

***Gifted* and “Possessed”**: Reading and Writing the Adaptable Frame

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Abstract

This article explores Patrick Evans’s neglected novel *Gifted*, arguing that Evans, as novelist, wilfully forges, inhabits and defends the same authorial ground his criticism of the work of Janet Frame assailed for decades. Positioning *Gifted* as part penance, part reparation, part justification for Evans’s literary criticism, this essay negotiates the dynamics of equivocal blend that characterise Evans’s “gifted” relationship with Frame and finds, within *Gifted*, an enactment of the continuum between paratext and adaptation.

Janet Frame observed, to veteran broadcaster Elizabeth Alley in 1991, that “The critic reminds me of the film *The Fly*, where the scientist, immersed in his experiment, doesn’t realise that a fly has accompanied him to the cabinet. When he emerges, his work finished, he’s part-man, part-housefly.”¹ Frame did not elaborate on the trajectory of David Cronenberg’s 1986 film, which sees the gradual and visceral mutation of the man into a monstrous, insane acid-excreting hybrid. The analogy’s alignment of criticism with contamination nevertheless gives some indication of Frame’s regard for critics, especially those who traffic in (as she put it) her “supposed personal views.”² The chief target of Frame’s antipathy towards “the critic” was, of course, Frame Studies pioneer Patrick Evans, whom Frame had famously cast in 1978 as “one of the Porlock people.”³ In 2010, six years after Frame’s death and his last engagement with Frame as “critic,” Evans initiated a flurry of new critical essays on Frame⁴ and published his novel *Gifted*: “an imaginative reimagining” of the sixteen months Janet Frame spent in Frank Sargeson’s hut in 1955-56.⁵ While it may be tempting to see Evans’s fictionalisation of Frame as a ventriloquistic act of retaliation against a writer who (Evans claimed) had taken up residence in the thirteen year old Evans’s mind and never left,⁶ *Gifted* presents a quasi-phenomenological scheme, in which the critic wilfully forges, inhabits and defends the same authorial ground his criticism assailed for decades. This article explores these dynamics and how Evans’s Commonwealth Prize-nominated but critically neglected novel elucidates the adaptive properties of criticism (intimated in Frame’s comment to Alley) by enacting the continuum between paratext and adaptation.

Parasites, Paratexts and Adaptation

Frame’s 1991 *Fly* analogy is a caustic and derogatory assertion of the enterprise of literary criticism as entailing hybridity or blend. This analogy finds a corollary in Frame’s attention to parasitism in her 1979 text *Living in the Maniototo* and its informing (posthumously published) work *In the Memorial Room*.⁷ In both texts (albeit more explicitly in the latter), the fictional Watercress family of “experts” have a parasitic relation to fictional author Margaret Rose Hurndell; they are engaged in “feeding” on her death and memory.⁸ The word “parasite” is deployed in *Living in the Maniototo* in terms strikingly similar to those published in J. Hillis Miller’s seminal essay “The Critic as Host” two years previously.⁹ In *Living in the Maniototo*, the narrator observes: “From time to time characters [e.g. “the *Watercress* family, the known experts on Margaret Rose Hurndell”] emerge surrounding an idea or a feeling or a dream, like creatures clinging to a growing vine, or parasites feeding for life upon their host.”¹⁰ The narrator later “marvel[s] at” “the richness of meaning within the words ‘guest’ and ‘host,’ with a guest as originally a host, a stranger, hostis, an enemy, a host as a guest, an army, a multitude

of men, women, angels; planets, stars; a guest as parasite sheltered by the host, the host a sacrifice and ultimately a blessed food.”¹¹ Miller, in 1977, had noted that: “‘Parasitical’ [...] suggests the image of [...] a clinging vine, able to live in no other way but by drawing the life sap of its host.”¹² Miller continued:

The host and the [...] parasite are fellow guests beside the food, sharing it. On the other hand, the host is himself the food [...] the consecrated bread [...] sacrifice, victim. [...] The words “host” and “guest” go back in fact to the same etymological root: [...] A host is a guest, and a guest is a host. [...] A host in the sense of a guest, [...] [p]erhaps he is the first emissary of a host of enemies (from Latin *hostis* [stranger, enemy]), the first foot in the door, to be followed by a swarm of hostile strangers[.]¹³

Both Frame and Miller are evidently intrigued by what Miller termed “The uncanny antithetical relation [that] exists not only between pairs of words in this system, host and parasite, host and guest, but within each word in itself.”¹⁴ Miller advises that “Each word in itself becomes separated by the strange logic of the ‘para,’ membrane which divides inside from outside and yet joins them [...] or allows an osmotic mixing, making the strangers friends, the distant near, the dissimilar similar, [...] without, for all its closeness and similarity, ceasing to be strange, distant, dissimilar.”¹⁵ How this dynamic pertains to gifts, paratexts and adaptation is germane to this article and to the contribution made by Evans’s *Gifted*.

The notion of the “gift” is, Miller details, implicated in “the logic or alogic of the relation of parasite and host”: “To receive or give a gift is a profoundly dangerous or equivocal act [...] the gift-giver or gift-receiver enters into the endless ring or chain of reciprocal obligation.”¹⁶ The title of Evans’s novel plays on (a version of) this “logic or alogic” and in the terrain of Frame’s and Miller’s preoccupations. To be “gifted” is at once to be the recipient of talent but it is also to be gifted to – received and possessed by – another. In one phenomenological scheme of literary criticism (a version of George Poulet’s “annexation of my consciousness by another”),¹⁷ the gifted (talented) host critic both receives and is possessed (taken over) by the gifted (received and talented) guest author. The gifted (talented) critic, at once given over to (possessed by) the gifted author, also possesses (holds within themselves) the gifted (talented) author. The gifted author at once possesses and is possessed by the gifted critic. Evans, in one interview, makes clear that his “attitude” towards Frame is summarised in the title of the novel; this is a work about Frame’s talent.¹⁸ Accordingly, his narrator/protagonist “Frank Sargeson” pronounces in the novel:¹⁹ “She’s gifted.”²⁰ In another interview, for a now defunct (and unverifiable) blog, Evans allegedly indicated that in *Gifted* he was “channelling” Frame.²¹ At a Wellington Writers and Readers Week event in 2012, Evans reportedly went as far as to attribute authorship of his work to Frame.²² In this scheme, Frame’s gifts are gifted to Evans, who is possessed by them even as he possesses the gifted Frame. In the “logic or alogic” (to use Miller’s terms) of being “gifted,” which is akin to Miller’s “relation of parasite and host,” the possessor shades into the possessed in a multi-directional flow; each is simultaneously themselves and the other. This “equivocal” blend of contrary states (which is, as we shall see, enacted in the dynamics between “Frame” and “Sargeson” in Evans’s novel) relates to the (albeit negatively oriented) hybridity of Frame’s *Fly* analogy and to the discourse exploited in Miller’s deconstructive manifesto. This blend entails a re-orientation, even rehabilitation, of the adaptive hybridity intimated in Frame’s comment, consistent with the uses to which Miller’s article was subsequently put.

It was Miller’s summary, in the 1979 (second) edition of his essay, of “para” as “signifying at once proximity and distance, similarity and difference, interiority and exteriority”, and “a thing in ‘para’” as “confus[ing]” “inside and outside,” “allowing the outside in, making the inside

out, dividing them and joining them,”²³ that Gérard Genette deemed a “rather nice description of the activity of the paratext.”²⁴ While the “paratext,” in Genette’s originating work, was reserved for author issued/sanctioned material that “surrounded and extended” a text “in order to *present* it [...] to ensure the text’s presence in the world, its ‘reception’ and consumption,”²⁵ the term has, unsurprisingly, since expanded to include non-author produced/sanctioned material that performs a paratextual function, such as critical commentary (i.e. criticism). Frame’s (albeit negative) *Fly* analogy recognises the hybridisation of potentially inimical properties that characterises the critical paratext. Frame, in her comment to Alley, reacts against the porousness of criticism and the textual object: against what Poulet celebrates as “the falling away of the barriers between you [reader/critic] and it [the book]. You are inside it; it is inside you; there is no longer either outside or inside.”²⁶

Gifted highlights the paratextual properties of literary criticism – the blend of antithetical properties (inside and outside the text, similarity to and difference from the text, proximity to and distance from the text) – by amplifying paratext (Evans’s criticism) into adaptation (*Gifted*). Adaptation is here “understood,” as Henry Jenkins summarised, “as a version or retelling of the original,”²⁷ where the “original” includes Frame’s work and biographical matter, as well as Evans’s paratextual criticism on Frame. Genette conceived of the paratext as “an instrument of adaptation” in the sense of the paratext’s “continual modifications in the ‘presentation’ of the text (that is, in the text’s mode of being present in the world)[.]”²⁸ Evans’s novel draws attention to the broader continuum between paratext and adaptation as products, whereby the permeability of inimical properties that characterises the former (e.g. its status as inside and outside the text) intensifies in the transpositive composition of the latter. As I elaborate below, adaptations are simultaneously like and unlike, faithful and unfaithful, to their adapted matter. *Gifted* (in addition to containing conventional paratexts in the form of a closing “Author’s Note” and a preceding declaration of fictionality) is at once a paratextual work – still negotiating the presentation of Frame’s work to the world – as well as text in its own right. As text, *Gifted*, in its composition and relation to both Evans’s paratextual Frame criticism and Frame’s work, goes beyond the “dramatiz[ation]” of “the boundary between criticism and fiction,” or “use” “of it as an energy source” that Mark Currie attributes to “theoretical fiction” and into the blended terrain of adaptation.²⁹

Linda Hutcheon famously presented adaptations as “inherently ‘palimpsestuous’ works, haunted at all times by their adapted texts.”³⁰ For Hutcheon, the “palimpsestuousness” of adaptation is produced through the audience’s “experience” of “the oscillation between a past image and a present one.”³¹ However, as I have outlined more fully elsewhere,³² it seems to me that the palimpsestuous properties of adaptation derive primarily from the simultaneity that Hutcheon describes as “the adaptive faculty”: the capacity “to embed difference in similarity, to be at once both self and Other.”³³ Adaptation’s intensification of the “osmotic mixing” of (antithetical) elements associated with paratexts characterises adaptations as “palimpsestuous” in Sarah Dillon’s sense of the latter term as denoting not “a palimpsest” but “the complex (textual) relationality embodied in the palimpsest,” whereby “texts are involved and entangled, intricately interwoven, interrupting and inhabiting each other.”³⁴ Adaptations blend oppositional elements, such as Hutcheon’s “self and Other,”³⁵ sameness and difference, “repetition” and “change,”³⁶ within an indissoluble whole. Adaptations can involve betrayal and exploitation; they always comprise multiple textual relations and the effacement of boundaries.³⁷ As I have observed elsewhere,³⁸ unlike the layers within a palimpsest, there is always already a relation between an adaptation and its adapted material (even if that relation is largely comprised of difference). As such, the palimpsestuousness of adaptations underscores what Sarah Dillon identifies as “the appropriateness of ... [the] phonetic similarity” between

“palimpsestuous” and “incestuous,”³⁹ and, through the meeting and mating of (un)related elements, exceeds the confusion of proximity and distance, likeness and unlikeness, inside and outside wrought by the paratext.⁴⁰

Gifted, as I explore across the sections below, enacts the “logic or alogic” (to return to Miller’s terms) of equivocal blend outlined above and the continuum between paratext and adaptation, by adapting (among other things) Frame’s work and biography, and Evans’s own criticism of Frame’s work. This adaptation amplifies the nature of criticism itself (its variously and simultaneously paratextual and adaptive properties) and also renegotiates Evans’s critical positioning, as Evans performatively blends roles of critic and author, host and guest in order to occupy, as novelist, the territory he crafted, as critic, for Frame as author.

Evans and Frame

The generation of Frame critics who followed Patrick Evans read his seminal Frame criticism with what Gina Mercer termed “a mixture of delight and despair.”⁴¹ The delight usually stemmed from the keen insights and attentive close readings of Frame’s work. The source of despair was Evans’s inclination to pursue what, in 1981, he termed a biographical “aboriginal ‘secret’” that would unlock Frame’s fiction.⁴² He seemed to confess in 1993 to an impulse “to find [...] some kind of origin for her writing, in her relationship to her father, for example, or to her extraordinary brother,” owning that it had “always been [his] vanity” to regard Frame’s autobiographies as “a process of retrieval for her of a past that had been sullied by [his] own doggy sniffings and scribblings over the years.”⁴³ As Frame asserted more control over her biographical narrative, Evans became more speculative. He greeted Michael King’s authorised biography in 2000 with a call “for the kind of insights into a writer given by a less cautious, more reckless, more irresponsible method, one in which there are guesses as well as proof, speculations as well as facts, even, sometimes, mistakes as well as accuracy.”⁴⁴ In this mode, Evans reflected on Frame’s capacity to “tease us for our desire to read ‘through’ her writing to some kind of biographical ‘truth’ behind it,” and concluded that “what [Frame] is doing when she touches on incest in [her 1970 novel] *Intensive Care* [...] is giving the reader a hint of the possibility of yet one more hidden story, one more piece of gossip, possibly even ‘the truth’ – something about which, [...] only she can know the final truth.”⁴⁵ Four years later, at the time of Frame’s death in 2004, even as Evans explicitly recognised (as Andrew Dean has noted)⁴⁶ “the sense that her writing conceals A Secret, some private fact or facts, even some kind of scandal, which, if known, would make her oeuvre suddenly complete” as a textual effect (what Evans terms “the Frame effect”), the biographical lure remained.⁴⁷ Evans now invoked the snippet of incest-oriented material in *Intensive Care* as “baffling and insoluble, impossible to trace back to actual historical events” and thereby contributing to the creation of “the Frame effect.” He nevertheless averred that “For [him], though, there are no greater secrets to her writing than the depth of its autobiographical bases.”⁴⁸

At once faithful and unfaithful to Evans’s critical positioning, *Gifted* enacts a shift from the sexual to the textual, sublimating the intimation of a potentially incestuous (or other) biographical “secret” to the practice of palimpsestuous adaptive blend within the novel’s scheme. The “Frame” of Evans’s *Gifted* is repulsed by “Sargeson”’s intermittent long-time lover, “Harry Doyle”. Evans imbues her reaction with a veiled allusion to the sexual reference in *Intensive Care*.⁴⁹ His “Janet” is “terrifie[d]” by Harry (*G* 229), who reminds her of “the men Dad works with on the railways,” who “used to look at us [...] At me and my sisters. As if they knew something” (*G* 227). Tom Livingstone, the potentially incestuous father in *Intensive Care*, was a railway worker. When Evans’s “Frank” asks “Janet” why “Harry” “terrifies” her, “a look of such anguish appeared on her face [...] that [Frank] decided to change topic” (*G*

229). Evans, however, constructs this spectre of an “aboriginal ‘secret’” only for the potentially sexual to cede to the textual, as *Gifted*’s “Frank” gradually realises that “Janet”’s “difficulty with Harry was a textual difficulty and thus a business of reading, or of learning to read” (G 242). Evans sustains his “Janet”’s oppositionality to “Harry,” while advancing the interconnectivity and integration of these opposed figures for narrator “Frank”: “It reinforced that sense I already had that the two of them, Harry and Janet, were connected in some way. [...] In some complex way they were both crucial parts of my life [...] I would be as little able to get rid of her as I’d ever want to get rid of him” (G 197). Palimpsestuous intersection between (un)related parts prevails within the scheme of “Frank”’s life; “present Harry” overlays and is inseparable from “absent Janet” and “present Janet” overlays and is inextricable from “Absent Harry” (G 206). “Between the two of them, Janet and Harry, there are so many links [...], so many little echoes and rhymes – [...] Yet how could a pair of people be more utterly different than these two most obviously are” (G 211). “Janet” and “Harry” are somehow versions of each other, even as their relationship is predicated on difference. These dynamics are mirrored at a compositional level, as *Gifted* enacts the move towards the blend of opposites, of related and unrelated components, that is found in the paratext and amplified in adaptation. As it does so, the novel produces a quasi-phenomenological scheme whereby the gifted critic inhabits the territory into which he has corralled the gifted author and (as we shall see) induces in the reader a version of his own critical practice and positioning.

In the course of the paratextual “Author’s Note” that concludes *Gifted* as textual object (at once inside the text and outside it), Evans implicitly declares his habitation, in *Gifted*, of the territory into which his biographical readings of Frame’s work cast Frame. He begins by advising that: “Nothing is written for the first time. As a novel about writers and writing, to some extent *Gifted* has been written out of the work of other writers” (G 301). He then goes on to list “those of whose influence I am aware” (G 301). Chief among these are Sargeson’s and Frame’s autobiographies, and Michael King’s biographies of the two writers. These texts are, of course, more than “influence[s].” *Gifted* is “an imaginative reimagining,” a transposition into fiction of alleged biographical matter: an adaptation that blends the oppositional constituencies of fact and fiction. Evans appears pressured by his material’s self-evidently adaptive status to issue disclaimers that are at odds with that adaptive status. The paratextual one line statement that precedes the text (simultaneously part of and separate from it) declares that “*Gifted* is a work of fiction” (G np). The paratextual closing “Author’s Note” states: “*Gifted* is not a *roman à clef*, and apart from its two protagonists its characters are fully fictional. Had I intended to refer to real people past or present, I should have named the characters to indicate this, as I have done with Sargeson and Frame. People who think they see themselves in its pages can be assured they are mistaken” (G 303). Evans’s defensive disclaimers signal his occupation of the space into which his biographical critical readings corralled Frame. In his 2000 Frame biography, Michael King records that Frame wrote to Evans in 1974 and in 1978 to dissuade his biographical critical pursuits and defend the fictionality of her work: “It is an occupational risk of authors that their work is confused with their life [...] writing fiction (and not writing autobiography) is my pastime.”⁵⁰ “Perhaps you feel that writers should inhabit as well as write their fiction?”⁵¹ Indeed, King largely attributes to Evans the origins of Frame’s “prejudice [...] against the writing of critical biography in general.”⁵² That “prejudice” would lead to the rigorous patrolling of the boundaries between biography and literary criticism evident in Frame’s request that King’s biography not include “analysis of her writing.”⁵³ Evans’s disclaimers, in *Gifted*, may indicate a writer concerned about potential litigation or signal the critic in penitential mode, experiencing for himself a version of the disquietude previously induced in his author subject. However, I would suggest a more complex adaptive scheme is at work in Evans’s relations with the gifted author and, notably, with his reader.

The performativity of Evans's defensive move in the "Author's Note" is indicated by its obvious lacuna. As the prominence of "Harry Doyle" in *Gifted* attests (Harry Doyle was Sargeson's intermittent partner), "Sargeson and Frame" are patently not the only significant characters in Evans's novel who "refer to real people" (*G* 303). This obvious omission from Evans's "Author's Note" queers the boundary between fact and fiction in the novel and lures the reader into a performance of Evans's own controversial reading practice as critic. The reader knows that Evans's text, while declaring its fictionality, contains a non-fiction component. The question of boundaries – where fiction ends and non-fiction begins – recurs across the reading experience. Like Evans as critic reading Frame's autobiography, compelled to contact every "Bone" in the Oamaru phonebook to see if there really was a "Nora Bone,"⁵⁴ *Gifted's* reader is arguably compelled to consult sources to ascertain ingredients in Evans's adaptation. As per the status of adaptations as palimpsestuous works, the reader finds partial glimpses of familiar details perforating, interrupting and blending into the surface of the text. The fictional Lyall Neary, for example, enacts a version of C.K. Stead's ambivalent and charged encounter with Frame from King's biography of Sargeson (later fictionalised by Stead in *All Visitors Ashore* [1984]). Exactly how much Stead informs Neary (the would-be writer but also boorish abattoir worker), and precisely where likeness shades into unlikeness cannot be determined. The reader is "caught," just as Evans spent his critical career, as he put it, "caught" by Frame in "between 'fact' and 'fiction,' neither able to solve the puzzle nor able to put it down."⁵⁵

Evans's induction of his reader into his own reading trajectory as critic may be informed by justification of his biographical critical pursuits, but I suspect it is also designed to induce readerly awareness of the limitations of an excavatory reading model and to refocus readerly attention on the production of indissoluble blend within adaptive compositional practice. The reader is positioned to realise the lure of sources and their relevance to the elucidation of Evans's compositional practice, but also the impossibility of quantification of authorial use, and thus the cul de sac presented by distillatory readerly/critical practice. For Evans the critic in 2004:

that fix where her reader is completely caught up between 'fact' and 'fiction' [...] is exactly where Frame wanted us. Her genius was to dissolve the boundary between Life and Art in such a way that we learn, through learning how to read her, a sense of the inseparability the two domains must increasingly have had in her mind as she read and wrote her way into her life.⁵⁶

Through the composition of *Gifted*, with its uncertain blend of fact and fiction, Evans adapts (transposes to, and enacts [a version of], in a different medium) not only his own criticism (his version of Frame and the "fix" in which he situates her readers) but, as we shall see, Frame's own compositional manifesto. In so doing, *he* becomes the authorial figure who has to protest the fictionality of the work while that work enacts and emphasises adaptive blend.

Frame's third volume of autobiography espoused a compositional process akin to the indivisibility of art and life claimed by Evans in 2004. In *The Envoy from Mirror City* (1985), Frame wrote: "[W]ithin 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."⁵⁷ According to this model, Frame's fiction entails an adaptive imaginative process, whereby the mirror cities accessed through the imagination are related (a reflection/version of) but not reducible to their source events. In *Gifted*, we see the reformation (in multiple senses of the term) of Evans's critical

approach to Frame's compositional practice. In 2000, Evans, as critic, espoused a thesis that "chunks of life [...] seem to be cut up and plopped, wriggling and uncooked, into her [Frame's] text."⁵⁸ In support of this thesis, Evans cited Sargeson's (King-supplied) comment to Philip Wilson that "it's part of her ... slant on things [...] to collect items about people she knows which she apparently has no second thoughts about using. ... it's a sheer bastard when she involves a third party (King 377)."⁵⁹ In *Gifted*, Evans blends Sargeson's historic antipathy towards Frame's use of factual elements within her work with Evans's 2000 critical premise regarding Frame's compositional practice. Evans's "Frank" panics: "who knew what details she'd helped herself to, who knew which of my furnishings and friends had ended up on her page by now: and (worse) *who knew what she had invented?*" (*G* 114-115). Crucially, then, Evans stages, within his novel, an evolution from this palimpsestic critical conception of Frame's work as fact layered with fiction (replete with the threat of their indistinguishability) to a celebration of palimpsestuous blend and transformation within Frame's work that aligns with Frame's "Mirror City" paradigm. Upon reading "Janet"'s manuscript, "Frank" concludes: "In Janet's nameless work I could see myself – I could see what she'd read of me and taken from my earlier stuff and made of it [...] [Janet's work] had in it *now* the recognisable sounds and moods of the world around us, its discords disharmonies disturbances dissatisfactions: all of them turned into something else or in the business of doing so" (*G* 220-221). As I explore in the final section below, *Gifted* identifies this "business" of adaptation, of turning material "into something else" within the critical readerly (as well as writerly) enterprise. The novel calls attention to the equivocal process of blend ("osmotic mixing") within criticism by intensifying those same dynamics within the novel's adaptive processes. In the equivocal relationship between his "Sargeson" and "Frame," and in the palimpsestuous blend of the novel's final tableau, Evans adapts his "gifted" relation to Frame, as well as his own criticism and Frame's work.

Equivocal blends

The unstable host/guest relation between "Sargeson" and "Frame" in *Gifted* enacts the equivocal "gifted" relation between critic and writer profiled earlier in this essay. *Gifted*'s ludic opening line presents a blend of narrator and implied (critic as) author. "Frank," as *Gifted*'s narrator, to whom Evans, as author, gifts the perspective of Evans as critic, announces with regard to "Janet": "Sometimes I think I've made her up" (*G* 9). Evans, as critic turned novelist, exploits the porous boundaries between inside and outside, interpretation and invention, and the presence of the latter always already within the former, and – from this opening onwards – dissolves the boundary between criticism and fiction.

The language of Evans's criticism permeates "Frank"'s discourse in the novel. "Frank" serially represents "Janet"'s behaviour in the novel as "stunt[s]" (*G* 47, 93, 201): the same term Evans used in his 2001 and 2004 criticism to collectivise the demanding machinations of Frame's fiction.⁶⁰ Evans has "Frank" perform the role of Frame's reader and critic in an enactment, transposition and ultimately adaptation of Evans's criticism. Evans tells us in his "Author's Note" that he has "transferred" to "Frank" the "role" of Frame's one-time psychiatrist R.H. Cawley as solver of "word-puzzles" devised by Frame (*G* 302). In *Gifted*, Evans's "Janet" duly leaves riddles on scraps on paper for "Frank" to solve. This adaptation of an historic dynamic is also a transposition and adaptation of Evan's criticism. In "The Frame Effect" (2004), Evans wrote: "There, in a nutshell, is Frame the Writer. As readers, each of us is caught up in the same contract she had with Cawley, under her control whenever we read her and required to perform – to *solve*. Each successive work she wrote was increasingly like a chess master class, apparently seamless to read on a first go, quite baffling at times, and not at all helpful."⁶¹ In a different medium, *Gifted*'s "Frank" wonders "What was she up to, what game was she

playing?” (G 102) and mulls “Janet”’s “unpredictability, her unreadability and these mystifying scraps of paper she’d been leaving about, with their strange riddles that at their very best sat on the edge of communicating something important but in the end told you nothing very much at all” (G 203). Evans’s “Frank” blurs the boundary between criticism and fiction by enacting, in *Gifted*, a version of the generic Frame reader of Evans’s Frame criticism: “She was as unreadable as ever” (G 123); “she’d engulfed me in that cloud of unknowing which seemed to be the given of all my dealings with her” (G 129).

“Frank”’s trajectory across the novel is not only towards initiation into, and partial success with the resolution of, “Janet”’s “riddles”; it also negotiates the “gifted” dynamic of “equivocal” blend described earlier in this essay. *Gifted* depicts “Frank”’s increasing confusion about the boundaries between him and “Janet” and about the dynamics of possessor and possessed: the ambivalence of being “gifted”. “Frank” oscillates between the sense that “Janet” is influencing and possessing his writing (“Once again, the word *possession* comes to mind” [G 137]) and the sense that he is the possessor of purloined material. He becomes increasingly unable to distinguish between the two conditions: “Janet, meanwhile, baffled me” (G 137); “Was I stealing from her now just as I’d feared she’d been taking from me before?” (G 137-138). “Frank” is variously convinced that he has “invented [his] strange hut-dweller” (G 191) and that he is “caught in one of her stories, completely at her mercy, completely under her control [...] *possessed*” (G 109). The spectre of excessive invention and critical self-delusion haunts their relation. “Frank” initially positions himself as “having to explain her own work to her!,” only to have “Janet” confound his social realist reading of her “sheep story” (G 51-52). “Frank”’s attempt to engineer “Janet”’s love life and thus write her “into a fiction of [his] own imagining” follows the same trajectory (G 119). Initially casting himself as “the author off to one side and paring his fingernails” (G 119) – terms of reference reserved for Frame in Evans’s criticism –⁶² “Frank” is revealed to himself as, instead, a misguided reader. Invention has overwhelmed interpretation: “Her silence and her misery, signs to me of impending breakdown and collapse?—no more than pangs attendant on any act of giving birth. In other words, [...] none of my imaginings had any basis” (G 233).

In the “Frank”/“Janet” relation, Evans adapts and blends not only his own “gifted” relation with Frame and his own criticism (note the echoes, from his essay “The Frame effect,” of “under her control” and of the description of Frame as “author standing above us watching our helpless struggles as she pares her nails”),⁶³ but also Frame’s work, with its many metafictional configurations. Evans invokes Frame’s third novel *The Edge of the Alphabet* (1962) – Frame’s first venture into metafictional territory – with “Frank”’s interest in “Janet”’s recourse to *Lear* (“*Sir do you know me? Madam I do not*” [G 87]). In *The Edge of the Alphabet*, characters may or may not be the creation of other characters, and the refrain “I know you Zoe Bryce” resounds across the text as a potential claim of authorship.⁶⁴ The “osmotic mixing”/equivocal blend of author/character, author/reader, possessor/possessed, inside/outside registers in “Frank”’s bewilderment: “*Sir, do you know me? Did I know her?—did she know me? Who knew whom?*” (G 56). The “Frank”/“Janet” relation is on a trajectory towards equivocal blend, as per the “logic or alogic” of being “gifted.” “Frank”, as he “reads” “Janet” (both her character and work) and acclimates to her perception of language, finds his boundaries of selfhood becoming porous. In another blend of narrator/protagonist and implied (critic as) author, “Frank” writes: “I sound like Janet writing this, I know: but that is the point, she was turning me into herself” (G 110). Again, like the “possessed” critic whose perspective “Frank” in turn channels, “Frank” muses: “she was now a part of my very being, she was someone who had crept her way inside my sense of who I am and thus, in that respect at least, *would never leave me—*” (G 41).

This trajectory towards equivocal blend of criticism and fiction, interpretation and invention, inside and outside, is also enacted in the adaptive composition of the novel. In *Gifted*'s author's note, Evans identifies his own "interpretation of Frame's use of Rilke's theory of language, and particularly of naming [...] at the core of the novel" (G 302). At the same time that Evans wrote *Gifted*, he produced two critical essays on Frame, which presented readings of Frame's 1965 novel *The Adaptable Man*.⁶⁵ Evans, as critic, pronounced that:

St. Cuthbert seems to represent for Aisley [a central character in *The Adaptable Man*] the conviction that the Anglo-Saxon language [...] fused word and thing in a manner now lost. In Frame's version, "Anglo-Saxon language" means what it says; but it seems also to be something more powerful, more privileged: a language that actually creates [...] thus Aisley fixates on the most famous story about St. Cuthbert [...] preaching to the waves [...] the words he speaks drawing seals from the water [...] It is as if words have created things [...].⁶⁶

Evans concludes that "Rilke's curious and distinctive model of language renovation is implied in Frame's version of the St. Cuthbert myth [...] This is, in effect, a 'mystical naming' that 'completes' the world by speaking its objects in a particular way, thereby making a new reality through a kind of verbal magic."⁶⁷ In *Gifted*, Evans adapts both *The Adaptable Man* and his own criticism on it, producing "Janet"'s elaboration to "Frank":

[I]f we had the kind of language St Cuthbert was speaking, we wouldn't have to talk about it. About the language—
You mean Anglo-Saxon—?
Perhaps— [...]
But anyway, she said. A language where there's such a tight fit between what you say and what you're saying it *about*— [...]
That the first creates the second— [...]
A language that rolls back the reel of time and reverses the Fall, she said. So there're no more gaps between us, people aren't strangers any more—
(G 77-78)

"Frank" concludes: "That's what St Cuthbert's *spell* did [...] as Janet might have it, he preached and in swam the whole damned world, caught by *language*, reeled in by *language*" (G 110-111). Andrew Dean has already established, in an essay on *Gifted*, that "Janet"'s "language games" with "Frank" are "Evans's praxis," that "the notes Frame leaves Sargeson act in the same way" as Anglo-Saxon in Evans's reading of *The Adaptable Man*, where the word calls the thing into being.⁶⁸ For Dean, *Gifted* "tender[s] a reading of [Frame's] philosophy of language, suggesting that for Frame—and perhaps for us too—language may come prior to the world."⁶⁹ *Gifted* undoubtedly behaves in this way, but I want to suggest that the text goes beyond the endowment of fiction with this specific critical purpose and into attention to the equivocal blend of adaptation itself, and its relation to literary criticism/interpretation.

The riddles "Janet" sets "Frank" are predicated on the transposition of Evans's interpretation/criticism of *The Adaptable Man* to an alternative form (i.e. an adaptation of that interpretation/criticism). However, *Gifted*'s adaptation of Evans's interpretation of *The Adaptable Man* is also an adaptation of *the Adaptable Man* and one that offers a competing version of that Frame text. I wrote earlier of the palimpsestuous blend of adaptation as involving inescapable relationality and betrayal and exploitation within an indissoluble blend. *Gifted*'s adaptation is simultaneously like and unlike its informing constituents of *The Adaptable Man* and Evans's reading of that novel; it is simultaneously faithful and unfaithful

to them. In *The Adaptable Man*, Frame registers the fallacy of Aisley’s “dream of St Cuthbert” even as Aisley indulges in it:

At times, now, when he looks from his window at the pleasantly rural scene he is not the Reverend Aisley Maude, he is – St Cuthbert himself, saying his prayers in the sea while his astonished fellow monks follow him, watching while the two seals come out of the deep water to warm him ‘mid heora flȳse’. Yet at times you can see Aisley smiling to himself, mockingly. He knows the infectious nature of apparent simplicity.⁷⁰

Evans, in fiction, gifts to his novel’s “Janet” the perspective of Frame’s fictional character, Aisley, minus both the nuance of the character’s self-critique and Evans’s own critical awareness that, by the end of *The Adaptable Man*, “No kind of known language seems to function.”⁷¹ This exploitation of facets of Frame’s novel and Evans’s criticism, and betrayal of others (through change/invention/omission), within *Gifted*’s adaptive blend, is strategic on Evans’s part. It enacts, at a compositional level, the readerly partiality present in interpretation and in “Frank”’s (mis)readings of “Janet”; and, more importantly, it creates the conditions for an equivocal blend of opposing elements in the novel’s final tableau.

At the novel’s conclusion, “Janet”’s final riddle, “Kind hawks kill” (G 263), stands among her unsolved efforts. In the final paragraphs of *Gifted*, “Frank” narrowly avoids collision with a harrier hawk.

And there it was, hung in the air above us, [...] the dark green-brown of the wings outspread. Released from Janet’s words it hung above us in truth and fact, watching us, being watched, looking out for things, ready to take over and in turn be overtaken. The meeting-point, it seemed in that small moment, of everything that might be said of the world, and everything that might become of the saying of it—

(G 299)

Recognising the famous image of language as the hawk from Frame’s *Living in the Maniototo*, Andrew Dean has identified that “the hawk itself seems to have dropped out of Frame’s fiction and into Evans’s novel.”⁷² *Living in the Maniototo* reads: “language in its widest sense is the hawk suspended above eternity, feeding from it but not of its substance and not necessarily for its life and thus never able to be translated into it; only able by a wing movement, so to speak, a cry, a shadow, to hint at what lies beneath it on the untouched, undescribed almost unknown plain.”⁷³ *Gifted*’s closing tableau displays the palimpsestuous dynamics of adaptation. Evans relies on the reader recognising that the suspended hawk of language from *Living in the Maniototo* permeates his tableau. Evans also relies on the reader recognising the blend of two competing conceptions/representations of language within that adaptive tableau. Andrew Dean, invoking my 2011 analysis of *Living in the Maniototo*, concludes that “language [in Frame’s novel], in its attempts to transform the plain of ‘eternity’ into that which can be comprehended, succeeds only in shadowing or hinting at what lies beneath.”⁷⁴ The hawk of *Gifted*’s final tableau thus signals this conception of language. However, it is also, contrastingly, the equivalent of St Cuthbert’s seals: the hawk brought into being through the Adamic naming properties of “Janet”’s riddles. As such the final tableau adapts elements of *Living in the Maniototo* but also adapts and enacts elements of Evan’s criticism and select aspects of *The Adaptable Man* that pull in a different direction.

The constituents of *Gifted*’s concluding adaptive tableau are simultaneously oppositional and non-distillable from each other in their presentation. As such, the novel’s closing adaptation blends proximity to and distance from, similarity to and difference from, source materials. This simultaneity and equivocal blend of competing elements/states is present in the explicit content

as well in the composition of this final adaptation. Language is the hawk in this palimpsestuous scheme; and, in “watching us, being watched, looking out for things, ready to take over and in turn be overtaken” (*G* 299), the hawk/language is both watcher and watched, poised to take over and be overtaken. The novel’s final line encourages us to associate this porousness between contrary states with the gifted “logic or alogic” of equivocal blend (including ambivalent possession) between critics and writers (dealers in language) and between their respective textual products. The hawk (of language) is, in the novel’s final statement, the “meeting-point of everything that might be said of the world, and everything that might become of the saying of it—” (*G* 299). The novel’s final adaptive tableau asserts both language as meeting-point and an all-encompassing transtextuality (in Genette’s terms).⁷⁵ That closing line, replete with its open dash, asserts the capacity for “everything that might be said of the world” – all commentary (writing as commentary on the world, criticism as commentary on that writing) – to “become” something else, for paratext “as instrument of adaptation” to shade into adaptation, just as the composition of *Gifted* – through its adaptation of Evans’s criticism and its emphasis on mutual dynamics of equivocal blend – has enacted a continuum between paratext and adaptation. Part penance, part reparation, part justification for Evans’s paratextual activities as critic, *Gifted*’s equivocal blend of fact, fiction, (re-)imagining, criticism, possession, exploitation, betrayal and devotion amplifies and elucidates the simultaneously adaptive and paratextual properties of criticism registered (as monstrous hybridity) in Frame’s *Fly* analogy.

¹ Janet Frame to Elizabeth Alley, “‘An Honest Record’ – Interview with Janet Frame,” *Landfall* 45 (1991): 154-168 (158).

² Frame to Alley, “‘An Honest Record’,” 158.

³ Patrick Evans, “Dr Clutha’s book of the world,” *Journal of New Zealand Literature (JNZL)* 22 (2004): 15-30 (23).

⁴ Patrick Evans, “Reaching for Rilke’s Angel: Janet Frame’s translations,” *Journal of Post-Colonial Cultures and Societies* 1, no. 1 (2010): 22-33; Patrick Evans, “‘The Uncreating Word’: Janet Frame and ‘mystical naming’,” *Journal of New Zealand Literature* 28 (2010): 61-85; Patrick Evans, “Modernity and the Holocaust counter-memorial: Janet Frame’s American fiction,” *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 46, no. 3 (2011): 513- 530; Patrick Evans, “‘They kill on Wednesdays’: Janet Frame, Modernity and the Holocaust,” *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 46, no. 1 (2011): 83-101.

⁵ Quoted by Terry MacTavish, “Astonishingly Joyful, Mischievous Theatre,” *Theatre Review*, September 16, 2013, <https://www.theatreview.org.nz/reviews/printreview.php?id=6288>.

⁶ Patrick Evans in conversation with Kim Hill, “Gifted Writers,” *Saturday Morning*, October 23, 2010, 4:20, <https://www.rnz.co.nz/national/programmes/saturday/audio/2424805/patrick-evans-gifted-writers>.

⁷ *In the Memorial Room* was written in 1974 and posthumously published in 2013. Sections of *In the Memorial Room* appear, in revised form, in *Living in the Maniototo* (1979).

⁸ Janet Frame, *In the Memorial Room* (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 2013), 65; Janet Frame, *Living in the Maniototo* (Auckland: Century Hutchinson, 1981), 108.

⁹ J. Hillis Miller, “The Critic as Host,” *Critical Inquiry* 3, no. 3 (1977): 439-447. I am not staking a claim that Frame necessarily read Miller, though I would not be in the least surprised if she did. My time in Frame archives has confirmed her as an omnivorous reader across disciplines and genres.

¹⁰ Frame, *Living in the Maniototo*, 108.

¹¹ Frame, *Living in the Maniototo*, 133.

¹² Miller, “The Critic as Host,” 440.

¹³ Miller, “The Critic as Host,” 442-443. For the avoidance of doubt, “(from Latin *hostis* [stranger, enemy])” is as per the original.

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- ¹⁴ Miller, “The Critic as Host,” 443.
- ¹⁵ Miller, “The Critic as Host,” 443.
- ¹⁶ Miller, “The Critic as Host,” 445.
- ¹⁷ Georges Poulet, “Phenomenology of Reading,” *New Literary History* 1, no. 1 (1969): 53-68 (59).
- ¹⁸ Patrick Evans to Charlie Gates, “Play’s creators reject criticism,” *Stuff*, August 24, 2013, <http://www.stuff.co.nz/the-press/christchurch-life/art-and-stage/arts-fest-2013/9081996/Plays-creators-reject-criticism>.
- ¹⁹ Where “Sargeson”, “Frank”, “Frank Sargeson”, “Frame”, “Janet” and “Janet Frame” appear in quotation marks, they refer to the characters of “Janet Frame” and “Frank Sargeson” in *Gifted*. Where they appear outside quotation marks they refer to the historical figures.
- ²⁰ Patrick Evans, *Gifted* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2010), 253. Further references are cited parenthetically, thus (*G* 253).
- ²¹ Patrick Evans, interview, “Kea and Cattle Blog,” October 24, 2010, cited by Denis Harold, “*Gifted* by Patrick Evans: a review,” “An Angel @ My Blog,” February 15, 2011, <http://slightlyfamous.blogspot.com/2011/02/gifted-by-patrick-evans-review.html>.
- ²² “But he doesn’t feel like he’s the one who wrote it. He feels like it was all Frame. That she was ‘up to her evil schemes’.” Megan Doyle Corcoran, “Patrick Evans – Gifted: Imagining Janet Frame & Frank Sargeson,” *Scoop Review of Books*, March 12, 2012, <https://books.scoop.co.nz/2012/03/12/patrick-evans-gifted-imagining-janet-frame-frank-sargeson/>.
- ²³ J. Hillis Miller, “The Critic as Host,” in *Deconstruction and Criticism*, edited by Harold Bloom et al. (New York: Seabury Press, 1979), 219.
- ²⁴ Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, translated by Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1 fn 2.
- ²⁵ Genette, *Paratexts*, 1.
- ²⁶ Poulet, “Phenomenology of Reading,” 54.
- ²⁷ Henry Jenkins, “Adaptation, Extension, Transmedia,” *Literature/Film Quarterly* 45 no. 2 (2017), https://lfq.salisbury.edu/_issues/first/adaptation_extension_transmedia.html.
- ²⁸ Genette, *Paratexts*, 408.
- ²⁹ Mark Currie, *Postmodern Narrative Theory* (London: Macmillan 1998), 53. Currie focuses on “the reciprocal influence between literary theory and fiction” (54) and writes that “Some fictional narratives seem to be more theoretical than others. [...] If fiction is sometimes a better vehicle for ideas than the essay, it is fiction with theoretical intent or theoretical fiction” (51).
- ³⁰ Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 6.
- ³¹ Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 172.
- ³² Jan Cronin, “Adapting *The Quiet Man*: John Ford, José Luis Guerín, and the Palimpsest of Place,” *Adaptation* 10, No. 1: (2017), 93–113 (94); *The Making Of: Adaptation and the Cultural Imaginary* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 7-8.
- ³³ Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 174.
- ³⁴ Sarah Dillon, “Reinscribing De Quincey’s Palimpsest: The Significance of the Palimpsest in Contemporary Literary and Cultural Studies,” *Textual Practice* 19, no. 3 (2005): 243–63 (245).
- ³⁵ Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 174.
- ³⁶ Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 176.
- ³⁷ Cronin, *The Making Of: Adaptation and the Cultural Imaginary*, 9; “Adapting *The Quiet Man*: John Ford, José Luis Guerín, and the Palimpsest of Place,” 94-95.

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- ³⁸ Cronin, "Adapting the Quiet Man," 94; *The Making Of: Adaptation and the Cultural Imaginary*, 9.
- ³⁹ Dillon, "Reinscribing De Quincey's Palimpsest," 254.
- ⁴⁰ See also Cronin, *The Making Of: Adaptation and the Cultural Imaginary*, 9.
- ⁴¹ Gina Mercer, *Janet Frame: Subversive Fictions* (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 1994), 160.
- ⁴² Patrick Evans, "'Farthest from the Heart': The Autobiographical Parables of Janet Frame," *Modern Fiction Studies* 27 (1981): 31-40 (38).
- ⁴³ Patrick Evans, "The Case of the Disappearing Author," *JNZL* 11 (1993): 11-20 (17).
- ⁴⁴ Patrick Evans, "The Case for Missing Verandahs: The Art of Michael King's Biography of Janet Frame (Transcript of a talk given in the National Library's seminar series, Wellington 14 September 2000)," *Kite* 20 (2001): 2-11 (11).
- ⁴⁵ Evans, "The Case for Missing Verandahs," 6.
- ⁴⁶ Andrew Dean, "Reading 'An Autobiography': Michael King, Patrick Evans and Janet Frame," *Journal of New Zealand Literature (JNZL)* 29, Part 1 (2011): 46-65 (57).
- ⁴⁷ Patrick Evans, "The 'Frame effect'," *New Zealand Books* 14, no. 2 (2004): 13-14 (13).
- ⁴⁸ Patrick Evans, "Dr Clutha's book of the world," *Journal of New Zealand Literature (JNZL)* 22 (2004): 15-30 (22).
- ⁴⁹ In *Intensive Care*, as Evans recalls in his 2001 and 2004 criticism, the character of Tom Livingstone is asked: "Anyway what have they [his daughters] got to do with bed? Surely you didn't love-a-dove them?". Janet Frame, *Intensive Care* (Auckland: Vintage, 1995 [1970]), 68.
- ⁵⁰ Cited by Michael King, *Wrestling with the Angel: A Life of Janet Frame* (Auckland: Viking, 2000), 394.
- ⁵¹ Cited by King, *Wrestling with the Angel*, 419.
- ⁵² King, *Wrestling with the Angel*, 420.
- ⁵³ King, "Author's Note," *Wrestling with the Angel*, np.
- ⁵⁴ Evans, "Dr Clutha's book of the world," 27-28.
- ⁵⁵ Evans, "The 'Frame effect'," 14.
- ⁵⁶ Evans, "The 'Frame effect'," 14.
- ⁵⁷ Janet Frame, *The Envoy from Mirror City* (1984; London: Women's Press, 1985), 10.
- ⁵⁸ Evans, "The Case for Missing Verandahs," 3.
- ⁵⁹ Evans, "The Case for Missing Verandahs," 4.
- ⁶⁰ Evans, "The Case for Missing Verandahs," 3, 6; Evans, "The Frame Effect," 13.
- ⁶¹ Evans, "The Frame Effect," 13.
- ⁶² Evans, "The Frame Effect," 13.
- ⁶³ Evans, "The Frame Effect," 13.
- ⁶⁴ Janet Frame, *The Edge of the Alphabet* (Christchurch: Pegasus Press, 1962), 153, 198.
- ⁶⁵ Evans, "Reaching for Rilke's Angel"; Evans, "'The Uncreating Word'."
- ⁶⁶ Evans, "'The Uncreating Word'," 66.
- ⁶⁷ Evans, "'The Uncreating Word'," 68.
- ⁶⁸ Dean, "Reading 'An Autobiography'," 59-60.
- ⁶⁹ Dean, "Reading 'An Autobiography'," 63.
- ⁷⁰ Janet Frame, *The Adaptable Man* (1965; Auckland: Vintage, 2007), 296-297.
- ⁷¹ Evans, "Reaching for Rilke's Angel," 30.
- ⁷² Dean, "Reading 'An Autobiography'," 61.
- ⁷³ Frame, *Living in the Maniototo*, 43.
- ⁷⁴ Dean, "Reading 'An Autobiography'," 62.

⁷⁵ Genette defines transtextuality as “all that sets the text in a relationship, whether obvious or concealed, with other texts.” Gérard Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, translated by Channa Newman and Claude Doubinsky (1982; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 1.