The Self and Janet Frame: Creativity and Selfobject Experience

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Abstract

The theory that psychological trauma restricts or inhibits the development of 'self', or the stream of consciousness, sparked my thinking about how these ideas link to creativity. Evidence of a flourishing stream of consciousness is apparent in many literary greats who have experienced emotional difficulties. Among them is Janet Frame, who writes poetically about the landscape of the mind. Within the framework of the psychoanalytic structure of self psychology this paper examines Frame's life, her 'self' development, and the healing function of her writing.

Introduction

I was absorbed, amused, saddened, and at times tearful during the hour and a half ceremony. There could be little doubt that the entire gathering attending Janet Frame's public Memorial Service was fully engaged. The 'spirit' of Frame was very present.

This was a tribute to the woman who has been acclaimed as New Zealand's most eminent writer: a woman who escaped having a pre-frontal leucotomy by a matter of hours, while she was a patient in a psychiatric hospital in the 1950s. A person who was reputed to shun the company of others and was apparently uncomfortable in situations where relating was expected. Her essence was perhaps most accurately described by her nephew, who said that if she were still alive one would never be sure if she would turn up to such a gathering in her honour.

Behind Frame's poetic use of language, described by many as genius, lived a retiring woman whose story is known to most New Zealanders: a story of a disadvantaged but highly imaginative child, who grew into an agonisingly shy young adult. Her creative life was shadowed by depression, fragmentation, ongoing social isolation, and difficult interpersonal relationships. This paper will explore the nature of the emotional difficulties Frame experienced, examining what is written in her autobiography, and by her biographer Michael King.

Central to her problems in childhood and adolescence were the experiences of loss and social isolation. It is reasonable to assume that Frame's grief was not adequately addressed, and was an aspect of her early depression and collapse. A diagnosis of schizophrenia made when she was 21 was many years later revoked by a Maudsley Hospital psychiatrist, who instead diagnosed a schizoid personality disorder. In her fictional writing Frame represented those who are misunderstood, traumatised, and rejected by society, often drawing from her own life experiences.

Frame's creative ability led to considerable literary achievement. The possible selfobject function her writing provided will be explored. Anna Ornstein (cited in Meares: 2000:165) suggests that a mental activity resembling the creative or poetic process is necessary to the piecing together and integration of the traumatic story. Did Frame achieve such integration and was her self restored through her creativity?

After beginning treatment at the Maudsley hospital in 1957 Frame found in her psychiatrist and the therapeutic milieu "support, safety and understanding" (King: 2002). Consequently improved self-understanding was gained and her writing flourished. Did this self-understanding enable Frame to develop her own mind to the point where she could maintain her equilibrium enough to remain out of hospital? How much self-restoration occurred, and how much did Frame's writing provide a selfobject function necessary for self-regulation, self-cohesion and self-reflection?

Background

Janet Patterson Frame was born in Dunedin, New Zealand, on 28 August 1924, the third of George and Lottie Frame's five children. She was the survivor of a pair of twins. (Her twin did not develop beyond a few weeks). Her mother also suffered a miscarriage the year of Frame's birth. The second child, 'Geordie', developed epilepsy and was constantly at loggerheads with his father: a source of ongoing tension in the Frame household.

George Frame worked for the Railways, eventually becoming an engine driver. Working-class life at that time meant he worked long hours and most of the child-rearing was left to his wife. The world-wide depression of the late 1920s and early 1930s affected all working people with no exception in New Zealand. Although never out of work George Frame had his wages reduced by a cut in working hours and overtime.

At one time the Frames lived in two railway huts, cut off from each other during the night by the snow and freezing temperatures of a southern winter. The four children slept in a separate hut. Frame (1989) writes that it was then, at four years of age, that she knew unhappiness for the first time, feeling miserable and cold locked away from her parents each night and unable to reach them except by going through the snow.

Some solace was sought by Sunday readings of the family Bible when Lottie Frame attempted to teach her children her fundamental Christadelphian beliefs. Lottie also wrote poetry, which may have helped ignite the flame of Frame's early literary imagination. It perhaps also suggests that Lottie needed an escape from the harsh realities of her life, and thus constructed a more idealised and romantic world view; unlike her husband who carried within his war experiences.

King writes that it was here in Southland at age three or four that "Janet began to accumulate what she would refer to later as her 'remembered life' " (King: 2002: 23). In this 'life', Frame (1989) describes an early play with words and a delight in her discoveries of both her inner and her outer world. This pleasure is interspersed with memories of experiences of humiliation and shame which overshadowed Frame's childhood and early adulthood.

The family's final move to Oamaru, north of Dunedin, initially held some hope for Frame and in her writing she described this town as "her kingdom" (Frame: 1989: 52). Here she enjoyed school and achieved academic success. Socially she did not feel at ease however and it was mostly with her sisters that she appears to have been able to relax and play. With her sisters she enjoyed a rich and imaginative life. They created plays and games in a family where impoverishment had its bounds in the material necessities of daily living.

In standard four, when Frame began to write poetry, she found herself the "teacher's pet" and blossomed as both an athlete and scholar under her teacher's guidance. Frame writes of this time "How proud I was of myself" (1989:65).

Unlike Frame, her older sister Myrtle was described as "loud, assertive and unmistakably present" (King: 2002: 68). She was important to Janet. Her sudden and accidental death by drowning early in 1937, at the beginning of Frame's first year of High School, "was the great shock and the defining event of Janet's adolescent years" (King: 2002: 33). In her grief Frame sought comfort in poetry and was amazed to find in her study of literature, poems that seemed to express exactly what she was feeling (King: 2002).

Not surprisingly, Frame described her years at secondary school as mostly unhappy (King: 2002). She wrote prolifically during this time, becoming a regular contributor to a local newspaper and having her poetry published. A prize winning poem was read on national radio. Her two remaining sisters shared her love of writing and together they discovered the world of the Brontë sisters and made it their own (King: 2002).

Despite being top of her class in English and runner-up Dux of the school Frame slid into a "pit of depression in that final year at school" (King: 2002: 41). Her exam results were her weakest ever and she writes in her diary "I am convinced I shall commit suicide soon. There is no bodily pain. I just want to cry and cry at the slightest sadness. I will die. I will commit suicide. Why should I live? I hate myself" (King: 2002: 41).

King (2002) records that her cycle of depression was interrupted by a dramatic change in her circumstances, brought about by her leaving home and beginning her teacher training and university study. Although free of the tension at home – the unresolved grief of her sister's death, and increasing animosity between her father and her brother – the following years were difficult for Frame. The chasm between herself and her family gradually deepened (ibid). Discovering the writings of Sigmund Freud and T.S. Eliot. Eliot she would return home and expound her new understandings to her bewildered parents. Through her absences and new experiences, Frame also came to feel excluded from the lives of her two younger sisters (King: 2002). When her family moved to their own home in Oamaru, finally buying a house, Frame felt that this would never be her home, feeling uncomfortable in this cramped living environment.

Boarding arrangements in Dunedin were also less than satisfactory for Frame. Her extreme shyness often rendered her unable to deal with matters both personal and social. She was more 'at home' in her imaginative world than managing the practicalities of everyday life. Frame developed a 'crush' on a handsome psychology lecturer, John Money. It was to him that she confessed, in a written assignment, her suicide attempt, made during her year as a probationary teacher (King: 2002).

A period of increasing tension preceded Frame's decision to take her life. Although she managed her classroom teaching she avoided contact with her fellow teachers and would dread the visit to her classroom by the headmaster. She stayed in her classroom during her break and lunch hour under the pretext of working. The psychology lectures she enjoyed on Saturday morning had been taken over by another lecturer and she missed her contact with John Money. This had been

her only source of pleasure and replenishment and Frame's unrequited 'pash' on Money caused her further distress (King: 2002). Following a particularly unhappy week at school she decided to take her own life and attempted suicide. Shortly after this Frame gave up teaching, literally fleeing from her classroom, and after she told Money of a further suicide plan, he arranged to have her committed to Seacliff Mental Asylum on the outskirts of Dunedin (ibid).

A series of hospitalisations between the years of 1945 and 1953 followed. During this time Frame had her work published and was the recipient of a prestigious literary award. (The Medical Superintendent at the time, hearing of this, took her off the waiting- list for a leucotomy.) Further tragedy had descended on her life in 1947, however, when Isobel, Frame's younger sister, drowned whilst holidaying. Six months later, John Money, who had provided supportive counselling for Janet after her first hospitalisation, departed for America. In her grief she sought help from a Christchurch psychotherapist John Money had recommended. This led to another hospital admission, and Frame receiving further electro-convulsive treatment.

It was not until 1955 that Frame found a niche in society when her remaining sister June introduced her to writer Frank Sargeson. Frame eventually came to feel accepted and valued by Sargeson and fellow writers of the time and under his mentorship her success as a novelist was launched and celebrated (King: 2002). Frame received a grant to travel and live abroad, and in 1956 she left for England, where her career as an internationally acclaimed writer was to develop.

A rich and significant period in Frame's life occurred later in 1956 when she spent time writing and living on the Mediterranean island of Ibiza. This was the place Frame would come to remember literally and metaphorically as "mirror city" (King: 2002). Here Janet experienced an inner transformation – an experience referred to symbolically in her autobiographical writing (Frame: 1989). She also felt 'at home' in her external world where she fell in love and became pregnant. Eventually realising her love was not reciprocated Frame fled to Andorra where she suffered a miscarriage. During her time there she became engaged to an Italian fellow-lodger but, becoming overwhelmed by the thought of marriage, left her fiancé and returned to England.

Following these experiences Frame, at John Money's recommendation, sought psychiatric assistance at the Maudsley hospital in London (King: 2002). During the next six years she received intermittent inpatient care and ongoing therapy from two different psychiatrists who appeared to attune to her inner world and

the vitality of her writing. Her significant and lasting relationship with John Money was life long, as were her other major friendships.

Frame returned to New Zealand as a celebrated writer in 1963. She initially lived with her sister June and her family and maintained a close relationship with them until her death. Later Frame lived independently in New Zealand; she travelled, continued to write and have her work published. She was a contender for the Nobel Prize for literature in 2003.

The development of Self

"There is a vast literature on the usage of the word 'self' in psychology and psychotherapy" (Hobson: 1985:148). Hobson says that this "puzzling notion of self" has been discussed in many different ways since the time of William James in 1910 (ibid). For the purpose of this paper the theories of Kohut, Meares, Hobson and Wolf will be discussed.

In looking at circumstances for the development of self in Frame's life there is portrayed an early environment that was far from ideal. The beginning of her relationship with her mother is not recorded in precise detail. However in what is written by Frame there is warmth of feeling, and evidence of an early flow of inner life.

Outlining the Conversational Model of psychotherapy Russell Meares expands on earlier developmental theories, and the concept of William James in which self is considered to be a flow "of inner life - the stream of consciousness" (cited in Meares: 2002: 1) Frame writes that her mother passed on intimate minutiae of her own family stories (Frame: 1989). She engaged her children in her own imaginative world – her stream of consciousness.

Unlike Frame's father, with whom there was a lack of intimacy. "Father, known to us as 'Dad' was inclined to dourness with a strong sense of formal behaviour that did not allow him the luxury of reminiscence" (Frame: 1989: 9).

Frame's earliest "fragmentary" memories were set outside – in the cow byre, under the walnut tree and in the neighbour's orchard. While her mother was busy with the new baby born when Frame was 20 months old, Grandma Frame became her companion and friend (Frame: 1989). When her grandmother burst into song Frame was filled with a feeling she claims that she identified later as "sadness". Memories and feelings before her third birthday are described by Frame as "isolated" (ibid).

Describing the work of Endel Tulving, Meares (2000:35) proposes a memory system that may be interrupted by trauma. This memory system consists of personal memories containing affect, referred to as 'autobiographical' or 'episodic', as compared with a memory of external events, not containing affect, called semantic. In this structure, Frame's 'fragmentary' and 'isolated' memories are both episodic or autobiographical and semantic. From the age of four she recalls ongoing personal memories of both her inner and outer world. In those who suffer early trauma the personal memory system is impaired or lost. This does not appear to have happened to Frame. As previously quoted Frame refers to her life from the age of four years old as her "remembered" life. A significant "isolated" memory is recorded from when Frame was three years of age:

> I remember a grey day when I stood by the gate and listened to the wind in the telegraph wires. I had my first conscious feeling of an outside sadness, or it seemed to come from outside, from the sound of the wind moaning in the wires. I looked up and down the white dusty road and saw no one. The wind was blowing from place to place past us, and I was there, in between, listening. I felt a burden of sadness and loneliness as if something had happened or begun and I knew about it. I don't think I had yet thought of myself as a person looking out at the world: until then, I felt I was the world. In listening to the wind and its sad song, I knew I was listening to a sadness that had no relation to me, which belonged to the world (Frame: 1989: 12).

Having a sense of inner and outer at three years of age shows the beginning development of a sense of 'self' (Meares:2000). And a beginning of a 'play' with words, fired by her imagination, that was Frame's undeniable talent.

Another important marker described by Meares (2000) in relation to developing a self is the discovery of a secret. Frame reflected on an experience when she moved to her third home at four years of age:

> On our first week in our Glenham house on the hill, I discovered a place, my place. Exploring by myself, I found a secret place among old, fallen trees by a tiny creek with a moss-covered log to sit on while the new-leaved branches of the silver birch tree formed a roof shutting out the sky except for the patterned holes of sunlight. The ground was covered with masses of old, used leaves, squelchy, slippery, wet. I sat on the log and looked around myself. I was overcome by a delicious feeling of discovery, of gratitude, of possession. I knew that this place was entirely mine; mine the moss, the creek, the log, the secrecy. It was a new kind of possession quite different from my beastie dress or from the new baby Isabel (1989:14).

In this passage not only does Frame reflect on the delight of her discovery of a secret place, she also reveals an embryonic sense of agency and a sense of ownership (Meares:2002). Using William James' description of a 'stream of consciousness' Meares identifies at least ten additional characteristics of self. These characteristics, additional to agency and ownership, are duality (i.e. reflective awareness), movement (sense of vitality), positive feeling (warmth and intimacy), non-linearity, coherence, continuity, temporality, spatiality, content beyond immediate present (i.e. of the possible, the imagined, the remembered) and boundedness (Meares:2002). Most of these characteristics are illustrated above.

There can also be little question that in all three passages Janet Frame as an adult writes poetically about the movements of her early inner life. She portrays a sense of aliveness and of vitality, and a 'doubleness' created by the reflective awareness of inner events (Meares:2004). From this evidence we might assume that Frame also experienced an early social environment and "particular form of relatedness" (Meares: 2004: 15) that, despite popular thinking about Frame's background of privation, was in Winnicott's language 'good enough'. Early idealising, mirroring, and twinship needs may have been met, at least in part, by her grandmother as well as her mother.

A further flowing of consciousness is demonstrated as Frame reflects on her life as a six-year-old.

> Life at Oamaru with all its variety of new experiences was a wonderful adventure. I was now vividly aware of myself as a person on earth, feeling a kinship with other creatures and full of joy at the sights and sounds about me and drunk with the anticipation of play, where playing seemed endless, and on and on after school until dark, when even then there were games to play in bed – physical games like 'trolley works' and 'fitting in' where each body curled into the other and all turned on command, or guessing games or imagining games, interpreting the shape and colour in the bedroom curtains, or codes, hiding messages in the brass bed knobs. There were arguments and fights and plans for the future and impossible dreams of fame as dancers, violinists, pianists, artists (1983:32).

Besides the clear flow of conscious thought in this passage Frame is also illustrating some of Kohut's thinking about the definitive qualities of self:

> Our sense of being an independent centre of initiative and perception,
> Of being integrated with our most central ambitions and ideals,
> And with our experience that our body and mind form a unit in space and a continuum in time (Kohut, quoted in Suesske: 1997: 9).

And, as an eight year old, in her singing class that she loved Frame writes of further movement of her inner life and her ability to connect thoughts and feelings as they occur. "We sang the Maori words too; 'E pare ra....' As we were singing, I felt suddenly that I was crying because something terrible had happened, although I could not say what it was: it was inside the song yet outside it, with me" (Frame: 1989: 41). When Frame arrived home that afternoon she was to find that her sister Myrtle's cat that the children shared had died. She reflects on the significance of this experience: "That sad afternoon of the singing of 'E pare ra' became part of my memories like the telegraph wires and the discovery of My Place" (Frame: 1989: 41).

Frame's autobiographical writing thus demonstrates a rich quality of inner and outer life, illustrating that in spite of the disruptions endured in early childhood, a "dynamism of self" as formulated by Meares (2002) was achieved. This particular form of consciousness described by Meares arises out of the brain's interplay with the sensory and social environment; it arises in the context of relatedness, is mediated by conversation and has to be achieved with the Other (2002). On self, Meares also writes:

> The domain of self, which depends upon intimate relating, is more fragile than that of adaption. It must come into being through the child's developing secure attachments to his or her caregivers, who have provided appropriate responsiveness. He or she develops the feeling of trust. This feeling allows the child eventually to use symbols and exercise the narrative function, as Jeremy Holmes has pointed out (2000:29).

Frame's use of symbols is abundantly evident in her narrative – in her autobiography, her poetry and her novels. Symbolic play is most obvious in her use of metaphor in her written work.

Having observed a rich and flowing early inner life we now look at whether Frame's developing self-structure provided strong enough scaffolds to withstand the many storms of her following years. It is in the sphere of intimate relating that Frame's world toppled. The constant feature of a healthy self in any theoretical model is that it develops in relationship with the Other and is expressed in language (Meares: 1993, 2000; Kohut: 1984; Hobson: 1985).

Self-disruption and the impact of loss

Leaving the cocoon of her family and starting school heralded a negative change in Frame's social world signified by her grandmother's death. She writes:

> And Wyndham was the time of the dentist and starting school and Grandma Frame's dying: all three memorably unhappy, although Grandma Frame's death was different in being world-sad with everyone sharing – the cows, the hens, the pet rabbit, even the stinky ferret as well the family and relations – while going to the dentist and starting school were miseries that belonged only to me.
>
> The visit to the dentist marked the end of my infancy and my introduction to a threatening world of contradictions where spoken and written words assumed a special power (Frame: 1989: 22).

Frame reflected on how she had to somehow bear her miseries of school and the dentist alone. She described a trip to the dentist where, terrified, she was lured into smelling a "pretty towel" which had been immersed in chloroform and rendered her unconscious. Understandably, "fury and total distrust" followed (Frame: 1989: 45). Frame also recalled crying in her bed at night because of her toothache. Her father "tanned her backside" when she was unable to stop crying because of her pain (ibid: 46). His literal spanking of her bare bottom was witnessed by her siblings who teased her the next day. Her response was to pretend that she was warmed by her "hiding" – an attempt to hide her shame. (Frame's teeth were to become an insurmountable problem of her later life. Self-conscious of their decay she was unable to seek dental care and her teeth were eventually removed when she was a patient in Seacliff Hospital.)

Other situations, where Frame's spontaneity was ridiculed by her family, could be described as disjunctive experiences and led to what Frame described as "a certain wariness, a cynicism about the ways of people and of my family, and an ability to deceive" (1989:24). Her ability to deceive with words became, perhaps, a needed way of managing her disjunctive experiences. Words appear to have been of particular importance especially at this stage in her life, when Frame does not appear to have had the "joyful response of her caregivers giving her sources of idealised strength and calmness, being silently present and in essence like her" (Kohut: 1984: 52).

This "threatening world of contradictions" became more dominant for Frame, as death and sickness became more prevalent in her life. She writes: "From being a horizontal thread or path that one followed or traversed, time in that year suddenly became vertical, to be ascended like a ladder into the sky with each step or happening following quickly on the other. I was not yet eight" (Frame: 1989: 36).

Frame goes on to describe how their lives were suddenly changed (1989). Her mother's time was taken up with the care of her sick brother, whose frequent seizures caused enormous upheaval in an already burdened family. The shadow of loss began to loom constantly during her childhood. Her discovery of the world of literature and poetry was an immense comfort to her and served a selfobject need as the distress of her brother's epilepsy prevailed in the family. Frame perceived her own inner states reflected in the world of poetry and withdrew further into her inner world, as the reality of her life became more complex. Frame found it harder to maintain her internal equilibrium as empathic responses from others diminished.

In describing the beginning of her adult life Frame entitles her first chapter "The Stone":

> The future accumulates like a weight upon the past. The weight upon the earliest years is easier to remove to let that time spring up like grass that has been crushed. The years following childhood become welded to their future, massed like stone, and often the time beneath cannot spring back into growth like new grass: it lies bled of its green in a new shape with those frail bloodless sprouts of another, unfamiliar time, entangled one with the other beneath the stone (1989:49).

The richness of Frame's childhood - "the green" - was now hard to see as the weight of the "stone" accumulated in her life. Frame's affect-regulation or self-regulation failed when she was finally visited in her classroom, during her probationary year as a teacher, by the school inspector and her headmaster.

> I waited. Then I said to the inspector,"Will you excuse me a moment please?"
> "Certainly Miss Frame."
> I walked out of the room and out of the school, knowing I would never return.
> (Frame: 1989: 187).

Following this event Frame obtained a doctor's certificate giving her time off school. As her return date loomed she decided that the only way out was suicide, and attempted this one weekend by swallowing a bottle of aspirin when her landlady was away. Thus began her intermittent hospitalisations where, as was the psychiatric practice of the time, Frame's symptoms appear to have been barely examined and she was misdiagnosed as suffering from schizophrenia. With no one to attune to her inner world except John Money who left the country shortly after her first admission, Frame was to suffer periods of fragmentation during the following years.

Fonagy et al. (2002) suggest that for attachment theorists and psychoanalysts, the regulation of affect is linked to the regulation of self, and that affect-regulation entails the capacity to control and moderate our own affective responses. Meares (2000) traces the beginning of self development in the proto-conversation between infant and caregiver described by Trevarthen. Within this dyadic orbit an embryonic innerness develops through play. Meares says it is necessary for the child to experience the caregiver as an extension of his or her self. This experience of the other as an extension of oneself is what Kohut called a selfobject experience. It is these selfobject experiences that sustain a developing sense of self, which we might also presume assists the process of affect-regulation.

Frame appears to have been unable to maintain affect-regulation or self-regulation at times of extreme distress when there was clearly no sustaining experience of another. Her "powerful use of words" and her ability to "deceive" as noted by her literary critics was perhaps a much needed self-sustaining and self-protective activity. Frame's reaction to disjunctions appears to have been that noted by Meares: "crippling shame, which was in extreme cases devastation, associated with the loss of a sense of personal worth" (1993:81).

After eight years of intermittent hospitalizations, Frame worked as a waitress, pursuing her writing in her spare time. She was keen to meet other known New Zealand authors and poets of the time, and constantly visited a book store in Dunedin which some of these writers frequented (Frame: 1989). Eventually she is recognised, and receives an invitation from Charles Brasch, poet and editor of the literary magazine *Landfall* (King: 2002). The described conversation during a visit to Brasch's home for tea is characteristic of Frame's social interactions as a young adult. She attempted conversation with Brasch by commenting that her mother at one time worked for his grandmother:

> Mr Brasch looked stern. I felt he disliked personal reminiscences and references, but what else could I say? I knew so little. He began to talk of New Zealand literature. I remained silent. I thought, he must know where I have been for the past eight years. I suddenly felt like crying. I was awkward and there were crumbs of seed cake all over my plate and on the white carpet at my feet. Then, remembering the introduction to 'Speaking for Ourselves' I murmured one or two opinions on the stories, quoting directly from the text.
>
> 'I agree with you' Mr Brasch said. Our conversation died away. Mr Brasch poured more tea from an attractive pot with a wicker handle arched above it.
> 'I'm fond of this teapot' he said noticing my glance at it.
> 'I'd better be going' I said (Frame: 1989: 237).

Mr Brasch's stern look was felt as disjunctive, Frame lost her sense of personal worth, attempted to maintain social discourse, was unable to, and eventually fled. In this instance there was a common interest, but experiencing shame and a constricted sense of herself, Frame was unable to converse about their shared understanding of literature.

Frame's life story however indicates that when alone she was not always afflicted with the pain of isolation and alienation. This pain was alleviated by the language of her writing – a vehicle for the communication of her rich inner world. It is in relationship with others that Frame appears to have struggled. Unlike those who suffer a severe self- disorder Frame was not caught in the zone of adaptation. In fact it could be said that it was with the language of social speech, described by Meares as language that is linear and outer-directed, that Frame struggled (Meares:2000).

Meares, in describing the two human languages of inner speech and social speech, observes that for most of the day the child uses the language of ordinary communication (social speech) and for most of the day the adult is not lost in thought (2002). We see from Frame's writing that her 'inner speech' is, as described by Meares, associative, inner-directed, intimate and self-related, unlike 'social speech' which is linear, grammatical, logical, communicative, outer-directed, non-intimate and identity-related (ibid). It would seem that from an early age, Frame discovered the "power of words" and came to feel more comfortable in her inner world and with the language of her inner speech. It is the view of Meares that the "two language forms become co-ordinated and mingled" (Meares:2002). To be effective in the world both languages are needed.

The concept of two playrooms is another associated idea of Meares (1993) relevant to Janet Frame. Meares writes of the child of three or four years inhabiting two playrooms – one real and the other partly illusory – from which the child oscillates between two states of being with the Other (ibid). The child, Meares asserts, needs both experiences, i.e. parents who are attuned to his reality and also experiences when the Other is not felt as part of this reality. "These experiences establish the concept of self boundary, since they bring into the child's awareness an 'outside' world which contrasts with that which is inner" (Meares: 1993: 79). It could be said that it is in the "real playroom" that Frame lacked sufficient attunement.

This lack of sufficient attunement in her social world was an ongoing difficulty for Frame who as an adult struggled with identity-related issues, especially after her admission to psychiatric institutions. She wrote of how the world and even her

family saw her as a 'mad person'. Her sense of her inner self, however, survived long enough for her to know in her own mind that she was not 'mad'.

In response to an invitation from Charles Brasch to write for *Landfall* Frame offered a poem about her experience of electro-convulsive therapy. The poem was not considered suitable for publication. The poem is entitled 'The Slaughter-House':

> The mind entering the slaughter-house must remain
> calm, never calmer,
> must be washed clean, showered on where the corned hide
> holds fast to bits of bacterial thought, must await the
> stunning hammer
> in silence, knowing nothing of any future load (Frame: 1989: 238).

This poem, like Frame's interpersonal experience, did not always engage the other. Following the rejection for publication of this poem Frame lapsed into empty despair, feeling her "life raft" – her writing – would no longer save her (ibid: 238). She recovered, however, shortly afterwards when her poems were accepted for another publication, *The Listener*. The much-needed mirroring was provided.

Creativity and other selfobject experiences

"Frequently the selfobject function is performed by a person, but it is important to remember that the selfobject is the function not the person" (Wolf: 1988: 52). Wolf also says that any experience that functions to evoke the structured self and manifests as an experience of selfhood, or maintains the continuity of selfhood, is known as a selfobject experience. It is not the relationship with the other or an object that provides this experience, but the subjective aspect of a function performed by a relationship (Wolf: 1988). In this sense it is intrapsychic and does not describe the interpersonal relationship (ibid).

In her thirtieth year, Frame moved to Auckland and met the writer Frank Sargeson, eventually living and writing in a hut on his property. Of this offer from Sargeson she wrote "it might save my life" (Frame: 1989: 245). Sargeson arranged for Janet to obtain a medical certificate enabling her to receive a welfare benefit which would provide the means to continue her writing. Hospital authorities had previously refused this request, insisting that a job would be more beneficial. Although Frame was working she wrote: "My only freedom was

within, in my thoughts and language, most of which I kept carefully concealed, except in writing. For conversation I reserved harmless chatter which - surely - no one would label as 'peculiar or 'mad' " (Frame: 1989: 246).

It was therefore by Sargeson that Frame felt understood and validated. His role in providing important mirroring, idealising and twinning selfobject experiences was crucial at this time in Frame's life that could be viewed as a 'transitional' stage: a stage when she was still struggling to adapt to her social world. From this time there is described gradual freedom also in her outer world where former constraints seemed far away. What was most important to Frame was that Sargeson "actually believed" she was a good writer (Frame: 1989: 246). This validation, and the space to write unencumbered by unattuned demands for adaptation, allowed Frame to explore more fully her inner and outer world. Her writing flourished and she gradually joined the social milieu of a small group of fellow writers.

As noted by Bragan (1989) Sargeson was interested in the breeding of silk worms and demonstrated to Frame the life cycle of the silk worm – how the silk worm appears to die and comes to life again. This provided an important metaphor for her that had a personal significance as she had also experienced and come through a living death (Bragan: 1989). She took up the golden thread of life again and wrote an autobiographical novel, *Owls Do Cry*, with a chapter heading "Finding the Silk" (ibid).

Sargeson's belief in her writing was reinforced by Dr Robert Cawley whom Janet was to see over a number of years whilst both an inpatient and outpatient at the Maudsley Hospital in London. As Bragan (1989) points out, we do not know the nature of her therapy with Cawley but we do know that she experienced him as empathic; that he saw her over a long period of time, did not desert her, was interested in her writing and provided important selfobject experience crucial to her recovery. He gave her confirmation in two important ways: that she genuinely needed to write and particularly write about her long hospitalisation in New Zealand and that she was a solitary sort of person and should not try to be sociable against her nature (Bragan: 1989). This was an essential validation of Frame's core self. She did write and publish a novel based on her hospitalisations, entitled *Faces in the Water*. Frame records that she left the Maudsley Hospital ". . . no longer dependent on my schizophrenia for comfort, attention and help but with myself as myself" (cited in Bragan: 1989: 141). The ongoing discovery of herself found in her writing is represented by the illuminating title of the last volume of her autobiography: *Envoy From Mirror City*.

Along with selfobject experience, attunement, and validation there is another important marker of Frame's recovery that is recognised in our work within the framework of Psychology of Self and Meares' Conversational Model. In a recent literary review of Frame, Patrick Evans (2004) relates a story he learned from a psychiatrist, Craigie Macfie, who worked at the Maudsley Hospital when Frame was a patient of Robert Cawley. Macfie told Evans (2004) that while Frame was an inpatient she would each night engage Cawley in a game of her devising. She would give him a baffling sentence to unscramble. Presumably, Evans says, something like the cryptic crossword clues she helped her father with. Cawley was expected to have 'solved' this each morning and he did. Although this is interpreted differently by Evans, who parallels it to the deliberately concealed aspects of Frame's writing, it could also be seen as a delightful example of the co-creation of a play-space.

In writing of the necessity of the play-space in early development Meares (1993) stresses the importance of the Other's presence as a selfobject in the developing sense of innerness. Frame's sense of innerness is not in question here; rather it is the question of her maintaining a cohesive sense of self in both her internal and external world and her relationship with others in her world. Meares (1993) suggests that responses from others that 'fit' an evolving personal reality have the effect of evoking a positive emotional tone, and if repeated, influence the acquisition of self esteem. It is possible therefore that Cawley joining Frame in her world of words - her play-space - was a pivotal step in what was clearly for Frame a lengthy and sustaining selfobject experience. And it is, as Wolf (1988) writes, how these experiences assist appropriate structuring into an organisation we call 'self' that is important.

The notion that creativity has a restorative function is supported by Kohut (1978), Hagman (2002) and Kligerman (1980). Kohut puts forward the idea that there is a certain childlike quality in the psychological make-up of the paradigms of creative imagination, and that this provides some form of tension mastery (1978). He says it is the special intensity of all the varieties of experience that forces such a personality to create because as adults they have less reliable neutralizing and buffering structures and are, therefore, less protected from traumatisation (ibid). The more protective structures that might exist in the average adult, Kohut argues, also give them less access to creativeness and discovery. This is an interesting suggestion regarding Janet Frame and the more creative clients I see. It might also shed some light on the different responses that exist amongst siblings, as seen with the Frames, who experience similar childhood experiences.

Kligerman (1980) elaborates further by suggesting that a sense of engagement is made possible by one's creative productions. This idea makes sense when one thinks about our subjective responses to art, music and literature. Like me, many attending Janet Frame's Memorial Service did not have a personal relationship with Frame. We were, however, intensely engaged, with heightened affect which was beyond sadness evoked by her loss.

The creative medium of writing for Frame provided an externalisation of subjective experience. It was healing, restorative and ultimately achieved the mirroring approval of the world and saved her from a long incarceration in a psychiatric institution. Her writing was the formal embodiment of her deepest experience of being in the world (Hagman: 2000): a representation of her inner state, providing a sense of vitality and self-cohesion. When, as was often, Frame did not receive resonance from others, she found it in the world of literature and the experience was soothing, perhaps providing as Wolf suggests an intimate personal selfobject responsiveness (1988). However, at vital times – times of loss and adversity – Frame's creativity was only partially sustaining. It was not until the time of her therapy with Robert Cawley that Frame wrote: "(T)he wastage of being other than myself could lead to the nothingness I had formerly experienced" (1989:383). Ultimately, it was the therapeutic relationship with Cawley and her creative self-expression that validated her personal experience and was restorative.

When The Sun Shines More Years Than Fear

When the sun shines more years than fear
When birds fly more miles than anger
When sky holds more bird
Sails more cloud
Shines more sun
Than the palm of love carries hate,

Even then shall I in this weary
Seventy-year banquet say, Sunwaiter,
Birdwaiter, Skywaiter,
I have no hunger,
Remove my plate.
Janet Frame

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