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Playing with Freud: Radical Narcissism and Intertextuality in

Frame's *Intensive Care* and *Daughter Buffalo*

Jennifer Lawn

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Playing with Freud: Radical Narcissism and Intertextuality in Frame's *Intensive Care* and *Daughter Buffalo*

Jennifer Lawn

Taking this pocket mirror, capture the reflection
of the row of lamps. Steady the mirror. So.

See those black stripes alternating with yellow?
They are bars of actual darkness not perceived by the naked eye.

To undeceive the sight a detached instrument like a mirror is
necessary.

(Frame, "The Pocket Mirror")¹

In the second volume of her autobiography, Frame mocks her own pretensions to knowledge after one year of studying English and psychology:

I explained theories as if they were my own. I had accepted the opinions on the classification of people partly because I was dazzled by the new language and its powerful vocabulary. I could now say to members of my family, "That's rationalisation, that's sublimation, you're really frustrated sexually, your super-ego tells you that but your id disagrees."²

The passage smiles at vulgar Freudianism, with its pan-sexualism, its ready diagnoses of behaviour and its baroque architecture of classifications and syndromes. Yet for the reader who knows what follows in Frame's life history, the passage conveys a queasy pathos. For Frame herself soon became the object of diagnosis, turned into a case study by the young John Money, who, "glistening with newly applied Freud," earned her trust with his regular counselling sessions.³ Up to a certain point, in Frame's version, their interaction retained an element of experimentation and even mutual appropriation: Frame served Money's professional curiosity, compassion and ambition; Money served Frame's need for recognition as a writer. But Frame's vulnerability became acutely exposed when Money, with the best intentions, inducted Frame into the mid-twentieth century New Zealand mental health system, setting off a chain of events climaxing in the now-iconic escape from a prefrontal leucotomy.

¹ Janet Frame, *The Pocket Mirror* (New York: George Braziller, 1967): 62.

² Janet Frame, *An Autobiography* (New York: George Braziller, 1991): 160.

³ Frame, *An Autobiography*, 201.

Frame thus presents her life story as an object lesson in both the seductions of theory and the far-reaching risks that arise in the passage from theory to discourse -- that is, when hypotheses about another become institutionally efficacious and structurally asymmetrical. Frame as text was deemed too legible, too quickly consigned to taxonomies, resulting in a diagnosis which occluded the extent to which Frame, according to her own account, was indulging in the self-dramatizations of the hysteric.⁴ Not surprisingly, Frame later expresses ambivalence about Freud. In her poem "Sweet Corn" she singles him out among "other heroes," but the context in which the allusion occurs ironises this ostensible admiration.⁵ The poet buries her verse, "bred with Freud and other heroes," implying that she is laying to rest his influence, or perhaps her naïve belief in him as "hero." Yet from this "foul disorder of my spirit's dung" the sweet corn arises "in orderly / rows": Freudian compost produces new growth, perhaps that of creative or emotional regeneration.

In this paper my aim is to place Frame and Freud in an interpretive relationship by pursuing just one point of intersection between them: the modulations of the Narcissus myth in *Intensive Care* and *Daughter Buffalo*, focusing on scenes that concentrate the dilemmas of transference, "desperate capture," and misapprehended love described so acutely in Frame's autobiography.⁶ *Intensive Care* features multiple displacements of specular desire in the pairings of Tom Livingstone and Ciss Everest, Colin Torrance and Lorna Kimberley, Colin Monk and Milly Galbraith. In *Daughter Buffalo* the strange simulacrum of dating embarked upon by Talbot and Turnlung culminates in an "act of recognition" between Talbot Edelman and Turnlung, who "became briefly two-dimensional, images only, in mirrors; the old and the young Narcissus."⁷ These novels speak to each other through infusions of fantasy: *Intensive Care* tells the story of generations of Livingstone dreamers, while the ontological

⁴ The complex play of desire, discourse and self-deception active in this relationship is well dissected in Simone Oettli-van Delden's study *Surfaces of Strangeness: Janet Frame and the Rhetoric of Madness* (Wellington: Victoria UP, 2003).

⁵ Janet Frame, "Sweet Corn," in *The Goose Bath: Poems* (Auckland: Vintage-Random House, 2006): 69.

⁶ The phrase "desperate capture" is from Janet Frame, *A State of Siege* (New York: George Braziller, 1966): 174.

⁷ Janet Frame, *Daughter Buffalo* (New York: George Braziller, 1972): 143--44. I use the term "encounter" here to describe a "meeting which involves surprise and conflict," one which resists legibility and for this reason enables communication to occur, on the very limits of understanding. See Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (London: Routledge, 2000): 6.

indeterminacy of *Daughter Buffalo*'s möbius strip-like narrative structure implies that fantasy cannot be confined to a single subjectivity, but rather that it is pandemic, a general condition of consciousness.⁸ Mirroring structures the fantasy dynamics of both novels; but paradoxically, the exchange between the two males in *Daughter Buffalo* will prove more "hetero," or difference-oriented, than the heterosexual passions of the earlier text.

In pursuing this project I share many sympathies with those commentators on Frame who read Frame's texts metacritically, as stagings of the multiple misapprehensions and risks inherent in everyday acts of interpretation. By dramatising encounters between self and other -- where "other" may be broadly conceived as a person, the land, the past or as an other within the self, such as memory, one's past selves, the uncanny or even ethnic inheritance -- Frame's texts heuristically school their readers in their own interpretation, often by counter-examples of misrecognition or moments of isolated or partial insight.⁹ "Theory" becomes a dangerous sign in such perilous circumstances. The critic who imposes theory on the text -- bearing in mind the more or less explicit equation between vulnerable text and vulnerable author in so much commentary on Frame -- risks replicating the role of the "bad doctor" who misdiagnoses the textual signs. In a thoughtful discussion, Marc Delrez argues that much Frame criticism fails to attend to the eclipsed existence of the other by

⁸ I am referring to the fact that the structure is designed so that no primary consciousness can be determined to frame the entirety of the fictional world; it is not possible to discern conclusively who narrates whom. For example, Turnlung may be read as a creation of Talbot's mind inspired by the painting given to Talbot by his father; alternatively, Talbot can be read as a character within Turnlung's last work. Or the two options can be combined: Turnlung imagines Talbot imagining Turnlung. Gina Mercer entertains yet further structural possibilities in *Janet Frame: Subversive Fictions* (Dunedin: Otago UP, 1994): 196--98.

⁹ *A State of Siege* seems particularly to attract such metacritical readings. One of the earliest sorties in this vein is Dawn Danby's argument that "any reader who imposes a final meaning is a kind of prowler, unhappy to be excluded, ready to break windows to find out what's going on inside" ("*A State of Siege*," *And 2* [1984]: 105--06). Gina Mercer reverses this scenario, preferring to locate herself as reader not outside but inside the textual "house," "besieged by a host of prowling meanings, which approach me from different angles, offering a variety of revelations" (*Janet Frame*, 103). For Jan Cronin the novel "is about interpretive processes, about unfixing and redressing the relationship between subject and object, subject and context as a complex series of interactions" ("Encircling Tubes of Being: New Zealand as Hypothetical Site in Janet Frame's *A State of Siege* [1966]," *Journal of New Zealand Literature* 23.2 [2005]: 82). For a reading of *Scented Gardens for the Blind* as a critique on the problems of interpreting Frame within assumptions of hermeneutic literary criticism, particularly in its psychoanalytic forms, see my "Redemption, Secrecy and the Hermeneutic

rendering it either too *legible* (instrumentalising Frame's text to the service of a prevailing theory), or too *illegible* (representing the place of the other as unknowable in principle, lacking the full status of communicable subjectivity). In the one case, theory uses and captures the text; in the other, theory fails to engage with the text precisely through what is, perhaps, a misplaced ethical restraint that sets limits upon what the other can mean, or be, for the interpreting self.¹⁰

Yet, of course, in her conceptually dense fiction Frame also reads -- and rewrites -- theories, including those of her ambivalent "hero" Freud. I will return to the axis of the reader-text relation at the close of my discussion, but for now I want to turn to the idea of Frame as interpreter of Freud, and vice versa. This involves an intertextual and philosophical rather than therapeutic engagement with Frame's texts, leading us not to scrutinise them for (or as) symptoms, but rather to study them as elaborations and creative transformations of Freudian ideas. This is not "psychoanalysis applied to literature" so much as the (at least ostensibly) contrary project of "applying literature to psychoanalysis."¹¹ The version of Frame that I thus enlarge upon is not the author who reaches deeply inward to produce a highly personal vision, but rather the Frame of acute intellect and omnivorous, indeed promiscuous reading capacities; the Frame who can, in a single novel such as *Daughter Buffalo*, evoke, condense and re-envision such an array of texts as Rainer Maria Rilke's *Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*, Jessica Mitford's *The American Way of Death*, Plato's *Phaedo* and *Symposium*, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and -- of primary interest for the present discussion -- Freud's interventions on the psychology of narcissism.¹²

In "On Narcissism: An Introduction," Freud sets out to provide the kinds of "classification[s] of people" that Frame will both exploit and critique in her fiction. Freud defines primary narcissism as an infantile state prior to ego development, in which a baby believes in "the omnipotence of thoughts," perceiving itself to be "the

Frame in Janet Frame's *Scented Gardens for the Blind*," *ARIEL* [Calgary] 30.3 (1999): 105--26.

¹⁰ Marc Delrez, *Manifold Utopia: The Novels of Janet Frame* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002): i--xxxi.

¹¹ The phrase is derived from Pierre Bayard, "Is It Possible to Apply Literature to Psychoanalysis?," *American Imago* 56.3 (1999): 207--19.

¹² Sigmund Freud, "On Narcissism: An Introduction," in *Collected Papers*, vol. 4 (New York: Basic, 1959): 30--59.

centre and heart of creation.”¹³ The state is characterised by megalomania or “want [is] get”:¹⁴ the infant’s will is unrestrained, and “the laws of nature, like those of society, are to be abrogated in [the infant’s] favour.”¹⁵ Despite learning to negotiate societal restrictions, the developing subject never wholly abandons primary narcissism, which emerges in watered-down or displaced forms in adult sexuality.¹⁶ Freud then labels “anaclitic” the mode of loving of the heterosexual male lover who, like Tom Livingstone, falls for the woman who tends him. The domain of primary narcissism in adulthood is reserved for women and the type of the homosexual male. Where *Intensive Care* seems to explicate such a taxonomy, I suggest, *Daughter Buffalo* will complicate and transpose it, opening the apparently closed circuit of desire into a field of play and intersubjective experimentation.

Dreaming On

The Narcissus intertext is activated as allusion in sections one and two of *Intensive Care*, and as analogy for the specular violence of the Human Delineation regime in the dystopian third section. The ongoing pun on “transformation” throughout the first two sections locates the mythological roots of the Livingstone dreamers in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. Tom’s story seems at first to promise idylls more enchanting than the tragedy of Narcissus. The recuperating soldier wakes in the sun:

He looked up at [Ciss Everest’s] dark hair knotted like a black-shining button at the nape of her neck, and her deep violet-colored eyes, and all afternoon he lay watching her move among the wounded. She was not conventionally pretty. [...] Her mouth was big. When she opened it he had a pleasantly dreamy sensation of being swallowed into softness. He wanted to kiss her. (2)

But something is awry; the fairy-stories, the mythologies are mixed up. Tom is less a masculine Pygmalion caressing his dream-statue into flesh than a feminine Galatea waking to see her lover’s face blotting out the sun; less an Oberon than a Titania,

¹³ Freud, “On Narcissism,” 32, 48.

¹⁴ Janet Frame, *Intensive Care* (New York: Braziller, 1970): 94. Further page references appear in the main text.

¹⁵ Freud, “On Narcissism,” 48.

¹⁶ Freud, “On Narcissism,” 45.

falling in love with “the first person he had seen on waking from his drugged sleep” (4). It is when Tom wakes up in a physiological sense that he begins to dream in the sense of entering fantasy -- the unconscious being, in Lacan’s succinct formulation, “precisely the hypothesis that one does not dream only when one sleeps.”¹⁷

Yet the elements which make the romance topos of the soldier and the nurse endearing -- the soldier’s helplessness, his pleasure in being attended to -- will flip easily into an aggressive claim for attention and resentment at the nurse’s power to deny it. The primary narcissism based on omnipotence, in which Tom’s ego encounters the immediate gratification of his desire in his surroundings, quickly warps into a maddening reliance upon the woman who reflects his desire, “the only person who understood” (3). Forty-seven years later, when Ciss Everest, dying of cancer in the Recovery Unit, no longer recognises Tom, his desire flips into rage that

a woman who had spread so wide in his world, for so many years that she had sucked up his life as the sun sucks up the sea and all the streams and rivers, should be lying so near him and yet make no sign to him. (18)

In an effort to re-assume control he smothers her as, in his mind, she has engulfed him. Ciss’s memory had been the prop of his existence, both in the sense that his fantasised memory of her had sustained his reality for the years spent separated from her, and in the sense of his expectation that she would remember him. As Naomi acutely comments in one of her letters to her dead father, “because Ciss Everest did not recognize you and thus denied your existence you killed her to escape annihilation” (55). By murdering the aged Ciss, Tom relegates reality to the state of tracing paper aligned with the deeper “real” of his desire (32); because such entrenched fantasies do not “stand against” reality but rather infiltrate it, actuality cannot provide a check or correction to the dream.

The Narcissus intertext becomes explicit in the story of Tom’s heir-in-dream, Colin Torrance. Some time after Lorna has left him, Colin dozes in the park beside a slow-moving stream, and in his dream “He bent to kiss her [Lorna], looking deep into her still-open eyes and a cloud of confusion came over him and he felt the blood draining from his face” (191). In Colin’s mind he is not Narcissus, searching for his

¹⁷ Jacques Lacan, cited in Shoshana Felman, *What Does a Woman Want? Reading and Sexual Difference* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1993): 91.

own reflection in Lorna, but an inert body “being sucked into her presence as if he were a plant leaning over a treacherous pool” (168--69). By this self-rationalisation Colin disowns his solicitations and protestations of love by displacing agency onto Lorna, whom he imagines as a seductress with the power to remove Colin’s last “small square of reality” (169). No longer his proper self, he fears that “if he did not take some action he might shrink and disappear, Lorna had such power to annihilate him” (174).

Returning to Freud’s taxonomy, Colin typifies the “anacletic,” masculine lover, who lowers his own self-esteem by loving, not wisely, but too well. Such love is “suggestive of a neurotic compulsion” -- a fixated repetition -- precisely because it remains in permanent disequilibrium.¹⁸ The anacletic masculine lover is most drawn to the narcissistic feminine lover, and vice versa: he will choose a woman who most absorbs his devotions and gives the least back, self-attentive as a cat; she will choose a man who, in a libidinal sense, feeds her to go hungry himself. Downplayed by Freud, but exaggerated by Frame, is the humiliation and aggression bound up with such love when it is not requited (as is indeed necessitated by the structure of anacletic love). Colin’s blandishments towards Lorna become inextricable from a concern for his own self-preservation, for “a man close to the woman he loves counts her heartbeats because his own life depends on them.”¹⁹ His emotional and psychological reliance upon Lorna’s regard points out the delusion of his “awareness of Lorna’s lack and his own plenitude” (172), a perception which preserves his self-propriety by recoding her deliberate rejection of him as a foolish misunderstanding of the degree to which her being is incomplete without his presence. His need for her twists into her need for him. His own longing to be intact is externalized in the image of the seagull who attracts Colin’s “concentration of hostility” as he returns, alone, from Melbourne to New Zealand: “dipping and rising in the little hollows of the waves” it appears to secure immunity “against seas and men” (178).

Knowing that he is born into a family of dreamers, Colin dreads repeating his grandfather’s “impossible wartime romance” (170), but, like a self-fulfilling prophecy, Colin’s fear induces the very infatuation that he tries to ward off. “He tried to reason. He cared for reason” (176). But Colin’s violence emerges precisely from

¹⁸ Freud, “On Narcissism,” 45.

¹⁹ Frame, *Intensive Care*, 44.

his hope in the might of reason over passion: he must annihilate Lorna because, in his mind, she is the irritation that sets his reason askew. To do so is also to remove his pool of self-recognition; to kill her he must kill himself. He does so, first in fantasy, and then in actuality. By an exquisite irony he receives the recognition which he desired in life only after his death: the police call in his next-of-kin to identify the body and “[t]hey [Pearl and Henry] identified Colin. May identified him. Warm in triple identification he lay dead but alive, named in memory” (203).

Owning Up

In idealizing the object of his devotions the heterosexual masculine subject makes his lover’s image belong to himself; the lover’s world becomes “struck with a presumption of idealization, of the suspicion of yielding [him] only [his] representations.”²⁰ Idealization of an other therefore cannot be extricated from a proprietary orientation toward “her,” for narcissism “*cannot* consist in finding satisfaction in one’s own visual image. It must, rather, consist in the belief that one’s own being exceeds the imperfections of its image. [...] [W]hat one loves in one’s image is something *more* than the image.”²¹ Yet narcissistic desire can neither “own” nor “own up to” its object. An idealization exists to have but not to hold: as Narcissus found, the lover must be content to “gaze on what [he] may not touch” -- at least, not without destroying the image and together with it the fantasy-prop of narcissistic subjectivity.²² Narcissism is therefore constituted visually and can only be maintained by warding off the moment of the “iste ego sum” (“I am that one!”), the moment of

²⁰ Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Principles of Psycho-Analysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, tr. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1981): 81.

²¹ Joan Copjec, *Read My Desire: Lacan against the Historicists* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1994): 37. Copjec’s discussion of narcissism helps my own in some ways but muddies it in others. Copjec critiques film theorists’ attempts to graft together the fundamentally incompatible perspectives of psychoanalysis and Foucauldian historicism. She elucidates the role of ownership in narcissistic idealization and insists that narcissistic relations “unbind” society rather than guaranteeing compliance with ideology, as film theorists (according to her account) would have us believe. It seems to me, however, that the question of a subject coming into being through identification with hegemonic images differs subtly from narcissism as a model for desire. In assuming identifications the subject misrecognises something not its own (the image) as something its own (an image depicting oneself, or an image belonging to oneself). By contrast one way of formulating narcissism is that the subject misrecognises something its own (an idealized version of a person) for something not its own (the person him- or herself).

owning up to ownership itself by realising that the image one idealises is the product of one's own desire.

Yet we know from the story of Narcissus, as well as from *Intensive Care*, that "owning up" as a moment of self-awareness does not suffice to break the drive toward annihilation provoked by the narcissistic bind. Narcissus, after all, arrives at a moment of self-knowledge but is unable to step out of his fascination with his own image:

I am that one! I realize it and my reflection does not deceive me.
I am burning with a love for myself, I both excite the flames and suffer them.
What am I to do? Am I to be wooed, or do I woo? And then, how shall I
woo?
What I desire is with me: my plenty has made me poor.
Oh would that I were able to withdraw from my body;
and, a strange wish in a lover, I should like what I love to be apart.²³

Narcissus is "bound" to the image of his own perfection because it is identical with his own desire: he is the image he adores. At the same time his exclusive infatuation with himself "unbinds" social relations -- what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak terms the "call of relationship" or ethics.²⁴ To unbind himself as a "prisoner" of his own "exaltation,"²⁵ he must separate himself from himself, make what he loves apart from himself through the dual logic of alienated recognition: "where it [my image] is, I am [not]."²⁶ This Narcissus cannot do. Unable to give himself up, he beats his own breast until it bleeds and he finally dies, his body "wasted and dissolved / by love."²⁷ This "unbinding force" of narcissistic desire, its necessary tendency to "conflict with and disrupt other social relations,"²⁸ is emphatically dramatised in *Intensive Care*'s multiple murders. Tom Livingstone and Colin Torrance remain caught in the "moment of Narcissus," stated as the annihilating double bind that "if I make disappear what I cannot not desire, I disappear too."²⁹

The third section of the novel shifts the dynamics, but does not dislodge this specular bind. Now Narcissus governs a totalitarian regime, but in reverse: the agents

²² Ovid, *Metamorphoses I--IV*, ed. & tr. D.E. Hill (Warminster, UK: Aris & Phillips, 1985): ll. 478--79.

²³ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, ll. 464--69.

²⁴ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Echo," *New Literary History* 24.1 (1993): 32.

²⁵ Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Principles of Psycho-analysis*, 61.

²⁶ Spivak, "Echo," 24.

²⁷ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, ll. 489--90.

²⁸ Copjec, *Read My Desire*, 23.

²⁹ Spivak, "Echo," 24.

of Human Delineation look to those labelled “animal” for the confirmation of difference, for assurance that the animal can be visibly demarcated from the human; they perceive instead an intolerable, uncanny similarity to themselves.³⁰ In the figure of Milly, with her unhinging mix of derivative language, flat affect and punning spellings, Frame reinserts Echo into the Narcissus intertext. “I could not see her more clearly” is Colin’s first impression of her, the lexical ambiguity of the statement encapsulating Milly’s paradoxical manifestation: she seems absolutely forthright -- the deepest lines on her face are “those of self-exposure” -- and yet she harbours a pool of inaccessibility, like “an elf who might know more secrets that [sic] one would prefer, inhabit more places than was wise for the comfort of others” (224). In what she terms this “deconstructive embrace” in which “Narcissus is fixed, [but] Echo can disseminate,” Spivak finds a supplementary relation which allows a passage between self and other “crossed easily and imperfectly in the exchange of everyday life,”³¹ yet at the same time impossible in an absolute sense. Thus Spivak might find, in *Intensive Care*’s unresolved psycho-social forces, a disturbing yet necessary truth of the impossibility of relationship as such -- a view which Frame entertains in this novel, but does not ultimately endorse in the tenor of her oeuvre more generally.

Milly’s disseminative potential notwithstanding, it is *Daughter Buffalo* which provides a conciliatory sequel to, and resolution of, the incessant displacements of ontological and physical violence in *Intensive Care*. The conceptual structure of the earlier novel is governed by entrenched sets of binaries: lack/plenitude, hunger/satiation, loss/return. *Daughter Buffalo* will remove the bar between these oppositions by insisting that a loss can be mitigated by further loss, that dispossession need not be violently traumatic, that loss can accrue to profit, and that what has been given can be kept. In learning ethics Talbot will become bound, not to his likeness, but to his “alien likeness”;³² in meeting Turnlung, Talbot will not recognise himself so much as have recognition thrust upon him. A dynamic of “dislocation” in both

³⁰ For a fine anatomy of the asymmetry of the gaze between the “sane” and the “mad,” see Susan Schwartz, “Dancing in the Asylum: The Uncanny Truth of the Madwoman in Janet Frame’s Autobiographical Fiction,” *ARIEL* [Calgary] 27.4 (1996): 113--27. On the dystopian third section of *Intensive Care*, see my essay “The Word as Remnant: Margaret Atwood and Janet Frame,” in *New Windows on a Woman’s World: Essays for Jocelyn Harris*, ed. Lisa Marr & Colin Gibson, vol. 2 (Dunedin: Department of English, U of Otago, 2005): 385--401.

³¹ Spivak, “Echo,” 34.

³² Frame, *A State of Siege*, 137.

temporal and spatial terms (Talbot sees himself in the form of an old man from a foreign land) will “locate” Talbot within his ethnic inheritance, the still living part of himself which he had once believed dead and excised. *Daughter Buffalo* thus opens a pathway for the masculine subject to “give over,” as the idiom goes: to “give over” a cycle of repetition -- break out of it or desist from it -- he must give something “over” in the sense of transferring property; he must dispossess himself.

Giving Over

“Giving over” is thematised through a series of transfers in *Daughter Buffalo*, the most tangible of which is the painting, “Noon,” which Edelman senior gifts to his elder son. Despite the WASPish aspirations of Talbot’s parents, this scene is rescued from the context of bourgeois accumulation because the essence of the gift lies not in its qualities as an aesthetic or material object *per se*, but rather in the way it functions as a portal toward a new state of mindfulness and receptivity. Edelman senior tutors his son in how to notice the painting: “See the sea, those waves, that vastness? [...] And the dog. Right in the middle, the dog. [...] And the bathers” (160). Engrossed in the heat of the noon without shadow, in the “moment of disbelief in substance and self,” Talbot experiences “an intensity to bestow where it would be received and absorbed and would not alarm with the accompanying demand that I show responsibility for it” (159). Thus although Talbot’s father has earlier truncated Talbot’s experience by withholding knowledge of his painful family history and “us[ing] the clean garbage disposal unit on his memories” (8), he also provides an avenue of consciousness for Talbot to experience the loss of his grandfather -- and, by extension, his traumatically interrupted ethnic inheritance -- formerly denied him.

That Frame also intends an implicit puncept on the term “transference” in its more specialised psychoanalytic sense is suggested by Talbot’s observation that his “first meeting [with Turnlung] was merely a raising of the level of unconscious into consciousness” (86), which is as succinct a definition of transference as any.³³ Their relationship reactivates Talbot’s losses and provides, as it were, a safe field of play for Talbot to encounter his own grandfather in the guise of Turnlung, he who can receive

³³ A “puncept” employs puns as the basis for an epistemology capable of maintaining multiple meanings (including contradictory meanings) simultaneously. See Gregory Ulmer,

and absorb without alarm. As a manifestation of grandfather, Turnlung allows Talbot to “love the dead as a living part of [himself],”³⁴ that is, as a part of himself which can continue its dying and thus leave him, thereby completing the mourning process. It is thus through the progressive dying of Turnlung, rather than the abrupt death of his parents, that Talbot enters into -- or rather, achieves -- his true inheritance.³⁵

A parallel pun on “will” helps explain how Talbot comes to inhabit a mode of consciousness that escapes the phenomenological chasm of Narcissus, that of suffering simultaneously from too much and too little separation from the other. In a dream following Turnlung’s death, Talbot has a vision of his “blood kin” squaring off against his “life kin,” “like families of the bride and the groom seated at a wedding ceremony” (196). “Blood kin,” in context, seems to refer to Talbot’s Jewish ancestors, and “life kin,” his chosen family, “who being accessible to me beyond the conforming structure of the genetic code thus gave me the illusion of having a ‘will’ of my own” (196). “Will” plays on the dual meaning of the capacity for voluntary action and the written statement of one’s testamentary gifts, implying that the phenomenon of involuntary genetic inheritance cannot be extricated from the “wilful” action of passing on an inheritance. It is in this intermediate state between agency and instrumentality that Talbot can “choose to be changed,” to use Rilke’s phrase:³⁶ unlike the Livingstone dreamers, he need not phobically defend his fantasmatic “will” -- in the phallic sense this time -- against the fear of annihilation. Instead he works toward a distribution of subjectivity and objectivity as “the love of self as other in separation,” the “elementary solution” to the impasse of Narcissus.³⁷

In turn, Talbot mediates Turnlung’s cultivated process of dying: in transmitting his death secret to a receptive younger man Turnlung completes his work and is able to enter the community of the dead. This relationship evokes the scenario of Greek

“The Punctum in Grammatology,” in *On Puns: The Foundation of Letters*, ed. Jonathan Culler (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988): 164--89.

³⁴ Jacques Derrida, “Fors,” tr. Barbara Johnson, *Georgia Review* 31.1 (1977): 71.

³⁵ For a fuller discussion on mourning and inheritance in *Daughter Buffalo*, see my article “From the Spectral to the Ghostly: Postcolonial Gothic and New Zealand Literature,” *Australasian-Canadian Studies* 24.2 (2006): 143--69. I depart from other commentators on the novel by reading Turnlung as the ghost of Talbot’s grandfather, releasing Talbot’s encrypted ethnic inheritance.

³⁶ The phrase is quoted in Janet Frame’s *Faces in the Water* (New York: George Braziller, 1961): 161.

³⁷ Jacques Derrida, cited in Anne-Emmanuelle Berger, “The Latest Word from Echo,” *New Literary History* 27.4 (1996): 635.

love, as explained by Diotima in Plato's *Symposium*. An older man "attaches himself to someone beautiful" and, by tutelage, ensures his immortality by reproducing his ideas in the younger man, with whom he "nurtur[es] the offspring produced" through this mode of conceptual auto-reproduction.³⁸ Although he "want[s] the old men to enter [him] with all their baggage of history," like a larder being stocked (20), Talbot also panics at this intrusion of his selfhood, fearing that "he [Turnlung] had steered himself toward me, sensing that he could survive by emptying his life into mine" (147). Talbot intuitively feels that Turnlung has come to take as much as to give, a grasping which continues even after Turnlung's death: when identifying Turnlung's corpse at the morgue Talbot feels that "he [Turnlung] was demanding from me all my knowledge of him, my memories, my dreams, with a successful trick of haulage that I tried to resist. Where were the thoughts about death which I had hoped to prize from him?" (193).

The stage seems set for another rendition of the Narcissus effect, in which Turnlung literally bequeaths himself, dying only to be reborn in his younger acolyte of death studies, and so replicates the morbid condition of America's fantasy of "springtime, eternal life" (27). Yet as I hope to show in the next stage of my discussion, at a deeper level *Daughter Buffalo* works against this kind of closure by interrupting the polarization of lack and plenitude necessary to narcissistic desire; for Love, as Diotima argues, "is never either without resources or wealthy."³⁹

Mutual Mirroring

Most critics who address *Daughter Buffalo* tend to absorb and neutralize Turnlung's sexuality, rendering it a "homosexuality of no importance," to borrow D.A. Miller's phrase.⁴⁰ Judith Dell Panny does address the issue, treating Talbot as an allegorical

³⁸ See Diotima's story in Plato's *Symposium*, tr. William S. Cobb (Albany: State U of New York P, 1993): 47.

³⁹ Plato, *Symposium*, 41.

⁴⁰ D.A. Miller, "Anal Rope," in *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, ed. Diana Fuss (New York: Routledge, 1991): 122. Shona Smith sidesteps the topic, focusing her feminist reading of the novel on Talbot's attitudes toward women, while Eve Scopes argues that Turnlung and Talbot are different aspects of one personality whose "joint project [...] is to break the ego apart" (148). Jeanne Delbaere comments concisely on Turnlung's kissing of Talbot as a moment of coherence between love and death, yet curiously elides the moment of sexual consummation itself. Delbaere has in turn influenced Marc Delrez's suggestion that "Turnlung's pioneering experience of death must be mined for what it will reveal in terms of

figure of Death in opposition to Turnlung as Life: “It is through [the literal act of] love that Turnlung completes his death education.” Panny adds, perhaps contradictorily, that “within the allegorical dimension, the homosexual act is another sin like that committed in the Garden of Eden. But for Edelman, the amoral man of the future, it is simply an act of self-gratification.”⁴¹ Gina Mercer is more positive, welcoming Frame’s explorations of “maleness in its diverse forms.” Yet she too finds Talbot to be an unloving partner for Turnlung: “Talbot’s narcissism feeds itself in the relationship with Turnlung, a narcissism which not only loves itself but hates and fears the other.”⁴²

In these responses to the text the conventionally pejorative connotations of narcissism as selfishness override contra-indicative textual details: Panny introduces a dimension of sexual impropriety which is raised nowhere else in Frame’s text, and Mercer elides the fact that the older man, too, is equally likened to Narcissus. Yet Frame’s genius may well lie in the way she enters the heart of narcissism, conventionally located in homosexual mirroring, precisely to expose the specular and proprietary capture of the other in conventional heterosexual “love.” Here, as in *Intensive Care*, she proves to be a nuanced reader of Freud, evoking not only the circularity of narcissistic desire but also its rupture and “imagin[ing] a moment when a large enough quantity of queerness is employed in the production of sameness that sameness itself will appear queer.”⁴³

As discussed above, Freud seems to distinguish between two different kinds of masculine lovers: the object-oriented “anaclitic” lover, and the male homosexual, who seems to epitomise the fundamental quality of narcissism as “the attitude of a person who treats his own body in the same way as otherwise the body of a sexual object is

‘unguessed’ discoveries which can be ascribed a positive heuristic value.” See Shona Smith, “Still Suppressing ...: Reviewers & *Daughter Buffalo*,” *Untold* [Christchurch, NZ] 8 (1987): 38--41; Eve Scopes, “Re-visioning *Daughter Buffalo*,” *Journal of New Zealand Literature* 11 (1993): 144--51; Jeanne Delbaere, “Turnlung in the Noon Sun: An Analysis of *Daughter Buffalo*,” in *The Ring of Fire: Essays on Janet Frame* (Sydney: Dangaroo, 1992): 161--76; Marc Delrez, “Forbidding Bodies: Avatars of the Physical in the Work of Janet Frame,” *World Literature Written in English* 38.2 (2000): 72.

⁴¹ Judith Dell Panny, *I Have What I Gave: The Fiction of Janet Frame* (Wellington: Daphne Brasell, 1992): 136.

⁴² Mercer, *Janet Frame*, 185.

⁴³ Gregory W. Bredbeck, “Anal/yzing the Classroom: On the Impossibility of a Queer Pedagogy,” in *Professions of Desire*, ed. George E. Haggerty & Bonnie Zimmerman (New York: Modern Language Association, 1995): 178.

treated.”⁴⁴ Presumably based on a morphological similarity between the lovers, Freud states that homosexuals “are plainly seeking themselves as a love-object”⁴⁵ -- as if “gender amount[ed] to alterity *tout court*,” as Michael Warner interjects in reaction against this presumption.⁴⁶ Like so many of Freud’s texts, the argument of “On Narcissism” then takes an ingenious turn. Having set up ostensibly distinct boundaries between the heterosexual and homosexual lover, Freud then entertains a more universalising account of homosexuality, mooted that homosexual libido forms the ego-ideal, the self-monitoring effect which is “the most powerful factor favouring repression”⁴⁷ and a key function in the formation of social law. Narcissism therefore lies both front and back of the subject, being both a lost infantile state and a future ideal.

But like anaclitic love, homoerotic narcissism for Freud will prove to be a “no exit” sign. Lacan’s commentary on this problematic in Freud makes overt the tragic ontology of desire in Freud’s speculations: homoerotic desire expresses the truth of desire itself, that ultimately it is “one’s own ego that one loves in love, one’s own ego made real on the imaginary level.”⁴⁸

The subject exhausts himself in pursuing the desire of the other, which he will never be able to grasp as his own desire, because his own desire is the desire of the other. It is himself whom he pursues. [...] The intersubjective relation which subtends perverse desire is only sustained by the annihilation either of the desire of the other, or of the desire of the subject. [...] In the one as in the other, this relation dissolves the being of the subject.⁴⁹

In pursuing the object of his love the homosexual merely ends up chasing his own tail, because what he finds attractive in the other is his anticipation of that man’s regard for him and acknowledgement of him; as Lacan puts it elsewhere, to love is to want to be loved. Desire is extended only in the expectation that it will “rebound” to the self, a

⁴⁴ Freud, “On Narcissism,” 30.

⁴⁵ Freud, “On Narcissism,” 45.

⁴⁶ Michael Warner, “Homo-Narcissism; Or, Heterosexuality,” in *Engendering Men: The Question of Male Feminist Criticism*, ed. Joseph A. Boone & Michael Cadden (New York: Routledge, 1990): 193.

⁴⁷ Freud, “On Narcissism,” 52.

⁴⁸ Lacan, as cited in Kaja Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (New York: Routledge, 1992): 4. The phrase “tragic ontology of desire” is Jonathan Dollimore’s in *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991): 202.

⁴⁹ Jacques Lacan, *Seminar Book I*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, tr. John Forrester (New York: Norton, 1991): 221--22.

dynamic which occurs between heterosexual couples but is simply more obvious, according to Lacan, when the loved object has the same genital morphology as the lover.

By contrast *Daughter Buffalo* is radical to me not because it depicts the only homosexual relationship in all of Frame's writing, but because it offers a love -- *contra* Freud -- which steps outside of a self-consolidating homoeroticism. Frame's innovation is to add the dimension of time to the narcissistic bond between Talbot and Turnlung. Freud seems, at least superficially, to do the same thing, arguing that the narcissistic mode of attachment not only takes present force but may also include a love for one's past self or future desired self. A person may love

(1) According to the narcissistic type:

- (a) What he is himself (actually himself).
- (b) What he once was.
- (c) What he would like to be.
- (d) Someone who was once part of himself.⁵⁰

In (1)(a) Freud's qualification of the word "himself" with the phrase "actually himself" is puzzling: why the apparent tautology? As Freud notes, all forms of object-choice, including anaclitic object-choice, involve an "over-estimation" of the object which "is doubtless derived from the original narcissism of the child, now transferred to the sexual object."⁵¹ Even the narcissistic woman does not love herself, "actually" herself, but the image of an *idealized version* of herself. Once this idealization is admitted, Freud's careful temporal scheme must also collapse, for idealization is psychically serviceable only if it stands independent of time. The subject loves an image of him- or herself precisely because it is possible to do with an image what one cannot do with one's own body: one can situate an image outside of time altogether in an effort to avoid the physicality of the body and its associated process of loss and aging. In all its forms Narcissism operates on a principle of synchronicity, as evidenced by the fact that the paradigmatic situation of narcissism, looking into the mirror, is a drama reliant more upon the spatial rather than temporal dimension.

⁵⁰ Freud, "On Narcissism," 47.

⁵¹ Freud, "On Narcissism," 45.

By contrast, in Turnlung, Talbot encounters not what he would like to be, but what he *will be*. In Frame's earlier novel *The Adaptable Man*, this theme of intergenerational recognition is anticipated in an exchange of looks between Greta Maude and her son's girlfriend, Jenny Sparling:

There had been the evening when Greta, deciding to have a bath and seeing that the others were absorbed [...] had crept upstairs and had begun undressing, when Jenny, not knowing she was in the bathroom, came in and saw her. She saw her touching the folds of her skin and thinking (for surely her thoughts were visible?), I'm like this.⁵²

Greta's self-image is mediated spatially as well as temporally: she sees herself being seen as a younger woman sees her. Greta experiences the moment of recognition as self-deflating, yet it is double-edged, for Greta's realisation, "I'm like this," is surely accompanied by a silent acknowledgement on Jenny's part: "I *will be* like this." *Daughter Buffalo* presents a scenario which is parallel but more involved: the novel splits this temporal encounter between three generations, not two, and folds the question of temporality into a more specifically masculine scenario of inheritance.

In his multiplex personality, alternately impersonating Talbot's grandfather, father and Talbot himself, Turnlung encompasses Talbot's past, present and future (86). In the guise of Grandfather, Turnlung makes present what Talbot "has been" by embodying his phylogenetic past, the disavowed part of himself that calls to him as a Jew when he experiences the gas chamber in the supermarket (127). Like Turnlung, Talbot *is* a male; like Turnlung, he *will be* an old man, his voice thin with spittle, his eyes milk-white, his body fluids flowing out. Talbot comes to desire what he will be -- not what he would like to be -- in a reconciliation with the necessity of time and decay. He undergoes the same senility, the same "form of erosion" (148), as Turnlung, whose "body was in my own image though aged and much used, so that what I felt for him I also felt for myself; he gave me permission to mourn and rejoice over my own life" (144).

By integrating "two seasons under one sky" of youth and old age (86), *Daughter Buffalo* works against a phallic inheritance which consists of the young man taking over his father's authority. Rather than coming into possession of the traditional

⁵² Janet Frame, *The Adaptable Man* (New York: George Braziller, 1965): 93.

guarantees of masculine identity -- the father's name, title, property and (hetero)sexual identity -- Talbot comes into the estate of death and loss that his parents had denied him. An analogy with a cartoon might help explain what I mean. Parodying the hackneyed scenario in which the patriarch surveys his lands and promises his heir, "Son, one day all this will be yours," the cartoon depicts a father standing in the living room of a modest home holding aloft a fistful of bills and saying, "Son, one day all this will be mine." Turnlung as father-figure goes one step further in terms of dispossession, for he dramatises not only the absence of phallic possession but also its impossibility. It is in this sense that Turnlung can bequeath what he does not have to Talbot:

For him and Daughter
Buffalo, I leave
what I have not, what I have not had, and what I have. (183)

The Pocket Mirror

In *Daughter Buffalo*, finally, we find Turnlung and Talbot mirroring each other like the pocket mirrors of Frame's poem: each shows to the other, not mimetic or objective reality isolated from the force of subjectivity, nor a fantasmatically projected self, idealised and objectified, but rather "bars of actual darkness," striations of alterity within the self, multiplied by the infinite regress of mutual reflection. But perhaps Frame's poem is not simply *about* a pocket mirror; perhaps it also functions *as* a pocket mirror, in which the reader gazes and reflects. Returning to the metacritical concerns announced in my introduction, what might be learnt about reading Frame from my observations of Frame as reader of Freud?

I have found that where *Intensive Care* seems static and diagnostic in its inculcation of Narcissus, *Daughter Buffalo* seems capable of a more dynamic transferential agency; where the earlier text applies static taxonomies, the later one enters the flux of "nonce taxonomies," so that Turnlung's travels down "Instant Street" belie, not an instantaneity of comprehension, but the contingency of knowledge for now, in this instance.⁵³ Where *Intensive Care* seems to offer an under-reading of Freud, almost a textbook set of case-studies on variants of narcissistic

⁵³ The phrase "nonce taxonomies" is borrowed from Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1990): 23.

neuroses, *Daughter Buffalo* seems a strong misreading, one which struggles with, exceeds, unravels, cannibalises, and tellingly misrepresents its intertexts, turning the Freudian dictum of the conservation of libido into a parable of subjective dispossession. Frame pushes these modalities of Narcissus, in both a logical and a narrative sense, to their termination in paradoxical convolutions of desire. In short, she uses Freud playfully, hauling the texts and mythologies of Narcissism into the gravitational forces of her worldview and arranging them into wondrous new patterns.

Frame's own practice can, in turn, serve as a model for working intertextually with Frame's oeuvre. The texts that readers bring alongside Frame's writing, whether theoretical or literary, do not merely supplement a self-sufficient or hermetically self-contained oeuvre: Frame's works represent an open-textured matrix of ideas with multiple points of entrance and exit. Nor should readers revert to any single intertext as some kind of explanatory master key: Freud is not the "answer" to Frame, but rather one of many theorists of memory and subjectivity with whom she converses. Instead, through an act of reciprocity and engagement, the movement of interpretation shuttles constantly inward and outward in relation to Frame's fiction: inward, to attend and respond to the precise terms of her writing, and outward, to the clamorous, intersecting world of ideas in which her work intervenes. We not only can but should subject her work to intense semantic scrutiny, pursuing metaphors and allusions to their fullest reach. The value of such critical response may be judged by the extent to which it both sympathises with and enlarges Frame's work.

To return to the psychotherapeutic scene which opened this essay, perhaps the reader is not in the place of Money, imposing interpretation upon the Framean text, nor in the place of Frame, upholding the analyst-text as the place of knowledge and affirmation, but rather like Talbot before Turnlung: coming to the text as a ground of subjective risk and experimentation, a trusted holding place for fantasy and hypothesis. The text, like Turnlung, "willingly play[s] the role of thing;"⁵⁴ it is robust; it will withstand all these interpretive pressures and more, leaving in the reader "valued traces." This is how Frame wants us to read -- by authorising and inviting us to use her texts in the most expansive sense of creative transformation.

⁵⁴ Barbara Johnson, "Using People: Kant with Winnicott," in *The Turn to Ethics*, ed. Marjorie Garber, Beatrice Hanssen & Rebecca L. Walkowitz (New York: Routledge, 2000): 49.

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