

WALKING THE IMPERIAL METROPOLIS: JANET FRAME'S *THE ENVOY FROM MIRROR CITY*

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Janet Frame (1924-2004), a titanic figure of New Zealand literature, is the author of a twelve novels and four short stories, but it is her autobiography that has earned her more popularity among critics. Frame's autobiographical trilogy –*To the Is-land* (1982), *An Angel at My Table* (1984), and *The Envoy from Mirror City* (1984)–, has been regarded as «one of the century's great feats of imaginative self-description»¹. Its second instalment has been popularised by Jane Campion's 1990 film version under the same title. Regarding the reasons that led her to dive into life-writing, Frame has asserted:

«... it was the desire really to make myself a first person. For many years I was a third person –as children are. 'They', 'she'... and as probably the oppressed minority has become, 'they'. I mean, children are forever 'they' until they grow up»².

Frame perceives her autobiography as a way to assert her own individuality, growth and counteract those who had *othered* her. This meant shaking off the mad woman image that preyed on her, after being misdiagnosed with schizophrenia by her New Zealand doctors. Frame spent her early life in small towns, where her father worked for the railways. Her upbringing was blighted by her family's poverty, a sense of inadequacy, and the deaths by drowning of two of her sisters. While she was working as a trainee teacher in Dunedin in 1945, her alienation and her family bereavements triggered an emotional breakdown, which doctors mistook for schizophrenia, a misdiagnosis which kept her in mental hospitals for almost a decade. As a critic remarks in an article published by *The Guardian* on the occasion of her recent death, the fictional

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1. Schaffer, William: *Mapping the Godzone: A Primer on New Zealand Literature and Culture*, Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 1998, p. 160.
 2. ALLEY, Elizabeth: «Janet Frame Interviewed by Elizabeth Alley», in Elizabeth Alley and Mark Williams (eds.): *In The Same Room. Conversations with New Zealand Writer*, Auckland, Auckland University Press, p. 40.

use that Frame had made of her time in mental hospitals and family tragedies, «her insights into the world of the insane», led to a widespread belief that she was a «mad genius, whose creativity had its origins in mental disorder»³. In her autobiography, then, Frame disclaims madness as an explanation for her art. Besides, she records her development as a writer despite being encouraged by her family and teachers to devote herself to teaching, a more fitting professional possibility for a woman in her time and place.

Not surprisingly, Frame's autobiographical trilogy has drawn the attention of critics working in the field of women's autobiography. In her volume *Gendered Resistance*, Valérie Baisnée analyses the autobiographies of Simone de Beauvoir, Maya Angelou, Marguerite Duras and the first instalment of Janet Frame's trilogy –*Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée* (1958), *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969), *L'amant* (1984) and *To the Is-Land* (1984) respectively– to illustrate how «autobiography has become a place in which the female subject not only records personal growth but also tackles certain political issues linked to the position of women in society»⁴. In their autobiographies, Baisnée goes on to argue, these four women comment on a period, that between the two World Wars, «which has redefined the role of women specially in terms of education and work»⁵. The focus of this paper will be on the third volume of Frame's trilogy, *The Envoy from Mirror City*, first published in Great Britain by The Women's Press, in which Frame recounts her youth and the beginning of her career as an internationally known writer in 1950's London.

This essay charts Frame's narrative of her appropriation of the public spaces of London in the mid-1950s and early 1960s, claiming her as a flâneur-artist. I adhere to Keith Tester's predicament that the flâneur is a «recurring motif in the literature, sociology and art of ... the metropolitan existence» rather than a figure tied to a specific place –Baudelaire's Paris– and time –modernity and its artistic manifestations⁶. In her essay «Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity», feminist art historian Griselda Pollock launches a recovery of nineteenth century female painters excluded from the male-dominated modernist cannon. Although her focus is on impressionist artists, Pollock argues that unfortunately, the configuration that shaped their work continues to affect the lives of women in our contemporary world:

«Modernity is still with us, ever more acutely as our cities become, in the exacerbated world of postmodernity, more and more a place of strangers and spectacle,

3. KING, Michael: «Janet Frame», *The Guardian*, January 30, 2004, online: <http://books.guardian.co.uk> (accessed March 2005), paragraph 5.

4. BAINÉE, Valérie: *Gendered Resistance. The Autobiographies of Simone de Beauvoir, Maya Angelou, Janet Frame and Marguerite Duras*, Amsterdam, Rodopi, 1997, p. 12.

5. Ibid.

6. TESTER, Keith: «Introduction», in Keith Tester (ed.): *The Flâneur*, London, Routledge, 1994, pp. 1 and 16.

while women are ever more vulnerable to violent assault while out in public and are denied the right to move around our cities safely»⁷.

Much work remains to be done on the issue of women and space regarding female writers who, due to their location outside modernity and/or to their national affiliations have been overlooked by this kind of scholarship. Those who, like Caribbean-born Jean Rhys, have not been neglected, have been approached without the due specificity. Rachel Bowlby's essay on Rhys' *Good Morning, Midnight*⁸, for instance, does not discuss the interface between Rhys's un-Englishness and her treatment of space and femininity in this novel. In my discussion of Janet Frame, I will address how her cultural specificity as a New Zealander determines her perception of metropolitan space in *The Envoy from Mirror City*.

1. THE WRITER IN THE CITY

The Envoy from Mirror City recounts Frame's seven-year stay in London, where she travelled in 1956 on a literary grant awarded by her country to broaden her experience as a writer. In London, Frame manages to stretch her grant money by doing part-time jobs which do not divert her from her main task, writing and elbowing her way through London's literary world. A crucial part of Frame's daily agenda in London are her daily strolls and bus rides though the city, which she admits to be «absorbing in its seasons»⁹. Indeed, Frame displays a modern sensibility towards the city, which spurs her creativity and provides her with materials for her fiction:

«... during my time at Grove Hill Road I had been aware of a subtle shifting of my life into a world of fiction where I spread before me everything I saw and heard, people I met in buses, streets, railway stations, and where I lived, choosing from the displayed treasure frag-ments and mo-ments that combined to make a shape of a novel or poem or story. Nothing was without its use. I had learned to be a citizen of the Mirror City»¹⁰.

From this passage we gather that Frame attaches a two-fold dimension to the city. It is, on the one hand, the bustling city of London, the real setting of her idle strolling; and on the other hand, the realm of the imagination, the «Mirror City», where experiences and revelations are stored and processed by the artist's sensibility. On arriving in London after a one-moth sea voyage from New Zealand, Frame realizes that the letter she had sent booking a room at the Society of Friends' Hostel at Euston Road had never reached its destination and there was no room available for her there. She eventually got a room for two

7. POLLOCK, Griselda: *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and Histories of Art*, London, Routledge, 1994.

8. BOWLBY, Rachel: *Still Crazy After All These Years. Women, Writing, and Psychoanalysis*, London, Routledge, 1992, pp. 34-57.

9. FRAME, Janet: *The Envoy from Mirror City*, London, Paladin, 1987, p. 112. Hereafter, page references to this book will be made parenthetically within the text.

10. Ibid., p. 154.

nights at the YMCA Hostel, which reminded her of «a mental hospital without the noise»¹¹. Despite the nuisance, Frame experiences this mundane incident as a moment of intense feeling where some truth is revealed:

«For a moment the loss of the letter I had written seemed to me unimportant beside the fictional gift of the loss as if within every event lay a reflection reached only through the imagination and its various servant languages, as if, like the shadows in Plato's cave, our lives and the world contain mirror cities revealed to us by our imagination, the Envoy»¹².

From early in the volume Frame reveals herself as «a secret spectator of the spectacle of the spaces and places of the city», to borrow Keith Tester's words drawing on Baudelaire¹³, a walker endowed with an active imagination for whom experienced reality has the meaning she attributes to it, thus displaying the motifs associated with the figure of the flaneur.

In her restless search for the best place to live in London, Frame stays in a cottage in the countryside, Suffolk, where she is allowed to live in exchange for her caretaking services. However, she soon realizes that, in spite of the peaceful and pastoral atmosphere, the bustle of London is more congenial to her writing, bearing out Tester's statement that «The poet is the man for whom metropolitan spaces are the landscape of art and existence»¹⁴. The city, with its impersonal crowd, speaks a more meaningful language to Frame than nature does:

«In Suffolk I ... was ... eager to go walking in the dew-wet lanes, watching the hares in the corn, seeing the wildflowers, primroses, cowslips, bluebells, blackthorn; but my heart was in London, I wanted to return there where I was happy to be alone in the crowd, surrounded and sustained by the immensity of people, of the human race, who, although it –we- had destroyed or crippled much of the natural world, including my northern hemisphere sky, could still send representatives to explore the Mirror City, and ... struggle home to create their works of art»¹⁵.

While in Suffolk, Frame misses her place in the metropolitan crowd and feels the need to escape from the seclusion of the Suffolk countryside and its domestic tasks, «*garden, clean, walk the dog, shop*»¹⁶. While performing her gardening duties, she is seized by the fever of digging out stones, «English, Roman, Saxon, Danish relics from another city»¹⁷, which point at her longing for a metropolitan existence. Her position in the crowd must be qualified, since even though she feels «surrounded and sustained» by it, she needs detachment. Frame knows that she possesses some «nobility» in relation to all the other members of the metropolitan crowd, as Baudelaire would put it¹⁸. She is above the crowd

11. Ibid., p. 19

12. Ibid.

13. TESTER, Keith: Op. cit., p. 7.

14. Ibid., p. 2.

15. FRAME, Janet: Op. cit., p. 158.

16. Ibid., p. 157.

17. Ibid., p. 159.

18. TESTER, Keith, Op. cit., p. 3.

in her knowledge of history, in her awareness of the harmful effects of British imperialism, which reached and exploited distant lands like New Zealand, her «northern hemisphere»; and in her ambivalent status as descendant of British settlers but New Zealand-born and raised. Besides, she is aware of the fact that there are only a few gifted people like herself among the crowd, who shuttle in and out of the urban scenery in order to create their works of art.

Frame observes the spectacle of the city, paying attention to its most fleeting moments as well as to its rituals of public spaces. In a dark winter evening, the flux of metropolitan life unfolds before her eyes:

«I watched the leaves turning and falling and drifting against the black iron railing of the parks. I saw the sun change to blood-red and stand on end upon the winterbeaten grass of the Common; I watched the people with a new urgency in their gait, hurrying to their homes, if they had homes to escape the dark and the cold; and those with no homes depending for warmth and shelter on the doorways of peopleless places like banks and insurance buildings and ... on the seats of the railway stations and bus terminals and down from the Strand, by the river, underneath the arches. Then after dark, the new life of London, the glitter, the people in taxis and dark polished cars ... wandering misfits shouting at the sky ...»¹⁹

In this passage, Frame is attentive to the transient moments of nature, the drifting of the leaves, or the red sunset against the green of the Common. She records her impressions with the eyes of a poet, aestheticising the colours of the city: the greenness of leaves and parks, the redness of the sun, the blackness of iron railings and cars, the polish and the glitter of the metropolitan night. She notices the effect the encroaching darkness and cold has on the city-dwellers, the commuters returning home at the rush hour, the haves and the have-nots, and the simultaneity and frenetic rhythm of contemporary city life as it renews itself after sunset. Endowed with a special sensitivity to marginality, Frame does not overlook the fact that, as Certeau argues, «urban life increasingly permits the re-emergence of the element that the urbanistic project excluded», «hierarchizing all deviances»²⁰. Thus, she notices with sympathy how the homeless occupy spaces such as the doorways of banks or the seats in train stations, or the insane roaming of the «misfits», those who have not found their place in the city.

2. COLONIAL FLANEURS

The absence of female flanery in the literature of modernity, Janet Wolff explains, is due to women's uneven access to the possibility of «lone travel», «voluntary uprooting», or «anonymous arrival at a new place»²¹; the flaneur is

19. FRAME, Janet: Op. cit., p. 170

20. DE CERTEAU, Michel: «Walking the City», in Lawrence Grossberg (ed.): *Cultural Studies*, London, Routledge, 1992, p.130.

21. WOLFF, Janet: *Feminine Sentences: Essays on Women and Culture*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1991.

usually, Wolff points out, a «person on the margins of society»²², for whom the spectacle he observes does not trigger a feeling of belonging, able to roam around the public spaces of the city unnoticed, and thus uncensored. Janet Frame, the New Zealand writer going about mid-1950s London on a literary grant, fits the pattern of the lone, uprooted traveller. Her national affiliation as member of a former British settler colony and now a Commonwealth country gains her a high degree of detachment and anonymity in London. It is thanks to her unbelonging, I argue, that she is able to wander the streets confidently and unacknowledged. Frame is outspoken about her marginality as a New Zealander in London: she knows that speaking the English language and having received an English education does not guarantee acceptance in the Mother Country, although it is not acceptance as British that she is after. Significantly, all the people she interacts and identifies herself with in the metropolis tend to be from countries like Ireland, Australia, or West Africa. Soon after her arrival in London she develops a brief friendship with Nigel, a Nigerian:

«We shared much. We were both colonials with ‘similar’ education – heavy doses of British Empire, English history, produces, rivers, cities, kings, and literature. He too had been given lists of the good, the strong, the brave, with friends and enemies clearly, permanently identified. He too had read of other places, other worlds with a mantle of invisibility cast upon his own world. I was more favoured, however, in having my ancestors placed among the good, the strong, the brave, the friendly, in the position of the patronizing disposers, the blessed givers»²³.

Both Frame and Nigel come from cultures which have been defined against the British, considered the norm. Frame is more «favoured», however, because she is a Pakeha, or white New Zealander, the descendant of the British settlers and not a Maori native; Nigel, in turn, comes from an overwhelmingly black society, where the British ruled as a small elite. That is the reason why Nigel addresses Frame as «you English»²⁴. The ambivalence of Frame’s identity is clear when we notice that whereas she is perceived as English by a Nigerian, she sees herself as a colonial in awe of the imperial metropolis, the Old World. A similar bond develops between Frame and her neighbour Patrick Reilly, an Irish immigrant that she considers her first friend in London. Patrick expects Janet to understand «what the English had done to Ireland»²⁵. Yet Frame resents Patrick’s bigotry since, despite being an immigrant himself, he warns her about the blacks in London, who «are stealing all the work»²⁶; in post-war Britain the Irish suffer as much housing discrimination as other immigrants, as the signs «‘no children, pets, coloured or Irish’»²⁷ that Frame encounters suggest.

22. Ibid., p. 39.

23. FRAME, Janet: *Op. cit.*, p. 34.

24. Ibid., p. 35.

25. Ibid., p. 23.

26. Ibid., p. 25.

27. Ibid., p. 130.

In her interactions with other foreigners in London, Frame shows a strong awareness of the cultural construction of difference. Her biases are first put to the test during the sea-voyage towards Britain. When the ship stops at Curaçao, a Dutch colony, she walks about the streets of its capital, Willenstad, feeling tempted to survey the poverty surrounding her with a civilizing gaze characteristic of nineteenth century British explorers²⁸. But as soon as she becomes aware of her resorting to «the old clothes of prejudice»²⁹, she makes an effort to overcome them. This gesture implies that, when she is the subject of the look, Frame refuses to be complicit with prevailing stereotypes, in this case those associated with a masculinist gaze. Frame is doing here what Pollock describes when analysing the paintings of Mary Cassat. Whereas male impressionist painters portray women as the passive subjects of their gaze, Cassat carries out a «rearticulation of traditional space so that it ceases to function primarily as the space of sight for a mastering gaze»³⁰. Thus, the women depicted by her, specially the widow in *At the Opera* (1879), appear as agents of their own looking or any other activity. The space of Willenstad, its exoticism and backwardness, is susceptible to be the object of a mastering gaze, which Frame will not hold. As I pointed out above, her mind is a receptacle of new experiences, alert to the «displayed treasures» that her stay abroad unravels.

The urban landscape of London, the heart of the empire, becomes a place of search full of «spaces of mystery»³¹ for the colonial flâneur-artist to observe. In her London strolls, Frame becomes a «reader of the urban text», to quote Patricia Parkhurst's words³²:

«And the words of London fascinated me – the stacks of newspapers and magazines, sheets of advertisements in the windows of the tobacconists and newspapers shops, the names on the buses, the street signs, the menus chalked on blackboards outside the humble Transport Cafes ... the numerous bookshops and libraries. I had never had so much opportunity for public reading»³³.

Besides common names on advertisements and shops, Frame is haunted by proper names such as «Mortlake, Shepherd's Bush, Swiss Cottage»³⁴, or «Crystal Palace, Ponders End, Piccadilly Circus, High Wycombe»³⁵. The poetry and historical reverberations in these names stimulate Frame's sense of wonder in a way that New Zealand's names do not. New Zealand is a New World where place names «still echo with their first voice»³⁶. London, in turn, is the source, a site to be excavated by Frame in her search for origins and meanings.

28. See PRATT, Mary Louise: *Imperial Eyes*, London, Routledge, 1992, chapter 9.

29. FRAME, Janet: Op. cit., p. 12.

30. POLLOCK, Griselda: Op. cit., p. 31.

31. TESTER, Keith: Op. cit., 13.

32. PARKHURST FERGUSON, Priscilla: «The flâneur on and off the streets of Paris», in Keith Tester: Op. cit., p. 29.

33. Ibid., p. 26.

34. FRAME, Janet : Op. cit., p. 26.

35. Ibid., p. 27.

36. Ibid., p. 28.

Michel de Certeau states:

«People are put in motion by the remaining relics of meaning, and sometimes by the ... remainders of great ambitions. Things that amount to nothing, or almost nothing, symbolize and orient walkers' steps: names that have ceased precisely to be proper»³⁷.

The motivation of names, the value engraved on them by urban planners and managers, is slowly lost in the course of time and replaced, Certeau explains, by the meaning that these names have in walkers' lives. Set in motion by London's proper names, Frame ponders on such contradictions. The spell cast on her by the reverberations of British history and literature that these names bring is broken once she observes the spectacle of urban decay they have come down to. Very often, the topographical features reflected in names have not survived centuries of history and change. Indeed, the pastoral connotations of «Shepherd's Bush» are at odds with the street's, «dreary-looking buildings set in a waste of concrete and brick and full of people who appeared to be pale and worried»³⁸, that Frame notices in her strolling. Likewise, Frame learns «the truth of Piccadilly Circus», that it was not a real circus³⁹. In fact, even the circular shape designated by the word *circus* has changed through years of urban planning. London's names and buildings are in fact relics of earlier, more pastoral times, and of the city's former glory as the heart of a vast empire. The London that Frame encounters in the mid-1950s is, in fact, a declining imperial power, the target of immigrants from former colonies⁴⁰, and remains traumatised by the Blitz: «The relics were evident: bombed sites not yet rebuilt, overgrown with grass and weeds and scattered with rubble; the former Underground station with its hundred of entombed Londoners caught in an air raid ...»⁴¹. The colonial's high expectations from the Mother Country are shattered by her experience of the real city.

London's architecture and urban planning bears, indeed, the imprint of past ambitions. As Jane Jacobs states, «the cultural politics of place and identity in contemporary First World cities is enmeshed in the legacies of imperialist ideologies and practices»⁴², which were the work of men. Piccadilly Street was named after a house belonging to a wealthy tailor famous for selling «piccadillies», a kind of collar, in the 18th century; this came to replace the street's former name, Portugal Street, in honour of Catherine de Braganza, the queen consort of

37. DE CERTEAU, Michel: Op. cit., p. 133.

38. FRAME, Janet: Op. cit., p. 26.

39. Ibid., p. 20.

40. India had achieved its independence in 1947, and the Caribbean colonies were released gradually over the 1960s, to cite some examples. The *Commonwealth Migration Act* (1962) was meant to curtail black migration from the colonies, which came in large waves in the post-war period. See LOPEZ ROPERO, Lourdes: *The Anglo-Caribbean Migration Novel: Writing from the Diaspora*, Alicante, University of Alicante Press, 2004, chapter I.

41. FRAME, Janet: Op. cit., p. 30.

42. JACOBS, Jane: *Edge of Empire: Postcolonialism and the City*, London, Routledge, 2002, p. 4.

King Charles II of England⁴³. In the nineteenth century, John Nash, George IV's favourite designer, undertook a massive renovation of central London, designing the big avenues of Regent Street and Piccadilly Circus, among others. Nash saw the construction of Regent Street as an opportunity to separate the good from the bad streets, leaving the latter to the East⁴⁴. At the turn of the century, the London Council realised the city lacked the broad avenues of continental cities like Paris⁴⁵. The face of London did not match the city's splendour as the heart of a global empire. They thus undertook the broadening of the Strand and the construction of a big artery running north from it which would eventually be called Kingsway. In the crescent built to link the Strand and Kinsway, the Aldwych, several emblematic representations of the British Empire were located –the Australia House, the India House, and the Africa House⁴⁶, creating the kind of atmosphere the Council had intended. At present, the city is pervaded with symbols of the country's wealth and power –Trafalgar Square, Cleopatra's Needle and Sphinxes, the Bank of England, and the like. London architecture and planning have historically been the backdrop for imperial policies. Both arenas, architecture and politics, have hindered women's activities.

In her walks about the city, Frame is oblivious to the connection between architecture and politics, or empire and patriarchy, although she admits to feel fear at the «Victorian atmosphere and appearance of many of the buildings»⁴⁷. However, the routes that she takes through the metropolis describe a shift away from peripheral marginality into the heart of the complex London publishing world. After living in marginal districts of North and South London, and even in the countryside, Frame is eventually given an apartment in Kesington, the West End, by her publisher. In one of the concluding chapters of the volume, Frame carefully describes the bus ride and walk that would take her from Camberwell, a district in South East London where she lived at that time, up to the Strand area, where she was to meet her publisher, W. H. Allen:

«I set out to the Strand and the publisher W.H. Allen in Essex Street. I sat in the bus enjoying the familiar route ... Now down past the Institute of Psychiatry, the Maudsley Hospital, King's College hospital ... past the new council flats, the dilapidated shops, the surge of East Street market and cluttered pavements, past the Elephant, the Eye Hospital, the Old Vic, Waterloo Station, Waterloo Bridge to the Strand ... I had my photo taken in a PolyFoto studio at Charing Cross. Then I walked back towards Essex Street, loitering as I was too early, by looking at shop windows. And then I had turned the corner from the Strand and was in Essex Street, standing in front of W. H. Allen»⁴⁸.

43. Online: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Piccadilly_Circus, (accessed March 7th, 2005)

44. TUCKER, Herbert: *Victorian Literature and Culture*, London, Blackwell, 1999, p. 434.

45. SCHNEER, Jonathan: *London 1900: The Imperial Metropolis*, Yale, Nota Bene, 2001, p. 24.

46. Ibid, p. 27.

47. FRAME, Janet: Op. Cit., p. 20.

48. Ibid., pp. 148-149.

The route described in this passage, which culminates in a publishing house of central London where Frame would sign the contract of her lifetime, encapsulates Frame's appropriation of the public spaces of the city, those of decision-making and visibility.

The city of London has no spaces forbidden to Frame. She frequents the bars in Soho, where the «outsiders» to London, many aspiring artists, meet. She explores the seamy side of the city, meeting prostitutes, «both male and female»⁴⁹, listening to their stories in order to increase her experience of life. The only conservative force that she has to confront in her London years is her Irish friend Patrick Reilly. The end of this friendship is crucial to Frame's progress in the city, since he threatened to curtail her freedom to move around with his patronising advice. Patrick, whose race bias I discussed above, holds the views that have kept women off the public spaces of the city. Working as a bus driver, he carries out a panoptic surveillance of the London streets, «rescuing young Irish girls from prostitution» and sending them to the Irish Hostels⁵⁰. Be these Irish girls prostitutes or not, it is obvious that for Patrick, women should not enjoy the same degree of public visibility as men. He enacts a narrative of sexual danger to restrain Janet's movements in the city and in Europe, for she has plans to visit Paris and Ibiza. He advises her not to travel alone, and to devote herself to school teaching instead of writing, and disapproves of her bohemian friends. The streets of London offer Frame too much freedom and artistic possibilities to let herself be patronized by Patrick, so that she is compelled to «shake herself free» of him⁵¹, who eventually leaves London for being too evil a city.

My concern in this paper has been to show Janet Frame's rearticulation of London's urban space in the last volume of her autobiography, written in the 1980s but providing a commentary on post-war Britain. Rather than the traditional space of female invisibility, the public spaces of the metropolis have become the setting of Frame's strolling and a rich source of materials for her writing. Furthermore, she has achieved visibility in the London publishing world, located at the heart of the city, and earned the international success that New Zealand did not grant her. An important part of my argument has been to highlight Frame's colonial condition, and its impact on her perception of the city. Her un-Englishness has granted her a marginal status in metropolitan society, which has resulted in a high degree of detachment and freedom to move. Her cultural background has provided her with a special insight into the construction of difference, as well as with a critical vision of London, a declining imperial power in the post-war period, and its urban landscape. As a subject of the look, she has refused to adopt an orientalising gaze characteristic of masculinist discourses. I have also wished to underline that the scholarship on women and space in literature needs to expand its corpus to include Com-

49. Ibid., p. 123.

50. Ibid., p. 24.

51. Ibid., p. 147.

monwealth writers, and shift away from the modern period into more contemporary configurations.

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