

Annotation of Ivane Mortelette's "A Proof that I Did Exist": Janet Frame and Photography", *Journal of New Zealand Literature* 24.1 (2006), pp. 94-114.

Daria Tunca, University of Liège

Ivane Mortelette's article investigates the many roles played by photography in the works of New Zealand writer Janet Frame. The critic confronts analytical statements about this visual medium – by Barthes, Sontag and Bourdieu, among others – with Frame's autobiography and fiction, and demonstrates how the use of snapshots and portraits in the author's narratives either matches or subverts the functions assigned to photographic images in theoretical studies.

The essay starts with an examination of Frame's *An Autobiography*, highlighting the multiple purposes of the images included in the 1989 edition of this work (originally published in three – pictureless – volumes in the early 1980s). Thus, it is argued that family photos and individual portraits, respectively, testify to the Frames' evolving relationships and construct Janet's personal identity. Even more interesting is the scholar's interpretation of the writer's *discussion* of two pictures of her deceased sister Myrtle, who drowned as a teenager. The analysis of Frame's literary treatment of these images leads Mortelette to emphasise the symbolic value of photographic representations beyond their purported "objectivity", and to establish links between pictures on the one hand, and both death and resurrection on the other.

The manifold significations attributed to photographs in Frame's autobiography aptly reflect the complex semiotics of images found in the novelist's fiction – an intricate network of meanings which recurrently offers insight into the concepts of identity and memory. For instance, Mortelette convincingly suggests that several characters in *The Edge of the Alphabet*

(1962) use pictures to project themselves into socially successful existences; she further states that, in *Intensive Care* (1970), photography is a metaphor for dehumanisation and for the refusal to face death and that, in *A State of Siege* (1966), images are stand-ins for memory, which are eventually revealed to be just as impermanent.

While the absence of a conclusion to the article leaves the reader somewhat confused, the essay nevertheless deserves to be commended for its most valuable analysis of several of Frame's novels and short stories.