

Patrick West

**Is Near To . . . and is . . . Distant From: Exegetical Manoeuvres in Janet Frame's *The Carpathians***

Abstract:

This paper argues that Janet Frame's 1988 novel, *The Carpathians*, can be read as a series of manoeuvres operating at the frontiers of exegesis and fiction. The overall effect of these manoeuvres is to interrogate the conditions of an exegetical (or literary critical) engagement with Frame's writings. In particular, *The Carpathians* drills down into the metaphors of one of the key notions of literary criticism: critical distance. Critical distance is a catch phrase of exegesis, as well as of literary criticism, because it serves to appropriately position the exegete (like the literary critic) as both near to and distant from the object of study: the literary text. However, Frame's fictional/Scientific concept of the Gravity Star deconstructs the metaphors of distance and, by extension, critical distance itself, by suggesting a para-doxical relationship of propinquity and remoteness. The Gravity Star is 'both relatively close and seven billion light years away.' Thus, Frame introduces chaos into language and logic, with the dual effect of undermining exegetical activity (which depends on the metaphors linked to critical distance) and of creatively multiplying the meanings of *The Carpathians*. In this way, Frame's novel replaces conventional exegesis with creative exegesis. My paper also looks at the games Frame plays, in this novel and in *Towards Another Summer* (2007), with Roland Barthes's notion of the 'death of the Author.' Like critical distance, the Author is a prop for exegesis that certain manoeuvres of writing can undermine, thus allowing the literary text to reproduce itself on an interior plane.

Keywords:

Exegesis – Author – Frame – Creative – Distance

Biographical note:

Patrick West is Senior Lecturer in Writing in the School of Arts at Griffith University. He has a PhD from The University of Melbourne, a Master of Arts (Writing) from Edith Cowan University, and a Graduate Certificate in Higher Education from Griffith University. Patrick's writing research interests span the fictional, creative nonfictional, journalistic and essay genres. His short story, 'Nhill', is published in *The Best Australian Stories 2006* and also in a recent issue of *Antipodes*. In May 2007, he co-edited the 'Adapt' issue of *M/C Journal* with Jeannette Delamoir (<http://journal.media-culture.org.au/0705/>). Patrick is also the reviews editor for *TEXT*.

To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing. Such a conception suits criticism very well.  
... (Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author')

Janet Frame's last novel, *The Carpathians*, was first published in 1988. This fact is worth noticing, as an introduction to my paper, because one of the most important points to be developed on the following pages is that the (anti-)exegetical manoeuvres contained within *The Carpathians* need to be contextualised by the timeline both of Frame's writing outputs and of the critical and popular reception and reproductions of that output – and indeed of Janet Frame herself as literary icon. It also requires noting upfront that for my purposes the term exegesis refers to a wide range of non-fictional academic, (auto-)biographical and/or scholarly activity that seeks to frame the novels and/or short stories and/or poetry of the New Zealand writer Janet Frame.

Under certain circumstances, a certain sort of writer will want to write (or, equally possibly, want to avoid writing) a certain sort of exegesis. This hypothesis grows in explanatory power in Frame's case, I suggest, as one traces the progress of her career during her lifetime, the iconic status Frame came to enjoy (or perhaps more to the point, endure) nationally and internationally over her final years, and the exponential development, since her death in January 2004, of the growth industry of academic Frame studies (which this paper fuels). Pamela Gordon notes that, 'at the end, letters reached her that were simply addressed to "Janet Frame, New Zealand"' (Gordon 2006: 20). The comma here is almost an equals sign, as if Frame *were* literary NZ.

How is a writer to deal with such external pressures upon themselves and their work? Janet Frame's supposed retreat into shyness speaks to this question psychologically, but the argument I want to prosecute in this paper is that *The Carpathians* should *not* be seen as a bulwark – a sort of circling of the wagons around the self – protecting the introvert Author from the interrogations of critics and the general public.

I submit that Frame understood all too well what Roland Barthes meant by the 'death of the Author...'. For her, on the evidence of her various writings, the Author was always already dead – never anything more than a highly convenient fiction – and Frame consistently divorced the life from the literature. The problem lies with those examples of critical regard for Frame that have kept alive, and fed off, the Barthesian myth of Authorship, in order to anchor the activities of exegesis. As Barthes explains, 'the [discovery of the] Author (or its hypostases: society, history, psyche, liberty [we might add, for reasons that will become apparent, Science])' becomes the 'task' of criticism (Barthes 1967: 1469). And once found, 'the text is "explained"' (Barthes 1967: 1469). 'Victory to the critic' (Barthes 1967: 1469). While much has been written on, around and against Barthes' theory, its implications for the study of Janet Frame, as a duplicitous framer of the Author's death, have not yet been teased out.

Penelope Ingram calls *The Carpathians* 'a magical-realist, apocalyptic novel that, with its multilayered frame and unreliable "imposter" narratives, actively resists summary' (Ingram 1999: 94). This comment (with its key word, 'actively') in itself

emphasises the anti-exegetical agency at work in Frame's novel. Subjecting the text to yet more exegesis, my own summary of the novel's storyline runs as follows: *The Carpathians* is set in the present, and actually date-stamped '1987' on page 196, although time soon stretches away from the present tense towards both the past and the future, which is typical for a Frame fiction. Frame's protagonist in this novel, Mattina Brecon, is a hugely wealthy New Yorker – with both writerly connections and pretensions – who travels the world collecting information about native populations to augment the stock of her own cultural capital. Her character combines a benevolent colonial streak with amateur anthropological tendencies.

Mattina's latest trip finds her in small-town New Zealand, a destination she has chosen on the strength of the legend of the Memory Flower, which the local tourism board has resurrected to drum up business. The Memory Flower denotes both an actual site (a sculpture in the orchards just outside the town of Puamahara) and also the narrative of the indigenous culture's version of time: through the lived experience of the land, the Memory Flower allows one to '[taste] the yesterday within the tomorrow' (Frame 1989: 11).

Mattina's sojourn in New Zealand culminates with what is, to those directly experiencing it at least, an inexplicable disaster, centred on the street where she has been renting a house. Each of her neighbours goes missing, almost without trace, and at the same time and place, all the world's languages are destroyed in a holocaust of words. In a novel so much about narratives inside of narratives, and about the losses associated with not possessing language – Mattina's husband, Jake Brecon, is a sad-sack writer with a life-long case of writer's block – it is not surprising that the key event of *The Carpathians* is this destruction of the means of its own construction: words. 'As if,' Frame writes 'they desired their own oblivion' (Frame 1989: 125).

In the aftermath of the disappearance of her neighbours, and the disaster of language associated with it, Mattina goes home to New York – back to her immense wealth and privilege – but she cannot leave behind the memory of her time in New Zealand and her dying wish (she has been ill with cancer all along) is for her husband to visit the sites that she visited. The final few chapters of *The Carpathians* are a melancholy depiction of Jake's trip. The very last paragraph of the novel unsettles linguistic performance yet again, however, as it conclusively reveals that Mattina's son, John Henry Brecon (whose initials sign the Note at the beginning of the novel: J. H. B.), has written all that has come to date. John Henry has been writing, we discover, in the voice of his mother: Mattina. In his narrative, furthermore, he figures himself as an adult even though (as he writes) 'my mother and father ... died when I was seven years old, and so I did not know them' (Frame 1989: 196).

Such a Barthesian conclusion to Frame's novel, problematising notions of authorship, initiates my reading of *The Carpathians* in connection with Frame's attempts to preserve a space, not for the obstinate flourishing of the stereotype of the genius Author, but for what she describes in her own words, in the 'Beginnings' essay of 1965, as "'that" world'; 'that world' being the wellspring of imagination and of words (Frame 1965: 45). I suggest that Frame is not so much protective of her personal reputation (of her Authorial authority), or even anxious to ward off so-called

misinterpretations of her work, as she is concerned for what might be called the welfare of words. By which I mean their ability to shake free of doxa, of banal commonsense, and to suggest alterity, difference, otherness. The apocalyptic streak in Frame's fiction largely derives from her favoured technique of creating explosions of meaning at (to borrow from the title of her 1962 novel) 'the edge of the alphabet.' These explosions of meaning assail literary, cultural and identity orthodoxies.

In *Wrestling with the Angel: A Life of Janet Frame*, Michael King details Frame's antipathy, which sometimes bordered on downright hostility, to exegesis: 'She [feared] "fury or perplexity or a sense of disbelief" if she actually read [these academic studies],' observing that she felt, in any given case, her "'own book lying as a shrivelled skin beside the newly-sprung essay'" (King 2000: 510). (Studies that linked Frame's fiction to inevitably stereotyped versions of her experiences in psychiatric hospitals especially tested her patience.) One particular gem from the 'Beginnings' essay expresses in more subtle form Frame's distaste for exegesis: 'It is for the critics and psychologists to remind and explain the sad truth that the urge to write is not correlated with literary talent' (Frame 1965: 47). Their own example, Frame seems to be suggesting, 'reminds' one of this truth. Almost as if she were constitutionally averse to (exegetical) non-fiction, Frame wrote very little of it herself: a few essays, one or two multiply authored open letters, a smattering of reviews.

The exegetical manoeuvres of *The Carpathians* are, as I will show, part of a cleverly disguised strategy on Frame's part – as the literary trickster that her fictions so often reveal her as being – to suggest a seductive model of the exegesis that only then reveals its own discreet explosive in the form of a total destruction of meaning and language: a rebirth of words, that is, rather than their (inevitably reductive) critical interpretation. For the potential exegete (naïve to the extent that the full meaning of any text will always remain ungraspable) *The Carpathians* both entices and ensnares.

Frame's anti-exegetical impulse also connects with Marc Delrez's suggestion that:

the distinctive quality of [Frame's] fiction derives notably from her determination to use language as a vehicle of (un)consciousness, permeable to whatever may lie on the other side of accepted knowledge – of the cultural consensus. (Delrez 2002: xv)

Frame's talent, as we will see, is to repel the exegetical approach and, simultaneously, to proliferate meaning at the heart of her own novel's textuality: the end product of this approach might therefore be labelled the interior exegesis, or even the creative exegesis. While exegesis, as Frame seems to see it, drags fiction within range of doxa, fiction itself has the capacity to engineer (by means of the interior exegesis) an advance of unconsciousness, of imagination, of creativity, that purges itself of doxa.

Delrez also comments that the 'deferral of limit' in Frame's fiction 'turns [it] into a moving target of which criticism, almost necessarily, falls short' (Delrez 2002: xvi). One of the aims of my paper is to nuance this statement of Delrez's, which is useful but not sufficiently particularised, against the backdrop of the mutations of Frame exegesis as these are expressed by the changing nature of the critical context itself and reflected in the variant exegetical manoeuvres of a range of texts that respond to this context (beside *The Carpathians*, I will look at an early novel-length output, *Towards Another Summer* – if space allowed, other texts/contextual could also be analysed).

I have already mentioned that Science is a hypostasis of the Author, on the view that Science possesses a similar cultural authority and objectivity for the explanation of a text. Pointedly, *The Carpathians* draws on the discourse of Science (with a capital 'S') in the production of its exegetical manoeuvres. Frame's (mis-)use of Science underpins her attempt to deconstruct and repel the very possibility of an exegesis of her work, because the form of Science that she appropriates erodes those attributes of authority and objectivity that Science has always paraded in the cultural sphere.

In this way, Frame subjects to extreme stress those notions of objectivity that are at least residual in exegetical activity. To turn Science against itself, can be seen as part of her attempt to ensnare the exegesis in its own attempts to maintain – in alliance with the notion of the Author – what literary critics call critical distance. We shall soon appreciate the damage Frame inflicts on this idea of (critical) distance through her deployment of the novelistic/Scientific concept of the Gravity Star. The proximate target of Frame's attack on objectivity is what objectivity subtends: critical distance.

Besides relating a very engaging narrative, Frame's writing in *The Carpathians* is in constant philosophical interplay with the concepts of the Gravity Star and the Memory Flower. If time is spatialised by the Memory Flower – as suggested by the phrase '[tasting] the yesterday within the tomorrow' – then this inversion of concepts is mirrored by Frame's novelistic engagements with that equally mysterious entity: the Gravity Star (Frame 1989: 11). The Gravity Star (a slightly more insistent presence than the Memory Flower in the novel) complements the Memory Flower's spatialisation of time with the unleashing of the chronologisation of space, meaning that it destroys quotidian perceptions of distance, of near and far (in fine, of spatiality, but necessarily also of chronology). The Gravity Star is near to ... *and is* ... distant from, which creates, as we shall see, a crisis for the concept of critical distance.

'Then Mattina told Jake of the Gravity Star. He'd heard of it, vaguely, he said – wasn't it a star that was at once close and distant? How could that be?' (Frame 1989: 166). The Note at the beginning of the novel, stated to be a passage from 'a Press Association Report,' answers Jake's question to Mattina in this manner (Frame 1989: 7):

'A survey of distances to galaxies has revealed something that at first seemed implausible: a galaxy that appears to be both relatively close and seven billion light years away ... the paradox is interpreted as being caused by the focusing of light from a distant quasar (starlike object) by the gravity of an intervening galaxy'. (Frame 1989: 7)

That Science is the provenance of the para-doxical Gravity Star is clear in the general tenor of this extract's language – with its neutral, third-person tone – and also through its own origin as a solidly non-fictional account of knowledge ('a Press Association Report') (Frame 1989: 7). The Gravity Star would appear to be Janet Frame's version of 'dark matter', as theorised in 1933 by the Swiss astronomer Fritz Zwicky. A newspaper article of May 2007, 'Halo With a Dark Secret,' reports that:

Using the advanced camera for surveys on board the Hubble space telescope, scientists created a map of dark matter by watching how light from remote stars was

bent by gravity as it passed a cluster of galaxies 5bn light years from Earth in the constellation of Pisces. (Sample 2007: 29)

Uncannily, Frame's novel (down to the near correlation of the notions of 'survey' and 'surveys') anticipates this discovery – twenty years on – in the empirical domain.

This scientific framing of the concept of the Gravity Star is significant. Frame uses Science, as observed above, to destabilise the methodology of exegesis (meaning the relative objectivity of language and its accompaniment: critical distance). If, as the Note that sets off *The Carpathians* indicates, the Gravity Star (product of 'objective' Science whose artificial language is mathematics) corrupts even the objectivity of mathematics, then what reserves of objectivity are left for the natural (everyday) language of exegetical literary criticism to draw upon? Frame uses Science and mathematics to attract all possible means for making meaning (reeling interpretation in, on a long line, from its furthest boundary in the 'objective' language of non-fictional Science) in order to expose the corruption of exegesis: that is, the language exegesis relies upon can no longer be considered objective. A sort of Science Criticism is thereby effected, as mathematics traverses natural language, and all objectivity or logic that words might possess is eliminated. It is exactly such a breakdown of language, along with the logical conceptualisations of the world such language supports, that Mattina's neighbours on Kowhai Street – moonstruck by the Gravity Star – experience on the catastrophic night when they all disappear, having 'absorbed and explored the principles of the Gravity Star' (Frame 1989: 131).

Such is the negative or reactionary aspect of Frame's novel. In almost the same gesture, though, *The Carpathians* causes a thousand meanings to bloom. This multiplication of meaning, also created by the Gravity Star, operates on the opposite flank of the novel from the conventional exegesis. Frame's interior exegesis abuts (in Delrez's terms) 'whatever may lie on the other side of accepted knowledge' (Delrez 2002: xv). It seeks not to capture the novel in the framework of a singular truth (as normal exegesis tries to do) but to expand the manifold range of its possible truths.

Nicholas Birns pinpoints this quality of the interior exegesis in the comment that 'under [the Gravity Star's] aura, everything still exists yet always can be something else' (Birns 1991: 22). The attribute of diverse immanence within Birns's formulation challenges exegesis to the extent that the latter holds a text hostage to a singular critical presupposition. The Gravity Star supports an alternative view of exegesis as the infinite addition of rhizomatic meaning: ... and is ... and is ... and is ...

The negative and positive effects of the Gravity Star (in alliance with the Memory Flower) on language and meaning – deconstructing conventional exegesis whilst also stimulating the growth of new meanings – operate within the force field of a generic engagement by Frame's novel with a form of literary Science Fiction:

It could not be possible that the bones of the world's written and spoken languages, at the onset of their destruction, had fallen first on Kowhai Street, Puamahara; that the residents of Kowhai Street, under the influence of the Gravity Star and the legend of the Memory Flower had each suffered a loss of all the words they had ever known, all the concepts that supported and charged the words, all the processes of thinking and feeling that once lived within the now shattered world of their words.

The people of Kowhai Street had experienced the disaster of unbeing, unknowing, that accompanies death and is thought by man to mark the beginning of a new kind of being and thought and language that, in life, is inconceivable, unknowable. The people of Kowhai Street, still alive, were now unintelligible creatures with all the spoken and written language of the world fallen as rain about them. The only judgement likely to be made about them, should their plight be discovered, was a diagnosis of mass hysteria or insanity. They were alive, yet on the other side of the barrier of knowing and being (Frame 1989: 129).

The content of this passage is the recognition that the Gravity Star breaks down the instruments of conventional meaning (words as we are used to using them) and inaugurates a new mode of meaning production – one easily confused with madness. Equally significant, however, is the form by which this content is transmitted. As Delrez suggests, Frame's text is an attempt to think the unthinkable, and this passage is crucial to such a project, for the insertion of one key phrase: 'It could not be possible' (Frame 1989: 129). Easy to gloss over, followed as it is by a lengthy and detailed description of that which is not possible, these five words suggest the extreme care with which Frame is attempting to adumbrate the unknown. To construct something as impossible, but by the very act of describing it to suggest its actual possibility, is a subtle act of interpretation (of interior exegesis) because it creates meaning (the possible) even as it avoids imposing interpretation (the impossible).

As this play with interpretation is taking place on one plane of *The Carpathians*, at another level a primary element of the known world – of the thinkable – is drifting across the sights of Frame's novel: that is, the exegetical concept of critical distance. Critical distance is a catchword of literary criticism, and thus of exegetical activity, which gives a sense of the critic's appropriately objective perspective (poised midway between closeness and aloofness) in relation to the object of enquiry: the literary text. Critical distance depends, however, upon a metaphor of distance that the Gravity Star pulverises by means of the forces of the unthinkable. Simultaneous nearness and farness is a paradox destructive of the doxa upon which conventional exegesis relies. By destabilising (critical) distance, *The Carpathians* starts to threaten doxic exegesis.

Frame's abstract, even abstruse, critique of the conditions of conventional exegesis – prosecuted in those passages that tarry with the implications of the Gravity Star – filters through the rest of her novel in the form of a more restrained undoing of various relatively mundane manifestations of exegetical activity. My first of two examples of this undoing engages Mattina's husband as he wallows in the depths of his writer's block. This passage isolates the act of exegesis, and throws a negative cast upon it. Jake is talking to Mattina, upon her return from New Zealand:

'I'm freelancing now, as always,' he said. 'And guest editing. I'm having a book of my literary essays published. And next year I'm assigned to the Presidential Campaign. I never was a fiction writer ... oh, I have written a few more short stories ... but I've confused being a lover, a student of fiction with having the talent for being a fiction writer. I've always felt myself to be a kind of imposter. Do you see what I mean? *An imposter.*' (Frame 1989: 161)

This is Jake as derisory exegete. The nonfictional writing roles presented (freelance journalism, guest editing, essayist) are all constructed as inferior to fiction writing, and Frame ends by neatly distinguishing literary creation from ‘imposter’ studentship. (This element of the novel is extended in the next chapter. Jake’s son tells him, ‘I didn’t know it was you who wrote all those essays for *The Times* and the *Coast Monthly* – we had to *study* them at school; you, the great American critic!’ [Frame 1989: 168])

In my second example of undoing of quotidian exegesis in *The Carpathians*, Jake’s self-criticism is turned outwards. Arriving in Puamahara, he encounters Albion Cook, real estate agent; initial impressions are far from favourable. Exegesis is critiqued here at the micrological level of conversation:

Jake felt that Albion Cook had a large supply of useless, sparkless words that he was determined to use. Where he might have used a crisp yes or no, he enlarged them into sentences that merely parcelled the yes and no for delivery by his easygoing voice; but after the unwrapping of the delivered words, only yes or no remained. (Frame 1989: 180)

Albion’s commentary on language (or more precisely a language of commentary) is like a poor form of criticism or exegesis in that it ‘merely parcels’ and is less than the sum of its parts – ‘only yes or no remained’ (Frame 1989: 180).

*The Carpathians* thus deflects exegesis, through the exegetical manoeuvres enabled by the Gravity Star, in order to clear the way for the production by the interior exegesis of multiplying meaning (a continual addition of interpretation). But what is it in the exegetical context of this novel of 1988 that requires such intensive deflection?

*The Carpathians* (to which, as Janet Wilson has informed me, Frame wanted to give the title *Housekeepers of Ancient Springtime*, until her publisher convinced her that shorter equals better) was first published immediately after initial publication of Frame’s autobiographical trilogy (*To the Is-Land* in 1982, *An Angel at My Table* and *The Envoy from Mirror City* in 1984). And the Jane Campion-directed film version of Frame’s autobiography, *An Angel at My Table*, which was released in 1990, was in pre-production during the late 1980s. *The Carpathians* nestles, therefore, in a thicket of exegesis (even if Campion’s film does not count per se as exegesis, it inevitably provoked a wave of third-party exegesis).

It is not my intention to conclude this paper, however, with the suggestion that *The Carpathians* is simply a variety of defence (even less a variety of defensiveness) directed against a mode of exegesis (predominantly the autobiography and the critical attention generated by the film) that exposed too much of Janet Frame as capital ‘A’ Author. Evidently, Frame knew very well herself that the Author was always already dead (that is to say, she was hardly cajoled into publishing an overly revealing autobiography). So, rather than playing the game of Authorship on the terms of her critics, by reacting against their (false) revelations of her self, Frame strategically inhabits the figure of the Author (or, better, the desire for the Author to be alive) in order to more effectively disable exegesis, with the ultimate intention of liberating meaning production via what I have been calling the interior or creative exegesis. I want to conclude, then, by exploring how such a notion of anti-exegetical activity –

spreading across Frame's entire corpus – encourages attention to the other, different strategies (appropriate for disabling exegesis) contained within another Frame text.

Frame's entire career presents, from this perspective, as a form of negotiation with those mechanisms of singular meaning creation (in short, exegesis), for which the figure of the Author is a necessary prop. The actual death of Janet Frame in 2004 has only served to underscore, with considerable irony, how completely 'Janet Frame' is always already alive as capital 'A' Author. The recent appointment of Andrew Wylie (New York-based agent for literary icons like Norman Mailer and Salman Rushdie) to sell Janet Frame internationally, combined with the release of two posthumous volumes (a poetry collection, *The Goose Bath*, and the so-called novel *Towards Another Summer*), has ensured that Frame's life beyond death, as an Author, lives on.

*Towards Another Summer* is an example of this strategic inhabitation of the Author, which predates *The Carpathians* by a quarter of a century. Frame wrote this piece of prose in 1963, but it was only released in 2007 because, according to the back-cover blurb, 'It's a highly personal work that she did not want published until after her death.' What a reading of this book sheds light on, however, is not so much the personality of the Author, as another permutation of Frame's anti-exegetical activity that, particularly by contrast with the context of Frame's growing fame today – never more alive now that she's dead – shows up the continuity in her career of a simultaneously negative and positive engagement with the problematics of exegesis.

That is, how like Frame (whose fictions constantly engage death) to write a collection of words designed to be read only after her own death (the moment of which no writer can know) not because they reveal too much of life (who cares what people know of a dead Author?) but because they speak so well to how words are always already implicated with death, in the sense that each one of them is part of writing's epitaph.

Thus far, I have kept referring to *Towards Another Summer* as a book; the question of its disputed genre is the foundational moment for this section of my discussion. In the 'Beginnings' essay, Frame calls it 'a novel-length autobiographical essay' (Frame 1965: 47). Reflect on the strangeness of this: the novel as a mere indicator of length, followed by the additional modifier 'autobiographical', ending, finally, with the noun (itself far from unproblematic as a genre) 'essay'. Everywhere in the publicity this book is called a novel, presumably on the basis that novels sell better than books identified by the exegesis-baffling description 'novel-length autobiographical essay'.

From a very early period in her career, therefore, we can identify Janet Frame's sly perversion of the autobiography genre, which she here apportions into categories of essay and novel (or, at least, the category of the word length that makes up a novel). This deflection of exegesis, in the form of an intricate quibble over genre description, is repeated, with a degree of similarity to *The Carpathians*, in the text's interior.

The character of Grace Cleave, a novelist on a torturous weekend sabbatical from her writing, battles to safeguard her identity as she spends time with Philip Thirkettle, journalist and friend manqué, and his young family. Painful and pained in company, Grace longs to escape from society, perhaps even from life, into the world of words; the 'other summer' referenced in the title is itself contained in a poetic epigraph by Charles Brasch, and Grace feels herself becoming a migratory bird like the godwits

(God-wit equals Author-humour?) also described in Brasch's poem, 'The Islands'. (There is an obvious connection between this title and Frame's later *To the Is-Land*.)

As one would expect from a Frame text, the plot is not done justice by this brief summary, but what is most striking about this book, for my purposes, is how the anti-exegetical activity of the later novel, *The Carpathians*, is transmuted into a meditation on the actual fiction-writing self. It is as if the Gravity Star, destroying critical distance and overturning all thought, has taken up residence inside Grace-as-novelist:

Grace was used to not being visited. There was always a flurry of it's great to know you, then disappointment that the woman who wrote books had difficulty in speaking one coherent sentence; then silence, silence. (Frame 2007: 34)

Even more extremely, in terms of its expression of Authorial retreat:

Half-heartedly, because she did not keep copies of her books, she had borrowed a copy of the latest from a friend, meaning to study it chiefly to find what it was about; she had flipped through the pages, not daring to read them – God what was the use? (Frame 2007: 35)

We might say, only God – originary hypostasis of the Author – would know 'the use'.

In these passages, we come across another level at which Frame writes contra-exegesis in her fiction, defending her ethics that the function of words is to explode meaning. (Rather, that is, than attempting to preserve the dead cult of the Author.) After her death, *Towards Another Summer* lives on, therefore, as a strategy that, masquerading as preservation of the Author's ego, rather operates, in conjunction with *The Carpathians* and other of Frame's fictions (and in its own specific context), to repel exegesis. Strategic rather than psychological, it deconstructs autobiography.

Frame's autobiographies (the trilogy and *Towards Another Summer*) add to the lineage of multiple autobiographies perhaps best exemplified by the pairing, in one volume, of Louis Althusser's autobiography *The Future Lasts a Long Time* and his autobiography *The Facts*. As Olivier Corpet and Yann Moulier Boutang – evoking Barthes' notion of 'the total existence of writing' (Barthes 1967: 1469) – comment of this circumstance: 'Are we therefore in the realm of fiction, and thus within the enclosed, imaginary symbolic system of the text, which refers only to itself? In a sense yes ...' (Corpet and Boutang 1994: 8).

Extending this insight, perhaps the most subtle of Frame's exegetical manoeuvres is the way in which she exploits what she seems most to resent (the Author myth) in order to create an even more effective defence for the words that are the only Author of her selves. Frame, then, as just that: a frame within which words and meanings can endlessly proliferate. 'The birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author,' notes Barthes (1967: 1470). But perhaps the 'death of the Author' is also, in Frame's case at least, prerequisite to the birth of the writer who can masquerade – to cunning advantage – as the far-from-dead Author. Frame insinuates into the myth of the Author a critique of exegesis. Hers is an anti-exegetical Authorship. She constructs a figure of clay then sits back to watch the clay crumble.

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