Any newly discovered and published novel of a famous writer is cause for great excitement and intrigue, and so it is with Janet Frame’s posthumously published *Towards Another Summer*. This slim volume, written in 1963, covers a winter weekend visit a very reticent and socially awkward protagonist spends with acquaintances in the north of England and, as a beautifully written work, clearly demonstrates the wordsmith for which Frame gained her fame. Based on a real event, the novel sheds light on Frame’s state of mind just prior to her decision to return to her native New Zealand, and does much to explain her move away from the colonial centre that had thus far fed the issues of identity crisis and marginality in the protagonists of her earlier novels. The new work further sheds light on Frame’s decision to leave Britain and become a writer forging new myths in a new land.

Although Janet Frame, New Zealand’s most famous writer and author of 11 novels and several volumes of short stories and poems, died in February 2004, a “new novel”, *Towards Another Summer* (TAS), was published posthumously in 2007. It is a short novel with a simple, unilateral plot about a somewhat successful New Zealand writer based in London in the 1960s who, experiencing writer’s block on her latest novel, takes time-out on a weekend visit with acquaintances in the north of England.

The novel is beautifully crafted, quintessential Frame, but since on a surface reading it presents as rather “tame”, it is a matter of intrigue as to why Frame considered the work “too personal” to be published in her lifetime (TAS: 205). Throughout the weekend the protagonist struggles with social necessities, and constant reminders of her homeland that send her down many of memory’s lanes where she awakens anew to the power of her homeland in her make-up and inner perspective. She eventually flees the holiday early to return to London, after which she becomes energized to write again. The intrigue surrounding the delayed publishing of the novel has been variously viewed as the private nature of the writing, and the similarity to Frame’s
three volume autobiography; however, it is the symbolism in the novel, and the significance of the reoccurring metaphor of the migratory bird, that is of most interest.

The novel is largely autobiographical as Frame did in fact spend a weekend in the north of England in February 1963 with the journalist Geoffrey Moorhouse, his New Zealand born wife Jan, and their two preschool children. Perhaps Frame felt her protagonist’s inept and somewhat dishonest overtures of polite friendliness were transparently cold and self-centered, and that her behavior was stressful, indulgent, even conceited and rude, causing her to fear her hosts may have thought it was a true representation of how the weekend went for her, and thus cause embarrassment to them. Perhaps Frame felt her inner musings on the family life of her hosts would be offensive and also reveal perhaps a little too much of herself, lowering her esteem in their, and her readers’ eyes, and to thus disappointing their expectations of her as a “renown writer”. For indeed the book is very precious. It is written entirely from the protagonist’s viewpoint, either in the first person, or by a third person narrator who reports on her behalf. The ‘story’ consists mainly of related episodes in the host’s home and nearby village, and revived memories of her childhood with long intense inner musings stimulated by reactions to her present situation. At no time is the reader privy to the thoughts or feelings of the hosts, and they are seen only through the eyes of the protagonist, who relates them only in reference to herself. However, despite the intense personal nature of the writing, which reads almost as if it were a private journal, I do not feel this can be the reason for the delay of the publishing of this book, especially given that the book was published after Frame’s own death, not that of her hosts, and that Frame had already called upon some extremely sensitive events in her life to inform her already published volumes. Furthermore, that her hosts took no umbrage or offence is further corroborated by the host of the weekend, as Moorhouse, who was contacted by Frame’s estate in 2007 prior to the publishing of the book, wrote:

“It struck both Jan and me that Frame’s estate was being unnecessarily scrupulous in seeking our approval of the script … the Thirketts [the name given to the family in the novel] are simply included as a context, as an amiable family who are for the moment propping her up … Frame was reworking a theme she returned to time and again, of the Outsider struggling to find a way in. Nothing else really mattered to her when set beside that … I’m left wondering above all why [she] did not want the novel published in her lifetime, for it isn’t a hurtful story, or one that makes you hope no one will ever recognize you as one of its characters. [She said] it was “embarrassingly personal”. But the same could be said of almost everything she wrote and secured her reputation with”. Moorhouse, G. (2008)
These comments lay to rest the idea that the hosts would be in someway affronted at the nature of the book, or the observations and comments made about them as a family. Clearly, the “embarrassingly personal” aspect of the book is what Frame reveals of herself through her protagonists’ experiences — a point rendered somewhat irrelevant some twenty years later with the writing of her intensely personal three-volume autobiography in the early 1980’s.

The autobiographical nature of Towards Another Summer (TAS) is clearly seen by even a cursory reading of her three-volume autobiography. Frame constantly said she was not her characters (Wilby, 2007), nevertheless her protagonists indeed channel an embellishment of her experiences and memories, and the similarities to her own life in TAS are undeniable; in fact so much so that it is difficult to write about the protagonist of the novel without thinking of her as Frame herself.

The novel is clearly an exploratory piece on many levels, and could perhaps be seen as the precursor to the autobiographies, exploring events of her past and experimenting with the accessing of childhood memories; a writing style that later found itself fully developed in her autobiographies to the is-land (1983), an angel at my table (1984), and an envoy to the mirror city (1985). Frame herself said she preferred to call her works “explorations” rather than novels (King, 2000), and in TAS she delights us with earlier references to many of the quintessential Framisms for which she has become renown. References to the same events, images and metaphors in TAS that are used elsewhere in her works, suggest to me she may have used TAS as a reservoir of material for other novels, and that perhaps this is the reason she did not wish to publish it. For example, the word play on jewel/dual appears in Daughter Buffalo (1972), plane/plain in Living in the Maniototo (1979), and references to envoy/mirror city in her autobiographies (1980s) are but a few such examples. Whereas the concepts of North / South and mirror city (the home of imagination) appear in her already published books Faces in the Water (1961) and The edge of the Alphabet (1962), the ‘recycling’ helping to establish her own myths and genre. Although memories of the death of her grandparents and sister feature in TAS, conspicuously missing is any in-depth agonizing on these deaths. TAS is a more gentle work, fraught with inner musings, but also with Frame’s special brand of humor, which is often tied to her use of the technique of metonym. Thus, in TAS, she delights us with several sequences of the stains; the frustrating world of publishing, with its people, paraphernalia, and demands:

“Being a writer, and returning home tired after every venture, you are so surprised to find yourself a slowly spreading stain of publisher, critic, agent. You turn in panic to the household hints in Peers Cyclopedia; running your finger down the list of stains – acid,
black-lead, blood, candlegrease, green ink, marking ink, Indian ink, nailpolish, nicotine rust scorch sealingwax soot, tar whitewash wine, and the remedies – water, turpentine, methylated spirits, carbon tetrachloride, photographic hypo vinegar … you wonder which stain and which remedy would apply to publisher, agent, critic … when you realize there’s nothing, you can neither identify the stain nor remove it … you set out … once more through the paddock …; and the stain spreads. (TAS: 19)

“Also, there are visits here and there to consult the stains in their place of origin”. (TAS: 27)

“The Friday before the weekend another stain unexpectedly marred Grace’s progress through her field… there was to be an interview recorded for the Overseas Service of the BBC” (TAS: 35)

“She wondered whether these accumulated stains that seemed so much part of her essentially private ventures would in the end spread over most of her life … would force her to vomit her whole life – all her treasured experiences and dreams …” (TAS: 37)

Frame’s choice of names for her characters further highlights the mischievous she often weaves into the agonizing. The novel has few characters; the principal being the protagonist, Grace Cleave, and the family she visited, Philip Thirkettle, his wife Anne, their two children Sarah and Noel, and the absent father, Reuben, whose room Grace uses during her stay. Grace means blessing of God, charm, pleasantness, while Cleave means both to split and to hold together (Cleave). This name suits the protagonist who feels herself to be graceless; grace cleaved, and to reinforce the analogy, throughout the weekend the young Sarah continues to refer to her as Grace-Cleave. Grace is both split and held together. Anne also means Grace of God, St. Anne being the patron of homemakers and mothers and a very fitting name for the wife who is enmeshed in daily domesticity. Grace sees Anne as the quintessential mother figure – truly blessed. Sarah, Noel, and Reuben are all biblical names relating to “gifts from God”, Noel being especially pointed in that Frame was initially invited for Christmas (Noel), although it was the following February before she took up her invitation. Of further interest is the meaning of Frame’s first name, Janet, as it too means God is Gracious (Names). With this, we have in fact the Three Graces – one of the references in TAS that Frame makes to the ancient myths of the past; here implied.
“The Three Graces are goddesses of joy, charm and beauty, the source of all decorum, purity of happiness in life, good will and beneficence and gratitude among men. The Greeks believed that without gracefulness, all labor was in vain and meaningless (italics are mine). Hence, the three deities assisted Hermes (Mercury) in his capacity as the god of oratory … Social intercourse, manners and culture were their domain, and they were frequently the subject of artists and poets alike” (Three Graces)

For a tongue-tied Grace/Frame, who could only find her voice in her inner world, the significance of her name is binding, until Frame comes to terms with her roots, and after seven years abroad, turns her ‘oratorical’ attentions to new myth-making in a new land, her homeland, New Zealand.

The host’s family name, Thirkettle, adds emphasis to Graces’ turmoil. ‘Thir’ derives from the god of thunder, Thor, a god who held considerable power in the old pantheon of Norse gods, and holds influence in place names even into modern times, and kettle which derives from ketill, a sacrificial secret cauldron (Thirkettle). Of particular interest is that Thor is noted for his long fierce red bushy beard; a mirror of Grace/Frame’s own bushy red hair. No reference could be found for the name of the village, Relham, except to read it perhaps as ‘realm’. However, in her struggle with the cold weather of the north, Grace/Frame references the northern gods as the ‘relentless gods’ (TAS: 97), a parallel she seems to make to Thirkettle’s relentless need for clarity, which often ‘froze’ her attempts to fudge social interaction.

“Her mind (yet) revelling in the drama of this foreign hemisphere where North was a word full of menace and South promised sun and warmth. The traditional phrases of her own country – up north, down south, had no meaning in this part of the world …Grace felt herself to be lost in a desert or snow-plain of reference; her mind grew chilled” (TAS: 97)

“… then Philip said with determination, using his words and their certainty as a part of a campaign against the bitter cold …” (TAS:115)

Thus Frame demonstrated humor in her writing in subtle ways, as Grace Cleaves’ time with the Thirkettles family is certainly a cauldron of experiences, emotions and memories, with Grace as the social sacrificial offering rather than one of the beautiful Graces of social manners and niceties. Grace/Frame eventually emerges from this mix with the realization that her blessings as a writer are to be found in her own unique mix of personal history, imagination, and
inner landscape.

Also of interest is the name of the book itself, and the layout of the chapters. The title is *Towards Another Summer*, the ‘foreword’ referencing the migratory bird, the Godwit. Since bird migration is largely a northern hemisphere phenomenon, it is natural to suppose Grace/Frame’s migration is from the wintery north (Britain) to the sunlight of the south (New Zealand), and she herself expresses this with the words “Why a migratory bird? No doubt because I’ve journeyed from the other side of the world. Perhaps I’m homesick for my own country and have not realized it.” (TAS: 15). Perhaps she ‘becomes’ the migratory bird each time she encounters a memory of her childhood, and an intense connection to the landscape of New Zealand.

However, the words in the title are not *towards summer*, but towards *another* summer. This would seem to indicate Grace/Frame had already experienced summer. Keeping in mind the story is about a writer with writer’s block who overcomes it by writing about her introspective and illuminating weekend stay with friends, it could be said that ‘towards another summer’ is more about finding the material to write again: “you’ve another book coming out soon?” [asks Thirkettle]. [Grace answers] “Yes, in Summer. It’s hopeless”. (TAS: 198). It is in this sense that the migration towards *another* summer – summer being a time of maturity, and ripening – is to dig deep into her inner self, where Grace finds what is needed to complete her book by the summer, and Frame finds her sense of direction.

“I have a passion for the sunlight of memory – I’m a migratory bird … flying towards another summer. (TAS: 118), [but] I’m in a different country now, I’m completing the act of finding by losing … let me not become a ship and sailor strangled in a bottle, a glass bird upon a mantelpiece” (TAS: 152)

There are only two chapters in the novel, ‘The Weekend’ and ‘Another Summer’. The first chapter is very short, only one third of the book, and deals with Grace’s London situation, an interview with two young people, and her frustration with “the stains”, which cumulate in her decision to take up the offer of a weekend away. ‘The weekend’ concludes at the end of the first night of the weekend – Grace already having been lead on several occasions into the world of her imagination and taken several flights into memory. The second chapter, ‘Another Summer’, begins with a long memory sequence and contains more references to Grace/Frame’s childhood memories than to any of her interactions with her hosts. Grace is constantly being pulled back to a consideration of her roots by the N.Z. connections and conversational references of her hosts, and by all the NZ memorabilia in the room in which she is staying. This chapter ends with
Grace suddenly returning to London, with a sharp “I think I’m homesick for my type-writer” (TAS: 162) and Frame returning to N.Z. not long after. ‘Towards Another Summer’, then, refers to Grace/Frame being able to once again access her writing material – from her imagination, in fresh and vibrant connection with her roots.

One of Frame’s signature metaphors is that of the hawk, a reference to freedom from an increasingly predatory society (Wilby, 2007). Although it does not appear in TAS, she does have a theme based around the metaphor of a migratory bird; it is this migratory bird that most excites the imagination, and is most illuminative of the ‘purpose’ and success of TAS. For it is this imagery, this prop, that enables Frame to make the decision to turn into the mirror city (imagination), to return home, and to become one of her country’s myth-makers, an act that had considerable significance on the rest of her life.

Early in the novel, Grace develops the feeling, the belief that she has turned into a migratory bird. The metaphor of the migratory bird continues throughout the novel and symbolizes the past, the present, and the future. First, in the present, Grace/Frame could not settle on which bird she was, and she listed many on several occasions (TAS: 15.16.128.), many of which are not in fact migratory birds at all. Finally she settles on the Godwit, and references the poem “Islands” by Charles Brasch, both in the “foreword” and throughout the novel.

“And from their haunted bay, the Godwits vanish towards another summer. Everywhere in light and calm the murmurings Shadow of departure; distance looks our way; And none knows where he will lie down at night” (TAS: 63.203)

Frame’s choice of reference for the introduction to her novel carries a greater significant than simply finding it in the Book of New Zealand Verse Grace happened to browse through whilst staying with the Thirkettes (TAS: 58). Brasch, a writer from her hometown Oamaru, was the editor and publisher of a literary journal called Landfall. Frame had sent a poem and a story to him for publication early in her career, both of which were rejected; The Slaughter House, which “while interesting, was deemed not suitable”, and Gorse is not People because “it was too painful to print” (an angel at my table: 126-30). In her autobiography, Frame related how this rejection devastated her, effecting her whole life and leaving her in despair as she wondered what she could do if she were unable to write for a living (ibid). Now, some years later in 1963, to ‘fly home on the wings of a Godwit’ is a wonderful vindication of herself as a successful writer, Frame having touched the essence of Brasch’s poem, and surpassed him in her renown.

Frame’s reference to birds, turning into birds, is somewhat literary and falls in with popular
allegorical references used by poets and writers, that has survived over the ages. The myth of Philomela and Procne, which Grace/Frame references twice in TAS, sees Grace/Frame paying homage to this tradition of old. The myth relates the story of two sisters parted by marriage. When Procne wishes to see her sister again her husband goes to fetch her. On the way he rapes Philomela and cuts off her tongue to prevent her from telling. Philomela weaves her story into a coat, and sends it to Procne. Together the sisters take their revenge, but in the awfulness of it all the Gods turn them all into birds, the husband into a Hawk, Philomela into a swallow and Procne into a nightingale. The swallow is silent, but the nightingale sings a sad revere for the tragic loss of her son in her revenge over her husband (Philomela). Grace/Frame says, on changing into a bird, that the old traditions of “Procne and Philomela must be tended, “only that way shall we survive” (TAS: 98). Later, however, on realizing she cannot find a parallel to her search for a memory of her childhood in the local village, Grace/Frame says “ Procne, Philomela. “The summer swallow. [the silent migratory bird] So perish the old Gods but out of the sea of time” (TAS: 103): A direct quote from the Norse ballads of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow:

“Till like the sun it seemed, Sinking beneath the waves. Balder returned no more! So perish the old Gods! But out of the sea of Time Rises a new land of song, Fairer than the old. Over its meadows green. Walk the young bards and sing” (Ashiliman: accessed Oct. 5. 2010)

Thus Grace/Frame has referenced the Ballad of Balder Blot, the Norse god of innocence and beauty; the God of the Summer Sun, whose death signifies the ending of the old and the coming of the new, encouraging her to turn away from the old myths and turn to a consideration of the making of new myths, “in a new land of song, fairer than the old”.

While Philomela is turned into a silent swallow, Procne is turned into a nightingale, a bird well known in literature as a representation for revelation, contemplation, and transformation into a psychic state. The nightingale features in a poem by Coleridge of the same name, which also mentions the myth of Philomela, while the myth of Philomela also appears in The Birds by Aristophanes, Eliot’s poem The Waste Land, Shakespeare’s Titus Andronicus, and Margret Atwood’s The Tent, among others (Wiki). Keats Ode to a Nightingale, especially stanza V where the nightingale sings of summer, uses the song of the nightingale to go deep into an imaginative state, and, as a reference to an escape into the imagination, takes from Shakespeare’s “Immortat Bird”, “Away! Away! For I will fly to thee”, an image found in TAS. The second part of the poem, for which Frame most certainly was familiar, she having written
about her inability to recite Keats when she traveled to the places of his inspiration (Wadell, 2008) is not about identifying with the bird, but rather discusses the convergence of the past with the future, while experiencing the present (Vendler (1983); what is known in post-colonial studies as 'time compression'. Grace/Frame gives the nightingale little more than a passing reference, although arrives at the same experience of time compression. For her, these are the old myths, referencing them in novels is the old way.

Ultimately it is the Godwit that wins the day, and leads Grace/Frame into the future, and home. This migratory bird has particular significance to the people of N.Z. The Godwit makes the longest direct migration in the world, traveling from its breeding grounds in Alaska to various parts of New Zealand in September each year on a nine-day non-stop trip of 11,000 kilometers (Gill: 2005). In fact when the flocks arrive in the wetlands of my home town of Christchurch, the cathedral bells ring for half an hour to welcome them as the harbingers of Spring, and when they are ready for their return journey they are sent off with a ritual farewell. Although it is unlikely Frame knew of the facts of the migration (it has only recently been confirmed), it has long been known that the birds leave N.Z. in March and travel back to Alaska in a more leisurely trip, stopping in Indonesia, Korea and China. These ‘ambassadorial’ birds (Kuaka) are referenced in Maori chants, and welcomed as messengers from far away lands.

From her intense experiences over her weekend away Grace/Frame decides to return to New Zealand, having now outgrown the need for the myths and cultural connections of the colonial center, Britain, and sensing a stronger purpose and understanding that she is to be a New Zealand writer, freed from her colonial past. In 1963, Grace/Frame wrote”

“ I … I matter … I fly alone, apart from the flock, on long journeys through storm and clear skies to another summer. Hear me! “ (TAS: 161)

In 1983, in to the is-land (p.7), the first of her three autobiographies, now unfettered by an alias, a more mature and confident Frame writes of herself,

“From the first place of liquid darkness, within the second place of air and light, I set down the following record with its mixture of fact and truths and memories of truths and its direction always toward the Third Place, where the starting point is myth”
References


http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2008/jul/05/saturdayreviewsfeatures.guardianreview23


Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 99: *The Three Graces*

http://towerweb.net/alt-lib/myth/three_graces.shtm (accessed Sept. 27. 2010)

Ode to a Nightingale: John Keats: (Feb.13.2009)

Academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/English/…knighting.html (accessed Sept. 27. 2010)


Wiki: *Philomela (princess of Athens)* and INFLUENCES of. Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia


112