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The Continuum of Grief: From Scandinavian Mythology to Zen Buddhism: Janet Frame's Intertextual Strategies in *Snowman, Snowman*

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In the wake of Richards Benton's "Keats and Zen" (published in *Philosophy East and West* (1966)), this paper sets out to examine Janet Frame's appropriation of Buddhist philosophy in *Snowman, Snowman* (1962). The novella's allusions to a Buddhist-like epistemology, together with its subtle references to Scandinavian myths, however, have so far remained uncovered and are therefore best approached in the light of what has been called "the suppressed intertextuality in post-colonial writing". The author's intention in this paper is twofold: On the one hand, the author will suggest that post-colonial writers do not necessarily write against the Western canon and that maintaining the contrary amounts to vindicating the centrality of imperial texts in the contemporary literary scene—an endeavour which is hardly post-colonial. On the other hand, the author will go some way towards shifting eastward the core of Frame's ontology by suggesting that her poetics is anchored not only in Western thinking, but also, perhaps more importantly so, in Eastern philosophy. The author's primary impulse, however, in examining the interplay between canonical and peripheral intertextualities, is to illuminate in fundamental fashion the haunting beauty of the writer's universe and the lyricism of *Snowman, Snowman*.

Keywords: Janet Frame, novella, *Snowman Snowman*, Buddhism, intertextuality, post-colonialism, Scandinavian mythology

Introduction

While, as New Zealand's most prominent author Janet Frame (1924-2004) says, "transactions between literatures are endless and age-old" (Frame, 1982, p. 88), it has become customary, if not fashionable, in the context of post-colonial criticism to consider intertextuality as a "specific property of particular texts and text classes" (Schulze-Engler, 1998, p. 4). The specificity of contemporary texts produced in (post-)colonial spheres, Diana Brydon and Helen Tiffin (1993) maintained, is that they "write back against imperial fictions" (p. 11) usually by "lending a voice to silenced characters, or developing some marginal aspects of the initial plot of the colonial hypotext" (Letissier, 2009, p. 15). However, it is growing increasingly apparent that the writing back paradigm is too limited a conceptual framework to account for New World authors' ambivalent attitudes towards the established canon which, as Letissier (2009) said, "seldom boil[s] down to an outright dismissal of the

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European legacy" (p. 8). Yet, it is sometimes the case that, when the intertextual strategies that are called upon by a post-colonial author fall beyond the narrow scope of decolonizing deconstructions, they are altogether dismissed. A telling example of suppressed intertextuality, Frank Schulze-Engler argues, is that of critics focusing exclusively on the allegedly "pure oral authenticity" of Okot p'Bitek's *Song of Lawino* (1966) despite the writer's insistence that his production "owed very little to the oral tradition and very much to the biblical Song of Solomon and to Longfellow's Song of Hiawatha" (Schulze-Engler, 1998, pp. 16-17). "Is this", Schulze-Engler (1998) wondered, "because the image of pure oral authenticity was not to be tainted? Or because p'Bitek made it clear that he was not 'writing back' to the texts mentioned above?" (p. 17). Implicit in such a comment is the idea that, above all, tradition is a matter of choice, a freedom exercised not only by the post-colonial writer but, arguably, also by the critic, whatever his or her field of interest—postcolonialism, postmodernism, or biblical allegories. One may venture against this backdrop that suppressed intertextuality in its broadest sense is but a symptom of a text being subsumed under the political or aesthetic ideology of the critic examining of it. Thus, what interests the author in this paper is to shed some light on the suppressed intertextuality in post-colonial writing, here Janet Frame's fiction, and point to the canon as a possible springboard for probing the depth of the post-colonial or, simply, the human identity. At the same time, and possibly against the grain of mainstream criticism, the author will go some way towards shifting eastward the core of Frame's ontology by suggesting that her poetics is anchored not only in Western thinking—Heideggerian concepts are for instance very popular among Janet Frame's scholars[1]—but also, perhaps more importantly so, in Eastern philosophy. What this entails in terms of the assumed continuum of experience supposedly shared by all post-colonial cultures and the ongoing centrality of imperial texts in cross-cultural encounters of a written kind will naturally be touched upon in the course of this essay.

The Novella's Hidden Intertextualities

Paradigmatic of the tension between covert vs. suppressed intertextualities, artistic vs. academic freedom is, it seems to the author, Janet Frame's *Snowman, Snowman* (1962),[2] a novella haunted by the transience of life and the stresses of changing a snowman must learn to confront as he himself disintegrates into nothingness. Given Janet Frame's insistence in the novella that Snowman has been made man, it has been suggested by some critics that the main character must be viewed as "a travesty of Christ" (Dell Panny, 2002, p. 61).[3] The snow-creature, however, possesses another allegorical identity which, in the context of the tale, is of far greater significance. It is alluded to a conversation prompted by the sight of the snowman standing forlorn in his suburban back garden; when a man asks his companion if he has ever "read those haunting tales of the Northern Gods, of Balder the beautiful is dead is dead—the voice passed like the mournful cry of sunward sailing cranes—that's poetry we had poetry at school once or twice" (Frame, 1962, p. 96).

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[1] In their introduction to *Frameworks: Contemporary Criticism on Janet Frame* (2009), Jan Cronin and Simon Drichel interestingly noted that Heidegger had "occasionally featured in previous Frame scholarship (most notably the work of Jeanne Delbeare), but that the consistency with which his work informs the conceptual terrains of [the essays collected in *Frameworks*] is striking" (p. xix).

[2] Fist published in *Snowman, Snowman: Fables and Fantasies* (1962-1963) and also collected in Janet Frame's *You Are Now Entering the Human Heart* (1983), the version the author shall be using in this paper.

[3] Dell-Panny's idea that Snowman is a Christ-like figure is in keeping with the critic's conviction that the centre of Frame's work has remained elusive "because subtle word-play and invisible personifications hide the allegorical components" (Dell Panny, 2002, p. 57).

Here, the speaker is quoting Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's *Tegner's Drapa* (1917),[4] an elegiac note on the perishing of "Balder the Beautiful,/God of the summer sun,/fairest of all the Gods" (19-21) in Asgard. Thus the poem continues:

> All things in earth and air
> Bound were by magic spell
> Never to do him harm;
> Even the plants and stones;
> All save the mistletoe,
> The sacred mistletoe!
> Hoeder, the blind old God,
> Whose feet are shod with silence,
> Pierced through that gentle breast
> With his sharp spear, by fraud
> Made of the mistletoe,
> The accursed mistletoe! (25-36)

The cunning Lok who, full of evil intentions, had sidled up to Frigga (Balder's mother) in woman's disguise, and induced her to disclose that all have sworn never to harm Balder, save the mistletoe, so slender and so weak that from it no vow was demanded, is but bidding his time to wreak havoc in Odin's kingdom. When, in sport, the gods make a game of aiming spears and swords at Balder, whom no weapon can pierce, Lok entrusts the blind Hoeder with a sprig taken from the mistletoe so that he may throw it at his brother, and so Balder dies.

From the web of affinities threading together a snowman fearing the advent of snowdrops and daffodils and a god threatened by a mistletoe emerges a pattern of cross-cultural encounters comprising Janet Frame's New Zealand, Longfellow's America, the European north and Britain. Inspired by the observation of winter life in Grove Hill Road, London, the novella's britishness further derives from its unobtrusive links with Balder's ordeal in the underworld, an aspect of the myth which is unrecorded in *Tegner's Drapa*, so that one must turn away from Longfellow and infer from Janet frame's intimate knowledge of the English poet Matthew Arnold that she read his *Balder Dead* (1963). This is important, because Longfellow is primarily interested in the happy void left for Christ by the disappearance of the old gods whereas Frame, by contrast, is concerned with the mutuality between perishing and survival, perceptible in the continuum of grief which, in Matthew Arnold, unites the living and the dead in a sense of universal loss.

Communion through imaginative identification in Frame, however, is a process of such overarching complexity that even the simple act of shedding a tear requires further theoretical delineation and is best approached in the light of the Keatsean negative capability. Keats' vision, in turn, has been shown by Richards Benton to bear strong resemblance to Zen Buddhism in a critical article (i.e., "Keats and Zen"), where Janet Frame's world views are circumscribed to such a remarkable extent—even though the author herself is never mentioned—that one must necessarily conclude that Buddhism has been instrumental in the shaping of her

[4] As an endnote to the poem, D. L. Ashlima writes that Esias Tegner (1782-1846) was an important Swedish poet and that a drapa is an Old Norse poetic form used for hymns of praise. See D. L. Ashlima's *Norse Ballads of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow* (2005) on http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/longfellow.html.

poetics.[5] Buddhism, the author will contend, is crucial to an understanding of Frame and of the novella, because at the heart of the philosophy is the idea that to reach a state of enlightenment which is to extinguish all the "illusory divisions of separate selves, created by concepts and language" (Hanh, 1975, p. 42). As a well-known Buddhist master says, we have to "strip away all the barriers to live as part of the universal life" and "see that the person in front of us is ourself and that we are that person" (Hanh, 1975, pp. 49-50). We will see in some details that stripping away all conceptual barriers is what Frame tries to do in the novella and is also the reason why she refers to the myth of Balder the Beautiful. The Western canon, in other words, is less the target of Janet Frame's decolonizing fiction than a treasured instrument she subordinates to her own purposes in order to unleash a poetics of textual violence against whatever imperial modes of knowledge have disrupted the continuum of grief in the modern world. Whether from the centre of or from the periphery of Western knowledge, intertextuality, then, is part and parcel of a creative strategy, which consists in questioning "supermarket recognitions" (Frame, 1982, p. 87) through the gesturing towards foreign ideas, selves or cultures—always with a view to present an unexpected view of the familiar, a landscape where "all recognition has been wounded" (Frame, 1962, p. 47).

The Dialectics of Truth

In a poem called "The Snow Man" (1953), Wallace Stevens writes that "One must have a mind of winter" (2), and yet retain something of the human vista though nothing of the human identity, to taste at once in the wind that blows upon barren winterscapes the utter desolation of death and the fullness of life:

> For the listener, who listens in the snow,
> And, nothing himself, beholds
> Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is. (Stevens, 1953, 16)

Accommodating two points of view is a perilous exercise in negative capability and is also a basic tenet in Buddhist training thanks to which one learns to see that the living and the inanimate are solidly there but that their true nature is "emptiness" or "no-self", because "nothing can exist by itself alone", "there is no being; there is only inter-being" (Hanh, 2002, pp. 47-48). This is to say that each of us functions as a separate body but that we truly *are* by virtue of our belonging to a continuum comprising the natural, the inanimate, and other selves—living or dead or, sometimes, just half-human. This training in double vision or "instant denial", as Frame calls it elsewhere,[6] is the ordeal of the reader who, if he/she is willing to work through the entanglements of a text constructed upon the dialectics of truth, may discover that for snowflakes and their relatives, snow is a principle of life but that "the candy floss of death" (Frame, 1962, p. 88) happily licked by children has always been "an ingredient of nightmare" (Frame, 1962, p. 97) for their parents. Snowman, for his part, is persuaded that

[5] This intuition has been confirmed by Janet Frame's niece and literary executor who, as an answer to my question, posted on a website dedicated to her aunt that Frame "had more than a handful of close friends who were Buddhists: notably Peter (EP) Dawson and Ruth Dallas" and that "It was while she was living in London in the early 1960s [when "Snowman, Snowman" was written] that Janet Frame was most serious about identifying as a Buddhist", though she still was one by the end of her career. See Pamela Gordon's *Janet on the Planet*, answer posted on May 19, 2010, on http://slightlyframous.blogspot.com/. For a full-length discussion on the issue of Janet Frame's Buddhism, see the author's article "Janet Frame in East-West Encounters", forthcoming in *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*. For a discussion of the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* as a backdrop for Frame's *A State of Siege*, see Gabrielle C. (2013) "Nothing, Not a Scrap of Identity": Janet Frame's Vision of Self and Knowledge in *A State of Siege*. Forthcoming in *ARIEL, 42*, 3-4.

[6] The notion of "Instant Denial" is central to Frame's *The Carpathians* (1988, p. 51), a text which, it could be argued, marks a return of sorts on the part of its author to a Buddhist-like epistemology.

the budding of plants in early spring is a "green disease" (Frame, 1962, p. 92), a cancer afflicting the branches of trees that might spread to human and animal limbs, causing them to perish as well. But beneath such conceptual flux is the hard core of reality, the inescapable truth of death, firmly anchored in the snow-covered reality. This comes as a surprise for the human and the non-human creatures dwelling in the Framean text and intertext so that, deaf to the warning conveyed by the warm "wind that is the enemy of snow" (Frame, 1962, p. 61), Snowman maintains that he is "preserved, made safe against death by [his] inheritance of snow" (Frame, 1962, p. 31). In that, he resembles the numerous human beings who, ignoring "never ending shrouds" (Frame, 1962, p. 65) of snow and other reminders of mortality, deluding themselves into believing that their reality is an Eden of immortality. Or for the Northern gods when they realize that the promise made by all the living and inanimate creatures has failed to save Balder; not even a god, it seems, is immune to the green poison.

The instability of truth, together with centrality of death, is no idle aspect of a text striving to crack open human conceptual carapaces so that alien selves, the mythical, the past, and its dead, and the natural may at last obtain a right of entry into the upper floor of the mind. Accordingly, the reader is made to confront death and to all but discard a worn-out identity so as to become the Other, a snow-creature. Herein, rather than in a rewriting of Longfellow or Arnold, Janet Frame's resistance lies against an imperial philosophy that still relies all too heavily on the dichotomization of experience and on the suppression of competing truths. To Frame, we must by contrast learn to probe beyond these dualities as a Buddhist would and as Snowman actually does when, observing a baby girl in her pram, he notices that:

> Its red fur cap now framed the face of its mother, and beyond that face like a shadow which is given a shape in darkness by a vivid beam of light shining upon it, was the face of the mother's mother, and then her mother before that, and if I had stared long enough I should have seen the dark space where the first signs of life were imprinted. (Frame, 1962, p. 66)

Caught in the "endless circular limits of life" (Frame, 1962, p. 88), beginning and end, birth and death, and the living and the dead are said in the novella to form a continuum in which each carries tiny fragments of the other's essence—quite in keeping with the notion in Buddhist philosophy that our body is not ours alone.[7] What this entails is no less than, to quote Richards Benton's (1966) essay again, "The Great Death which Buddhists often speak about [and which] refers to the process of dying to the ordinary life, putting an end to the analyzing intellect in order to get beyond the world of distinctions" (p. 43). Even in Frame, the mutuality between perishing and survival consists in dying a little to one's old self to become a host to otherness while, at the same time, being accommodated by foreign selves who, in effect, become a last rampart against oblivion. "The dead who drop like parachutists to the darkness of memory" indeed survive there, because "They are buckled and strapped to the white imperishable strength of having known and been known, of having made the leap to darkness surrounded and *carried* by the woven threads of people whom they greeted, abused, loved, murdered" (Frame, 1962, p. 89, emphasis this author's).

Sadly, however, the parallel story of the little note of music which, though it is excruciatingly lonely, "cannot or will not join the chord", because "It will at the same time forget the sound of itself" (Frame, 1962, p. 65) testifies to the difficulty of making room for something beyond the self. Therefore, when Snowman's teenage

[7] Because our body is not ours alone, when we tread upon the damp soil or the fresh snow, we leave footprints in common with all our ancestors (Hanh, 2002, p. 6).

creator is run over by a truck, no one, not even her parents, truly mourns her death. Appalled by Rosemary's darkness and loneliness, the orphaned Snowman cries out in disbelief: "I do not understand. Why is not everyone weeping?" (Frame, 1962, p. 91). Inconspicuous as it may seem, the condemned desiccation of tears brings us back to that part of the Balder tale which is left aside by Longfellow but recounted at length by Matthew Arnold. In the latter's poem, the gods acknowledge their powerlessness to conquer the underworld, yet they remain unwilling to yield Balder to its queen. Therefore, Hermod, the swiftest god, is sent out to the realm of the dead where, falling before Queen Hela's feet, he implores her to restore Balder: 'thou know'st, thou know'st, what grief we have in heaven' (Arnold, 1950, 192), he says. Thus the queen answers:

> Show me through all the world the signs of grief!
> Fails but one thing to grieve, here Balder stops!
> Let all that lives and moves upon the earth
> Weep him, and all that is without life weep;
> Let Gods, men, brutes, beweep him; plants and stones!
> So shall I know the lost was dear indeed,
> And bend my heart, and give him back to Heaven. (234-240)

Soon, messengers are sent all over the world to beseech "all living and unliving things to weep Balder" (Arnold, 1950, 300). Unfortunately, in her deep-dark cavern, the Hag of Ironwood—"Thok is she call'd, but now Lok wore her shape" (Arnold, 1950, 335)—declares: "I weep him not! Let Hela keep her pray" (Arnold, 1950, 354) and Lok "triumphs still" (Arnold, 1950, 447).

The sense of incommensurable loss depicted in the Balder tale is of another age for, in Snowman's London, Hags of Ironwood are rather commonplace. As the freshly-deceased Rosemary is lying on the pavement, the involuntary witnesses of the accident, her neighbours in fact, find it shocking that the first-aid workers put a blanket over her face, one of those grey blankets.

> They shouldn't have done that in full view. It let us know she was dead, they shouldn't have let everybody see she was dead, they should have taken her in the back of the ambulance as if she were ill or something and would recover. I don't suppose they thought at the time. But it let everybody know she was dead, and it makes things worse to know. It would have been better to read about it afterward in the paper, as if she had died in hospital. (Frame, 1962, p. 75)

The eagerness that is displayed here to minimize a tragedy recalls the perception earlier on that "grief over events" is always "strictly rationed and the size of the ration is controlled by distance in time and space" so that "The massacre of a race is only at the level of a disappointment" (Frame, 1962, p. 70), if it is sufficiently remote from the heart. Worse, the quoted passage sustains a sense in which the witnesses are counting upon distance, spurious as it may be, not to shed a tear over Rosemary. Subsequently, they are going to deploy a wealth of discursive strategies to reduce what they feel to be a threatening proximity with the dead. Surprised that the incident should yield "six pages of unrelieved conversation from the crowds which gather helplessly around [the girl's] body and chatter their orderly, futile phrases at one another", Patrick Evans dismisses the irritating trivialities at the heart of these conversations (Evans, 1977, p. 115). To the author, the witnesses' sudden desire to book their next holiday and desperate craving to identify the victim and her parents' name, address, and occupation partake of a distancing impulse which exposes in an important sense the ugly reliance on identity as cementing the walls between "being and being" (Frame, 1962, p. 34).

The Loss Which Being Partly Human Implies

When Snowman is caracoling in the sky with the other snowflakes, his experience is one of intense freedom and of at-oneness with the world which, however, is irremediably compromised the moment he acquires a semi-human identity. Partly snow and partly man, he never ceases oscillating between the two poles of his awareness and this is why his feeling of outrage for Rosemary's loneliness is contrasted with his disavowal (very human indeed) of the invisible threads uniting the living and the dead in the common tapestry of the universe. Deciding at some stage that his supply of grief must be rationed, he exclaims:

> But why should I mourn the death of creatures on earth? I am only a snowman. I have no arms to fold across my body or hands to clasp as if in prayer. I am only a snowman. My body seems to be sinking slowly into the earth and I am weeping ceaselessly now and I do not know why, and there is a heaviness upon my shoulders as if an unfamiliar burden had been placed there, but where shall I carry the burden, to whom shall I deliver it, when I cannot move and I am planted forever in this garden? (Frame, 1962, p. 100)

It is significant in this context that the main protagonist becoming aware of the heaviness upon his shoulders should directly follow his refusal to "mourn the death of creatures on earth", for it is certainly a hint that, as Delrez (1994) said, "It is the responsibility of the living to harbour [the burden of memory] within themselves" (p. 98). At a further remove, however, it appears that Frame's concern with the salvage of memory is in fact also underpinned by her indictment of exclusionary protocols in their broadest sense, for it is by virtue of his being "only a snowman" (Frame, 1962, p. 100) that the main protagonist deems that remembering the dead is not his concern. His attitude finds a correlative in the unwelcoming mother of Mark Wilbur who refuses to carry her retarded seven-year-old son into her arms and heart, because "giving in", she assumes, "is a kind of balloon collapse where people see their power escaping from them into the air and being seized by others who have no right to it" (Frame, 1962, p. 53). The preservation of the balloon of self, in turn, is described in the course of the tale as "a matter of greed more than of loneliness" (Frame, 1962, p. 100). Indeed:

> There is one of each creature because that creature devours all others. […] The wind blowing from life to death puffs one being to the size of the world. The sky fits him like a skin, and the surface of the earth is only as wide as the soles of his feet or the grasps of his claws. (Frame, 1962, p. 77)

The concurrence that exists between harbouring the memories of those who cannot speak for themselves and ceasing to cannibalize otherness suggests quite crucially that there is more to remembering than a simple acknowledgement of the past. If remembering is one of the possible means through which otherness can be carried from within and if opening up to otherness amounts to collapse the distinction between Self and Other so as to become one *with* the world, as opposed to being one *in* the world, this entails that to remember is to relinquish one's sense of apartness. In fact, there is a definite suggestion in the text that any genuine knowledge of the world and of other selves necessarily derives from the state of selflessness one may experience in the continuum. It is a mistake, indeed, to approach "powerful abstractions" with the usual "weapons of personification" for theirs is "a region of the mind which must be entered in nakedness of thought" as "soldiers do when they surrender […] and walk naked towards the hostile territory" (Frame, 1962, p. 84). The region of the mind Frame alludes to in *Snowman, Snowman* is a barely disguised version of the Buddhist nirvana, a word literally meaning "the extinction of all concepts" (Hanh, 2002, p. 39). Following the Buddhist trend in Frame's

novella amounts, then, to situate the locus of knowledge and, by extension, of memory beyond what Hanh (1975) called "the illusory divisions of separate selves, created by concepts and language" (p. 42)—hence the fact that it must be entered in utter "nakedness of thought". "What freedom of view it would be", Snowman is told at some stage, if human beings were rid of their "parasitical identity" (Frame, 1962, p. 72)—their proud lonely greed. Thus, the Great Death, the sacrifice of one's sense of apartness that is so central in the Buddhist philosophy, is in Janet Frame as well the only access to true knowledge, an uncluttered view of the world.

By this stage, it is perhaps worth emphasising the continuity of concern linking the novella with the writer's late production. As a variation on the reconciliatory stance that inheres in Frame's vision, the author-figure in *Living in the Maniototo* firmly defines art as the knack of annihilating distance prior to entering the speech of another. Significantly, her two published novels are entitled *Lichen like Fire* and *The Green Fuse* (1979, p. 27), a tribute no doubt to stationary life's capacity for ripping apart layers of tar or concrete. A capacity which green fuses and lichens share with authors strives to "pierce the armor of otherness worn by the characters of [a] book" (Frame, 1979, p. 61). The perception of memory as a powerful tool for reconciliation is key to *Snowman, Snowman* as well as to *The Carpathians*, where memory appears under the guise of an inconspicuous flower which:

> Banish[es] the painful opposition and contradictions of everyday life. More than in the splendour of many kinds of love, in the gift of the orchards and the Memory Flower, it seemed that lost became found, death became life, all the anguished opposites reverted to their partner in peace yet did not vanish: one united with the other; each two were lost and found. (Frame, 1988, p. 114)

Terms of oppositions that maintain their original value while becoming antithetical to themselves also characterise the interplay in *Snowman, Snowman* between mistletoes and other daffodils or snowdrops on the one hand and snow on the other hand, for these images symbolize at once renewal *and* utter disintegration. Quite in the line of the multi-layered nature of the narrative, snow and greenery further function as the counterparts to lichens like fire, green fuses, and memory flowers. When it snows, for instance:

> The earth is obscured and people are unaware of the divisions between street and pavement and they become afraid for they have always known where to walk. The obliteration of the earth enhances the need to touch it, to feel the shape of it, to be guided by it […] oh Snowman, all recognition has been wounded. (Frame, 1962, p. 47)

Because they long for clear-cut identities and recognition, human beings have grown fearful of snow and they also cannot tolerate "the outrage of furious vegetable growth, believing it should happen only in fairy tales" (Frame, 1962, p. 61). Unsurprisingly, the "deathless Eden" on which they fantasize always takes the shape of an "uncluttered garden—vegetable state with drops of dew shining like mirrors between separate lives" (Frame, 1962, p. 49). Repeatedly in Frame's fiction, however, nature hurls itself against human conceptual and physical barriers to recover the circular inclusion of "flesh, clay, flesh" (Frame, 1962, p. 91) so that the vision of vegetable growth and of snow as principles of reconciliation must be extended to all other elemental forces, to the lichen like fire in *Living in the Maniototo* or the burning hoop in "The Training of My Tiger", the gusts of wind invading cities and allowing for the intrusion of spring in "A Windy Day",[8] and to water, the liquid guise of snow, that will eventually "[leak] through to the padded satin" (Frame, 1962, p. 90) of Rosemary's coffin. "The first night of rain

[8] "The Training of My Tiger" and "A Windy Day" are both collected in Janet Frame's *Snowman, Snowman: Fables and Fantasies*.

is the loneliest night the dead ever endure" (Frame, 1962, p. 90), Snowman is told, because they have no one to turn to for solace, while they make the terrifying experience of being compelled to accommodate all that they previously labelled as other. The rain operates such drastic changes that:

> The ashes and the body whisper with rain and the flesh sinks to accommodate lakes and seas and rain and to make a home for the fugitive creatures which crawl upon the sea bed and are sometimes as brilliantly coloured as earth-flowers; and the pools make rainbows even in the dark. (Frame, 1962, p. 90)

That the freshly deceased retain something of their separateness contravenes perhaps the notion that death is the ultimate state of dissolution—or, if it is, it must be attributed to the working of elemental forces. The earth, in other words, is endowed with its own digestive system which sometimes succeeds in reincorporating the living within the continuum (as in the two novels) but which, more often than not, must wait for the body to be deposited in its midst.

Conclusions

To sum up, the author-figure's endeavour in *Living in the Maniototo* to write fiction that burns as a lichen of fire allows one to posit that the artist is an avatar of the natural and thus that his/her textual and intertextual strategies will consist in leaking through the safety-coffin of habitual recognitions and operate such drastic changes that the view will no longer feel familiar. The haunting universe of the northern skies, where mistletoes are lethal and grief is of such a force that it can carry the dead back to the realm of the living, is just one of those "unfamiliar view[s]" (Frame, 1982, p. 88), which the writer would like us to visit. The reference to Scandinavian mythology has further emerged in the course of this paper as a supplementary point of access to a poetics which may well have been greatly inspired by Buddhism and which traverses *Snowman, Snowman* but also, arguably, *Living in the Maniototo* and *The Carpathians*. And, because these texts are respectively set in Britain, America, and New Zealand, one may venture that when she exposes the spiritual aridity of civilizations without tears, Janet Frame is careful to pinpoint the absence of any continuum of grief both in imperial and in post-colonial spheres. In the last analysis, the writer's own brand of poetical resistance is bound to remain a thorn in the side of a post-colonial criticism which vindicates the proximity of settler colonies with other post-colonial nations, downplaying in a way their complicity with imperial manoeuvres.

In keeping with this, *Snowman, Snowman* can be seen to write back against the "Man Alone" paradigm, a foundational myth in New Zealand (and Australia), which celebrates not a common victimhood but the conquest of the real by settlers heroically coming to terms with their environment.[9] The individual in his/her ivory tower of self, alone against nature, is not only shown to be a universal condition, shared even by a snowman melting in a London suburban back garden, but it is also said to be the major shortcoming of humankind. When Snowman becomes half-human, he too grows impatient to inscribe his newly acquired separateness upon the blank page of his being but is told instead to pass "beyond the visible obstruction of print to draw forth the invisible words with the warmth of [his] passionate breathing" (Frame, 1962, p. 32). This understanding naturally is quite hard to gain but the snowman is helped in the course of his nine-day life by his "likeness", a picture of himself which does not

[9] For a detailed analysis of intertextuality and the "Man Alone" myth, see Janet Wilson's "Intertextual Strategies: Reinventing the Myths of Aotearoa in Contemporary New Zealand Fiction" (1998, pp. 271-290).

"come out" (Frame, 1962, p. 69). In the failed picture of the snowman, snow and clouds are turned into "stone and steel", while all that is usually solid become "part of a landscape of nothingness" (Frame, 1962, p. 79); human beings for instance are shown to be melting snowmen. The "bewitching process which extracts stone from snow" also discloses the dangerousness of plants, it shows that trees are in fact "swords and knives" (Frame, 1962, p. 79) and so is a slender mistletoe. In wounding habitual recognitions, the picture importantly reveals the twofold nature of the world, that what we believe to be "whole and contained within itself" (Frame, 1962, p. 32) is also insubstantial and integrated with a greater whole, and vice versa. Naturally, Snowman's likeness alludes to the Buddhist belief that "emptiness and form, the absolute and the relative interpenetrate with no obstruction" (Glassman, 2002, p. 70), but neither of them are eliminated, each two are lost and found. In the novella, however, the picture is said to suffer "the humiliation of most projects that fail—projects of light, conscience, time, discovery"—when they are "burned quickly on the fire", because "it might take too much time and energy to prove that they are successes" (Frame, 1962, p. 79).

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