very far from the self-confident centre of subjectivity typically understood by the phrase 'unitary, autonomous': this is an isolated individual, estranged against his will from society, having no control over his destiny and at odds with the social world around him, usually at the bottom of the hierarchy, often the persecuted subject of an aggressive manhunt, rather than on top surveying the world. It could thus be argued that New Zealand in the 30s had a very specific notion of autonomy conditioned by social and political considerations but also by a climate, vegetation and geography that encouraged writers to describe man versus the elements, man the persecuted pioneer.

While Part One showed the consequences of *not* locating the self, Part Three was an attempt to draw out some of the differences and specificities of Janet Frame's writing background and the relationship of this background to the narrative of her life. I looked at a range of social categories that might be used to define/ describe Frame and asked whether she too actually described herself in and through such categories. Again, these categories

⁸ John Mulgan, *Man Alone* (Auckland: Longman Paul, 1972).

⁹ Mulgan, quoted on the back cover of the 1972 edition.

¹⁰ Robert Chapman, quoted in Lawrence Jones, 'The Novel', *The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature in English*, ed. by Terry Sturm (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp.105-199 (p.147).

¹¹ In fact, Mulgan's novel was not widely available in New Zealand until it was reprinted in 1949. See Jones, 'The Novel', p.147.

¹² Jones, 'The Novel', p.148.

were exposed as broad generalisations which closed out possible nuances of belonging and the singularities of personal experience. As an extension of this emphasis on specific time and place I then looked at how a local, regional and national writing environment might be seen to influence the possible descriptions of self in narrative, concluding that the possible narratives we write about our selves are to quite a large extent predetermined by such environments.

One essential aspect of 'locating the self' in autobiography that has been touched on at various points throughout the thesis is the role or position of the reader. It is particularly the case that in literary representations of the self both the writer's and reader's constructions must be borne in mind. The reader cannot be underestimated as a player in this construction of self: where is the reader 'coming from'? At which points does she consciously (or subconsciously) relate to the protagonist and how does this obscure her reading of other less pertinent areas of the text? What is it exactly that reverberates with the reader's own experience and does it help her to reflect upon her own life? In other words, to what extent does the reading of a construction of selfhood encourage and influence the reader in simultaneously constructing a narrative of her own selfhood? Is the reader's association with or disassociation from the text constructed through gender, for example? If, as we have seen proposed in the analysis of autobiography undertaken in Part Two, the writer's self is constructed in the text, to what extent is the *reader's* subjectivity constructed in and through that same text? (The literary critic is, in some sense, the reader par excellence, and her textual readings will both reflect and construct her own subject-position.) As Donna Haraway has argued, 'inclusions and exclusions are not determined in advance by fixed categories of race, gender, sexuality, or nationality'. It is the reader who determines what these differences are, since, by definition, the author must be different from someone else: while the text may self-consciously define difference from other protagonists/ characters in the text, in the end the defining difference is that between author and reader. Haraway argues that as readers, "'we" are accountable for the inclusions and exclusions, identifications and separations, produced in the highly political practices called reading fiction'. She goes on to declare that 'all readings are also mis-readings, re-readings, partial

readings, imposed readings, and imagined readings of a text that is originally and finally never simply there.'¹³

In Part One, I showed how the reader's location as a contemporary theorist inevitably informed by developments within postmodern, postcolonial and feminist discourse in fact made it impossible to read the self as 'unitary' and 'autonomous'. Since much of the reading undertaken from this theoretically informed perspective is inevitably of traditionally marginalised subjects (the working-class, women, the 'colonized') it is not surprising that the characteristics of such subjects are swiftly defined as having all the opposite qualities to those previously identified (from a very different theoretical perspective) as typical of the male self. I showed that in transposing the theoretical concepts from such contemporary reading practices to texts previously held up as classic examples of this male self we would, inevitably, and controversially, discover these very same qualities of fragmentation and alterity. In this sense then the self of autobiography (the history of the self) was exposed as just as much (if not more) a construction of the reader as of the writer.

In Part Two, I looked at the extent to which the reader was a crucial player in the triadic autobiographical contract. In Part Three, I discussed the lengths to which the writer's construction of the self might be informed by the literature available to her and whether she reads it as representing or misrepresenting her story: what are the gaps in the existing literature? To what extent was it possible to be a New Zealander and have an identity that was not somehow qualified by a gesturing towards Britain? To what extent does the reading material incorporated by autobiographers in their narratives and described as influential by them conform to programmes of instruction and cultural notions of appropriate reading material? In Frame's case, we saw that there was indeed a close fit between the poems she cites, the lyrical observations she makes and the novels she loves with the contemporary reading practices of the nation typified in Georgian sonnets, children's letter pages and the school journal. Such reading material creates a specific culture and environment which delimits what it is possible to say about the self in that time

¹³ Haraway, p.124.

and that place. The author's exposure to such reading must inform and shape what she is able to imagine a self to be and how it is to be described.

There has not been the space within this thesis to develop systematically a theoretical notion of the 'located reader' although this would certainly be an important area to consider in the future as a component of the narrated self in autobiography. My reading of Janet Frame is evidently constricted by the time and place of that reading. Perhaps a next step would be to locate my reading as Haraway has done in her article 'Reading Buchi Emecheta': perhaps this should be compulsory in any analysis of narrative constructions of self? Haraway illustrates how 'specific' and 'non-innocent' positions can read very different differences in women's texts. She takes as example three readings of the black Nigerian writer Buchi Emecheta by three feminist critics with very different personal and political agendas. The first reading is by Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi, professor of African-American and African literature at the University of Ibadan. Haraway argues that Ogunyemi 'declined to read' Emecheta: for her own political and feminist purposes she traces a history of married woman's resistance and strength since the end of colonization, arriving at a place of political hope where women would be committed to the survival and wholeness of all African people (men and women) in Africa and in the diaspora. None of Emecheta's female characters represent marriage in this way: typically they explore its failure. Ogunyemi is thus dismissive of Emecheta's writings, practically saying that they are the autobiographical and narcissistic outpourings of a failed wife. Ogunyemi reads Emecheta through her own feminist frame and assesses her writing accordingly. Barbara Christian, a professor of African-American studies at the University of California and a pioneer of black feminist literary criticism, has 'very different stakes' in reading Emecheta. She sets up a series of readings which reclaim a matrilineal tradition, tracing the contradictions and complexities of mothering for black women in the U.S., from slavery to post-civil rights. But she uses this image of the mother to 'foreground a particular kind of feminism [...] committed to forbidding the marginalisation of lesbianism in feminist discourse by women of colour'.¹⁴ Finally, Haraway analyses her own ('Euro-American,

¹⁴ Haraway, p.120.

middle-class, university-based feminist') first (published) reading of Emecheta, placing it in a particular 'postmodern theory' moment which inevitably emphasises the 'potent ambiguities of Emecheta's fiction and of the fictions of her life.' In particular, Haraway emphasises Emecheta's many varied roles and experiences: 'I wanted to stay with affinities that refused to resolve into identities or searches for a true self.'¹⁵

A preliminary application of Haraway's methodology to my own status as reader might be the following. My reading of Janet Frame's autobiography has evidently been predetermined by my reading of theories of autobiography: I am alerted to passages, concepts, metaphors in her text that another reader might be blind to. I read her for the insights she can add to my understanding of autobiography as genre. I am drawn to passages that focus on concepts fundamental to autobiography, such as memory, the past, narrative. I cannot undo this knowledge and am unable to read Frame's autobiography without this dual perspective in mind: I read for her life, certainly, but that life is always read in the context of a theory of life-writing.

Autobiography and Metaphor

In introducing this thesis I suggested that reading autobiography is a particularly accentuated continual to-ing and fro-ing between the imagined (or known) *hors-texte* and the text itself and that this characteristic of autobiography makes it an ideal candidate for an interdisciplinary study of the interstices between literature, sociology and history. In thinking through issues raised by Frame's texts, I identified an impasse between two ways of reading autobiography: the first (literary) textual approach has tended to see the autobiography as self-contained with no external reference; the alternative (historical/sociological) contextual approach has tended to discover and describe material extraneous to the text without an acknowledgement that such material is itself transformed by the text that contains it. We saw in Part Two that Paul Ricoeur's work in his three-volume Time and Narrative on the relationship between history and fiction can be an insightful tool for

¹⁵ Haraway, p.121.

analysing autobiography's position as a genre which must, by definition, continually negotiate experience and a narrative of that experience, life and the representation of that life. Through a reading of theorists who seek to demonstrate the links between text and context both within the field of autobiography (Lejeune, Bruss) and outside (Foucault, Ricoeur, White), always explored in tandem with the practice of writing autobiography (Frame), I arrived at the notion of a 'textual contract' which would allow the reader to hold on to a sense of 'the real' outside the text while remaining simultaneously aware of the representative nature of reality within the text. In thinking through the difficulties and implications of defining autobiography as genre and struggling with the debates within history and literature I have continually had in mind the sense that 'metaphor' would be an extremely productive and accurate term to describe autobiography, while highlighting the difficulties of generic definition that have been identified throughout this thesis.

In an earlier (and almost as lengthy) volume, The Rule of Metaphor, Ricoeur's exceptionally rigorous methodological approach to hermeneutics can again provide invaluable insights for the issues that have been developed throughout this thesis: this time, for the possibilities of reading autobiography as metaphor. In this volume, Ricoeur describes 'the *reference* of the metaphorical statement as the power to "redescribe" reality'. It is the simultaneous and inextricable link between what the metaphor describes (the real) and its rhetorical status as poetic language that once more disturbs the apparently mutually exclusive categories of the real and the fictional:

The possibility that metaphorical discourse says something about reality collides with the apparent constitution of poetic discourse, which seems to be essentially non-referential and centred on itself [...]. This brings the work to its most important theme, namely, that metaphor is the rhetorical process by which discourse unleashes the power that certain fictions have to redescribe reality. By linking fiction and redescription in this way, we restore the full depth of meaning to Aristotle's discovery in the *Poetics*, which was that the *poiesis* of language arises out of the connection between *muthos* [fable/ plot] and *mimesis* [imitation].¹⁶

¹⁶ Paul Ricoeur, (1975) The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language, trans. by Robert Czerny with K. McLaughlin and J. Costello (London: Routledge, 1986), p.7.

Autobiography has as its mission to *redescribe reality*: it is not reality, but reality revisited. Past reality is only available to us through the joint processes of plot (which throughout this thesis has been described as narrative) and imitation. Imitation is the means and efficacy of representing reality. To use I.A. Richards' well-known phraseology, if we were to describe autobiography as metaphor, the *tenor* would be the author's life; the *vehicle* would be the narrative of that life: the two together constitute the metaphor that is autobiography.¹⁷ The life, as a lived enacted thing, is one foot of the compass (to use a conceit of John Donne's); the representation of that life as text is the other foot and together they draw out/ design/ trace the pattern of a life on paper. They work together, and the textual foot may make a wider or closer circle around the 'base foot' but is always explicitly joined to it: the circle could not be made without both feet of the compass. In autobiography, life and text are joined at the hip. In fiction, this join is not so evident or overt.

Indeed, Ricoeur's understanding of metaphor as this kind of bridge between the real and fiction could be very helpful in the debate between Derrida and Foucault that was discussed in Part Two, Chapter Six. Madness can only be described through metaphor: words can only *suggest* madness as they simultaneously are incapable of describing it, since madness by definition operates outside a common and communicable lexis. To quote Ricoeur once more, metaphor has the capacity 'to provide untranslatable information and, accordingly, [can] claim to yield some true insight about reality'.¹⁸ Metaphor in this sense emphasises what Homi Bhabha in a different context has termed, '*a subject of difference that is almost the same but not quite*'¹⁹. Discussing the notion that the colonized person imitates or mimics the colonizer, Bhabha questions the very process and nature of mimeticism: what does it mean to mimic or copy? A copy, after all, implies an authentic origin. The desired outcome of colonization is that the colonized person will be taught to mimic his or her superior, the colonizer. The mismatch between the copy and the original

¹⁷ See I.A. Richards, (1936) *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1971), chapters 5-6.

¹⁸ Ricoeur, *Metaphor*, p.141.

¹⁹ Homi K. Bhabha, 'Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse', *October*, 28 (1984), 125-133 (p.126); emphasis in original. Republished as chapter four of Homi K. Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 85-92.

emphasises the inferiority of the colonized, her inability to be the colonizer. Yet Bhabha argues that 'mimicry' can be seen as an empowering tool for the colonized. Rather than seeing imitation as second-rate, as a failure to *be* the original, this imitation is *itself* the reality: the colonized person *is* a mimic, this is her actual status and identity. What that identity is cannot be described in any specific terms, it is simply a suggestion of difference. If we were to take this analysis to its postmodern extreme, and think it through Jean Baudrillard, we might conclude that there is only autobiography; there is no life to speak of. Baudrillard effectively abolished the concept of image because he placed in doubt whether the image is indeed a copy of anything else in the world or if there is an original version of the image itself.²⁰ But the understanding of autobiography as metaphor insists on the deep and inextricable connection between the original and its transformation, while highlighting that it is this linguistic connection itself which conveys meaning.

The notion of mimicry as a state of being, as a permanent sense of 'almost the same but not quite' is enforced if we envisage autobiography as a metaphor for a life. As Barrett J. Mandel declares, during the process of reading autobiography, the author says to the reader, 'my life was as this tale I am telling'.²¹ The emphasis is placed on the preposition *as*, emphasising the analogous rather than the identical. Although Mandel translates this phrase as evidence that 'autobiography is comparable to an extended, epic simile', I prefer to think of autobiography as metaphor: the simile makes explicit what 'autobiography' seeks to mask, or as Paul Ricoeur puts it, 'simile explicitly displays the moment of resemblance that operates implicitly in metaphor'.²² Whereas in the above phrase the tale is *like* the life, an autobiography professes to *be* that life. In this sense, then, we can read the term 'autobiography' as a metaphor.

'This tale' is evidently not 'my life': my life is a nebulous, intangible series of experiences, events and feelings, nowhere gathered together as a coherent whole. And yet

²⁰ See for example Jean Baudrillard, *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1995).

²¹ Barrett J. Mandel, 'Full of Life Now' in James Olney, ed. *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1980), p. 62. Frank Kermode quoted this phrase in his paper 'Memory and Autobiography' presented to the conference 'Writing One's Own life' at the University of London School of Advanced Study: Centre for English Studies and Institute of Romance Studies on Wednesday 23 November 1994.

²² Ricoeur, *Metaphor*, p. 27.

this tale, this autobiography, is inextricably linked to that life and describes and defines it, forces it into a tangible, speakable entity. As we saw in the final chapter of the thesis, the order of events (first life, then tale) is not at all straightforward. Rather the two reinforce each other: sometimes my sense of this tale or society's need for me to construct this tale of my life can precede and predetermine that life. At other times I tell my life at a distance of many years when memory is dim or unreliable, and yet my tale of the past, my reconstruction of events, somehow takes on more significance in my present and future life than the actual events themselves.

A metaphor holds together two disparate things or images: carrying over the sense of one term or object to another, implicitly talking about one thing in terms of something else, simultaneously describing and transforming its original referent. Aristotle gave a well-known definition of metaphor in his Poetics: 'metaphor is the application of an alien name by transference either from genus to species, or from species to genus, or from species to species, or by analogy, that is, proportion'.²³ As Ricoeur interprets, "'To metaphorize well," said Aristotle, "implies an intuitive perception of the similarity in dissimilars." Thus, resemblance itself must be understood as a tension between identity and difference'.²⁴ And again, Ricoeur affirms that what metaphor and simile have in common 'is the apprehension of an identity within the difference between two terms'.²⁵

We can see then how the sense of autobiography as metaphor might contribute to debates within cultural, literary, social and historical studies around the empirical and the imagined, the past and its representation, identity and difference. Yet there is a further, more literal sense in which a study of metaphor might contribute to an analysis of autobiography. Throughout this study, metaphors in themselves have also been prominent. The titles of Frame's volumes of autobiography, To the Is-Land and The Envoy from Mirror City were elaborated as metaphors for exile, for identity, autobiography, the imagination. The title of Frame's autobiographical novel Faces in the Water was similarly seen to suggest notions of specificity and representativeness. Such analyses show how an

²³ Aristotle's Poetics, trans. by S.H. Butcher (New York: Hill and Wang, 1961), XXI, 4-7, p.99.

²⁴ Ricoeur, Metaphor, p.6.

²⁵ Ricoeur, Metaphor, p.26.

interpretation of metaphors employed in autobiography allow the author to communicate to the reader an experience that the reader does not yet know: to convey to the reader a personal and unique experience by tying it inextricably through metaphor to something that instead is known and understood by the reader. This is to encourage identification by simultaneously emphasising similarity and difference.

On the one hand we have individual, personal experience which can only function as the truth: the truth is what we know, first-hand, what we have experienced, what can thus be said to exist, to be an event or happening. Yet of course experience is always mediated through language and narrative: in order to be communicated it becomes something other than what it was. In order to communicate experience we can only describe it by relating it to something that is previously known: *we can only convey a new truth by relating it to an old one* and highlighting the difference/ similarity from one to the other. Metaphor then can perform this 'bridging' function. For Richard Schiff, this sense of metaphor resolves the conundrum of how experience is read as knowledge, and how art is linked to life:

In a changing world, metaphor renders the truth of experience as the truth of knowledge, for it is the means of passing from individual immediacy to an established public world; the new must be linked to the old, and the experience of any individual must be connected to his society. Excluding the possibility of the creation of entirely new worlds and the resultant transformation of all personal identities, acts of genius or dramatic breakthroughs in fields of study can affect our present world order only if they are joined to it by means of a powerful metaphor. Indeed establishing the metaphoric bridge itself may be considered the act of genius, and the entry into new areas of knowledge is its consequence.²⁶

Finally, this notion of metaphor might also be employed to resolve the difficulties I identified at the beginning of this chapter around issues of representativeness. I mentioned the dangers of using the narrated self of one writer to stand in for the narrated selves of other writers who might be identified as sharing common characteristics with that writer:

²⁶ Richard Schiff, 'Art and Life: A Metaphoric Relationship', in *On Metaphor*, ed. by Sheldon Sacks (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1978), pp. 105-120 (p.106).

such characteristics have been named over and over as, for example, race, class, gender. What if the phrase 'she is working-class' were understood metaphorically? What if the verb 'to be' in this sentence were understood to be the copula of a metaphor, the link between two unlike images or words or signifiers? If the phrase 'she is working-class' is read as a metaphor, the unstated sense of the sentence is transformed to: 'she is *like* a working-class woman'. We know then that she shares characteristics with other working class women but we don't know what precisely those characteristics are, nor how this particular woman will experience them. As Ricoeur states: 'I conclude that the "place" of metaphor, its most intimate and ultimate abode, is neither the name, nor the sentence, nor even discourse, but the copula of the verb *to be*. The metaphorical "is" at once signifies both "is not" and "is like." If this is really so, we are allowed to speak of metaphorical truth, but in an equally "tensive" sense of the word "truth."' ²⁷ This notion indicates too that there is more and productive work to be done with Frame's rich metaphor, *To the Is-Land*.

This thesis then is an attempt to keep both life *and* its representation in the foreground. Thinking of autobiography as metaphor allows me to acknowledge the representative and transformative power of narrative but also its ability to shed light on its referent, to feed back into its own definition, to give a fresh perspective which immediately makes us aware of sameness (there is something in this image that is like its original) and difference (after all, that is the power and freshness, the flash of recognition, when a metaphor is successful). Janet Frame's life then is as this tale I have told. To this extent, her life is representative of other lives (the shock of recognition: yes, that's how it was!): representative perhaps of other lives which could be slotted into various combinations of the same social categories of gender, race, class, nationality. Representative of those who accidentally share experiences in common: the death of a sister; the sight of a parent's soiled underclothes; the fascination with the construction of words. But hers too is the

²⁷ Ricoeur, *Metaphor*, pp. 6-7.

unique vision, the invention of a fresh metaphor that persuades us to see things anew, to recognise what we always knew but had never yet put into words.

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