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**CRONIN, JAN and SIMONE DRICHEL, eds. *Frameworks: Contemporary Criticism on Janet Frame*. Cross/Cultures: Readings in the Post/Colonial Literatures in English (Crossc): 110. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009. 227 pp. \$75.00.**

Edited by Jan Cronin and Simone Drichel, *Frameworks: Contemporary Criticism on Janet Frame* proposes fresh or refreshed angles of approach to Janet Frame's oeuvre which, in their accumulation, work less to frame than to unframe Frame from the smothering bag of unself-critical (biographical, nationalist, social-realist) criticism. The volume consists of nine essays organized into three sections: "Meta-Critical Frame(s)," which contains Cronin's and Lawn's essays; "Metaphysical Frame(s)," to which Wevers, Smaill, Baisnée, and Michell have contributed; and "Beyond the Frame(s) of Representation," which is made up of essays by Delrez, Prentice, and Drichel. Considering that the titles of all three subsections contain the word "beyond" (or the prefix "meta"), one may do worse than to chart interpretations of the "beyond" in the different contributions to provide a quick overview of the volume and, possibly, point to discussions that are likely to surface in the next few years.

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Starting with Cronin's perception that the author regularly recycles the "parable of the cave" (15) and with Delrez's argument that the conquered surfaces of our reality are "signposted with the markers of an external dimension felt to exist beyond the frame of representation" (141), we could easily imagine that, in Frame, those who live by the rules of conquered surfaces dwell in the shadow world, Plato's cave. It is at this juncture that contemporary Janet Frame criticism subdivides into two discrete schools of thought. The transcendentalists (or Delrezian school, as I call them), all seem to agree that Frame's "remedial scale" is, by definition, "transcendental" (Delrez 143) so that the self who attempts to peep at "the transcendent Good" (Drichel 202) is necessarily seeing mere "reflections of his [or her] own representations" (Cronin 17). In transcendental readings, Frame's humanity is left to contend with a shadow world from which it is impossible to escape.

Equally aware of the insulation of the self, the proponents of the second school, whom I call the existentialists, consider that beyond the cave is the outside world. Whether this outside world is, in turn, fitted with a transcendent beyond is, for the most part, not these readers' concern. In Smail's analysis, then, our neo-Platonist cave is the refuge of the self who seeks to escape from the extreme "facticity" (79) of things, and from the contingencies of Time and Death in "the objective world" (86), whereas authentic life is an "existential synthesis" between "one's subjectivity" and "the possibility of an externalized, objective point of view" (80). Frame's condemnation of "self-willed retreat into pure subjectivity" (Smail 82) is but at a stone's throw from her deconstruction of full-fledged narcissism, as shown by Lawn, and intimations that an encounter with the other is the "integration of two seasons under one sky" (Lawn 43). Lawn's use of Freud connects well with Prentice's argument that seduction "constitutes/is constituted by cycles of reciprocity" (157) and with her Freudian slippage of the pen where Frame's Violet Pansy Proudlock is dubbed "Violent" Pansy Proudlock (164), which may well be a subliminal reminder of the violence associated with un-hybridized subjectivities. From the parallel that is established between Smail's conclusion and Lawn's or Prentice's interpretations, emerges the idea that, in his or her rejection of the world, the self excludes not just the objective but also any foreign subjectivity, which means, in other words, that each self is utterly alone in his or her own narrow cave. Despite appearances, the selves who have hardened in chosen homegrounds of being are not necessarily the "self-possessed" or authentic in Wevers's reading for, as she explains, many Framean protagonists are not where they seem to be, at home in the present, which raises the question of where their selves are to be found (59). Indirectly responding to these considerations, Smail shows that the longing to "enter a pure, and eternal absolute" (85), one that would be untouched by the world's contingencies, has landed numerous selves in illusory but nonetheless fixed (Michell 112, Baisnée 93) places of being and this may well imply that modern selves *create* their neo-Platonist caves by groping for a better and beyond.

If it is indeed the case that, as the existentialists suggest, absolute orders of being do not exist outside human thinking and if being at home in the (physical) world involves a relinquishing of idealized places, then one wonders why the existentialists' section has been called "Metaphysical Frame(s)." Unless we consider that imaginary travels, where one is in a state of physical absence, sometimes allow the self to touch down to the outside world, the physical. Once again, this begs the question of the (im-) possibility of exploring, in art or in life, a beyond. Should art and human existence simply cease to seek the beyond because it is transcendental and therefore impossible to explore? Or is it the case that the self must cease to pitch the physical world against the transcendental because the only "beyond" is "within" this world? No doubt this question, which *Frameworks* had the merit to unveil, if not to fully address, as well

as other points of divergence or convergence between the different essays, will invite further elaborations and enrich the already fertile soil of contemporary Janet Frame criticism.

Interestingly, an aspect of the editors' agenda in *Frameworks* has been to integrate the fresh delineation of Frame's favoured themes with a minute examination of the relationship between the author's work and their critical practices. This certainly has its usefulness but, in some cases, metacritical comments are used less to help readers avoid certain textual traps than to warn that whoever tries to invest Frame's texts with "final meaning is a prowler" (28). Ironically, this species of prescriptiveness might work against the volume's intention of doing away with readings of Frame as a "marginal visionary" (xi) by reinstating just this perception. Further, the volume is intensely interested in the relationship between Frame's work and philosophy or cultural theory. Hence, the nine essays make (abundant) use of Kristeva, Freud, Heidegger, Levinas, Sartre, Baudrillard and others, so much so that, sometimes, the reader has to ingest up to fifteen pages of pure theory before actually confronting analyses of Frame's oeuvre. One wonders if the general leaning towards theory (and not just a very utilitarian version thereof) is not what explains the relative neglect in which *Frameworks* has been held by interpreters of Frame's biosemiotics or of her short stories. For instance, while the contributors of *Frameworks* often emphasize the relevance of French thinkers in Framean studies, French critics acknowledge only very rarely the existence of *Frameworks* in the 2011 *Publibook* volume on *The Lagoon and Other Stories* and not at all in the *CNED* monograph on Frame's debut fiction. This, I believe, is a mistake for, despite its theoretical twist and the related difficulties it poses to the reader, *Frameworks: Contemporary Criticism on Janet Frame* contributes importantly to current debates in the field and should certainly be one of the books to clutter the bedside table of any committed Janet Frame scholar.

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