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Département de Langues et Littératures Modernes - Orientation Germaniques

**Cannibal Selves, Consuming Identities:**

**A Reading of Janet Frame’s “Snowman, Snowman”**

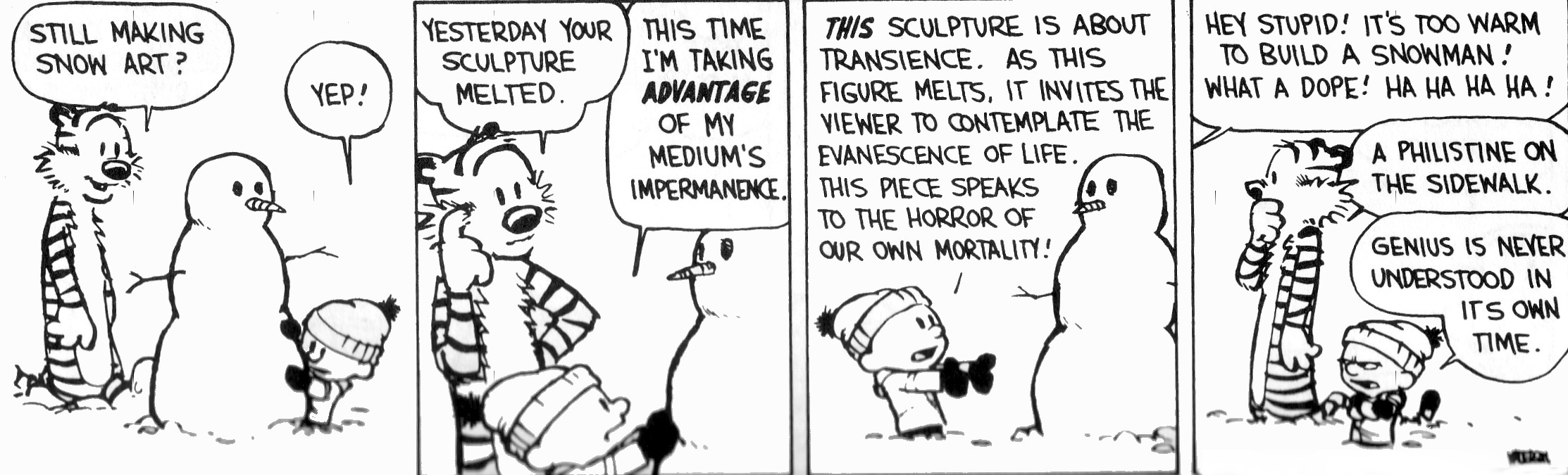
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**Acknowledgment**

I must thank Marc Delrez for his support and corrections and for introducing me to an author whose work is so rewarding (and amusing) to analyse. Knowing that I would have to write a dissertation as part of my ‘D.E.A.’ in postcolonial studies, he asked me if I would be interested in doing something on Janet Frame and if I wanted to follow the course he would give on the author. He added that “Snowman, Snowman,” the second text we were to read, had never been much discussed. It sounded like a wonderful challenge, but first, I had to read the story. After it was done, I immediately accepted.

I would also like to thank Roland Lousberg for his infinite patience and for reading a dissertation concerned with things so alien to him: literature and literary analysis (and in English at that).

**Foreword**

This is a dissertation centring exclusively on Janet Frame’s “Snowman, Snowman.” Although Janet Frame’s stay in London and her “observation of winter life around Grove Hill Road”[[1]](#footnote-1) have provided the primary material for the writing of the novella, this dissertation is not concerned with linking the author’s life or experience with the events occurring in the text, the style in which it is written and the themes broached in it. In fact, it has been a purposeful choice to avoid mentioning the author’s biography, partly because there was no need to repeat what is recounted in Janet Frame’s three-volume autobiography, *To the Is-land* (1982), *An Angel at My Table* (1984) and *The Envoy from Mirror City* (1984), in Michael King’s biography, *Wrestling with the Angel* (2000), and in Jane Campion’s film, *An Angel at My Table* (1990). Perhaps too much attention has been paid to the author’s life as opposed to the context of e.g. her upbringing which indeed can provide interesting insights. For my part, I wanted to ‘swim’ in the wake of those whose assumption is that her work can be read, analysed and understood as a piece of art in its own right.

The chapters of this dissertation have been organized around central themes so as to disclose progressively the complex pattern of images deployed in the novella. However, since most notions or themes are interconnected, it was near-impossible to avoid referring to certain scenes more than once. Also, it was sometimes necessary to anticipate slightly on forthcoming discussions for clarity’s sake.

**Introduction**

It is surprising, given the attention that Frame is currently receiving, to note the relative critical neglect in which “Snowman, Snowman” has been held – all the more so since the text in question has been published twice: the author decided to reprint the story in *You are now Entering the Human Heart* (1983) some twenty years after it first appeared in *Snowman Snowman: Fables and Fantasies* (1963). In his seminal work on Janet Frame, Patrick Evans contends that the novella is a companion piece to *Scented Gardens for the Blind* and that the two should be read “as a single work cleverly drawn together by their author.”[[2]](#footnote-2) Evans goes on to underline the unreadability of *Scented Gardens for the Blind* to conclude that “only those who have been converted to the language advocated by the novel, in which metaphor yields truth,”[[3]](#footnote-3) can ever penetrate Frame’s world and make sense of the two texts. In keeping with this, Dell Panny considers the snowman (henceforth Snowman) to be a metaphor or allegory for mankind; “Snowman believes himself to be superior to man [but] the fixity of his perception and his limited mind and vision are recognizable as human failings.”[[4]](#footnote-4) Marc Delrez, for his part, sees the novella as “an examination of the evolutionary possibilities of sense perceptions”[[5]](#footnote-5) in which a snowman “ruthlessly crosses the borders of perception which habitually delimit a ‘human focus’.”[[6]](#footnote-6) Opposed as these two views may appear, they are on no account mutually exclusive, for they simply point to Snowman’s tendency to oscillate between the two poles of his being. As an extraterrestrial creature (coming from the sky), Snowman is naturally endowed with a talent for peering through the visible – an inborn capacity which is however counterbalanced by his newly acquired human identity (he has been made man) and the restricted perceptions going hand in glove with this. It has further been suggested that Snowman is a true allegorical figure in the sense that his “twin tendency to die and to disbelieve in death [makes him] larger than life and truly representative of the human species.”[[7]](#footnote-7) Importantly, Delrez and Dell Panny’s standpoints contrast with Evans’s who insists on depicting the novella as a Bildungsroman of sorts, in which, “with the passage of winter and the approach of the thawing sun of spring, [a snowman] begins to realize that he is mortal.”[[8]](#footnote-8) Again though, it is possible to reconcile these views: we have seen that Snowman has a natural propensity for crossing the borders of human perceptions and perceive aspects of reality which human beings remain unaware of or simply erase; but he also complains that, ever since the moment he was “rolled into being,”[[9]](#footnote-9) he has “caught the human habit of deception”[[10]](#footnote-10) with the result that he will keep hovering between an awareness of death and the human habit of erasing the grimmer aspects of reality. In the following chapters, it will become increasingly clear that the reading of many scenes and passages differs according to the focus – human or alien – one espouses. This also explains why various critical approaches to the text such as that of Delrez, Evans or Dell Panny are possible: i.e. because the story sustains a duality which can accommodate these approaches in a spirit of fluctuation or epistemological hesitancy mirroring Snowman’s geminate nature and which thus can only be settled by his death.

Written in 1962, “Snowman, Snowman” then recounts the story of a snowman slowly melting as the ‘reinforcement armies’[[11]](#footnote-11) he is desperately counting on fail to turn up. With his mentor, a disembodied entity called the Perpetual Snowflake, he observes the ways of life and death of the people living nearby. The difficulty of the novella may very well derive first of all from Frame’s “determination to tamper with the rules of realistic representation,”[[12]](#footnote-12) but also from what has been identified as the main subject matter of the text: a minute exploration of death. Concerning Frame’s third novel, *The Edge of the Alphabet* (1962), Gina Mercer interestingly argues that “the combination of these two factors [an unusual topic and a challenging form] has led to its almost total neglect by critics.”[[13]](#footnote-13) Dell Panny, for one, identifies the scarcity of critical studies on Frame as stemming from the difficulty of sensing where the centre of her work lies, which she claims has remained elusive “because subtle word-play and invisible personifications hide the allegorical components.”[[14]](#footnote-14) For her, if Snowman is an allegory for man’s insecure “tenure on earth,”[[15]](#footnote-15) he is also “a figure who in some respects resembles Christ.”[[16]](#footnote-16) However, it is ironic that a critic who strives to identify the centre of Frame’s work by focusing on allegories should have failed to pinpoint a third allegorical identity for Snowman. This third identity is subtly hinted at in a conversation prompted by the sight of the melting snowman; 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. (96)

Here, the speaker is quoting Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s “Tegner’s Drapa,”[[17]](#footnote-17) a relatively long poem (seventy-three verses) which begins as follows:

I HEARD a voice, that cried,

"Balder the Beautiful   
Is dead, is dead!"   
And through the misty air   
Passed like the mournful cry   
Of sunward sailing cranes.

A sense of the Balder story can be derived from Donald A. Mackenzie’s *Teutonic Myths and Legends* (1912).[[18]](#footnote-18) The legend has it that, one night, Balder (a Scandinavian god) is disturbed in his sleep by dreams “which boded ill, and revealed to him, alas! that his life was in peril.”[[19]](#footnote-19) To protect her son from evil, Frigga sends forth her servants to take oath from each object and living creature that they will never harm Balder. Certain that he has been made safe against death, his companions invents a game which consists in throwing spears, swords and all sorts of objects at Balder, knowing that these will keep their word and fall on the ground or change their course before hitting the god. However, full of evil intentions, Loki assumes a woman’s disguise to sidle up to Frigga who reveals that all creatures and objects have indeed sworn to spare Balder, save the mistletoe, “so slender and weak […] that from it no vow was demanded.”[[20]](#footnote-20) Without delay, Loki sets out to find the little shrub, plucks a sprig, and gives it to Holder (Balder’s blind brother) so that he may throw it at Balder.[[21]](#footnote-21) When Holder does so, the branch flows right into his brother’s heart, killing him on the spot.[[22]](#footnote-22) Perhaps unsurprisingly, Frigga refuses the ordeal of death and sends another son, Hermod, in Hela (the realm of the dead) so that he would ask its queen for Balder to return because all beings with life (in heaven or on earth) are weeping for Balder. To this, Urd answers that if it is indeed so, if no eye remained without tears, then she will restore Balder. Back in Asgard, Hermod tells his mother of Urd’s condition, and messengers are sent all over the world to beseech “all who have being and all things with life [to] weep for Balder,” so that he might be restored again.[[23]](#footnote-23) Unfortunately, in her deep-dark cavern, the Hag of Ironwood refuses to do so and Balder never returns.

According to Dell Panny, “a novel with a deliberate, sustained pattern of allusions to a prior (or earlier) text is likely to be defined as an allegory.”[[24]](#footnote-24) It is certainly the case that Snowman’s fate reminds one of Balder’s. For the two of them, the colour of death is not black but green: while Balder is quite literally killed by a plant, similarly the budding of snowdrops and daffodils is for Snowman no less than a death sentence. What is more, although an oracle has predicted his doom, Balder still convinces himself that his mother’s ruse has rendered him immune to death and in that he resembles Snowman who, deaf to the Perpetual Snowflake’s warning against the warm “wind that is the enemy of snow” (61), maintains that he is “preserved, made safe against death by [his] inheritance of snow” (31). In any case, what Balder’s story makes clear is that any attempt to keep death at bay ultimately fails and as a matter of fact this is equally true for Scandinavian mythology as a whole. The gods of Asgard indeed know that, sooner or later, their reign will come to an end and that they will be brought down by their perpetual enemies, the giants of Jötunheim[[25]](#footnote-25):

The day will come, when fall shall Asgard’s towers,  
And Odin, and his sons, the seed of Heaven;

But what were I [Balder], to save them in that hour?[[26]](#footnote-26)

It is perhaps also significant that the knowledge of this inevitable catastrophe weighed heavily on Odin’s heart and that, unlike other gods, he was quite incapable of convincing himself he lived in a “deathless Eden” (to paraphrase the Perpetual Snowflake, p. 49). If the relation between Snowman and the Perpetual Snowflake is in some respects akin to that of Christ and God, my contention is that it resembles even more conspicuously that of Balder and Odin. This is all the more true since, in “Snowman, Snowman,” the Perpetual Snowflake is never quite profiled as an omniscient figure and neither is Odin in Scandinavian mythology: Odin is said to constantly seek to deepen his wisdom, for, although he is the celestial father, he does not have universal knowledge.[[27]](#footnote-27)

That there exists a rich pattern of cross-references connecting “Snowman, Snowman” and a story where death is the central theme, is in keeping with the belief that “death hovers in all Frame’s work.”[[28]](#footnote-28) The minute exploration of death which is foregrounded in the novella is better understood if its intertextuality is accounted for. However, we are probably risking an oversimplification if we insist on seeing Balder’s story as a further illustration of the absolute darkness of death. It is indeed significant that Balder is not restored to life because *one* being (the Hag of Ironwood) refuses to weep for him. When the Hag disrupts the continuum of grief that links all beings and objects to the dead one, she definitively separates him from the living. This is not to say that the novella sustains a belief that the dead would come to life again if they were grieved for. Rather, it is suggested that remaining part of the continuum is a necessary condition for survival (in memory). We shall see in greater detail how the concepts of memory, ontological continuum and grief are articulated in “Snowman, Snowman.” For the time being, suffice is to say that the overall picture of the story is not as bleak as it first appears in that, in this continuum, even those who have borne no children, even the families whose members have been wiped off, do not fall into oblivion. This shows that there is actually room for an optimistic reading of the novella. Going against the trend of mainstream criticism at the time, Delrez in *Manifold Utopia* paved the way for such a reading by countering the more or less general assumption that Frame failed “in novel after novel to offer hope for the reader.”[[29]](#footnote-29) Central to his work was (among other things) a new insistence on the importance of Frame’s compassion for “eclipsed reality/humanity,”[[30]](#footnote-30) which is proportionate to her longing for an “enlarged humanity”[[31]](#footnote-31) and to a vision of “alternative ontologies”[[32]](#footnote-32) which is outlined in all of her texts.

My own modest contribution will be to show that, despite the many suggestions to the contrary, Frame may have felt concerned for people’s well-being but that her way of taking care of others was perhaps misunderstood as a form of hostility towards society because, as the Perpetual Snowflake explains,

The damp blurred distorted film, the unexpected “failed” view of the familiar, bring the danger of happiness, and you may know [Snowman] that happiness is a great danger in the lives of people, and that they are prepared from birth to fight and overcome it, to protect themselves from it with shields, hoods, specially fitted claws and stings. (80)

Crucially, presenting an “unexpected ‘failed’ view of the familiar” is precisely what the author strives to achieve in the novella. In effect, she hybridises the focus, resists the erasure of otherness, alters our habitual way of conceiving identity and destroys the associated language. These textual strategies are by essence violent because they are aimed at piercing the shields, hoods and other means of protection that people are wearing to overcome “the great danger of happiness.” If the author’s agenda in “Snowman, Snowman” is indeed to remind people of their mortality, this is subordinated to a greater aim which (even if it means confronting us with inconvenient truths or using formal violence) is arguably to help us find a sense of existential completion. How this may be compatible with Frame’s focus on mortality, not to mention the bleakness of the Balder myth, is what should become apparent in the course of this dissertation.

**1. Structure and Focus**

1.1. Organization of the Novella

“Snowman, Snowman” is a seventy-page-long novella divided into nine sections of unequal length. In the first section, corresponding to Snowman’s first day on earth, most of the major themes of the story – further developed in the subsequent chapters – are already present, albeit in a somewhat condensed form. These are i.e. the issue of static living, of Snowman’s hybrid nature, of people’s true identity vs. their ‘points of anchorage’, the question of belonging and the prospect of im/mortality, language and the difficulty of communicating with something ‘other’ and, finally, the motif of violence. Most of these themes are hastily hinted at by a Perpetual Snowflake eager to start the education of his new companion. Of course, the Perpetual Snowflake’s unravelling of life’s complexities leaves Snowman – who, at first, finds it “a privilege to [have been] made Man” (35) – bewildered and sceptical. Perhaps sensing Snowman’s unease, the Perpetual Snowflake keeps repeating, prophet-like, “You will understand, Snowman. Tomorrow and the next day it will be clear to you” (34-35). However, Snowman only reaches a state of maturity resembling that of the Perpetual Snowflake *after* his death (as a snowman). To a certain extent, what the Perpetual Snowflake is doing in the very first chapter of the text could be compared to what Cynthia’s mother, Gloria, undertakes in the second in that both have embraced the duty of preparing the newborns to “consider the world outside” (44). The only difference is that Gloria is teaching Cynthia to see the world according to human conventions, which is a reductive way of conceptualizing reality, whereas the Perpetual Snowflake’s intention is to make Snowman realize that:

Trees, cars, streets, people, they are but the dark print upon the white page of snow. Your coal-black pine-forest eyes are no use until you are able to read the page itself, as men read books, passing beyond the visible obstruction of print to draw forth the invisible words with the warmth of their passionate breathing. (32)

Naturally, since Snowman also wants a “human focus” (38), or to see “facts the usual way, as people arrange them through habits” (38), the Perpetual Snowflake must decode for him the strange ways of human beings.

Even though neither of the two main characters is actually moving, many chapters of the novella read as if the Perpetual Snowflake were showing Snowman round. Consider e.g. the third chapter (pp. 51-58) and the way in which it is organized: first, the snow-creatures observe the council flat around the corner and start reflecting upon the trick of vanishing. Then their attention drifts to the Wilburs family with the story of Mark, a mentally handicapped boy. Finally, the Perpetual Snowflake points to the house two doors away where a woman, Sarah Inchman, is about to die, because he would like Snowman to notice the untidiness of death. Other chapters simply revolve around specific events: the actual death of Sarah Inchman (chapter four), Rosemary’s accident (chapter six), the picture that fails to turn out (chapter seven), Snowman being blinded by a stray newspaper (chapter eight) and his eventual melting (chapter nine). At first, the ordering of the many digressions inside the different chapters may seem to follow no specific pattern, yet a closer look at them reveals that they are arranged in an associative way. To give only one example: in the second chapter, the Perpetual Snowflake takes an interest in the family living around the corner because “the owners are always painting heavy black numbers on the gate, and the numbers get larger each time they are painted” (39). Then, without transition, he goes on describing that family’s passion for looking alike and, finally, concludes his narration with the interesting fact that they have a new car and that, on Sundays, when the boys are allowed to ride, they are escorted by the three West Indian children “dressed in their Sunday best, bunched and frilly as daffodils” (39). Since the word *daffodils* startles Snowman, an explanation on daffodils follows quite naturally. Each chapter corresponds more or less to one day of Snowman’s life: most of them end with Snowman dozing off when it is night, and his awakening the next morning signals the start of a new chapter. Section four, though, takes place on the night of the third day so that the fifth chapter is only Snowman’s fourth day. Since he sleeps two days between chapter six and seven and since section eight takes place on the same day as section seven, his ninth and ultimate day on earth coincides with section nine.

1.2. The Two Focuses

It is quite surprising to find – at least in adult literature – a story told from the point of view of a snowman. My impression is that this testifies not only to the author’s unconventional imagination but also to her desire to help humanity. If, in the novella, Frame is “daring to enter the speech of another [i.e. a non-human creature],”[[33]](#footnote-33) it is arguably in an attempt to show the limitations of our “human focus” (38), to free us from “the wheelchairs of [our] own making” (92) – whether this refers to imagination, language, history or our culturally induced perceptions. Yet, because he has been made into “a human shape of snow” (30), Snowman gradually becomes contaminated by just such a human focus; as he states, “the habit of being a man […] has begun to persist” (30); accordingly, the perspective of the text can be seen to hybridise – hence the relentless commuting undertaken in the story between the usual human stance and a more alien one.[[34]](#footnote-34) The richness of “Snowman, Snowman” thus lies, among other things, in the fact that the interpretation of many images or passages is going to differ according to the grid of reading one applies to the narrative – i.e. if one considers things from a human standpoint or from that of Snowman (or of the Perpetual Snowflake). This is particularly true for one of the most prominent and most complicated motifs of the story: the image of snow.

Perhaps because the main character of the story is convinced that snowmen belong to the human species, he takes it for granted that he and human beings share the same definition of snow. For Snowman, snow is quite understandably a safeguard against melting and death. Conversely, he regards the budding of plants in early spring as a “green disease” (92), a cancer afflicting the branches of trees and that will cause them to perish. Paradoxically, he also believes that the green disease will only impact on people, animals and trees and that the only survivors will be snowmen since their “limbs are not affected with cancers from which burst tiny spears of green disease” (92). It is interesting that Snowman never concludes from all this that snowmen and human beings may after all have very little in common. Rather, he appears to think that if snow fails to protect people, it is actually their own fault and responsibility; indeed he insists that:

It is people only, those bone-and-flesh scissors snapping in the street, refusing the overcoat of snow which their shadows wear, sneaking faithfully beside them, it is people who change and die. People and birds. (86)

Of course, the reader knows that human beings do not bud in spring and that, even though snowmen do not blossom either, change assumes different manifestations for snow-creatures. However, the reference to the story of “Balder the beautiful” (96) might be a hint on the author’s part that Snowman’s alternative vision of reality can reflect some truth and should therefore not be dismissed too readily. Balder’s story proves Snowman right in the sense that it demonstrates that even gods (who are supposedly immortal) are not immune against the ‘green poison’; and, by extension, neither are human beings.[[35]](#footnote-35)

To nuance Snowman’s view and keep his promise, the Perpetual Snowflake will, throughout the story, try to untangle the meaning of snow with a human focus. One of the lessons Snowman is to learn is that if, for snowflakes and their relatives, snow is the principle of life, for creatures of flesh and blood, it has always been “an ingredient of nightmare” (97). This idea is e.g. conveyed in the following passage:

They fill torpedoes with striped sweets, they press buttons which open snow-white umbrellas above the sea, and certainly it is all most beautiful, Snowman, and artistic, the candy floss of death licked by small boys from the hate and fear blossoming on the tall wooden sticks. (88)

Here, the image of falling snowflakes is conflated with that of the explosion of a nuclear bomb so that, when the children taste the snowflakes/radioactive dust, they lick “the candy floss of death.” Snow is also dangerous on a more literal level in the story: for example, one of the (human) characters of the novella recalls that, some years earlier, a friend of his got lost in a snowstorm and narrowly escaped death by hypothermia. Besides, snow is also depicted as a kind of “mass camouflage” which blurs “the division between street and pavement” (47), and sometimes little girls trip on the snow and are run over by passing lorries. The point the Perpetual Snowflake is trying to drive home is that, for all these reasons – because people associate the ‘greenlessness’ of wintertime and the treachery of snow with death – the most perfect place they dream of, their Eden, is surely not wrapped in the “never-ending shroud [of snow]” (65), but is a place where the earth is “safe and solid underfoot” (49) and where people live forever.

Snow is thus the enemy of human beings, but they do not all think that snow is dangerous: “Children do not care. They gallop like horses through the streets and fly into the sky” (97). Children are said to be reckless in the story, for they pay no heed when adults warn them that hanging upside down too long on a jungle-gym is not healthy (see 41). Some of them even wish to know how it feels to break a leg, become the centre of attention and then be interviewed by the BBC. In fact, what adults regard as reminders of death leave children unimpressed because “as yet they are not used to the idea of dying; they have not yet set a place for death at their table” (100). When Snowman first sees children playing in the snow (while adults are scared of it) he immediately senses that they differ in many ways from adults for, unlike them, “children belong to the snow […]. The children dance; their footmarks have the same delicacy as those of cats, dogs, birds” (37). That Snowman ranks children with snow-creatures and animals is crucial because it makes it clear that children are at one with the rest of creation. As they grow up, though, they gradually learn to “sharpen the huge *axe* of [their] needs and desires, and too soon without the help of the sun [reduce] each day to darkness” (94, emphasis mine) and lose their special connection with the world. The image of the axe is a recurrent one in the text; cold for example is said to cut “the flesh with an axe made of ice, it knows its boundary, it keeps its place in the wound even when it strikes completely through flesh and bone” (90). We shall see in some more detail that axes, but also claws and stings for example, function as a means of separating or redefining the boundary between one being and another: between a child and a bird or simply between two persons. It may very well be then that children belong to a more unified reality until they develop those metaphorical weapons which adults use to preserve the separateness of their identities.

Concerning Rosemary Dincer, the main child-character of the narrative, Snowman and the Perpetual Snowflake never seem to consider that she ‘belongs to the snow’. Rosemary is rather depicted as a quite unimaginative girl who, to know how to walk, dress and act, imitates the patterns of behaviour set by her elders (see 70). From time to time, however, she forgets her “Grammar School dignity” (71) and e.g. shapes a snowman. Teenagers are by definition on the edge between the world of adults and that of children. As for Rosemary, it looks as if she had already begun the process of border-crossing, and is more than half-way towards her desired destination. Rosemary’s case further exemplifies that imagination and the ability to transcend our culturally induced ways of apprehending reality go hand in glove. This is also visible in the passage in which Salvatore (the Italian boy) imitates/becomes a horse. When a passer-by notices Salvatore, he tells his friend to:

Look at that little boy at the gate slapping his legs and galloping *as if he were* a horse. A cocky little chap. Look at him. *Thinks he is* a horse. (96, emphasis mine)

What is being described here surprisingly contrasts with what Snowman recounts when he catches a glimpse of Salvatore hurrying out the door:

He looks left and right, waits a long time, then he runs across and as he runs he is flapping his right hand against his backside and his legs are galloping and away he goes to the shops. *He is* a horse galloping through the snow […]. He gives a snort, kicks his legs, taps himself smartly on the rump, and is away flying through the sky. (93, emphasis mine)

The discourses held by those witnessing Salvatore’s transformation – i.e. Snowman on the one hand and a passer-by on the other hand – differ in that for the latter, the little boy only “thinks he is a horse”, whereas for the former, “he *is* a horse”. What Snowman actually acknowledges is that thanks to his imagination, Salvatore has transcended (albeit only temporarily) the limits of his own being to become something ‘other’ – something which, apparently, adults cannot understand, let alone imitate.

It is not often the case in “Snowman, Snowman” that one scene (as that dedicated to Salvatore) is described from the standpoint of Snowman or of the Perpetual Snowflake *and* from that of a human being: most of the time, the human focus remains, as it were, implicit. For example, when Snowman first ponders upon the notion of Time, he reflects that: “There is a clock in the city. It keeps time. […] When the snow came the clock stopped suddenly because the hands (which grasp) had frozen […]” (35-36). Snowman, who possibly takes human language and expressions too literally, is quite convinced that the hands of clocks actually grab time and keep it as their prisoner. This no doubt sounds rather amusing to readers who very well know that the hands of clocks only point to an arbitrarily established scale of values. Analogously, when the Perpetual Snowflake is showing Snowman round the neighbourhood (in section two for instance), his interpretation of what is going on around them more often than not strikes the reader as not being the only possible way of seeing things. This is for example manifest in the passage where he explains to Snowman that “some people known as *youths* tore pages from the directory [of the telephone box] and smashed the mirror on the wall and tried to wrench the telephone from its stand” (42). If, for us, such acts are simply perpetrated out of sheer vandalism, the Perpetual Snowflake rather considers them to be symptomatic of the human problematic relation to communication and of the frustration and anxiety resulting from it; as he remarks: “People have such a love and hate for telephones” (42). To prove his point, the Perpetual Snowflake further recounts the story of the man who bought a radio kit but found that he could only transmit and receive one message, SOS. Helpless to identify the person who had sent this call for help and torn between a desire to answer the message and perhaps a reticence to send an SOS himself as he had otherwise been very happy in life, the man shot himself. In a sense, the moment this man received the SOS, he became aware of his responsibility towards others but could do nothing on account of the limitations of a machine after all designed for communicating – hence his new “existential guilt”[[36]](#footnote-36) and the suicide resulting from it. The passage relating the birth of Cynthia and her two-month-long seclusion from the rest of the world is also one in which an alternative to the Perpetual Snowflake’s reading is clearly possible. When Cynthia was born, her mother kept her inside for many weeks and she herself hardly ever left the house. According to the Perpetual Snowflake, she did so to prepare, arrange everything “for Cynthia to consider the world outside” (44). However, some elements in his account suggest that there might be yet another reason explaining why the baby remained so long in her room, the first being that, when she was born, Cynthia was a “tiny baby” (43). Another piece of the puzzle is the mention that, for some unknown reasons, a district nurse regularly came to the house. It may then be that Cynthia was a premature child or caught an infantile disease soon after her birth so that she had to be kept in and taken care of until she grew stronger.

It is clear from the last two examples – the story of the telephone box and of Cynthia’s birth – that the Perpetual Snowflake does not always succeed in explaining the habits of the people living nearby with a human focus. This is a positive failure, for keeping a mixed up perspective is a very efficient way of reaching truths which would otherwise – that is with a purely human stance – remain inaccessible. Saying that Cynthia remained so long in the “secretive room” (44) not because she was ill but because she was taught to consider the world outside enables the Perpetual Snowflake to highlight the deficiency of human habits of perception: because of them Cynthia is not likely to notice that “if she came outside to tread on the snowy tablecloth she would leave footprints in common with all other creatures living or dead who touch the snow” (44). The two readings are not necessarily mutually exclusive and one reading is not necessarily less valid than the other. As in the case of Cynthia, there are not enough elements to decide whether the second interpretation is better than the first, therefore the two possibilities remain open. Similarly, the Perpetual Snowflake is perhaps also right to believe that these youths destroyed the telephone box to compensate for the unhappiness created by the limited and unsatisfactory means of human communication.

Although the Perpetual Snowflake helps Snowman understand the ways of the people who live on earth, very often he only provides clues about how Snowman should “read the signs or join the dots” (55). Moreover, the Perpetual Snowflake sometimes falls silent and temporarily disappears from the narrative. When he does, Snowman and the reader must find for themselves how to interpret what they witness or read. The undecidability of some scenes also derives from the Perpetual Snowflake’s stubborn unwillingness to explicit everything. One such example can be found in the passage related to Snowman’s nature: is he insubstantial or “stone and steel” (79) as the failed picture revealed? The Perpetual Snowflake himself only admires (and is puzzled by) the “bewitching process which extracts stone from snow” (79) but leaves it to Snowman to find out his true nature by himself.[[37]](#footnote-37) Snowman, for his part, has no idea what the answer might be and keeps oscillating between the two poles; as is apparent when he exclaims: “I am a mountain, so strong. I am a lamppost with light burning in my head. I am a dragon. I am only a snowman” (93). And perhaps there is no answer to this question, or rather the answer is that Snowman is both insubstantial and substantial… depending on the viewpoint one decides to adopt. From a human perspective, Snowman is only a heap of frozen water which is bound to resume its former liquid state at the arrival of spring. But from the snow-creatures’ point of view, it is rather all that is solid[[38]](#footnote-38) which is “nothing and will finally become nothing” (81).

**2. Static Living & True Journeying**

2.1. Imprisonment

The sight of Snowman “standing forlorn” (86) in his suburban front garden has the strange effect of prompting people (and birds) to emit “menacing remarks” (44) – which, in turn, induce Snowman’s pondering upon questions such as belonging, mortality or identity. One of these comments is uttered near the onset of the novella so that the main character is plagued by existential riddles from the very moment of his birth. “You are in prison [Snowman]” is indeed what a passing bird, “a half-starved grey sparrow,” says to him (30). Snowman’s first reaction is naturally to refute the bird’s allegations:

But that was not so, it is not so now. […] for me it is easy, it is staying in the same place without anymore *flying*, without trespassing or falling over cliffs or being swept down to sea and swallowed by the waves; never diving or*dancing*; staying the same, never influenced by change as human beings are. (30-31, emphasis mine)

To contradict the sparrow’s assertion, Snowman deconstructs the usual dichotomy between living in prison on the one hand and, on the other, having an unrestricted freedom of movements. To him, captivity should not necessarily be equated with the inability to ‘fly and dance’. In fact, Snowman himself seems to find static life (remaining rooted in a suburban garden) easier than a life where one is always on the move. Yet, his optimism is short-lived and soon the implications of his new condition begin to sink in; he notes that “the lost armies that flew with me to earth, and that still fall […] do not recognize me, they float by without acknowledging my snowman-being rooted here in the white world” (31). Now that Snowman has a separate identity, a shape that distinguishes him from all the other snowflakes, he is cut off from the chorus of “Peter-Paul tissue[s] of snow” (77) to which he formerly belonged: “The loneliness is [both] the price and the reward” (65). In this new light, it becomes apparent that the bird told Snowman he was in prison not so much because he leads a static life but because he has, on account of his new identity, lost the ability to commune and communicate with something ‘other’ than himself – which actually amounts to saying that Snowman is imprisoned in his brand-new identity.

Being in prison is clearly a leitmotif in the tale, but one which only reappears under different guises – i.e. almost exclusively through related images such as that of flying or that of dancing. In the passage quoted above, these two words are used in their most basic meaning, which is quite literally related to movement. Later on, as the story unfolds, they are increasingly invested with a new significance, as we can see in the following excerpt:

I pity the dead and the living people who possess the gift of sight and hearing and are forbidden to use them, who are born to *dance* but must be propelled from restricting wall to wall in wheelchairs of their own making. (92)

It thus seems that, although human beings are born with great gifts of “sight and hearing,” they are incapable of putting them to use so that, instead of dancing, they remain seated “in wheelchairs of their own making.” Even though this is not made explicit in the text (at least not directly), the gift of sight and hearing that Snowman is referring to relates to human perceptions of reality and, as I understand this, the scene in which children are trying to imitate polar bears near the time of Snowman’s death has a bearing on the matter. Interestingly, the children distinguish between two kinds of polar bears, those (which they consider to be the real ones) that live freely on the ice floe and those (the dirty ones) that people “keep in a cage with a pond made of concrete and the rocks painted blue and white to cheat [them] into believing they are ice” (98). To a certain extent, human beings could be compared to the dirty polar bears inasmuch as they too take it for granted that they perceive the world in its entirety, while in fact they only see a poor replica painted on the wall. The difference is that, while polar bears have no say on whether or not they should have been deprived of their freedom, people willingly remain in their cage, refusing to admit that they eclipse from their vision of reality a whole chunk of experience. On such an issue, the Perpetual Snowflake would certainly reflect that it is worse when ‘one is deceived by one’s own deceit’ (see 85).

Of course, it would hardly be fair to claim that all of Frame’s human characters remain obstinately seated in such wheelchairs and, thus, are unable to “even conceive of a journey beyond the known.”[[39]](#footnote-39) We have seen that, until they have learnt to “sharpen the huge *axe* of [their] needs and desires” (94), children belong to that category of characters who have “a capacity to journey past existential boundaries.”[[40]](#footnote-40) And indeed, in some of the excerpts quoted in the preceding chapter, children were significantly depicted as being able to fly or dance. To quote these passages once again:

Children belong to the snow […]. The children *dance*; their footmarks have the same delicacy as those of cats, dogs, birds. (37, emphasis mine)

Or, to give another example (this is Snowman’s description of Salvatore):

He is a horse galloping through the snow […]. He gives a snort, kicks his legs, taps himself smartly on the rump, and is away *flying* through the sky. (93, emphasis mine)

The parallel that is drawn here between Salvatore being transformed into a horse and his flying through the sky suggests that the prison house of human perception can be transcended thanks to the imagination. This also implies that people would be able to see the world in its truth (and fly) if they could include in their vision of reality all that they usually label and subsequently dismiss as ‘fiction’, as the product of one’s imagination. Most adults are however quite unable to do so and this is why, while Salvatore is said to be able to ‘fly trough the sky’, those who (like pigeons) “have lost the desire to fly […] only potter about in people’s heads making white messes in the attics of thought” (79).

Clearly, the “human focus” (38) is in “Snowman, Snowman” no less than a prison which human beings accept, perhaps too readily, as their reality – as if they were “unable to resist the comfort of its beautiful treachery” (49); the poor painting on the walls. One understands therefore why, time and again, the author shows the limitations of the human focus: i.e. to free people from “the wheelchairs [or prisons] of their own making.” Further, my impression is that she does so to ease their loneliness and let them dance at last. Before Snowman arrived on earth, he too belonged to an army of snowflakes with whom he flew, danced and swept over cliffs. When he became partly man, he concomitantly lost all contact with them; so that, when he looked at the sky and noticed “the white whirlpool of the still-conquering armies” (32), a feeling of loneliness swept over him. This suggests that there might be yet another way of interpreting the bird’s utterance: indeed, the sparrow perhaps rightly sensed that when Snowman was made man, he also became contaminated with the human focus and therefore (partly) lost his freedom of view.

2.2. The Loss which Having a Human Focus,

or Being Partly Human, Implies

At first sight, “Snowman, Snowman” mainly appears to be an allegory of mortality in which the main protagonist successively denies and acknowledges the imminence of his own death. However tempting this interpretation may seem, it is also very reductive since it fails to take into account that Frame’s agenda in the novella is to present human beings in their naked essential humanity, and that it is with this in view that she has endowed Snowman with an inborn capacity for peering through visible surfaces. As has indeed been argued elsewhere, Snowman “is not to be considered as a round character destined to grow and to gain in awareness in the course of the story; rather, he must be approached as Frame’s special instrument for contemplating people ‘in an unbearable clearing of light and proper original shade.’”[[41]](#footnote-41) My contention here is not to dispute this view but to nuance it further, for a closer look at the text indeed indicates that Snowman is initially not very good at scanning reality with his “invisible eye” (77), and thus must learn to do so with the guidance of the Perpetual Snowflake. If Frame has devised Snowman as an instrument of “outward observation,”[[42]](#footnote-42) then is it not paradoxical that her ‘special instrument’ should experience difficulties in fulfilling what is perhaps the most important role of his life?

The second time the Perpetual Snowflake addresses his new companion, it is significantly to contradict a snowman who remains quite convinced that “the world is a remarkable place” (32) and that he sees perfectly with his coal-black pine-forest eyes: namely that trees, cars, streets and people are “outlined clearly against the snow” and that “everything is *whole* and contained within itself” (32, my emphasis). As yet, Snowman is not ready to even consider the possibility that his vision of the world may not be all-encompassing and he takes no notice of the Perpetual Snowflake telling him that it is not so; this is clear when he, perhaps ten minutes later, exclaims: “What wonders I observe with my coal-black pine-forest eyes!” (33). The comparison that has been made between human beings and the imprisoned polar bears could then be extended to include Snowman – incidentally, it is he whom children compare to a “dirty old polar bear” (98) – in that he, too, seems to mistake the ‘painting on the wall’ (an incomplete replica) for reality. In that connection, it is relevant that the Perpetual Snowflake should respond to Snowman’s enthusiasm for the wonders he observes by describing a germ cell, a beast:

curled upon the Dincer doorstep, tethered to past centuries, and every time Harry Dincer comes staggering up from the King’s Arms he trips over the lead of the sleeping beast. (33)

In yet another instance of the seemingly human focus, the Perpetual Snowflake explains that Harry’s staggering is not induced by the effects of alcohol on his neurologic functions but by the lead of the beast over which he tends to trip; the sleeping beast tethered to past centuries being the embodiment of Rosemary’s father’s alcoholism. In any case, the Perpetual Snowflake’s ultimate motive for recounting this anecdote is to confront Snowman with a grim aspect of reality which he had utterly erased from the picture. Again, Snowman’s reaction is one of denial; he claims that he “can see nothing on the front doorstep but a small mat for wiping feet, and yesterday’s footprint dark with mud and soot” (34); which suggests once more, if needed be, that teaching Snowman to use his coal-black pine-forest eyes properly is going to prove an arduous task for the Perpetual Snowflake.

It is in keeping that the Perpetual Snowflake should set out to explain the world to Snowman *and* at the same time try and show him how to use his capacity for peering beyond the visible. It is he who points to “the massing of hidden determined forces” (39) which works its way “within the deep genetic groove” (39) of a family so that its members never grow to disresemble one another. It is also he who trains Snowman to decipher the “disposition of death” (87) and to detect the artifices which people resort to as a means of hiding the process of decay (new wrinkles or greying hair) preceding it. Concerning the signs or disposition of death, without the Perpetual Snowflake Snowman would e.g. never have noticed that Sarah Inchman was living her last instants. Now, to understand why Snowman experiences trouble when scanning reality with his “invisible eye,” one needs to return to the moment of his birth when he remarked that ‘the habit of being a man was beginning to persist’ (see 30): along the human part of his identity, Snowman, as it were, inherited the human focus which, more often than not in the course of his life, proves to be a handicap for him. Little by little, the Perpetual Snowflake’s efforts nevertheless begin to come to fruition (from chapter five onwards) and, when e.g. Snowman encounters Max, Harry’s colleague, he is able to observe the “bald patch on the back of his head […] so carefully darned with crisscross strands of hair [an artifice to hide aging] that you didn’t notice it unless you took special care to see it” (69). That Snowman has developed his x-ray vision is also manifest when he, while looking at a baby girl in her pram, discovers that her face also frames that of her mother, and of the mother’s mother, but also of the mother before that and so on (see 66). What Snowman realizes is that human beings (here the little girl) are more or less than individuals with distinct identities. He thus finally distinguishes the “hidden determined forces” which the Perpetual Snowflake had pointed to some time earlier (pp. 39 and 52). This moment could be considered as a turning point in the sense that it signals a kind of breakthrough on Snowman’s part which is going to be confirmed in the remainder of the novella, e.g. in the scene of the icicle or that of the blackbird (I will return to these later). In the final analysis, it appears that Snowman is indeed the author’s privileged instrument although he only reaches this status half-way through his life. Furthermore, the fact that most observations concerning the grimmer aspects of existence or the “hidden determined forces” are made by the Perpetual Snowflake indicates that he too could be regarded (perhaps even more so than Snowman) as a privileged instrument of observation – especially since he (unlike Snowman) is apparently not handicapped by a human focus.

It is perhaps time, then, to shed some more light on the nature and the role of this Perpetual Snowflake. The Perpetual Snowflake is a shadowy presence standing on the Dincer family’s windowsill who, it is now quite clear, strives to balance out Snowman persisting human tendencies. Snowman, he maintains, cannot simply store up life-experiences, what is being inscribed upon the blank page of his being in a passive way, for he also has to see “beyond the visible obstruction of print to draw forth the invisible words” (32). In spite of the Perpetual Snowflake’s support, Snowman, as often as not, fails to do this. The Perpetual Snowflake is nonetheless a very good and knowledgeable mentor, so much so that, to some, he might easily appear as a god-like figure instructing a Christ-like snowman. It is true that, like the Father, the Perpetual Snowflake is a disembodied figure whereas Snowman, like the Son, has been made man. Yet, nothing in the text sustains Dell Panny’s belief that “Snowman was called into being by the Perpetual Snowflake,”[[43]](#footnote-43) as Christ was by God.[[44]](#footnote-44) Moreover, the comparison between God and the Perpetual Snowflake only holds as long as the latter’s flaws are left aside. Indeed, Dell Panny claims that the “Perpetual Snowflake is all-knowing and [that] his wisdom seems infinite;”[[45]](#footnote-45) a vision which is hard to reconcile with the several instances in the text when the Perpetual Snowflake lets on that people’s ways confuse him (see 51) or that he himself is at a loss to understand certain things. How to distinguish beginning from end is e.g. a question which anguishes the Perpetual Snowflake:

I may not recognize [the end] when I reach it, for the beginning like the end is never labelled. What should I do if I reached the beginning and thought that I had arrived at the end? What should I do? (49-50)

Another case in point is of course his inability to help Snowman determine whether he is solid or rather insubstantial by nature (see 79). These instances of doubt but also the fact that, when he finally encounters Snowman (after the latter’s melting), he loses the battle against him and dies, demonstrate that the Perpetual Snowflake may not after all be equated with God. Neither is he immortal as has been suggested by both Dell Panny and Delrez; I will also take the opportunity below to dispute this view. On the other hand it is true that the Perpetual Snowflake is a very crafty spirit so that, in the end, it is often hard to decide whether or not he is only pretending not to know how to answer this or that question. The extent to which the Perpetual Snowflake has been manipulating Snowman is epitomized in the scene in which he, by accident, almost divulges the fate awaiting his companion:

I have seen the earth before and after snow. You may see it too when you become an old-fashioned Perpetual Snowflake talking to next year’s old-fashioned snowman. But I was telling you of remedies […]. (49)

This utterance sounds very strange coming from someone who makes a point of informing Snowman that he will never see the earth dry (see 86). Not only does this anticipate the actual conclusion of the story (some fifty pages later) when Snowman survives his own melting to become in his turn a Perpetual Snowflake, but it also contradicts the Perpetual Snowflake’s endeavour to prevent Snowman from convincing himself that he lives in a “deathless Eden” (49). Presumably because he realizes his mistake, the Perpetual Snowflake refrains from lingering on the matter and swiftly moves to another topic. The point is partly that, without necessarily standing for a god-like figure, the Perpetual Snowflake obviously knows more than he is willing to tell Snowman.

2.3. The Ease of Static Living

Up to this point, ‘being in prison’ has been related to the handicap involved in some deeply ingrained habits of human perception. The picture that has been presented so far is however not quite complete and, in fact, Snowman is not entirely wrong to think that leading a static life may not necessarily mean spending one’s existence in custody. Where he is wrong is when he assumes that static life is always undemanding and therefore declares: “Oh the ease, the simplicity of static living” (33). As often in “Snowman, Snowman,” simplicity tends to be deceptive.

Even though Snowman is rooted in his suburban garden and despite his handicap, it could be argued that he is making an exhausting journey towards real understanding.[[46]](#footnote-46) Some of the insights he gains in the course of his life are that light is no “life-signal” (35) but something that stabs and wounds (see 59 and 93), that language is deceptive and that he had always contained fire (his own death) “within the sight of [his] eyes” (102). What also appears to be an important achievement is his discarding of the human focus. The Perpetual Snowflake had indeed initiated him into the art of distinguishing the people in the street, a skill Snowman soon acquires so that he becomes able to recognize “the milkman, the meter reader, and the window cleaner, and the postman” (63). But then he once again seems to lose “control of [his] knowing” (36) and tells his mentor: “Although you have told me of some of the people in the street of the city I cannot remember them or distinguish one from the other” (91). The reason why this failure is a positive achievement is that human beings tend to insist on their separate identities at the expense of a more communal sense of being. Passing “beyond the visible obstruction of print” (32), Snowman thus senses that identity as people usually conceive it is parasitical. Paradoxically, a few pages afterwards he easily gives a name to the little boy who metamorphoses into a horse with the result that one wonders if Snowman was only feigning to have bypassed the habitual strictures of perception. The explanation is simply that, since Snowman is in essence a hybrid creature, he will never succeed in adopting a purely human *or* non-human focus; neither can he unlearn any of them. The two sides of his identity, so to speak, perfectly counterbalance one another.

Yet, it has been argued that Snowman never fully wakes from the illusion that “it is people who change and die. People and birds” (86), not because the human side of his identity prevents any definitive awakening to the harsh realities of life, but because “utter awareness [of death] is finally impossible since the exploring consciousness must dissolve, at the outcome of his quest, into that which it strives to understand.”[[47]](#footnote-47) I will contend that there is room for a more positive reading of the novella since Snowman, prefiguring a figure such as Godfrey Rainbirds,[[48]](#footnote-48) “died and yet did not die” (102). On his last day on earth, the main protagonist indeed dies as a snowman but survives by eliminating the Perpetual Snowflake and taking his place. Still, the new Perpetual Snowflake knows that his respite is only temporary and that, sooner or later, another snowman will supersede him: “I wait for spring, the sun and the snowdrops and the daffodils, with as much fear as when I was a snowman. How is it that I fear death yet I have died?” (103). Perhaps because his disintegration has been postponed and perhaps because he is not anymore restrained by a human focus, the new Perpetual Snowflake has finally discarded his old dream of immortality with the result that he now fears for his life. The quest for a better understanding of the world and of mortality is nonetheless perilous, sometimes lethal, for those who undertake it. In that connection, it is interesting that the grey sparrow who had somehow come to understand the shortcomings of human identity and perception should be “half-starved” (30). As for Snowman, he is said to “have grown thin with the perplexities of being, of merely standing here in a garden in a street of the city. How much more terrible if I were human, moving, travelling […]” (101). Clearly, one can launch into a journey towards a true vision of reality while staying “surely and permanently anchored in a small suburban front garden” (47-48). This journey is already so excruciating when one remains in one’s place that Snowman cannot help but conclude that travelling would only complicate the matter further. In this he is again mistaken, for, as the Perpetual Snowflake had explained some time earlier, people do not undertake to journey at some peril for themselves. Rather, travelling is for them a way of reaching safety, “the place they most desire [to attain] before dark[[49]](#footnote-49)” (62). Thus, even though Snowman never budged from his suburban garden, his life has been a true journey, fraught with dangers.

**3. Violence and Textual Resistance**

Violent happenings, sudden griefs upset the development of the scene often subjecting it to so much violent overexposure that the result is a view of nothingness. (81)

This excerpt can be read as a comment made by the author on the art of writing and on her own tendencies to break the rules of realistic representation. Indeed, to free people from the prisons of their own making, Frame not only criticizes society at large but she also offers textual resistance against its normative ways by wreaking violence upon habitual recognitions. Violence is at the heart of the narrative, hence the numerous destruction scenes such as that of Tiny battering her snowman or that of the man setting fire to his son’s half-formed snowman. The devouring of the candy snowman and the deaths of Sarah Inchman, of Rosemary, of the blackbird and of Snowman himself also fit into the category of those violent happenings so central to the story. The raison d’être of these episodes is of course to demonstrate to Snowman the extent to which a (snow)man’s life is ephemeral or, alternatively, to teach him about death. On the other hand, the many references to dark camps, murders, massacres, grief and greed can be seen to indicate that the motif of violence is more complex than may first appear.

It is perhaps typical of Frame’s dualistic approach to the world that, in “Snowman, Snowman,” violence is presented both as people’s chief weapon for eliminating or blotting out all that does not correspond to their view of the familiar *and* as the remedy which can possibly cure reality from the violence gangrening it. Indeed, as Delrez says: “The paradox is that, when she argues for the demise of an inherently violent world order, Frame necessarily calls upon further violence which may never reach a climax in her work, but which is nevertheless implicit in her more daring formal experiments.”[[50]](#footnote-50) In this chapter, I shall thus concentrate on Frame’s use of formal violence which I call her strategies for ‘wounding recognitions’ and which, as I explained in the introduction, testifies to a wish on her part to recuperate reality’s “various suspended others.”[[51]](#footnote-51) But before doing so, I first intend to show that people’s tendency to erase otherness actually stems from their greed for an equilibrium of selves and that this greed or cannibalism accounts not only for their failure to find a sense of completion but also, by extension, for their loneliness.

3.1. Existential Cannibalism

Time and again, Snowman himself is the victim of violence in that some children keep snatching his limbs or his human attributes (his pipe, hat, etc) as if he belonged to them; not that Snowman really minds since other children pack him with extra layers of snow and replace the missing attributes. But then, as the story unfolds, Snowman comes to understand that this is perhaps what makes him human; he reflects that:

Each day I live someone adds to me or subtracts from me, therefore perhaps I am more human than I realise? Then I must be happy, as human beings are. (47)

Presented as such, Snowman’s linking of his nature as a snow-*man* and this particular type of violence may seem odd, but taken in context, his reasoning is on the contrary very logical. Snowman reaches the conclusion that he is probably more human that he had realized after hearing the anecdote of the three-inch-high candy snowman whom people devoured at a party; a story which the Perpetual Snowflake ends as follows:

It seems that people who have lived in the earth for so many centuries have used much of their cunning to discover this marvellously secret way of concealing the fact that they are continuously eating and being eaten by those whom they love. (47)

Several observations can be made starting from these excerpts, the first being that this metaphorical cannibalism – “eating and being eaten by those whom we love” – *is* a form of violence which all human beings seem, at the same time, to be the victims and the perpetrators of. As a result, the usual distinction between victors and victims, as that between war and love, becomes blurred. Of course, the phrase ‘metaphorical cannibalism’ is too vague a definition for “eating and being eaten.” Yet, when the two quotes cited above are put side by side, it becomes clear that ‘eating’ corresponds to the operation of addition while ‘being eaten’ fits that of subtraction, so that one can conclude that ‘eating’ means adding some substance to the self (at the expanse of someone else) whereas ‘being eaten’ implies losing that substance from the self. In fact, the text sustains a sense in which the self is not something very stable but is in constant reshaping. This idea is actually instantiated elsewhere in the story, namely in the passage in which Snowman defines his own essence:

The wind [stirs] milk-white clots and curds of my essence in street and garden, for my immortality does not mean that I contain myself within myself, I breathe my essence in a white smoke from my body and the wind carries it away to mingle it with the other flakes of the lost armies […]. (31)

Instead of remaining contained within the boundary defined by the lines of his body, Snowman’s essence is rather said to mingle with other flakes – symbolizing otherness. It is important here to distinguish between the notion of metaphorical cannibalism and that of overlapping essences, for if the latter is undoubtedly a positive value, the former is presented as one of the causes of human existential incompletion. That people are constantly ‘being eaten’ indeed suggests that they are incomplete, not in the physical sense, but on a more abstract level. A final point ought to be made in connection to cannibalism: the use of words or phrases such as *continuously* (second excerpt) or *each day I live* (first excerpt) indicates that “once again violence emerges [in Frame’s work] as the foundational principle upon which our present reality is constructed.”[[52]](#footnote-52)

It is strange that Snowman – since schoolchildren keep amputating his limbs, making him (physically) incomplete – should conclude that he must be happy, as human beings are. It is perhaps the case here that Snowman senses that most people cherish the spurious belief that they can ‘contain themselves within themselves’, and that it is this fake integrity or equilibrium of self that these people define as happiness. Naturally, it is the insistence at all costs (and at the price of violence if necessary) on the separateness of selves which – by cutting them off from something more communal – actually makes people incomplete and lonely. In this respect, Harry Dincer’s craving to say “‘Ullo Paris, Rome, Marseilles’, to communicate over thousands of miles in a foreign tongue” (34), could be seen as symptomatic of his desire to find a sense of completion. Indeed, even though his wish to eavesdrop on conversations in foreign languages is somewhat futile compared to that of hearing “the most secret nameless sound which no one has ever heard distinctly” (38), it is still an attempt to come into contact with something other. However, even if his dream came true, one can doubt whether Harry will ever succeed in achieving a sense of completion since he seems to be one of those who want both integrity and communion with others – two opposites quite impossible to reconcile. Yet, we shall see that some of the characters in the story are cynical enough to devour ruthlessly all that represents a threat (real or imagined) to their integrity while claiming to open up to something ‘other’. This actually also amounts to saying that violence, cannibalism but also the use of weapons such as claws or stings, is caused by a will for self-preservation against the danger of any encounter with otherness, but also paradoxically that existential incompletion is simultaneously brought about by the erasure of otherness.

The first victims of society’s sometimes violent attitude towards all that fails to correspond to the ‘expected view of the familiar’ – whether this refers to behaviour or physical appearance – are often those who desperately crave for love and care. This is especially true for Mark Wilbur, a mentally handicapped boy of seven, who wants his mother, Dorothy, to carry him lest she should vanish. Because she has been instructed not to give in and “treat Mark as if he were an ordinary child of seven [and] accept him ‘as he is’” (53), she refuses to comply with her son’s request. With his invisible eye, the Perpetual Snowflake understands that “giving in 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” (53). If opening up to something ‘other’ or, simply, to someone else is, as we have seen, opposed to forcefully defending one’s integrity then, the fact that Dorothy in unwilling to share her power with “others who have no right to it” (not even her son), means that she is certainly not accepting Mark by refusing to give in, quite the contrary. To have a chance of seeing his wish fulfilled, Mark will therefore have to wait until the moment he joins:

the dead who drop like parachutists to the darkness of memory and 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 their greeted, abused, loved, murdered or heard news from even at a great distance […]. (89)

Clearly, then, Mark longs to be carried not only in his mother’s arms, but also in her heart and memory. This is presumably too much to ask from a family keen on keeping the boy out of sight (he boards at a special school), merely attending to him during the holidays. For the Perpetual Snowflake, it is only appropriate that the boy should be called Mark, “that is, a stain or blot or saint” (53), since his family treat him as a stain to be blotted out. Furthermore, it is also ironic that someone like Mrs Wilbur should, on special occasions such as “Jumble Sales” or “Christmas Festivals” (52), display a poster reading “all are welcome” (52) inside her front window when she herself forsakes her grandson. Those who are welcome should in other words not display any trace (or mark) of difference and this is certainly also true for society at large. However, we all know from everyday experience that some stains are indelible. The good news for Mark is that, in the novella, they tend to persist as well since the author counters the erasure of otherness by focusing on all those whom society usually ostracizes. Besides, if for his family Mark is merely a stain, from another perspective he is a saint, i.e. a person worth of worship and who endures in collective memory.

As I said, people tend to ignore or obliterate all that may problematize their reductive vision of reality; this is not only true for human beings but also for inconvenient abstractions such as time or, as the following passage illustrates, death:

All who believe in daffodils [and buy plastic ones from a gypsy] while snow falls around them are living uneasily beating lives, their rhythm is the lost note which cannot or will not join the chord because although it will gain security and strength by being with other notes it will at the same time forget the sound of itself and therefore it stays alone in strange hollow places where there is no other music. The loneliness is the price and the reward. (65)

A world wrapped “in a never-ending shroud” (65) of snow reminds people of their mortality and those who cannot face this prospect resort to buying plastic daffodils to take their minds off the ‘enemy’. In a sense, those who live “uneasily beating lives” resemble Mark’s mother in that each (or the note representing him or her) is reluctant to “forget the sound of itself” as Dorothy is to “give in” (53) her power. These lost notes “cannot or will not join the chord” and find at last a sense of completion presumably because opening up to ‘others’ means renouncing the illusion of the separateness of selves which, in turn, involves accepting death, since death is the ultimate state of undifferentiatedness. Instead, they “stay alone in strange hollow places” where loneliness, not being ‘contaminated’ with otherness, is both “the price and the reward.” To return to violence, it is linked with loneliness in that, for society’s victims, i.e. those who keep being rejected, violent acts serve as a catharsis for purging the feelings of frustration aroused by their often repeated failures to find company. In view of this, the fact that Mark Wilbur deliberately smashes the milk bottles when he is home (see 53) should not so much be regarded as yet another sign that he is retarded but rather as a response to his mother’s obstinate refusal to carry him. The same can also be said of Tiny, “a middle-aged woman who is four feet high and has the understanding of a child” (44) and who, after having created a snowman that matched her perfectly,[[53]](#footnote-53) batters and ruins him for what at first seem to be obscure reasons. Tiny’s motives are best understood in the light of Rosemary’s disappointment at being too young to date a university student. The Perpetual Snowflake guesses that, to soothe her grief, her parents will resort to using “things and objects as remedies” (50) and buy her something she likes. The Perpetual Snowflake himself finds this solution quite dubious and wonders “what happens inside people when they long for the companionship and adventure of another, and are given instead a box of chocolates” (50). Another equally important element is Snowman’s musing on “what it is that prompts people to make us [snowmen]” (32); a question which the Perpetual Snowflake indirectly answers by promising to Snowman that soon: “You will learn part of the meaning of the people who made you, of the street and the city. You will know that Harry Dincer is deeper and deeper in despair because he is unable to say ‘Ullo Paris, Rome, Marseilles’” (34). Read backwards, the Perpetual Snowflake’s statement signifies that it is loneliness and the consequent despair which prompt some people to take jobs as telephonists and others to make snowmen. Both Rosemary and her father long for the companionship of others, but, instead of consolidating their father-daughter relationship (or of creating it), Harry decides that it is preferable to ease his loneliness by getting in touch with people living in distant places; “has skin-to-skin conversation failed him so sadly” (34), the Perpetual Snowflake wonders?[[54]](#footnote-54) It is now quite clear that the reason why Rosemary and Tiny have each shaped a snowman is that both crave for company. That Tiny soon afterwards destroys her creation owes to the fact that no communication or exchange is possible with her snowman – hence her lamenting a loneliness she cannot ease:

Later in the afternoon when Tiny returned from work she became angry with her snowman, at the way he stood in the garden, not speaking or smiling or moving, just submitting to the perpetual collision of fresh flakes upon his body. Tiny’s anger increased. She began to cry, not simple crying with tears running down her cheeks but a moaning complaining cry without tears. (45)

3.2. Wounding Recognitions

In the light of the above, it becomes increasingly apparent that violence is twofold in the novella: either it is a response to erasure on the part of those who are endangered by it or it is the act of erasure itself as perpetrated by society’s ‘victors’. As for the formal violence called upon by the author, it obviously belongs to the former category inasmuch as its purpose is to recuperate “reality’s various suspended other’s.” This is to say that Frame’s strategies for wounding recognitions – her textual resistance against the marginalization of those who have been “institutionalized as abnormal,”[[55]](#footnote-55) her destruction of human language and logic[[56]](#footnote-56) and her poetics of disenchantment – all represent instances of a positive or redeeming violence. Sometimes, tough, this redeeming violence finds an outlet via the characters of the story, and this is best illustrated in the scene centring on Tiny. Indeed, it is meaningful that, while making her snowman, Tiny had “laid a ring of pebbles around him as a sign that […] no one was to touch him” (p. 45) for, when she shatters the snowman soon afterwards, she also destroys with it the old idea or dream that one can be made safe against death.

It is useful at this stage once again to compare “Snowman, Snowman” with the tale of Balder the Beautiful. When Balder reveals to his family and companions that his days are numbered, the very first thing Odin does is to utter magic runes so as to protect his son.[[57]](#footnote-57) Tiny’s enchanted ring of pebbles thus finds a counterpart in Odin’s magic runes. Still, Balder and Tiny’s snowman are annihilated, which can be seen to demonstrate that the protections sought against death are no less than a form of superstition, a kind of magical thinking which Tiny, a retarded woman, has outgrown. This idea is actually also sustained in another of Frame’s texts, namely in one of the short stories collected in *Snowman Snowman: Fables and Fantasies*, “The Mythmaker’s Office” (pp. 125-130). The story has it that, one day, the Minister of Mythmaking decides that Death has become unmentionable: “We must ban all reference to it, […] make it an indecent offence to be seen at funerals, drive Death underground” (126). However, since “people did not stop dying” (127) death remains “an intense part of the lives of every inhabitant of the kingdom” (127). It is interesting that the decision to eradicate death stems from the minister of mythmaking: it shows that the belief that we live in an Eden of immortality *is* a myth, a curse upon people that should be lifted as “the denial of Death is also a denial of life and growth” (129). In “Snowman, Snowman,” Robert Inchman too understands when his mother dies that refusing to confront death is tantamount to being “enchanted in looking at the rest of the world” (60). He remembers that, when she was alive, her clothes seemed “as bright as bird-of-paradise plumage” (60). Now that death has entered his thoughts, “he could not find the bright clothes she had worn. Had he dreamed them? If that was so then was he also enchanted in looking at the rest of the world?” (60). One way of interpreting this is that as people ignore the drabness of life – e.g. that they are mortal – they also conjure up colours where there are none. At first, Snowman is also the victim of this spell, which explains why he is unable to perceive the darker aspects of reality such as the beast “tethered to past centuries” embodying Harry Dincer’s alcoholism. Gradually, though, he partly cures himself of this enchantment and, while looking at an icicle “starred like a frozen wand” (78), he realizes that besides the wonderful rainbow colours enclosed in it, black blood “also constitutes the true colour of the icicle.”[[58]](#footnote-58) If for the author denying one’s mortality is synonymous with being “enchanted in looking at the rest of the world,” then this implies too that her aim in making death so central in the novella with e.g. numerous destruction scenes is to try and break this magical spell. This is something which we, by analogy, may want to call Frame’s poetics of disenchantment, her textual resistance of the erasure of death.

Naturally, Frame not only resists the erasure of death, she also counters the marginalization of those who, in society’s eyes, wear a mark of Cain. One way of measuring this would be by counting the number of ‘outsiders’ depicted in “Snowman, Snowman;” a number which, we will see, is strikingly high. To put this in more accurate terms: among more than fifty human characters,[[59]](#footnote-59) some twenty are either handicapped (Mark, Tiny or Phyllis), Blacks (Cynthia and her parents, doctor Merriman etc), foreigners who barely speak English (Salvatore’s family e.g.) or otherwise marginalized people (the gypsy woman e.g.), which shows that the author does not people her world exclusively with those who “conform to established patterns of behaviour.”[[60]](#footnote-60) Often, though, her treatment of Blacks, newly immigrants or eccentric characters is the same as that reserved for other, more conformist, people. Mentally handicapped characters, on the other hand, appear to detain the keys to knowledge others find hard to get by and, in this, their role is crucial. One of the characteristics of non-handicapped human beings is that, as Delbaere-Garant notes, “usually [they] ignore death. They dismiss it as someone else’s, see their own demise as a future reality not yet real, stop the fissure which the death of others has opened in the order of things and go on living quietly inside the protective barriers which they have built around themselves.”[[61]](#footnote-61) By contrast, Phyllis, the daughter of Ken and Myra, who gives the Perpetual Snowflake the impression that “she can’t understand or didn’t hear clearly or interpret correctly the sound of the world about her” (42), is said to wear “mauve eyeshadow and mauve lipstick” (42). This detail might seem trivial but it is significant that while all elude death, she wears a colour often associated with it.[[62]](#footnote-62) Thus, while most women, including Phyllis’ own mother, wear “Cake Makeup, Invisible Foundation, Fairy-Spun Face Powder” (41) to conceal their wrinkles, and rightly so since “rack and ruin […] is a sleepy quiescent stage before death” (48), Phyllis chooses a make-up with death as an intrinsic component. Phyllis’ thinness,[[63]](#footnote-63) along with her mauve make-up, gives her, one might imagine, the overall appearance of a participant in a ‘danse macabre’.

It is perhaps also in keeping with her poetics of disenchantment that Frame has devised a story taking place in the winter season. As a matter of fact, several critics have asserted that the author often opposes “the normal world outside”[[64]](#footnote-64) with “the snow world of those who are dead.”[[65]](#footnote-65) Interestingly, snow is at some stage also compared to a powerful detergent, a point which calls attention to the fact that reminding people of their mortality may not be the sole function of snow. Exactly as Cleanic “remove[s] all trace of an overnight scar” (45), snow “repairs, cushions, conceals; knives have no blades, mountains have no swords […]” (86). When snow obliterates the earth, it operates as a “mass camouflage” (49) concealing the violence inherent in reality;[[66]](#footnote-66) so that the Perpetual Snowflake is convinced that “no people would accept a government which performed the world-wide deception of snow; or perhaps they would be unable to resist the comfort of its beautiful treachery?” (49). Snow thus forms a kind of counterpart to “scarred surfaces [which in Frame’s oeuvre] serve as a warning against the seductiveness of a regime of reality that is mere camouflage for it conceals the scene of the crime.”[[67]](#footnote-67) Although there seems to be no ‘scarred surface’ in “Snowman, Snowman”– no crack in any mirror as in *The Adaptable Man* (1965), no missing chapter as in *Living in the Maniototo* (1979) – the crack she digs here into an otherwise depthless surface is arguably the author’s break from realism: in the world she has created, the protagonists are fairy-tale creatures who easily exist side by side with ‘real’ human beings.

Again, the image of snow is not as simple as it first appears. It is significant that the Perpetual Snowflake should describe snow as something that makes:

the world simple as deceit is simple, a soft mask concealing the intention and truth of hills and plains and cities […] and grass growing like green ribs to accommodate the sky’s breath [...] [reducing the world] to such a terrible simplicity that people are blinded if they gaze upon it. (69)

By concealing life, the growing grass for instance, snow transforms the earth into a barren land. A world wrapped in a blanket of snow is thus reduced to the simplicity of death and this simplicity is terrible because nothing in the landscape can help people avert they eyes from this vision of death which blinds them not so much because the reflection of light on snow is painful for the eyes but because they are not accustomed to being confronted to ‘deadscapes’ at all. However, the extract quoted above makes it clear that simplicity itself *is* deceitful and this perhaps indicates that if Frame gives death the central role it is denied in everyday life, she does so without reducing the importance of life – which she (or the Perpetual Snowflake) significantly describes as “the truth of hills, plains and cities.” What is more, if on the one hand snow is a mass camouflage, it is on the other hand something that quite interestingly (perhaps by extension) blurs the divisions between valleys and mountains, streets and pavements. People “have always known where to walk,” but when it snows, “all recognition [is] wounded” (47). These words strongly echo the episode of Snowman’s failed picture, and this is only apt since important snowfalls and overexposed pictures both result in a changed view of the familiar and are therefore inimical to recognition. Concerning his failed portrait, Snowman wonders if his nature has actually been transformed from insubstantial to substantial by the “bewitching process” (79) of picture-taking, which in turn induces the Perpetual Snowflake’s explanation:

But the objects were not changed, Snowman. You are still a snowman. It was the view of them – have you ever heard people speak of a view? When they choose where to live they often say, “It must have a good view.” People like to look at the sea […]. It deals out peace and speckled flowers pink and blue and rakes in the losses, deep deep, and the losses are secret and no one ever learns the extent of them. (80)

People yearn for views of nature’s quintessential beauty. They like to look at the sea “[dealing] out peace and speckled flowers pink and blue” because it fulfils this wish – or so they think. The problem is that the sea also harbours “losses, deep deep” but, because people are not ready to include the bleakest sides of reality in their vision of the world, these losses remain unacknowledged. If the same persons had the opportunity to take a peep at Snowman’s icicle, they would certainly admire the “pink and light and deep-blue world” (78) enclosed in its glass walls. One wonders, however, if they would also observe the black blood oozing from the icicle’s body, especially since, most of the time, these people reject any ‘failed’ view of the familiar with incredible violence. The familiar view can then be considered as an obstacle to the perception of a reality in which both the marvels *and* the losses would be included. Further, the text sustains a sense in which the only way of altering the focus is by subjecting the development of the scene to a “violent overexposure” (81). That recuperating eclipsed dimensions of experience is solely possible through a distorted view of the familiar actually points to the shortcomings of mimetic realism (or pictures that ‘turn out’). This no doubt explains why Frame herself – in yet another instance of positive violence and a deeply compassionate one, too, since it aims at recuperating “the losses” and therefore making people at last complete – blurs all boundaries, or wounds all habitual recognitions in “Snowman, Snowman.”

Obviously, portraying reality, including the lives of the people in the streets of the city, from an alien focus is a way of presenting an unexpected view of the familiar. However, all categories are mixed up in the novella; to start with, human and alien focuses are not always distinguishable from one another. The Perpetual Snowflake’s repeated failure to adopt a purely human focus means that, beside more realistic accounts, readers are also presented with surrealistic descriptions of e.g. “an empty carton, a man’s ear, a desolation, a happiness, shops and people” (37). This is also true the other way round: at some stage, one indeed gets the impression that the alien focus has contaminated some of the people, two friends passing near Snowman. The Perpetual Snowflake and Snowman speak of the sun as a “gap in the sky” (83) as if the sky was for them some sheet of paper and the sun a hole in that sheet. This very unusual way of describing the sun betrays the differences between human and snow-creatures’ cognitive senses. And yet, when the two passers-by start talking of the sun as well, it is in exactly the same terms; one of them says: “did you see the gap in the sky, did you look in the sky?” (96). At this particular instant, human and alien perspectives merge; the implication is that people are potentially capable of transcending the prison of their perceptions. This moment of epiphany is however very brief for the character in question and we (readers) are brought back to ordinary reality when, speaking again of the weather (two pages later), this person exclaims: “there’s the sun, look up at the sky, at the gap between the clouds” (98). It is also important to note that, in the novella, the boundary between realism and fairy tales is one that is far from stable or well-defined on account of the fact that ‘real’ human beings seem to exist side by side and without any apparent contradiction with fairy-tale creatures. Indeed, Snowman’s world is not only inhabited by human beings, it is also the dwelling place of speaking animals (the half-starved grey sparrow), blackbirds with obscure intentions and giants “trampling the snow” (50) at night. In addition, the more realistic elements of the narrative are sometimes presented as being part of a fairy tale: for example, that “it is not the old grandmother who sits in the attic spinning, but the father, the homeworker, weaving spells into overcoats” (39), is according to the Perpetual Snowflake typical of “the modern fairy tale” (39). Or, to give another example, that parents get frightened when their child is growing up fast owes not so much to the fact that there is a risk for the child to outgrow its strength: the real reason, as the Perpetual Snowflake supposes, is that the parents “cannot accept the outrage of such […] growth, believing that it should only happen in fairy tales” (61). In view of this, it is interesting to note the ambiguity of the following passage:

Now it is night, deep blue with butterscotch light under the clear folded sky, and the giants are trampling the snow, walking with two or three swift paces across the earth, for it is night, and fairy tales have come to rest, and now I will sleep. (50-51)

Is it because the modern fairy tale (realistic accounts) has come to a standstill that giants are free to walk across the earth? Or are they swiftly proceeding to their places of rest as the telling of fairy tales (to which they belong) has now come to an end since it is night and children are asleep? If the latter, then it means that the world of imagination, of literature, has become reality, as if giants had stepped from a book into the real world. Yet, that some other magical elements equally present in the text – talking birds, separate homemade centres able to converse, horses interchangeable with human beings or, simply, living snowmen and Perpetual Snowflakes – are not said to originate from books possibly indicates that the first explanation is the valid one. What this implies is that some kind of reversal between our real world (perceived through the filter of our conditioning) and the world of fiction is at work in the novella with the result that fairy tales are presented as being real whereas our reality becomes the fairy tale. This is quite logical since, as we have seen, people tend to repress or try to erase a whole stratum of experience from everyday life; Delbaere-Garant has e.g. demonstrated that, for them, death is some kind of fiction.[[68]](#footnote-68) Saying that these people’s reality is the fairy tale, a poor replica of the authentic reality, would be in keeping with the statement that they are “enchanted in looking at the world.”

**4. Newspapers, Snowdrops and a Harvest of New Words**

4.1. The Newspaper Shelter

It is no breaking news that “there is a fundamental division in [Frame’s] artistic vision between the boredom and regulation of the alphabet world and the world at the edge of the alphabet.”[[69]](#footnote-69) In “Snowman, Snowman,” this hierarchy of values finds an outlet in the opposition between journalistic writing on the one hand and the several instances of disruption or even destruction of the normative language on the other hand.

It is commonly accepted that the primary function of newspapers is to keep people informed of current matters or incidents taking place in their more or less immediate surroundings: their town, their region, their country, the world. The Perpetual Snowflake, however, knows that it is not so and that, in fact, newspapers are above all appreciated as shelters; even Snowman uses one in such a way:

You are not the only one to seek shelter from a newspaper; it is common practice. People use it to protect themselves from the weather, others use it to hide from history or time or any of those inconvenient abstractions which man would destroy if only they had a visible shape for him to seize and defeat. (83)

That people use newspapers to hide from history has clearly something to do with the quality of immediacy inherent in all newspapers: each day or week brings fresh news so that even yesterday’s or last week’s news is stale. Bruce King comments that, generally speaking, the author tends to distrust any writing that is “an act of deception, a falsification, the creating of orderly, normal patterns that do not, cannot exist, but which tranquillize the reader’s mind.”[[70]](#footnote-70) Not only does journalistic writing tranquillizes its readers, but it is also filled with false promises such as that made to Harry, which the newspaper in question keeps showing week after week. After seeing an advertisement reading “Ullo Rome, Paris, Marseilles, men up to fifty-nine with or without experience” (69), Harry indeed decided to become a telephonist. What the advertisement failed to make explicit is that only those who could speak several languages such as French or Italian would be allowed on the continental circuit so that, unable to do so, Harry now lives in despair and tries to drown his problems in alcohol; the bad news for him being that these are always excellent swimmers.

As Snowman realizes upon reading the news inscribed on his newspaper shelter, the distinction between fresh and stale news is a confusing one: “Stale news. Yet how can I tell whether news is fresh or stale? When the Perpetual Snowflake talks to me of people he brings centuries old news that is fresh to me, and the stale news of the prompt arrival of each morning brings with it the excitement of fresh news” (87). If, in newspapers, any piece of news that belongs to the past is erased in favour of events that have just occurred, for Snowman and for the Perpetual Snowflake, stale news is part of history in its own right and therefore it is still worth hearing of or talking about. In fact, it is quite positive that Snowman should abolish the distinction between fresh and old news, for it shows that, in his conception of history, there is also room for the past. If history was no longer declared stale but became a tool for understanding the present, anticipate on the future and avoid the mistakes of the past, then one might imagine that our societies would change for the best. The fact that Snowman believes in the value of news that would not be stale suggests an openness to change. Also, it is important to note that there is a price to pay for benefiting from such a shelter: a loss of sight. At first, Snowman is pleased with the protection provided by the newspaper shelter. Soon, however, he complains: “I can see nothing while I wear this torn newspaper over my head” (84). Normally, Snowman has the ability to telescope time which explains why, when looking at a baby in her pram, he notices that “its red fur cap [also] framed the face of its mother, and beyond that face like a shadow which is given a shape […] was the face of the mother’s mother, and then her mother before that” (66). Thus, in Snowman’s vision of reality, past and present are conflated and, by this token, Delrez has qualified Snowman’s “capacity for peering through surfaces”[[71]](#footnote-71) as an “x-ray vision”[[72]](#footnote-72) of sorts. Strangely, though, the same x-rays are stopped short by a sheet of paper which they cannot pierce. This does not imply that Delrez’s approach is not valid, but rather that Snowman’s blindness is both literal (his sight is obscured) *and* metaphorical. The image of the blinded snowman indeed should also be regarded as a metaphor suggesting that only having eyes for fresh news or events amounts to losing the capacity for perceiving a more universal history, from which the past would no longer be banned. It is further ironic that Snowman’s piercing sight should be related to a man-made instrument when, in fact, the two do not compare. People have devised tools to measure

the sound of planes, cars and other machines, but not to measure the enormous sound of people living, their hearts beating […]. What hope is there of hearing a man’s heart, recording the storms, the sudden darkness and flashes of lightning, the commotions of unseen life? No one really listens to the beating of a heart. He [the appointed listener] only listens to the listening of the stethoscope […]. (38)

Unlike Snowman’s x-rays, human instruments of measure are either misdirected or simply useless. Incidentally, the same can be said of human languages: if the contents of news are empty of sense and devoid of substance, the medium through which any piece of news is conveyed is no less bankrupt. This again proves particularly relevant for Harry Dincer whom Snowman pities because he “runs back and forth with his polished earphones trying to get in touch with foreign places but no one listens to him for he cannot make the correct signal” (92). At a first level, “the correct signal” mentioned by Snowman quite simply refers to the speeches for which Harry lacks proficiency. In another sense, however, it could be asserted that, to come into contact with the hidden dimension of existence, human languages – which in their current configuration constitute the wrong signals – have to be either discarded or “rearranged anew.”[[73]](#footnote-73) It is now quite clear that Harry’s endeavour to master foreign languages is no less misdirected than the more technical instruments of observation. That he lives in despair because of this failure is therefore judged to be futile by the Perpetual Snowflake. Subsequent to his arrival on earth, Snowman too is confronted with the difficult task of understanding a foreign language. Eventually, he admits that “when I tried to learn the alphabet of it I found myself lost among columns and archways of letters with my voice only a small echoless whisper” (101). It thus seems that learning a human language, exactly as being made into a human shape of snow, inevitably involves cutting oneself off from the chorus of beings to which one formerly belonged – hence Snowman’s echoless whisper.

4.2. Snow-drop and Follow the Sun

Contrary to all appearances, the episode of the blinding shelter has some positive consequences for Snowman. It can be argued that, thanks to the stray newspaper, the main protagonist has the opportunity to discover that whatever theoretically offers an accurate reproduction of the real world is by nature arbitrary.

On account of the Perpetual Snowflake’s warnings against the time when the sun’s light “pours and spills and the first flies are in the air, gummed with sleep” (95), Snowman increasingly fears the advent of the “golden bush of light” (95) he knows nothing of but nevertheless intuits. He actually visualizes it for the first time thanks to his newspaper shelter:

And the picture of the sun puzzled me. I could see the caption clearly – follow the sun – and at first I was foolish enough to believe that if I looked at the picture of the sun it would have the same effect upon me as if I looked at the sun itself. The sun was portrayed as a semicircle with tentacles growing from it, and a wide smiling mouth. What had I been afraid of? (85)

Deceived into believing in the harmlessness of the sun by a picture, Snowman exclaims: “I don’t need shelter from the sun. I have seen its kind face” (85). Still, he understands that the picture of the sun is not going to make him melt, which points to a growing awareness of the discrepancy between a picture and the object it portrays. The same is of course also true for words and real objects, although it is going to prove incredibly difficult for our snowman to reach this conclusion. The scene in which a blackbird flies down and pecks at the newspaper blinding Snowman marks the starting point of an almost inconspicuous but nonetheless sharp examination of language. The relevant passage is worth quoting at length:

The blackbird had pierced the word *snowdrops*. When I looked out through the gap in *snowdrops* I could see the blackbird disappearing over the roofs of the buildings and thus I could not ask him whether it was joy or sorrow which had impelled him to stab the chosen word. […] There is a sound at my feet. Something has fallen from the sky.

It is not a snowflake, it is a blackbird and it is dead, I know for I have learned the disposition of death. […] There is a snowdrop lying beside him; its neck is twisted and a green liquid oozes from the crushed stem. (86-87)

To paraphrase this, one could say that, for some reason, a blackbird dies in flight, and in its fall, damages the snowdrop he presumably wanted to eat or, perhaps, use in order to build its nest. Snowdrops are traditionally speaking associated with the coming of spring and the renewal of life after the cold season. That this particular flower is crushed therefore means that there is not going to be any renewal for the bird. Alternatively, it is perhaps simply a further confirmation for Snowman – besides the bird’s “huddled” body and “ruffled” feathers (87) – that what he is confronted to here is death (by this stage he has indeed “learned the dispositions of death”). On the other hand, if we change the grid of reading or extend the limitations of our habitual view and relate this passage to the rest of the text, then it becomes quite clear that the interpretation of the scene centring on the blackbird is much more complex than what is suggested above. If, for human beings, a return to ‘greenness’ – the blossoming of nature, of the snowdrops in spring – is synonymous with revival, and if, analogously, the ‘greenlessness’ of wintertime is associated with death, it might be less so for snow-creatures. For the main protagonist, snow is indeed quite understandably a safeguard against death (or melting), whereas the budding of plants in early spring is a “green disease” (92), a cancer that will cause the trees to die. It may very well be then that Snowman concludes from what he has just witnessed that the death of the bird has been caused by the snowdrop (later on described as a “perilous flower”[[74]](#footnote-74)) which reinforces his belief that the ‘greenness’ of sap is poisonous: even Balder (a god) has succumbed to the green poison.

Does this reading imply that when the Perpetual Snowflake, to reassure Snowman, promises that snowdrops are harmless – “You need not to be too afraid. […] Snowdrops are in bud, but snowdrops are made of snow” (65) – he is lying or has himself been deluded by the word ‘snow-drop’? The latter explanation is no doubt quite dubious, for it seems very unlikely that a creature who has such an awareness of the limitations of language (he maintains for instance that “people should burn off the old words”[[75]](#footnote-75)) should have been tricked by a word. It is also crucial that only half a page later he adds that “snowdrops are the first white steel pylons erected to carry the message” (65). Again, the Perpetual Snowflake fails to make explicit what he means by this, although it is clear from the remainder of the text that, when there is news from other seasons, snowdrops are the first to carry the message. One can assume that the Perpetual Snowflake takes the word at face value to prompt Snowman to discover the fundamental difference between a word and the object it refers to. Thus, even though the composition of the word *snowdrop* gives the impression that the flower is harmless (because it is made of snow), real snowdrops *are* dangerous. Clearly, the Perpetual Snowflake’s agenda is to help Snowman pass “beyond the visible obstruction of print;” as he states, “your coal-black pine-forest eyes are no use until you are able to read the page itself” (32). The fact that, at some stage, Snowman is forced to look at the world through a gap in a word (the word *snowdrops* in the stray newspaper) might be a metaphor for what he should strive to achieve. In that connection,the Perpetual Snowflake significantly remarks that “not every snowman has the privilege of looking through a gap in a snowdrop” (91), by which he probably means that Snowman is very lucky to get some external help. Some displacement has taken place here, in that the word *snowdrops* has been replaced by ‘a snowdrop’, as if Snowman were actually gazing through a flower. The Perpetual Snowflake’s failure to differentiate between the two might be ironic and could perhaps be seen as an attempt on the author’s part to problematize the habitual (and automatic) way of using language, of equating words with objects without reflecting upon them.

It is a human habit to take language for granted even though it can be treacherous, “[forcing] our gaze to pierce the word and not the perilous flower” (92). If we keep this in mind, it might be possible to find the reason why the blackbird stabs the word *snowdrops* in the stray newspaper sheltering Snowman. One possible interpretation is that the bird was tricked into thinking that “the chosen word” (86) truly stood for the real thing: perhaps he simply thought it was food. However, a snowman would probably interpret this as a sign that the bird knows ‘greenness’ to be dangerous. In that case, the bird – by attacking a word instead of the peril itself – may have made a lethal mistake. Delbaere-Garant has noted that “Janet Frame’s characters fall into two main groups, distinguished from each other by their different attitudes towards death; the authentic on the one hand, the inauthentic or ‘adaptable’ on the other.”[[76]](#footnote-76) The former, she goes on, “live in constant watchfulness, never for a moment relaxing their attention or letting […] the deceiving tricks of everyday language hypnotize them into forgetting the ‘enemy’.”[[77]](#footnote-77) Clearly, the blackbird is one of the many victims of language who keep reappearing in Frame’s text, and, up to a certain point, the same can also be said of Snowman. Until the very end of the novella, he remains convinced that the ‘green disease’ will kill people, birds and trees exclusively and that “the only survivors [will be] snowmen” (92). Perhaps paradoxically, then, he also feels endangered by that part of him which is human and thus vulnerable, and, therefore comes to wish he was “wholly snow, that no one had ever called [him] Snow-Man” (92). If, on the one hand, he realises that he will soon die, on the other hand – because he has “caught the human habit of deception” (92) – he also convinces himself he lives in a “deathless Eden” where snow is everlasting and snowdrops are made of snow. However, his last words as a snowman indicate his awareness that it is not so; indeed he says: “I am going to sleep now, and the wall of the sky is patterned with snowdrops, the complete flower and not the broken word or promise” (102). Here, Snowman clearly distinguishes between word and object, between *snowdrops* as a word and the actual snowdrops which dot the lawn around him. That the word *snowdrops* is broken might point to the fact that it has been pierced by a bird, but perhaps this also suggests that the “promise” of harmlessness induced by the word was a fake one (hence the “broken promise”). Snowman finally understands that the (real) flower is going to prove deadly.

4.3. The Crops of a New Language

Certain abstractions are powerful and may be lethal yet the best way to approach them is not to carry weapons of personification but to act as soldiers do when they surrender, to discard all the known means of defence and retaliation and walk naked towards the hostile territory. (84)

Time, history, death are amongst those “inconvenient abstractions which man would destroy if only they had a visible shape for him to seize and defeat” (83). When Rosemary is killed in a road accident, the Perpetual Snowflake hopes that this violent happening is going to alter her parents’ focus, even though if he knows that “it is likely that their landscape will emerge in conventional form with death as a recognisable creature” (81). This suggests that Kath and Harry belong with the many who – thanks to the weapons of personification they carry – identify the enemies (the inconvenient abstractions), give them a (fake) tangible shape the better to exclude them from their everyday reality. The text sustains a sense in which the self tends to ‘equip’ itself with an armour and “claws that [grow] as weapons upon the hands” (94) for fear of the “unexpected ‘failed’ view of the familiar” (80). These weapons can then be seen to protect people’s hardened way of conceptualizing reality. Moreover, since our perception of the world is conditioned by language, this also means that, to enter the territory of lethal abstractions and see them in their truth, the language, the techniques for identifying otherness associated with it and other means of defence and retaliation have to be discarded. It is only in our naked essential humanity – without language and identity since these are chiefly useful for defining otherness – that we may have a chance of seeing the world in its entirety and find a sense of completion. It is worth pointing out in this connection that our familiar conceptualization of reality is alone quite useless when it comes to finding why the blackbird dies and why a snowdrop lies near its beak. To understand the scene, the reader has to discard her or his focus, and enter in a state of nakedness Frame’s territory.

Far from shedding light on all that tends to be obscured, language is treacherous, full of fake promises. It is a useful agent for arranging and retouching reality, so that it helps people “perpetuate partial aspects of reality until these partial fictions become a tyranny over the imagination, blocking out perspectives of the whole.”[[78]](#footnote-78) The solution the Perpetual Snowflake advocates is to apply society’s way of handling those who fail to conform and “exterminate all the brutes:”[[79]](#footnote-79) “People need to burn off the old words in the way that a farmer destroys the virgin bush to put the land to new use with controlled sowing and harvesting” (84). Wreaking havoc on the heaps of fossilized words does not remain a theoretic possibility only. An actual destruction of language – yet another example of positive violence – indeed occurs in the text, namely when the blackbird tears the word *snowdrops*. Evans argues in this connection that, when the blackbird “swoops down and pecks a hole in the newspaper,”[[80]](#footnote-80) Snowman resumes his melting. He adds that the bird is comparable to the “hawks of truth [which] always come out of the sky”[[81]](#footnote-81) and that his main function is to prevent Snowman from “fall[ing] back upon the comfort of falsehood when a piece of newspaper blows across his head and conceals the reality of the sun with its comforting print and a reassuring picture of the sun with a smiling face.”[[82]](#footnote-82) Interesting as this may seem, it is unlikely that such a tiny hole should change anything to the process of melting. The warmth of the day bothers Snowman *even* when he is wearing his newspaper shelter and *even* before a hole has been pierced in it; this is e.g; clear when he says: “The gust of wind came near me but it did not blow away my newspaper shelter, and towards the evening the tears stopped flowing down my cheeks […]” (86). The newspaper shelter changes nothing to the fact that Snowman hovers between an awareness of the imminence of his death and a denial thereof. Besides, if the bird ‘disapproves’ of Snowman being comforted by the image of the smiling sun, why then does he perforate a particular world – not chosen at random, one guesses – and not the image in question?

Of course, this particular instance of language destruction is partial because it involves only one word out of the many that form the vocabulary of a language so that one may wonder whether the harvest of the newly planted language (to re-use the Perpetual Snowflake’s words) ever occurs within the boundaries of the text or if it remains something of a utopia. My impression is that, to continue with agricultural metaphors, there *is* in the text a tiny sprout of the new language, of a conceptualization of reality, but that harvesting a totally new idiom remains something of an “infinitely deferred ideal.”[[83]](#footnote-83) In the remainder of this chapter, I shall thus examine how language is transformed from, to start with, a newspaper kind of writing to a more creative one. One of these instances of transformation – in this case, the wrecking of syntax – occurs when Snowman tries to read what is written on the newspaper clinging to his head:

I can see only words in print as you have explained to me. Not *Help help*, but said Mrs Frank Wilkinson in charge of the unit I suppose they have seen some deaf and dumb people on buses and in the street and felt sorry that nobody could talk to them […] hearing your lovers’ dream home gas death *two sides to him* you’ve had your last chance *I’m going to sentence you snowdrops are flowering and crocuses are showing in some places* […]. (84-85, italics mine)

Newspaper-writing is, as opposed to creative writing, supposed to be easily decipherable, but here – because of the lack of punctuation and of the disorganization of the pieces of news – it is obviously not the case. By obscuring the meaning of the news, the author transforms a mimetic report on reality into something more akin to art. It is significant that, after its passage through the transformation of artistry, the newspaper should disclose information which would, otherwise, remain inaccessible. The phrase “two sides to him” naturally refers to Snowman’s hybrid nature. As for snowdrops and crocuses, inasmuch as their flowering signals the arrival of spring, they indeed sentence Snowman to death.

It can further be asserted that letting readers witness scenes from people’s daily life through the lens of snow-creatures is yet another strategy for disrupting language. Perhaps because Snowman and the Perpetual Snowflake do not always use and understand language as we would, their way of reasoning differs from that of human beings with the result that the normative way of conceptualizing reality is revisited in the story. For example, when the Perpetual Snowflake tells the choking story of the “three-inch-high” (46) candy snowman whom, even though he was “in some respects human” (46), people devoured at a party, he interestingly concludes that human beings are “continuously eating and being eaten by those whom they love” (47). The Perpetual Snowflake’s reasoning is erroneous in the sense that he generalizes the case of a snowman to the rest of humankind, whilst he also equates human beings with snow-creatures without taking into account that snowmen only stand for men. This is not to say that his analysis should be dismissed, quite the contrary since it is this unconventional logic which leads him to pinpoint human existential cannibalism. Such examples are almost countless and, at times, the meaning of entire passages is obscured on account of the weird logic governing the novella. When the Perpetual Snowflake’s scrutinizing glance is directed at the family living across the road, the Wilburs, he explains that:

the mother-in-law is the head of the house because she wears a purple hat and a blue apron and sweeps their share of pavement and carefully closes the gate when the postman and the milkman have left it open. (52)

This seems quite nonsensical except if one remembers that, despite what she claims, all are not welcome in Mrs Wilbur’s house and heart; certainly not her grandson, Mark. By carefully closing the gate, Mrs Wilbur protects herself and her family against any invasion by the “contamination of the street” (54). Further, if the function of snow is to wound recognition, the fact that she scrupulously removes all traces of snow or dirt from the family’s share of the pavement indicated that she sticks to her familiar recognitions and erases otherness as she sweeps away snow or dirt (or Mark, the stain).

Unaware of the metaphorical value of language, Snowman too invests old and familiar concepts with a new significance or poetic value. Consider e.g. the following passage:

There is a clock in the city. It keeps time. That is remarkable, isn’t it? When the snow came the clock stopped suddenly because the hands (which grasp) had frozen, and workmen […] burned small fires day and night behind [the clock’s] face to warm it, with the result that it soon kept time once again. Time can be rejected, refused or kept. The chief problem is where to keep it as there is not much place on earth for invisible property. (36)

Well before the Perpetual Snowflake tells Snowman that man would destroy all those inconvenient abstractions “if only they had a visible shape for him to *seize* and defeat” (83, emphasis mine), Snowman senses that people do not keep time as a guest but as a prisoner. In fact, it is with this in view that they have devised clocks with hands capable of *seizing* time and keeping it in convenient containers; that is, out of people’s sight since they are afraid of it and of growing old. There is no difference then between keeping time and rejecting or refusing it. Those who try to keep time do not realize, however, that they are competing with other powerful forces: “One might say that a person takes a few seconds to die […] but the notion is false and people realize it, for it is death which takes the few seconds, and once death takes a handful of time there is no amount of minutes, days, years which will satisfy his greed; in the end he takes a lifetime” (59).

In fact, neither the tearing of the word *snowdrops* nor the transformation of journalistic writing into something almost indecipherable constitute the most extreme instances of language disruption in the text: language undergoes even more dramatic disturbances[[84]](#footnote-84) near the time of Sarah Inchman’s agony. More pointedly, the scene in which Sarah Inchman has just been taken to a chapel mortuary and her son (to screen off this reality) tries to read a book of science-fiction back home foregrounds the emergence of an unknown idiom; it sounds:

The fenew is cardled. The blutheon millow

clane or hoven. In all the dolis gurnt plange

dernrhiken ristovely; Kentage, merl,

the fenew is cardled, onderl,

pler with dallow,

dimt, in amly wurl. (60)

Here, it will not do to simply argue that this unknown speech is some kind of graphic representation of an extraterrestrial language – namely, that spoken by the characters of Robert’s science-fiction book. For an alien speech, this sample contains a surprising number of English words such as: *the*, *is*, *or*, *in*, *all*, *with*. Also, it is important to note that its apparition directly follows the doctor’s twirling of a globe of the world – which he presumably did during one of his three visits to the Inchmans when the mother was living her last instants:

Dr Merriman held up the globe of the world in all its blues browns greens reds and spun it lightly with his fingers. He withdrew his hands. The world continued spinning, faster and faster. (59-60)

One imagines easily that the more the globe gains speed, the more the boundaries between the colours become blurred. It is only logical that the high speed of the globe also results in a language-quake where the general landscape (the syntax) remains unchanged whereas most constructions (the words) collapse: the speech sounds familiar because it is a compromise between old and new. Incidentally, this calls attention to the limitations of this new idiom which, instead of uniting mankind, remains to a large extent utterly incomprehensible. It is moreover partial in the sense that it retains the Latin alphabet and some English words as if displaying traces of Anglophone cultural imperialism. Still, on a more formal level, the language does symbolize unity. Indeed, it is from the combination of the physician’s act – the twirling of the globe – and of Robert’s reading that it materializes. The whole sequence is structured around a principle of alternation between the two characters with the Perpetual Snowflake successively entering the thoughts of each of them in such a way that their consciousnesses seem to overlap. If the words quoted above come from Robert’s book then it is quite significant that the physician – who has not been reading any book – should start thinking in terms of similar words: “Dr Merriman smiled. My God, he thought. He knew and the other in the room knew. The holtrime, the wentwail, the sturgescene had…” (60). What this passage makes clear is that the language the author hunkers for is one of union and that, although the idiom invented in the course of the story comes closer to this ideal than anything else (newspaper-writing e.g.), it still requires to be transformed further so that it might actually encompass all the communities and cultures of the globe. Finally, it is worth pointing out that Dr Merriman is an Indian physician and that most of his clients, the Inchman family included, are white, which means that the coming together of Robert and of the doctor’s consciousnesses through language may have a political resonance also.

**5. Parasitical Identity?**

The self or selflessness is clearly a leitmotif, if not the unifying theme in the novella. Almost no chapter of this dissertation could be developed fully without referring to identity. It has e.g. been suggested that Dorothy could not truly accept Mark and carry him in her heart (the core of her being) because of her unwillingness to renounce her power and to share even a tiny particle of it with her son or others who have no right to it. She is one of the many who are:

organized and trained to kill because the growth of centuries has entangled them in the habit as in a noxious weed which they are afraid to eradicate because in clearing the confusion between being and being, […] they face each other set in an unbearable clearing of light and proper original shade […]. (34)

For Snowman, the confusion between being and being is at last cleared when, looking at the baby girl in her pram, he realizes that a human being is always more or less than simply an individual with a distinct identity. But does the fact that, to join a chorus of beings, a note has to forget the sound of itself imply that, for Frame, identity is parasitical? Or is she, in yet another attempt to wound recognitions, destabilizing the old notion of identity to redefine it anew in “Snowman, Snowman?”

5.1. Official Identity and the ‘Points of Anchorage’

To a certain extent, the criteria which we all use to construct our identity – our name, date and place of birth and address – correspond to those established by institutions. Official identity could then be defined according to the parameters inscribed on our passports, or alternatively, by those asked by the Board: “If you wish to claim a grant from the Board you go to one of these cubicles and answer questions about your income, property, age, occupation, and so on” (63). On the other hand, the tension between the dehumanizing power of institutions and people’s subjectivity or individuality is clearly perceptible in the passage dedicated to the Board. Although cubicles have been constructed on basis of the “average height of a person sitting” (63) to give a semblance of privacy, visitors still lower their voices. It goes without saying that if the Board considers data such as age, property and income as neutral, for those sitting in the cubicles these data are strictly private and, knowing that anyone might overhear their conversations, visitors are ill at ease. The Perpetual Snowflake, for his part, is quite convinced that these cubicles are perfectly appropriate inasmuch as their heights have been calculated on the assumption that “personal secrets do not rise above the head of those who posses them” (63). He humorously concludes that visiting the Board “is a way of getting money when you have no work, and incidentally of stabling and training secrets so that they do not rise above a man’s head” (63).

Amongst all the passages dedicated to official human identity, this is the one in which the author is most clearly mocking institutions. Such a humorous description of the Board should however not blind us to the more tragic dimension, institutions’ dehumanizing power, it precisely conceals. Similarly, if the anecdote in which a family keep repainting the numbers on their gates and the numbers get bigger each time this is done is amusing, it also underlines that “it is important for people to know where they live, and to let others know, to have their places defined and numbered” (39). The Perpetual Snowflake warns Snowman against dismissing too readily these “irritating trivialities” (35) – that is, people’s address, their age and the objects that are important to them, for:

All these things – even televisions and gondola shopping bags, are anchored to the earth or to people upon the earth, and when you find the point of anchorage, the place which most resists the ravages of the tides of forgetfulness and change, there you will also find the true meaning of the objects […]. (35)

The fact that the family living in the house on the corner loathe being mistaken for others (by the postman) demonstrates that, when it comes to determining who does not belong with you, addresses play a crucial role. It can be assessed in the light of the following excerpt that names too have a point of anchorage; the passage centres on the reactions of the Wilburs’ neighbours when they see or hear that Mark is behaving in a strange way:

At the sound of the little boy’s cries people living near open their windows and front doors and look out.

‘It’s Mark Wilbur.’

They say his name aloud, pleased with the certainty of it, for if he is Mark Wilbur then he can’t be any of their own children, can he, the ones who […] speak intelligibly, who play with other children and stand up for their share of everything. (53)

The neighbours are pleased with the certainty of the boy’s name in that it helps them differentiate Mark from their own children. With their weapons of personification (the little boy’s name) these people have once again succeeded in identifying the ‘enemy’ (Mark) and now exclude him from the group of other children. Naming is thus not simply a means of recognition, but also one of exclusion.

Beside age, name and address, the need for light and the reliance on things to soothe grief can also be said to constitute human identity. The text suggests that the urge to escape from places where the dead have lain has always been a constant in the history of humankind, and this is also the point of anchorage of people’s dependence on material goods: “It is a human habit to provide remedies for grief because even if tears are common and usual signs of unhappiness they must never be allowed to become emissaries of death, to claim more than brief significance” (49). As for light, the Perpetual Snowflake explains that people need “the most brilliant searchlight beams in order that their identity may be established. When you are walking in the street it is important to know who passes close to you […]. There are many strangers about, Snowman. Who knows?” (58-59). One should not conclude from this that the Perpetual Snowflake is prejudiced against strangers; he is only voicing the usual argument against them. In fact the Perpetual Snowflake is well aware that race is only one of those irritating trivialities, “a kind of code […] and bribery” (53-54), and that “Indian skin or West Indian skin or European skin, it [is] all the same when the light has gone” (43). Race and, by extension, identity as it is defined by institutions are only provisional codes that dissolve when we die, and indeed when “the light has gone.”

In this context, it can further be argued that the raison d’être of the whole section dedicated to the conversations of those who have directly or indirectly witnessed Rosemary’s death (pp. 72-76) is to demonstrate the value of these points of anchorage. The nonsensical aspect of these conversations – the fact that the witnesses obsessively try to recall the name of the shop held by the girl’s mother, or that they absolutely want to know who called the ambulance and if he is a foreigner – is in keeping with the Perpetual Snowflake’s statement that, when an accident occurs, all the witnesses do is bring their “contribution of irrelevance” (71) to the scene. Evans, who seems to agree with the snow-creature, writes that “the incident [of Rosemary’s death] yields six pages of unrelieved conversation from the crowds which gather helplessly around her body and chatter their orderly, futile phrases at one another.”[[85]](#footnote-85) It thus appears that Evans dismisses the irritating trivialities uttered by the witnesses without delving for the possible “deeper layers” (35) of meaning. Yet, it is for example significant that one of the onlookers should exclaim that he or she “won’t be able to walk past there today or ever” (73) and that another should start to talk about booking his next holiday, for it underlines human long-lasting “urgency to escape from the presence and the place of the dead” (58). That the first reaction of the spectators is to try and establish the identities of those involved is indeed quite irrelevant in such a situation. However, it is possible that they do so to identify the group of sufferers and distance themselves from it. Other elements prove that the speakers do not wish to feel sad for Rosemary; this is mostly visible in the following dialogue:

They 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. (75)

It is interesting to parallel this passage with the one in which it is explained that, since “grief over events must be strictly rationed and the size of the ration is controlled by distance in time and space” (70), the massacre of a race is often reduced to a mere “disappointment” (70). Surely, this can be read as a hint that people will feel grieved by a tragedy if and only if it happens nearby in time and place. To give only one made-up example, a famine which took place in an obscure region of, say, Spain five centuries ago is hardly going to arouse any grief in their hearts. Worse, the dialogue quoted above exemplifies the fact that people are not only indifferent to events stemming from the past or from far away places, but they *use* this process of detachment for tragic incidents which have *just* occurred so as to reduce them to mere disappointments. Not to use up her or his ration of grief for Rosemary, one of the onlookers indeed comes to wish s/he had read about her death *afterwards* in the newspaper.

The common point between the attitude of the crowd towards Rosemary and the reactions of the Wilburs’ neighbours towards Mark is that, in both cases, some ostracizing process is at work. We have seen that – because his otherness has been identified – Mark is kept out of the group to which all the other (normal) children belong. As for the witnesses, after having identified the victim, they quickly decide against shedding a tear over her. And since selection often goes hand in glove with exclusion, in doing so the onlookers exclude Rosemary from those whom, they feel, are worth grieving for. Again, identification is used as a means of exclusion, and I will contend that the same is equally true for insisting on the separateness of one’s identity; this is best illustrated in the following passage:

Keeping alive is a matter of greed more than of loneliness. There is one of each creature because that creature devours all others, it roams through the world with its magnetic mouth seizing the tiny filed brightness which are the commencement of others of its kind. You think that you observe other creatures – you have seen many people in the street, little dogs, birds flying or perched here on your tree (your tree!) […]. But if you observe with your invisible eye you will know that to each creature there is only one – himself. 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. […] Strangely enough, Snowman, this proud lonely greed is a condition of love as well as of hate, for the self does not know where to stop, it devours friends and enemies. (77)

The paradox here is that, although we have read of Snowman observing a number of adults and children, a sparrow, a blackbird and a cat, the Perpetual Snowflake maintains that his companion could never have seen “many people in the street, little dogs and flying birds.” Does the Perpetual Snowflake mean by this that instead of many separate entities, there is on earth only *one* human being, *one* dog and *one* bird – which would be positive in Framean terms? That the sky is said to fit each of these creatures like a skin might further be mistaken for a sign (again, a positive one) that they have bypassed the limits of their own beings to encompass the whole earth. Yet, the suggestion that they devour the commencement of others of their kind clearly associates them with cannibalism. Indeed, it may very well be that, not knowing where to stop, the self of these beings “devours friends and enemies” and expands with the sky as its sole limit. The point the Perpetual Snowflake is trying to drive home is that there is a distinction to make between the species which human beings have delineated in order to classify the living and the individuals that supposedly belong to this or that supra-category. Snowman then is wrong to assume that the animals he sees roaming in the street – Rex, Lady and Beethoven for instance – are dogs: how could the perpetrators of cannibalism possibly be grouped together in a canine common pool?[[86]](#footnote-86) In fact, each of them rather fights this encountering of otherness with claws and this also explains why “to each creature there is only one – himself.” Thus, because of their ‘proud lonely greed’ for separateness, instead of becoming one, all these creatures remain distinct entities.

In the light of all this, it can once again be asserted that if men and women are constantly being associated with claws but also with axes, scissors or stings, it is to indirectly demonstrate their greed for a (fake) sense of completion or equilibrium of self. Those who cling to their old identity and to the points of anchorage attached to it do not realize that such points of anchorage are but “green moss [upon] a neglected stone that no one will ever want to overturn to observe the quick-running life beneath it” (35); the price to pay for separateness is not only loneliness but also a blindness to the secret life teeming beneath the stone of identity.

5.2. Interpenetration of Personalities

It is strange that someone like Mark’s grandmother – who is keen on rejecting otherness – should be said to actually resemble “most of the other middle-aged women in the street, yet they are not related, but all possess domineering bones impatient to be rid of the tired webbing flesh […]” (52). Mrs Wilbur, whose self definitely devours friends and enemies, is perhaps not aware of the fact that she is competing against forces which are bound to gain the upper hand in the end: ultimately, the grandmother will become indistinguishable from all the other old women. Sometimes, the same forces also play disconcerting tricks inside families with the result that “if you look from either of the two sons [living in the house on the corner] to his father you have the confusing impression that your eyes have telescoped time, that your glance at the son has caused him to arrive in a twinkling at middle age” (39). Similarly, “if you glance from either of the two sons to his mother you experience the same feeling of concentration of time, with the son becoming his own mother, the mother being transferred to the son” (39). It thus appears that identity is a superficial thing, a code or façade more efficient at hiding than countering the forces which seek to gather all beings in a common pool where identity dissolves into a kind of universal belonging.

Even though human beings reject overwhelming evidence of this, personalities then do interpenetrate. Another element which perhaps demonstrates this is that, at some stage, human and alien perspectives become one. Indeed, one of the two passers-by who had been talking of Iceland and of Balder seems to have adopted the Perpetual Snowflake’s discourse (albeit only temporarily) and speaks of the sun as a “gap in the sky” (96). As for our snow-creatures, they interact more often with one another than with human beings. The most obvious example is of course that when, Snowman dies, he himself becomes a Perpetual Snowflake:

As almost the only snowflake left on that spring morning I whirled suddenly into the air meeting the Perpetual Snowflake who had guided me in my life, and there followed a battle between us two tiny snow-tissues that were so thin the wind could look through us and shadows could signal to each other through our bodies. I survived the battle. I died once yet I survived. (102)

If the few critics who have so far concentrated on “Snowman, Snowman” have expressed sometimes starkly diverging views, all agree nonetheless that “in the context of ‘past centuries’, a man’s life [is] as brief as a snowman’s”[[87]](#footnote-87) so that Snowman’s fate “resembles the ordeal suffered by humanity.”[[88]](#footnote-88) Paradoxically, they also claim that the Perpetual Snowflake is “an immortal crystal of ice,”[[89]](#footnote-89) that he is “as old as the world itself”[[90]](#footnote-90) and that his “particular kind of immortality may contain a clue to the nature of whatever survival is in store for the snowman.”[[91]](#footnote-91) Both Dell Panny and Delrez assume that the Perpetual Snowflake’s “wisdom seems infinite,”[[92]](#footnote-92) and Delrez interprets this as a sign that Snowman’s mentor “grapple[s] to his bosom the sum of all snowmanly knowledge.”[[93]](#footnote-93) Accordingly, he goes on to say that Snowman’s “final meditation on death offers few certainties except that the Perpetual Snowflake is unique and engendered by the encounter between the identities or ‘souls’ of all snowmen.”[[94]](#footnote-94) This would mean that the Perpetual Snowflake is immortal in that, each time a snowman dies and becomes in turn a Perpetual Snowflake, he incorporates the old Perpetual Snowflake and the sum of knowledge he has acquired through time. If, with the arrival of winter, the old Perpetual Snowflake survives in the new one, this indeed suggests that both Snowman and the Perpetual Snowflake are immortal. What this further implies is that, by adding something of the Perpetual Snowflake to his own being, our snowman has at last freed himself from the straightjacket of identity to become something more than himself. Yet, if the author’s agenda is to demonstrate the centrality of death and its inescapability for gods and, perhaps even more so, for human beings, is it not contradictory to endow snow-creatures with the surprising ability to survive their own death? I shall take the opportunity below to dispute the view that the Perpetual Snowflake has gathered such an impressive sum of knowledge by proxy and that he and Snowman are immortal. But before doing so, it is first necessary to insist that the Perpetual Snowflake and Snowman’s consciousnesses do intertwine at times and this is most visible if one looks at the repetition, like a litany, of the opening sentence throughout the text.

It is in the context of Sarah Inchman’s agony that Snowman hears the litany from his mentor for the first time. Snowman subsequently integrates the litany and repeats it a number of times in the course of the story. He voices it in chapter seven (p. 80), eight (p. 87), nine (p. 103) and of course in chapter one (p. 30) when he is on the verge of narrating his past life. But how can we be sure, when it is often so difficult to distinguish the two main narrators from one another, that the first time the litany is uttered chronologically,[[95]](#footnote-95) that is the Perpetual Snowflake who is speaking? It is important here to understand the system of inverted commas which Frame applies in “Snowman, Snowman.” Inverted commas are used in dialogues so as to distinguish one speaker (Snowman) from the other (the Perpetual Snowflake). However, even though it is clear from the context that it is still the same protagonist who is talking, a new inverted coma is sometimes inserted, as if to mark a pause between two utterances. To give a short example (this is the Perpetual Snowflake speaking):

‘And that, Snowman, is death.

‘See how there is no concentration, no tension […].

‘Listen, Snowman.’ (71-72)

The only possible way of ascertaining whether some passages – especially those where the Perpetual Snowflake does not address his companion directly by his name – are dialogues or monologues is by checking if they are framed by an opening comma (‘) and a closing one (’). If the latter is absent, as is the case in the second and third sentences of the above example, then it means that the same speaker is going to develop his point further – albeit after a short break. Keeping this in mind not only makes it easier to read the novella; thanks to this technique it is indeed also possible to establish that there exists a continuity between the Perpetual Snowflake and Snowman’s visions. This is not to suggest however that the two would be one if Snowman was not imprisoned in his humanoid body. Besides, even if this was the case, Snowman and the Perpetual Snowflake’s united identities would still fall short of the utopian identity the author apparently values. Human and animal spirits are clearly no components of the Perpetual Snowflake’s being: if he indeed functions as a kind of container for the souls of all snowmen, it seems that he has no room left for other entities. Besides, by stating that “Snowmen and Perpetual Snowflake*s* have no need of words” (84, italics mine), the Perpetual Snowflake himself insinuates that he may not be unique. This sole hint that several Perpetual Snowflakes may exist makes it difficult to draw any clear conclusion. One possibility would be that Perpetual Snowflakes are geographically located and that each street or each suburb has one such spirit. If so, then it clearly follows that the Perpetual Snowflake does not synthesize in his bosom the souls of *all* snow-creatures. A Perpetual Snowflake is in other words a creature which on no account stands for something universal but which represents nonetheless more than something strictly individual – or so it seems.

To return to the litany, my impression is that it is more than simply a reflex from our snow-creatures’ consciousnesses. It is significant that when Snowman survives his own melting, he at no moment rejoices over his victory against death; on the contrary, he regrets having conquered the earth and repeats his litany a last time adding a small sentence to it (in italics):

*How I wish now that I had not conquered the earth, for* People live on earth, and animals and birds; and fish live in the sea but we do not *defeat* the sea, for we are driven back to the sky, or we stay, and become what we have tried to *conquer*, remembering nothing except our new flowing in and out, in and out, sighing for one place, drawn to another, wild with promises to white birds and bright-red fish and beaches abandoned than longed for. (103, italics mine)

Snowman who, near the onset of the novella, found his brand-new static life, “without any more flying, without trespassing or falling over cliffs or being swept down to sea and swallowed by the waves” (31), wonderful, is now nostalgic for the time he could freely explore the sky and dive in the sea. Of course, since this is the antepenultimate sentence of the text, the reasons for this abrupt change of mind are never clarified. Still, my contention is that it is possible to understand what Snowman means by this and, more generally, to decipher the enigma of survival, by relating the theme of identity to the motives of conquest and defeat. It is crucial that, when Snowman voices the litany himself for the first time, the Perpetual Snowflake should respond to it by making the following remark: “That is true Snowman. The victor has a habit of assuming the identity of those he has vanquished. It is a habit of people also, and animals and birds and bright red fish” (80). Clearly, this is what happens to Snowman when he flies to earth (or conquers it): he assumes the identity of the people living there.

That the sea is a place that cannot be conquered actually connects it to that region of the mind – the proper place to see abstractions in their truth – “which must be entered in nakedness of thought” (84). To enter the sea, to become one with a more all-encompassing universe (comprising both the losses and the wonders), one has to surrender to it. When this is done, ‘you remember nothing’ of e.g. your individuality since the armour of the self is dismantled by the assaults of the sea. Those who try to vanquish the sea and through habit assume its ‘identity’, or here its non-identity, ironically become akin to a “stealthy nothingness of wet” (32): they become what they tried to conquer and lose their individuality. It is important here to distinguish between assuming someone else’s identity and becoming something other: the latter is positive in the sense that it allows the union of hitherto distinct ontologies whereas the former is only a form of existential cannibalism with one being snatching the essence of the other without renouncing its own identity. Of course, another important conquest in the tale occurs when Snowman finally melts, for a battle between him and his mentor ensues and it is Snowman who gains the upper hand. That there is a battle between the two contradicts Delrez’s idea that the Perpetual Snowflake is engendered by the encounter of the souls of all snowmen: to become something more than an individual with a distinct identity, one has to discard all the known means of defence and retaliation – a concession or sacrifice which neither Snowman nor the Perpetual Snowflake is prepared to make. A further element possibly indicating that Snowman has not fused with the Perpetual Snowflake is that, after their encounter, the remainder of the novella is told from the sole perspective of the former Snowman. These elements no doubt show that Snowman is far from reaching the utopian identity valued by the author, for, instead of becoming one with what he tried to conquer, Snowman has replaced it: now he assumes his mentor’s role as a Perpetual Snowflake. Therefore, if Snowman wishes he had not conquered the earth, it is perhaps because he has realized his shortcoming. Alternatively, he might be anxious because he knows that Perpetual Snowflakes are “powerless and diminished” (62) and that they stand no chance against freshly deceased snowmen. The only tenable conclusion that can be drawn here is that the Perpetual Snowflake is no common pool of snow-beings, but some kind of spirit with a separate identity changing each time a new snowman wins the battle for the safeguard of his identity.

5.3. Nothingness and the Equation

It is symptomatic of the Perpetual Snowflake’s highly ambiguous attitude that his acts should be inconsistent with his convictions. His attempts to demonstrate to Snowman that identity is parasitical are clearly at odds with the impulse to resist the dissolution of his own. One could imagine that he holds such a discourse on identity in anticipation of the ultimate confrontation with Snowman, to induce Snowman to drop his guard when the time comes for them to meet. The Perpetual Snowflake’s final resistance could also be seen, perhaps even more convincingly, as a kind of ultimate reflex on the part of a dying consciousness, akin to the struggle a drowning person may put up when falling short of oxygen. In any case, it would be a mistake to assume that the Perpetual Snowflake’s voice corresponds to that of the author and that, for her, identity indeed is – as the Perpetual Snowflake maintains – a kind of curse or hindrance. To continue unravelling Frame’s complex treatment of identity, I shall now shed some light on the existential equation present in the text. This secondary litany, voiced by Snowman, reads: “Man is simplicity I thought. Coal, brass, cloth, wood – I never dreamed” (30).

If a lump of snow to which some coal, brass, cloth, and wood have been added metamorphoses into a snowman, then it also means that human beings are made of coal, brass, cloth and wood; for Snowman, the equation is as simple as that.[[96]](#footnote-96) Of course, what he fails to take into account (for obvious reasons) is that snowmen only stand for men but are not equal to them – which is why his equation is not valid. Yet, there might be more to say on the topic of Snowman’s human attributes which, contrary to all appearances, have not been selected at random. Snowman’s eyes, the “two sharp pieces of coal, fragment of old pine forest” (30) that were thrust in his face are, as the excerpt indicates, associated with ancient forests (see also 63), and, significantly, in Frame’s imagery ancient forests often represent one’s forebears.[[97]](#footnote-97) Along with his pipe, Snowman’s coal-black pine-forest eyes also carry in their core the worst enemy of a snowman: fire. Perhaps sensing this irony, Snowman complains: “I have been so afraid of fire. I did not know I contained it within the sight of my eyes and that when I gazed upon the sun the dreaded fire would originate from myself” (102). Another of Snowman’s attributes, “the row of brass buttons [that] was arranged down [his] belly” (30), is compared to a man’s heart; we can see this in the following passage:

It is marvellous, Snowman, the way Cleanic can remove all trace of an overnight scar [the racist insults on the brass plate outside the Indian doctor’s house]; it ought to be more used by human beings when they suffer attacks from those who love them so much that they must write their love as insults upon the heart of the loved. Have human beings hearts of brass? (45)

As for cloth, Snowman’s hat, the fact that one has to walk *naked* towards the hostile territory to see abstractions in their truth or to genuinely accept what is other could be seen to indicate that clothes stand for the armour (comprising perhaps the claws and the stings) one wears as a means of protection against the world, against death or any of those inconvenient abstractions. Another element instantiating this is that, as soon as his mother dies, Robert Inchman becomes obsessed with his mother’s clothes: “Why was it that […] her clothes seemed drab, brittle, that burnt brown colour like beetle shells found in the grass in September? Like a collapsed armour?” (60). In the light of this analysis, it becomes possible to view Snowman’s last words – man is indeed simplicity, I never dreamed – not “as consciousness’s final denial in the instant of death”[[98]](#footnote-98) but rather as a confirmation of the validity of the equation. Also, I would like here to dispute Dell Panny’s view that man is simplicity because “he resists or misinterprets the more profound truths;”[[99]](#footnote-99) indeed, she contends that: “Although he considers himself superior and capable, modern man is shown, in his ‘simplicity’, to depend on material goods: ‘Coal, brass, cloth, wood.’”[[100]](#footnote-100) This materialistic interpretation of Snowman’s equation is rather reductive and falls short of the complex pattern of images that has carefully been embroidered in the text. When all the terms of the equation are replaced by their equivalents, the true characteristics of humankind appear: human beings are their ancestors, their own death, a heart and an armour… man is indeed simplicity.

That there seems to be no room for identity in this equation is certainly in keeping with the statement that:

Nothing will finally become nothing. And then when all the creatures and objects are cleaned of their parasitical identity, why, then the rhymes will have reason. If all the world were paper, if all the seas were ink, if all the trees were bread and cheese – what a marvellous freedom of view that would be, Snowman! (81)

But is Frame really suggesting that identity is nothing and only hides the existential simplicity inherent in mankind? On the one hand, there is certainly this (utopian) urge to include all kinds of beings in one common pool where identity dissolves. It is however also true that, as Delrez says, “the story sustains a sense in which nothingness of identity nonetheless translates into *something*, not unlike the snow which tastes like nothing, but then ‘so much of nothing that you could imagine special flavours to it, only the sweetness sourness bitterness which you put there yourself. Snow is a responsibility don’t you think?’”[[101]](#footnote-101) In human existential simplicity (the equation above) there is thus room for identity, if only because, as stated earlier, simplicity is deceitful. Of course, the identity Frame seems to value is certainly not the one that is determined by the Board or by what is written on our passports (name, address, date of birth, etc). It is rather something which is not defined by institutions or even by the boundaries of one’s own skin since, as stated in *The Adaptable Man*, “skin’s is not a very efficient hedge. People *do invade*.”[[102]](#footnote-102) Official human identity is parasitical because it is too firmly anchored in strategies of self-definition by means of exclusion: name, address, race and skin being chiefly useful either to distinguish oneself from the mass or to identify the enemy. And, if Frame “debunks the old idea of the self,”[[103]](#footnote-103) if she presents an unexpected view of the familiar, it is to make room for a new way of defining identity which, by no longer relying on strategies of exclusion, would at last enable people to find a sense of completion. But for the time being, our authentic identity, not unlike “the truth of hills and plains and cities” (69), remains concealed by the mass camouflage of official human identity.

**6. “The Endless Circular Limits of Life”**

The least which can be said is that the equation proclaiming man’s simplicity is but a screen of smoke covering up a much more complex vision of humanity. In this respect, even the structure of the equation is crucial, not only because it mirrors the informing structure of the text but also because it has a bearing on any discussion revolving around the notion of survival. Indeed, it is certainly not a coincidence that the first term of the existential equation (coal, a form of wood) should relate to the last one (wood) and that, by this token, the equation could be seen to describe some kind of circle where beginning and end become indistinguishable. The author’s vision of mortality and survival in “Snowman, Snowman” is best understood if the role played by circularity is accounted for; a role which will be highlighted in this last chapter.

6.1. Seasonal Time and the Circle of Belonging

As far as Snowman is concerned, the logic of the women and men he chances to hear is incoherent, more so than that of children, and often he feels confused by the contradictory pieces of information they appear to convey. For example, when a little girl passing near Snowman prepares to hit him to see if he will cry, she is rebuked by her mother who cries out: “You can’t go into other people’s gardens like that. The snowman doesn’t belong to us” (37). Further, when the child asks her mother who the snow belongs to and is told that “it’s everybody’s” (37), she naturally concludes that Snowman is hers, only to be once more chastised by the mother: “Don’t be silly, stupid, it belongs to the person who made him” (37). This in turn prompts Snowman to wonder if he is common property:

Do I belong to Rosemary Dincer because she made me, and to Kath because Rosemary belongs to Kath and to Harry because Kath belongs to Harry, and who does Harry belongs to, does belonging describe a circle which starts again at Rosemary or does it extend to all people and everybody belongs to everybody else on earth? Who decides? (37)

However, it will not do to discuss this passage without commenting upon the discourse underpinning it. The suggestion that a woman and her child are the property of the husband or father while the father or husband is the property of no one is, to use today’s terminology, far from being politically correct. Yet it is also the case that the author’s espousal of patriarchal ideologies is partly redeemed by her treatment of belonging as it filters through in the passage dedicated to Tiny, for it is Tiny who in an indirect way answers Snowman’s questions. We have seen that, as a final touch to her creation, Tiny encircled the snowman she was shaping with a ring of pebbles, “as a sign that he belonged to her and that no one was to touch him” (45). The pebbles are then not only a protective charm; they also symbolize belonging, and, importantly, the figure they form together is perfectly circular. This circle of belonging proves that nobody belongs to anybody, or alternatively, that everybody belongs to everybody. It is further significant that, when the snowman is battered and ruined by her creator, he sinks “within the charmed pebbled circle” (46). If the ring of pebbles is left intact by the snowman’s falling to pieces, this indirectly demonstrates that death has no influence on the circle of belonging and thus that the dead belong with the living and conversely.

Of course, a condition sine qua non for the circle of belonging to spiral endlessly is that it should never be disrupted by any time limits, and inasmuch as time is presented as being circular rather than linear, it is not. This is for example clear when the Perpetual Snowflake lets slip that he has “seen the earth before and after snow” and that Snowman “may see it too when [he] become[s] an old-fashioned Perpetual Snowflake talking to next year’s old-fashioned snowman” (49). A contrario, he also assures his companion that he is “just as modern as the little green man with black horns” (60). Modernity and past times come together in Snowman in that he is both newly born *and* old-fashioned since his appearance is predictable: a new snowman may have a different hat or an umbrella instead of a pipe but his overall shape will remain similar to that of the preceding generations of snowmen. In retrospect, the Perpetual Snowflake’s slip proves that he always had some foreknowledge of Snowman’s inevitable victory over him; and indeed, one season or more later, his prediction comes true. More pointedly, the blank (on the page) between Snowman’s melting and the actual epilogue of the story[[104]](#footnote-104) stands for an indefinite lapse of time: the story, so to speak, cannot come full circle if the next winter is too mild for snow since the “white clay” (96) is the primary material to shape snowmen.[[105]](#footnote-105) The only certainty is that it is winter again and that a new snowman has been brought into being; he asks the deceased snowman:

‘Who are you?’

‘I am the Perpetual Snowflake.’

‘Why do you talk to me? Are you here to explain the world to me because I am only a snowman? I should like to know the place where I am to live for ever and ever. Tell me.’ (102)

One imagines easily that the exchange between the snowman and the Perpetual Snowflake is going to be some sort of repetition with a difference of what has been recounted so far and that, to teach the new snowman to see with his coal-black pine-forest eyes, our Snowman will transmit the many truths he heard from the Perpetual Snowflake as the later was pretending to explain the habits of the people living on earth with a purely human focus.

This impression of repetition is further reinforced by the resemblance between the old and the new snowmen. Exactly as his predecessor did before him, the new snowman doubts the trustworthiness of the disincarnate spirit hovering near him. His inquisitive questions on the Perpetual Snowflake’s identity (“who are you?”) and motives (“why do you talk to me?”) remind one of Snowman’s attitude who – when his own Perpetual Snowflake promised that “tomorrow and the next day and the next day” (35) he would understand all the mysteries of human beings – answered, “is it necessary? I am only a snowman” (35), and asked, “who is the Perpetual Snowflake? I never knew him though our family is Snowflake” (35). Incidentally, the two snowmen are also convinced that they will live “for ever and ever” and justify their failure to comprehend the complexities of the world by stressing the fact that they are only snowmen. As for the structure, the conclusion of the epilogue – i.e. the last three sentences comprising the litany, the title phrase (“Snowman, Snowman”) and the existential equation – is an almost exact repetition of the beginning of the tale so that, once again, beginning and end become indistinguishable. It is worth pointing out in passing that the difficulty to differentiate beginning from end is one which worries the Perpetual Snowflake, too, no matter how wise he seems to be:

I don’t know how it began and I’m not going to travel back until I reach the beginning, not simply for your sake, Snowman, for I may discover the real nature of the beginning, and that may frighten me, and you. Besides, I may not recognize it when I reach it, for the beginning like the end is never labelled. What should I do if I reached the beginning and thought I had arrived at the end? What should I do? Both the beginning and the end demand such drastic action that I should be forced to decide immediately, and what if I made a mistake? There are responsibilities which even I am not prepared to face. (49-50)

Similarly, readers may not realize straight away that the prologue of the tale (roughly, the first page) does not stricto sensu correspond to Snowman’s first day on earth. That Snowman’s story is told retrospectively – i.e. the narrator is recounting his nine days of life from a moment located after his death, after he has assumed his mentor’s role – is visible in the use of tenses. To put this more accurately, a swift transition between past and present is operated at the moment Snowman rebukes the sparrow who maintains that he lives in prison by saying: “But that *was* not so, it *is* not so now” (30, emphasis mine). Conversely, while reaching the last pages, readers may be tempted to think that they are now heading for the conclusion of the story, but what they perhaps take to be an end is in fact a new beginning.

6.2. “The Lifeless Pretence”

It is the habit of people to look at the beginning of life in order to determine the moment of birth, but as a Perpetual Snowflake I am not so prejudiced, I know that seed is shed also at the moment of death. (83)

It is definitely not customary to conduct, as Janet Frame does, a minute exploration of the human body in the aftermath of death and to invest its decaying with a positive significance. The author even goes as far as to describe a rebellion of the dead which, ostensibly, is in keeping with the idea that seed is shed at the moment of death since it could be interpreted as a clue that the dead rise, phoenix-like, from their ashes and that they are therefore immortal. However, we have also seen how reductive it was to conclude, from the fact that Snowman survives his own melting, that death is a provisional state which is nullified as soon as we agree to “welcome [its] eradication” (34). It is now quite clear that Snowman’s respite is only temporary and that he shall not be restored to life once more when superseded by the next year’s old-fashioned snowman. The point is partly that it might be a mistake to consider death as a middle passage between one’s life and one’s resurrection:[[106]](#footnote-106) the old dream of immortality is untenable in that the text sustains a sense in which the only way for the living to eradicate death is by reaching the last station of life and die. In fact, the seed that is shed at the moment of death is not aimed at saving one in danger of extinction: rather, its function is to perpetuate life in a more general way so that, mutatis mutandis, the living resemble the burning “pine cones [that] are crackling and sparkling as they are used to doing when they are ripe and it is time for them to spill their seed” (102).

As such, perishing may not be a very pleasant experience, but it is not entirely negative either in that, afterwards, our remains blend with the rest of creation; we become “a part of the plain or the desert with the shadows of the wings of the vultures wheeling over the earth like great broad blades of a windmill set in motion by winds blowing from beyond the frontiers of death to draw new forces of life from the mingled grass and sand and dead human flesh” (58). As I understand it, the author’s ‘poetics of recycling’ implies that, when we are reduced to ashes or to decaying bodies, we still take part in the cycle of life…in a function akin to compost. Also, it is ironic that skin, such a useful agent for marking the boundary between one being and another, makes room for the enemy almost the instant we die. Preserved in the safety of her coffin, Rosemary may soon resent her terrible isolation, for:

Perhaps tomorrow or the next day it may rain, and the rain will continue through the night and Rosemary will lie where she has been buried as one of the dead, and the rain will treat her as earth, making pools in her where little fish swim and insects burrow and skate and new streams form and flow from her body to the clay and back again with circular inclusion flesh clay flesh. (91)

When caught in a circular movement, all artificial boundaries collapse and what had previously been kept apart – man (flesh) and nature (clay) but also beginning (life) and end (death) or the dead and the living become one.

Unlike cold which “cuts the flesh with an axe made of ice” but “keeps its place in the wound” (90), rain penetrates: it dives in the bowels of the earth and assaults the coffins buried there until it can leak in. “The first night of rain is the loneliest night the dead will ever endure” (90) because they have no one to turn to for solace while they make the terrifying experience of being compelled to shelter all that they previously rejected as ‘other’; not only the clay, but also little fish and insects. 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. (90)

This passage forms an interesting counterpoint to the one in which the losses raking deep in the sea are said to coexist with the “speckled flowers pink and blue” (80) it deals out to the great pleasure of human beings. The same is true for the passage centring on the icicle since “all the colours of the rainbow” (78) – that is, the “pink and light and deep blue worlds enclosed in it” (78) – form, together with the black blood, the true colours of the icicle. This calls attention to the fact that the author’s impulse to pinpoint the losses concealed by the wonders also works the other way round. She makes it clear that the grimmest aspects of reality hide in their core some unheard-of wonders, for rainbows glimmer “even in the dark.” But how could human beings perceive the true colours of the world – rainbows in darkness and darkness in rainbows – when they imagine colours where there are none, as Robert Inchman does, and when electricity (street lights at night) “stabs and changes – like a drug administered – the aspect of all colour” (59)? At night, Snowman is “not snow, [he is] sunset; sunset and dragons” (59).

By mingling with other creatures and elements, the dead have clearly transcended the debilitating limitations of selfhood – which in Framean terms is very positive. But why is it then that they decide to rebel on their first night of rain? Strangely enough, this seems to have nothing to do with a desperate attempt to avoid being contaminated by otherness; they rebel because they are “satisfied no longer to be the calm docile dead with their eyes carefully closed and their hands in an attitude of willing surrender; their toes tied to keep up the orderly lifeless pretence” (90). My impression is that the passage preceding the description of Rosemary’s first night of rain provides clues as to how the metaphor of rebellion should be understood. Indeed, the point is not that the dead actually rise zombie-like from their graves to take their revenge upon the living. Simply, their anger is some kind of counter-blast or response to those who, even though no “spell has been cast” over their world (89), tend to stay “forever within the same moment” (89):

It is all the same story, in the end. Widows have husbands living, the spinsters are married, the childless have borne children. […] You saw Rosemary die. Yet she is alive, she goes to school each day, she still dreams of her University student and his long striped scarf. (89)

At first, this excerpt might be taken to mean that, when we pass away, we go on living in the memories of those who stayed behind, but clearly, in the cases of spinsters and infertile couples, there is no one to remember. The only conclusion that can be drawn here is that all these people deny what has gone wrong in their lives, which in some cases implies the denial of death. Thus, Rosemary is lonely because her parents refuse to acknowledge her being dead, and this is also why she, in the form of a “revengeful ghost,”[[107]](#footnote-107) rebels to “teach the living through dreams, nightmares, fantasies, the true discomforts of death” (91): falling into oblivion.

6.3. Memory and Continuum

So far, we have seen that the author’s poetics of recycling, the unexpected demise of Perpetual Snowflakes, the hint that protections sought against death are a form of superstition and the story of Balder the Beautiful all debunk our persistent tendency to imagine that we live in a deathless Eden. The rebellion of the dead on their first night of rain should then not be taken too literally. Still, it will not do either to ignore that there *is* this idea that something of us remains after our death; not in any physical sense, but in a spiritual one. Yet, apart from the “black chimney pots parading among the clouds and the brittle stars [during the festivals of death] to get a peep at the *other world*” (68, italics mine), very few elements in the text can help us determine the nature of this other world. The spiritual afterlife foregrounded in the story is, in other words, vague enough to, as Delrez says, “accommodate any faith or brand of atheism.”[[108]](#footnote-108)

Difficult as it is to elucidate the type of survival that is in store for human beings, the matter resists expeditious dismissal and returns, as it were, through the back door via the existential equation. As I said, human identity is constituted by, notably, one’s forebears – hence Snowman’s capacity to probe beyond the mask of selfhood when looking at the baby girl in her pram. To quote this passage once again:

I saw 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. (66)

It may very well be that the continuum comprising the living and the dead is preserved because human beings survive in their own children; Snowman would otherwise not be capable of perceiving the child’s ancestors framed in her own face. If it is so, then is the author’s view not somewhat limited: what is indeed the prospect of survival for those who remain childless or for families going extinct because of, say, a war? It has been noted in the previous chapter that, although ‘separateness of selves’ is a religion to which humankind in its near entirety adheres, it remains nonetheless a myth. The reality behind the deception is that on account of the “hidden determined forces,” all human beings – even old women who are not related for instance – grow to resemble one another, until they are grouped in a common pool where the individuality they cherish is reduced to nothingness. Still, if they cling so dearly to their old identities it is presumably because they cannot even imagine the benefit of having identities which interpenetrate. This bonus is that, when someone dies, even if this person has no children and relatives, the continuum between the living and the deceased one remains and in a way this person survives.

Indirectly, this brings us back to Rosemary whose condition arouses the concern of a snowman who had hitherto never felt much sympathy for her and others of her kind. Appalled by her darkness and loneliness, he says: “I do not understand. Why is not everyone weeping?” (91). Inconspicuous as it may seem, this statement links Rosemary to Balder the Beautiful who, as we know, could not be restored to life because one being refused to shed a tear over him. In Snowman’s world, creatures such as the Hag of Ironwood are quite commonplace and tragic events are often reduced to mere “disappointments” since tears must never be allowed to become the “emissaries of death.” This proves especially true for Rosemary in the sense that those who witnessed the accident refuse to feel saddened by an insignificant schoolgirl’s death. Even her parents banish their grief by cheating themselves into believing that their daughter is still alive and goes to school each day. Similarly, perhaps because his ration of grief is limited too, Snowman soon distances himself from the tragic events he has observed:

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? (100)

It is certainly no coincidence that Snowman’s becoming aware of the heaviness upon his shoulders directly follows his refusal to “mourn the death of creatures on earth.” Surely, this can be read as a hint that mourning and (therefore) remembering all the “blurred creatures” (100) is everyone’s burden, no matter if you are only a snowman. As Snowman is more and more quickly “growing thin” and “sinking into the earth” (101), he senses that the burden has to be transmitted to a new porter because “it is the responsibility of the living to harbour [the burden of memory] within themselves.”[[109]](#footnote-109) But in effect, he is at loss to find whom it should be delivered to and, knowing that being remembered is his only hope for survival, this proves to be a source of unspeakable anguish for the agonizing snowman. It is possible that Snowman is allowed to keep his burden yet a little longer (until he really dies) so as to transmit it to the next snowman, or perhaps he never succeeds at all. Thus, Snowman but also Rosemary are likely to be blotted out of people’s memories and Mark is likely to remain uncared for because most people (the true inheritors of the Hag of Ironwood) are unwilling to endanger their sense of integrity in order to carry a portion of the other, the dead and the living alike. As long as “the dead [have] no share in the living” (57), the continuum is disrupted and survival (in memory) compromised, but of course it is also important to accept the other while s/he is alive. If being carried ceased to be the prerogative of those who are brought to their graves, Mark would definitely be happier, and perhaps we would all be.

It is only appropriate to conclude a chapter dedicated to circularity by returning to the beginning of the discussion with a few words on the title: “the endless circular limits of life” (88). The phrase of course is oxymoronic since two of the terms it comprises – *endless* and *limits* – are perfect opposites. Besides, when caught in cyclical movements, beginning and end become indistinguishable so that “the limits of life” cannot possibly exist. Interestingly, when those limits have dissolved, what remains is ‘the endless life’, the unbroken continuum of Frame’s utopian world.

**Conclusion**

While working on this dissertation, it has often been the case that I could not help thinking of the novella as a vast labyrinth, or rather, a spiderweb of ideas which it was my task to explore. If spiderwebs are works of art in constant reshaping, then – inasmuch as some of its themes and images keep being invested with extra layers of significance – so is the novella. The pattern that emerges from the criss-crossing of all these interrelated themes and images is one in which the “dark still centre” (71) remains elusive because what lies on this “untouched, undescribed almost unknown plain” is only hinted at by the author with “a wing movement, so to speak, a cry, a shadow.”[[110]](#footnote-110) Concretely, this means that neither the double focus, nor the points of anchorage nor – *pace* Dell Panny– the allegorical component, nor indeed anything else can be regarded as *the* key granting a full access to the story. It is therefore perfectly fitting to compare a spiderweb shaped around a void with a piece of art that contains no central truth lest it should crystallize into a partial vision of the world. For the same reasons, it is also clear that this study could have been organized in an utterly different manner: e.g. with the notion of simplicity – of man, of snow and of static living – as a federating theme.

The least which can be said is that all intimations of simplicity are misleading, so much so that one may have the impression that the bewitching process which transforms all that is insubstantial into steel and stone has contaminated the notion of simplicity, turning it into its contrary. Wrapped in a never-ending shroud of snow, the world is e.g. reduced to such a terrible simplicity that people are blinded if they gaze upon it. The simplicity that is laid bare by the snow is of course death, but it is also important to remember that for Frame the losses conceal some unheard-of wonders or rainbows and thus that, beneath the snow, life is awaiting its rebirth. The image of snow is in itself multi-faceted: as a safeguard against death, it opposes e.g. ‘the green poison’ to which both Snowman and Balder succumb. However, if Snowman survives his own death by forcibly taking his mentor’s place, Balder’s only chance of being restored is spoiled by the one creature who refuses to weep for him. By this token, the god’s ordeal resembles that suffered by Rosemary whose first night of rain is the loneliest ever. Indeed, despite the fact that it is the burden of the living to remember the dead, no one is willing to carry her in their memories: nobody, not even her parents, is going to mourn her. Of course, the text suggests that each creature longs for the companionship of others and thus that the living should be carried as well. The self however is such a greedy creature that, when the commencement of others ‘threatens’ its own integrity, it is ruthlessly devoured. Each day “human beings suffer attacks from those who love them so much that they must write their love as insults upon the heart of the loved” (45). (Un-)fortunately, though, Cleanic or snow removes all traces of an overnight scar; it conceals the violence inherent in reality and the existential incompletion going hand in glove with the practice of cannibalism. Nevertheless, it is positive that some people should realize the extent to which they are isolated as well as incomplete and that to ease their loneliness they should try to come into contact with something other – either by shaping snowmen, dating university students, calling out for their mothers or by dreaming of conversations over thousands of miles in a foreign tongue. Time and again, the result falls short of their expectations either because they are denied access to any chorus of beings – whether this simply refers to a mother and her child or to a common pool comprising all the creatures on earth, even the dead ones – or because they cannot bring themselves to ‘give in’ and renounce a tiny particle of their power. In this case, they cannot quite bring themselves to ‘forget the sound of themselves’ and cease insisting on their individuality which would be a condition sine qua non for truly accepting others. It is the frustration aroused by this failure that prompts them sometimes to batter snowmen, become alcoholic, write racist insults, or shatter telephone boxes. Strangely enough, hatred and racism seem to be the side effects of an unfulfilled potential for love and care: in some cases, violence is a distorted form of love.

In the case of Harry and the youth who wrenched the telephone box from its stand, language in its current configuration constitutes a major obstacle to happiness. Not only do human languages render communication between people of different countries or backgrounds difficult but they are also terribly efficient weapons of personification, chiefly convenient for giving abstractions a tangible shape the better to seize and destroy them – that is to pretend that time e.g. can be controlled and that death can be ignored. What is more, they also simplify the task which consists in distancing oneself from the victims of tragedies by allowing for a quick identification but also that of ensuring that those who wear a mark of Cain remain where they supposedly belong: i.e., not with ‘normal’ people. Instead of uniting, languages separate; they are amongst those claws and stings children equip themselves or their selves with as they grow up. As for identity as we or institutions usually define it, it is also part of the armour Snowman has, in his existential equation, identified as a major attribute of women and men. But aside from cloth (the armour), human beings are also made of coal, brass and wood – man is simplicity, Snowman never dreamed. This intimation of simplicity yields (if it is decoded) a vista of humankind which opposes the somewhat reductive view that, in the novella, “man is shown, in his ‘simplicity’, to depend on material goods.”[[111]](#footnote-111) Besides, if brass – a surface upon which tokens of love are written as insults – indeed corresponds to the heart, indirectly this implies that love is inscribed in the equation. Thus human beings (Dorothy for instance) would be potentially capable of accommodating or carrying the love of others (of Mark) if only the self was not that efficiently protected against such ‘contamination’ by Cleanic and other means of erasure. In their simplicity, human beings also have a filiation with the creatures of their own kind that extends well beyond the frontiers of death. Of course, those who have crossed this frontier will only be carried on condition that the living acknowledge them, which in turn is solely possible if the living cease denying their own mortality. Making room for death in one’s self-definition is in other words of the highest importance – hence the inclusion of one’s own death, via the coal or wood (fire), in the existential equation.

Weighed down by the armour of human identity and by the human focus which he adopts when he conquers the earth, Snowman is unable to fully wake from the illusion that ‘it is only people and birds who change and die’ (see 86). Not that he really minds since he finds “the ease, the simplicity of static living” (33) enthralling; as yet, he does not realize that he resembles all those people who possess great gifts of sight and hearing enabling them to perceive the world in its entirety (via imagination for instance) and a potential for love and union (the heart and the coal) but remain obstinately seated in wheelchairs of their own making. In the last analysis, however, Snowman’s static life proves to be excruciatingly demanding so that it appears once more that the notion of simplicity has been turned into its contrary. Clearly, one can travel beyond the known and grow “thin with the perplexities of being” (101) without moving at all. As a Perpetual Snowflake, Snowman nonetheless feels nostalgic for the time when he could freely dance in the air and wishes he had dived in the sea instead of flowing down to earth, for the sea is a place where no conquest or defeat can occur and where he would not be endangered by the coming of the next year’s old-fashioned snowman. He knows that the only way to counter a snowman endowed with a human armour is to use even more violence, subject the development of the scene to such extreme overexposure that people or the snowman’s landscape may not re-emerge “in conventional form with death as a recognizable creature” (81).

If the text is so concerned with violence as a formal strategy for altering people’s focus, it is clearly because it is a means, perhaps the only one, of breaching the armour of the self with its specially fitted claws and stings. We have seen that these claws and stings are weapons aimed at protecting people’s vision of the world and of identity by seizing and destroying all that fails to fit in: the handicapped, the dead, inconvenient abstractions, etc. In fact, the terrible loneliness of humankind is a corollary of people’s tendency to cut themselves off from any chorus of beings but also of their ruthless blotting out of entire aspects of human existence. The solution to ease their loneliness consists in doing violence to their habitual recognitions (which exclude) so that they may discover the world anew, with its wonders and its losses, and redefine their identities away from strategies of exclusion. However, even if coming into contact with something other than oneself is a condition for finding a sense of completion and even if some dream of this encounter, accepting to jeopardize one’s integrity is too much to ask for many and often loneliness and unhappiness are found to be preferable. As a result, any attempts to alter human habits of perception are bound to be met with incredible antagonism. Still, if in the novella all kinds of formal strategies are developed to wound recognitions, this perhaps points to the fact that it is the role of art to take this risk, the danger being perhaps that works of art which strive to present a failed view of the familiar may suffer “the humiliation of most projects that fail – projects of light, conscience, time, discovery – [and be] burned quickly on the fire […] because it might take too much time and energy to prove that they are successes” (79).

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2. Patrick Evans, *Janet Frame* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1977), 118. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Evans, *Janet Frame*, 120. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Judith Dell Panny, *I Have What I Gave: The Fiction of Janet Frame*. 1992 (Wellington: Daphne Brasell Associates, 2002), 57. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Marc Delrez, *Manifold Utopia. The Novels of Janet Frame* (Amsterdam – New York: Rodopi, 2002), 127. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Delrez, *Manifold Utopia*, 130. Quote from Janet Frame, “Snowman, Snowman” (in *You Are Now Entering the Human Heart*), 38. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Marc Delrez,“The Unbearable Burden of Being: Janet Frame’s ‘Snowman, Snowman’”, *Commonwealth Essays and Studies*, 17 (1994), 91. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Evans, *Janet Frame*, 113. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Delrez, *Manifold Utopia*, 131. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Janet Frame, “Snowman, Snowman” in *You Are Now Entering the Human Heart*. 1983 (London: The Women’s Press, 1984), 92. Further page references are in the main text. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. I.e. some more snow. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Delrez, *Manifold Utopia*, 128. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Gina Mercer, “*The Edge of the Alphabet*. Journey: Destination Death”, *Australian and New Zealand studies in Canada,* 5 (1991), 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Dell Panny, *I Have What I Gave*, 154. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Dell Panny, *I Have What I Gave*, 57. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Dell Panny, *I Have What I Gave*, 58. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. The poem comes from *The Seaside and the Fireside* (1850) and can be found on D.L. Ashlima’s website, *Norse Ballads of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow* in: pitt.edu (University of Pittsburg)

    http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/longfellow.html.

    As an endnote to the poem, 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.” [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Donald A. Mackenzie, *Teutonic Myths and Legends* (1912), in L.C.Geerts (Revised 5 May, 2005), *Earth’s Ancient History* in: earth-history.com.

    http://www.earth-history.com/Europe/Teutonic/chap15.htm [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Mackenzie, *Teutonic Myths and Legends*. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Mackenzie, *Teutonic Myths and Legends*. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Of course Holder never meant to kill his brother, he was simply tricked by Loki. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. The remainder of the story is not in Longfellow’s poem but some elements indicate that the author was well-versed in Norse mythology. For example, Mercer points out that Thora’s name in *The Edge of the Alphabet* is “the feminine form of the name of the Old Norse God, Thor” (Mercer, “Journey: Destination Death”, 49). Besides, that Frame speaks in the novella of “haunting tales of the Northern Gods” in the plural perhaps suggests that she knew a number of Scandinavian stories. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Mackenzie, *Teutonic Myths and Legends*. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Dell Panny, *I Have What I Gave*, 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. See Edith Hamilton, *La mythologie* (Alleur: Marabout, 1997), 404 – 405. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Extract from Matthew Arnold, *Balder Dead* in: Tinker, C.B. and Lowry H.F. (ed.), *The Poetical Works of Matthew Arnold*. 1950 (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 127 (vv. 487- 489). [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Hamilton, *La mythologie*, 405. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Eve Scopes, “Re-visioning Daughter Buffalo”, *Journal of New-Zealand Literature 11* (1993), 145. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Scopes, “Re-visioning Daughter Buffalo”, 145. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Delrez, *Manifold Utopia*, XXXI. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Delrez, *Manifold Utopia*, 215. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Delrez, *Manifold Utopia*, XXX. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Janet Frame, *Living in the Maniototo. 1979 (London: The Woman’s Press, 1996)*, 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. This does not imply that the two perspectives are always distinguishable from one another, quite the contrary. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Incidentally, when Rosemary dies, some witnesses notice that her blood has “a funny *green* colour” on the snow (71, emphasis mine). [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Jeanne Delbaere-Garant, “Beyond the Word: *Scented Gardens for the Blind*”, in Delbaere-Garant, Jeanne (ed.), *The Ring of Fire: Essays on Janet Frame* (Mundelstrup and Sydney: Dangaroo, 1992), 98. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. This is conveyed in the question he asks to Snowman: “Would you rather have an image of yourself as a black stone (it might even be marble!) or as white nothingness?” (79). This is a question which the Perpetual Snowflake eludes by digressing towards another topic. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. I.e.: people, creatures, objects and perhaps also snowmen if snowmen are “steel and stone.” [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. W.D. Ashcroft, “Beyond the Alphabet: *Owls Do Cry*”, in Delbaere-Garant, Jeanne (ed.), *The Ring of Fire: Essays on Janet Frame* (Mundelstrup and Sydney: Dangaroo, 1992), 63. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Ashcroft, “Beyond the Alphabet”, 64. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Delrez,“The Unbearable Burden of Being”, 91. Quote from “Snowman, Snowman”, 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Delrez, *“*The Unbearable Burden of Being”, 91 [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Dell Panny, *I Have What I Gave*, 60. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. It is Rosemary who is identified as Snowman’s creator, and repeatedly so (e.g.: page 30, 31, 32, 48 and 92). [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Dell Panny, *I Have What I Gave*, 59. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. In “Departures and Returns”,Janet Frame reports that she was told by “a friend who also writes” (91) that “you can travel to foreign lands without moving from your own backyard” (91). Even though this is not explicitly mentioned, what the “friend who also writes” probably means by this is that reading books allows one to travel (via the imagination) without moving at all. Frame however senses that not all writing allows such travelling, certainly not the kind of travel literature (best-sellers) which only ends up “reinforcing prejudices and differences between cultures” (87). But for the few who are willing to read true travel literature, she goes on, there is indeed no need to ever go “further than your own backyard” (91), for exploring “the unfamiliar view” is tantamount to visiting “another country and another culture” (86). See Janet Frame, “*Departures and Returns*”,in Guy Amirthanayagam (ed.), *Writers in East-West Encounters: New Cultural Bearings* (London and Basingstoke: The MacMillan Press, 1982), pp. 85 – 94. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Delrez, “The Unbearable Burden of Being”, 92. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. The main character of Janet Frame’s *The Rainbirds*. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Dark is indeed associated with insecurity: there is “death by accident or intention in the dark” (59). [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Marc Delrez,“Aesthetic and Political Violence in the Work of Janet Frame”, unpublished manuscript (21 pages), 16-17. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Delrez,“Aesthetic and Political Violence”, 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Delrez,“Aesthetic and Political Violence”, 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. She “made him exactly her own size, to fit, eye level with eye, mouth with mouth and heart with heart” (45). [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. It is possible that Rosemary resorts to making snowmen on account of the fact that her father is so engulfed in his obsession (or his own loneliness) that he neglects her. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Howard McNaughton, “Abjection, Melancholy, and the End Note: the Epilogue to *Owls Do Cry*”, *Journal of New Zealand Literature 11* (1993), 94. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. This shall be tackled in the next chapter. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Mackenzie, *Teutonic Myths and Legends*. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Delrez,“The Unbearable Burden of Being”, 90. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Sixteen are named and more than forty are described, excluding the passers-by who make comments on Snowman, and groups (like the council flat children) whose numbers are hard to determine. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. John Beston, “The Effect of Alienation on the Themes and Characters of Patrick White and Janet Frame”, in Massa, Daniel (ed.), *Individual and Community in Commonwealth Literature* (Msida: University of Malta, 1979), 132. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Delbaere-Garant, “Death as the Gateway to Being”, 147. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Mauve is a shade of violet and, in *A Dictionary of Literary Symbols* (p. 223-224), it is associated with mourning, but also with love and death. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. According to the Perpetual Snowflake she is indeed very thin (see 42). [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Delbaere-Garant, “Death as the Gateway to Being”, 149. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Delbaere-Garant, “Death as the Gateway to Being”, 149. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. If any act of erasure is indeed an act of violence, the concealment of the world by snow is of course also a form of violence. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Delrez,“Aesthetic and Political Violence”, 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. See: Delbaere-Garant, “Death as the Gateway to Being”, 149. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Delbaere-Garant, *The Ring of Fire: Essays on Janet Frame* (Mundelstrup and Sydney: Dangaroo, 1992), 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Bruce King, “*The Adaptable Man*”, in Delbaere-Garant, Jeanne (ed.), *The Ring of Fire: Essays on Janet Frame* (Mundelstrup and Sydney: Dangaroo, 1992), 115. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Delrez, *Manifold Utopia*, 129. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Delrez, *Manifold Utopia*, 136. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Delbaere-Garant, *The Ring of Fire*, 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Page 92. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Page 84. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Delbaere-Garant, “Death as the Gateway to Being”, 147. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Delbaere-Garant, “Death as the Gateway to Being”, 147. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Anna Rutherford, “Janet Frame’s Divided and Distinguished Worlds”, in Delbaere-Garant, Jeanne (ed.), *The Ring of Fire: Essays on Janet Frame* (Mundelstrup and Sydney: Dangaroo, 1992), 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. This phrase comes from *Heart of Darkness* and is employed by Rutherford in connection to Janet Frame in “Janet Frame’s Divided and Distinguished Worlds”, 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Evans, *Janet Frame*, 115. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Evans, *Janet Frame*, 115. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. Evans, *Janet Frame*, 115. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Delrez, *Manifold Utopia*, 221. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. In this case, the disruption of language is both an instance of destruction and one of reconstruction. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. Evans, *Janet Frame*, 115. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. The same of course also applies to people, cats, birds, etc. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. Dell Panny, *I Have What I Gave*, 55. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. Delrez, *Manifold Utopia*, 127. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. Evans, *Janet Frame*, 115. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. Dell Panny, *I Have What I Gave*, 60. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. Delrez, “The Unbearable Burden of Being”, 95. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. Dell Panny, *I Have What I Gave*, 59. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. Delrez, *Manifold Utopia*, 134. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. Delrez, *Manifold Utopia*, 134. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. That is, if we exclude the first page of the novella since the small section in which the litany is included is told *after* the events. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. To put this in mathematical terms:

    snow + man = snow + coal + brass + cloth + wood

    man = snow – snow + coal + brass + cloth + wood

    man = coal + brass + cloth + wood [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. In *Living in the Maniototo*, the children of Blenheim are said to be “restless, with a sense of loss, as if they had truly been children of the native forest which, like a father, had abandoned them by dying” (21). [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. Delrez, *Manifold Utopia*, 133. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. Dell Panny, *I Have What I Gave*, 62. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. Dell Panny, *I Have What I Gave*, 62. Quote from “Snowman, Snowman”, 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. Delrez, *Manifold Utopia*, 132. Quote from “Snowman, Snowman”, 97. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. Janet Frame, *The Adaptable Man.* 1965 (New York: George Braziller, 2000),72. [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. Jeanne Delbaere-Garant, “The Divided Worlds of Emily Brontë, Virginia Woolf and Janet Frame”, *English Studies*, 60 (1979), 710. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. The last three paragraphs, from the middle of p. 102 to p. 103. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. Snowman’s winter e.g. surprises the Londoners who “never knew it to snow for so long” (74), especially since the “last winter was mild as mild” (68). [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. It must be noted that this discussion is not concerned with spiritual immortality or afterlife. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. See Delbaere-Garant, *The Ring of Fire*, 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. Delrez, *Manifold Utopia*, 132. [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. Delrez,“The Unbearable Burden of Being”, 98. [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. Janet Frame, *Living in the Maniototo*, 43. [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. Dell Panny, *I Have What I Gave*, 62. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)