



The Lagoon: A Collection of Short Stories

Janet Frame

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This collection of stories - Janet Frame's first published book - appeared in New Zealand in 1951, while she was confined in a mental hospital. It won the Hubert Church Award, and a threatened brain operation was averted. These stories bring into focus a crucial turning point in her life.

The Lagoon: A Collection of Short Stories Details

Date : Published 1997 by Bloomsbury (first published January 1st 1951)

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Author : Janet Frame

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mark monday says

it is really too bad that janet frame is so little known outside of New Zealand. although some may know of her from the film based on her life, An Angel at My Table, by the marvelous director Jane Campion. the writing in this collection of sad, strange stories is at times spikey and sharp, and other times gently hallucinatory, almost as if written in some kind of fugue state. death and madness abound, but softly rendered. fascinating! a wonderful and odd little book. Janet Frame must have been a wonderful and odd person.

here's an interesting fact, well-known to lovers of the author: the stories in this collection saved her from a lobotomy! according to my best friend, wikipedia:

The volume was awarded the Hubert Church Memorial Award, at that time one of New Zealand's most prestigious literary prizes. This resulted in the cancellation of Frame's scheduled lobotomy.

whew, close call!

Sarah says

Janet Frame's The Lagoon is a collection of her short stories & was the first book that she had published. The Lagoon famously saved Frame from being lobotomised, when her doctor read an article about Frame's book winning an award. The Lagoon is full of sad, beautiful, lost, dreamy stories. Many are told from the point of view of young girls growing up in small-town New Zealand, and some are narrated by young women living in psychiatric institutions. Seeing the parallels between these stories & Frame's autobiography, it is clear that Frame has drawn inspiration for these stories from her own life. It is interesting to compare The Lagoon to Frame's later work - her style is less refined here, her themes less sophisticated.

The closing lines of the final story are really sad, I think that Frame must have felt this way a lot of the time: "I think I must be frozen inside with no heart to speak of. I think I've got the wrong way of looking at Life."

Frank says

Aside from "The Bed Jacket" and "The Park," this collection falls short of its hype as the "book that saved Janet Frame from a lobotomy!" Her style in these two is stream-of-consciousness or spontaneous prose-like, flowing, beautiful, and revelatory of a life the average person knows nothing about.

Several stories such as "My Cousins" and "Child" convey a childhood nostalgia that I enjoyed (especially when considering her angst and retrospective idealizations are occurring in an asylum).

Aside from these gems, I can not recommend this as a purchase; borrow it from someone or get it in a library, but don't waste your money.

Kevin says

I hadn't heard of Janet Frame until I found two of her short story collections in an Oxfam last year. The blurbs and write-ups were very intriguing, non more so than the fact her work in this book, upon winning a literary award, saved her from a leukotomy whilst in a mental asylum diagnosed with schizophrenia.

With this in mind, there is a haunting air of instability that permeates the twenty-four stories written in the late 1940s. They are delicate slivers of life in New Zealand as young, innocent girls or fragile young women. A lot of the stories seem to draw on Frame's own life; either taking place in mental hospitals or recounts of life on the homestead as a little girl experiencing new best friends, strict parents or dubious tales of a supposedly murderous grandmother. They are very short fragments and thoughts, meditative but incredibly powerful. She writes with such pathos and poignancy that you become absorbed in an inherent sadness within the words; her prose and its tone are truly beautiful and resolutely struck a chord ever more strongly as the book went on.

Unsurprisingly, the book is reminiscent of Sylvia Plath's writing so if you like her or just want to appreciate some beautiful, melancholic short stories, I strongly urge you to give this a go.

Judith Johnson says

I found this book in the library of a hotel in the Austrian Tyrol, a library discard from U.K., and picked it up to read as am currently enlarging my (small) knowledge of Australasian writing. Beautifully written short stories, and pleased it's the author's first book as I like reading works in order! Definitely now want to read more of Janet Frame's work.

Maia says

classic. She can inhabit any mind and feel its feelings. Short stories

Matt says

really enjoyed these. they almost read more like poems than short stories, with the narrator drifting between ideas and images before focusing in for the kicker. the first few stories had a threatening feel to them that i thought was particularly effective and that i missed later on.

Jenny says

mostly, the stories are about little kids and new zealand. i would recommend this book for fans of short

beautiful fiction, especially the salinger fans among us. perfect for your commute & pleasant on repeat reads.

Linda says

Amazingly simple picture of life as a child and thoughts and later as an inmate of an institution for the mentally unwell.

Jane E says

I generally don't like short stories but these were evocative of my childhood. Slater bugs, the rotary washing line, lino flooring etc, etc. New Zealand terminology. And then there was knowing that on the strength of these stories being published it was decided within the institution where she was held that Janet Frame should not have a lobotomy. They saved her life after a fashion - certainly her life as it eventually played out as an internationally renowned author. A slim volume that it is worth hunting down.

Ian says

Janet Frame's debut collection of stories, *The Lagoon*, collects together pieces she wrote during the late 1940s and early 1950s, a time when she was repeatedly hospitalized in psychiatric institutions. The collection was initially published in 1951 by The Caxton Press (there have been numerous subsequent editions) and in 1952 won the Hubert Church Memorial Award, a New Zealand literary prize established in 1945 and given annually to the best first book of prose published during the previous year. The book established Frame's reputation as a daring prose stylist and fearless storyteller who focused her art primarily on childhood perceptions of the adult world. The stories are loosely structured, rarely dramatic and occasionally come across as surreal or dreamlike. Several of the stories are built around a family event of some sort, such as an outing or a holiday, in which children interact with the natural world while forming alliances and making observations about their siblings, their parents or other adults. Some situate the narrator in a grown-up environment reminiscing about or recalling an earlier time in his or her life. The trusting and ingenuous perspective that dominates the stories concerning children is often threatened or endangered by the more serious and weighty concerns of those around them, creating a kind of push-pull effect as the children are thrust into the adult world and compelled to acknowledge it. But we discover too that the adults in Frame's stories are not always reliable, the men sometimes drunk, the women often distracted, confused or depressed. Read in sequence, the twenty-four stories collected in this volume create the impression of an author of prose fiction who, while trying to establish her voice through experimentation, is actively seeking ways to stretch the limits of the genre. Though the fragmentary nature of some of the stories in *The Lagoon* mark it as a youthful work, it remains a significant document that heralds the arrival of an extraordinary writer who over the next fifty years would produce one masterpiece after another.

Carol Wood says

Janet Frame's language is astonishing. She brings us to see things from a slant or side angle. This was her first book, a book of short stories, and many of them are told from the simple view of a child or young adult. All the more powerful for the sometimes uncomfortable truths they convey.

Alyson says

Oh dear. And it sounded so good on the cover. However, I found 90% of the short stories to be meaningless to me, with little final 'ooh' moment at the end. Some of them didn't really seem to have much of a point at all. Many were written in the same style/voice which began to irritate me after a while. I'm afraid I rather lost patience with it all! There were one or two quite good stories, and, given the rave reviews on the back of the book other people must like it. Maybe it's just a personal thing!

Glen U says

Janet Frame is a much overlooked writer, at least here in America, that hails from New Zealand and wrote in the 1950's and on into the 70's where she was at her most prolific. The collection of stories in "The Lagoon" was her first published book and is the celebrated work that saved her from a lobotomy. For that historical fact alone, it is a must read for any bibliophile. The stories seem to be auto-biographical as they alternate between tales of young girls growing up in New Zealand and experiences in a mental asylum. Every story is a wonderfully written narrative but all have a somber tone or at least a bittersweet feeling to them. Some are written in a stream of consciousness style, while others are a straight narrative. All are done well. Her "experiences" in the mental institutions are especially poignant and will leave the reader with a sense of dismay as we are introduced to the sometimes whimsical, sometimes fantastical but always lonely thoughts of the mental patient. A very good read, pulling emotions from the reader and I will read some of her other works in the future.

Heather says

Most of these stories aren't fully realized, but they're great beginnings that often observe their claustrophobic protagonists with a less-than-sympathetic eye.
