

FRAZER, Margaret (Pseudonym for author duo Gail Frazer + Mary Monica Pulver), USA

The Murderer's Tale (1996)

Dt Der Dämon (1996), Üb: Anke Grube

In dem in England im 15. Jhdt spielenden Roman versucht ein Bösewicht, seinen an Epilepsie leidenden Cousin zu beerben, indem er einen Mord begeht und so aussehen läßt, als habe ihn der Kranke im Zustand der Besessenheit ausgeführt. Die Anfälle beginnen mit einer sensiblen Aura im linken Arm, die es dem Kranken erlaubt, sich zu verstecken und helfen zu lassen. Das Verhältnis des Epilepsiekranken zu sich und seiner Umwelt, typische Reaktionen der Letzteren, Behandlungsversuche einschließlich Exorzismen und Wallfahrten sind gut recherchiert und zutreffend dargestellt, sowohl was zeitbedingte Verhältnisse als auch zeitlos gültige Probleme angeht.

Zur Autorin (Wiki 12.1.25):

„**Margaret Frazer**, born **Gail Lynn Brown** (November 26, 1946 – February 4, 2013), was an American historical novelist, best known for more than twenty historical mystery novels and a variety of short stories. The **pen name** was originally shared by Frazer and Mary Monica Pulver Kuhfeld in their collaboration on *The Novice's Tale*, the first of the *Sister Frevisse* books featuring the Benedictine nun Dame Frevisse. Their collaboration came to an end with ***The Murderer's Tale***, the sixth book in the series. Starting with the Edgar Award-nominated *The Prioress' Tale*, the Margaret Frazer pen name was used exclusively by Gail Brown. She also wrote the *Player Joliffe* mysteries, starring the medieval actor Joliffe.



Frazer was born and grew up in Kewanee, Illinois. An actress and member of the Society for Creative Anachronism, she lived and worked in Elk River, Minnesota. Frazer died on February 4, 2013, from breast cancer, aged 66.

The first six *Dame Frevisse* mysteries were written as a collaborative effort between Frazer and Mary Monica Pulver Kuhfeld. The rest of the series was written by Margaret Frazer alone. Frevisse is a nun at the small, fictional, 15th-century Oxfordshire convent of St. Frideswide's, with its ten (more or less) nuns; the neighboring village of Prior Byfield belongs partly to the priory and partly to Lord Lovell (an historical figure). Six of the novels are set entirely at the priory and/or village; in others Frevisse leaves the convent, either to accompany another nun on some family or convent business or on business of her own. Many of the novels have the quality of "English village" murder mysteries, in which we see at close hand the everyday material life (and the intellectual and spiritual life) of various classes of people and observe the tensions within and between them; but here, the "everyday" is of the 15th century, carefully researched. Some of the later novels are primarily

historical novels, in which Frevisse serves as an observer of the well-documented events and characters which brought on the Wars of the Roses, though there is always a murder for her to solve.

Dame Frevisse is related to Geoffrey Chaucer, author of the *Canterbury Tales*, by her aunt's marriage to Geoffrey's son, Thomas Chaucer. Titles of the Frevisse novels follow the format of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, e.g., *The Novice's Tale*, *The Prioress's Tale*. There is no relation between Frazer's title characters and Chaucer's, even when they have the same role in life (e.g. Chaucer's Prioress is a dainty, sentimental woman while Frazer's is an ambitious, domineering one). However, there is the same implication that we are offered a variety of points of view. Each book begins with a chapter or passage focusing on the title character; this is followed by a change to Frevisse's perspective, which dominates the novel, though we return from time to time to the point of view of the title character. The role of the title character varies from book to book: murderer, victim, a person in power or a victim of others' power. Seven of the title characters in the Dame Frevisse mysteries have been women.

The novels of the series are set from 1431 to 1452, during the reign of Henry VI of England; they overlap William Shakespeare's *Henry VI, part 1* and *Henry VI, part 2*. They proceed in chronological sequence, and the heroine ages from a thirtyish nun in 1431 through the next twenty years. In the early novels, Frevisse's uncle (by marriage) Thomas Chaucer, son of the poet, provides a contact point with historical events as he brings news of the world to St. Frideswide's; at his funeral (*The Bishop's Tale*), Frevisse establishes a relationship with her cousin Alice Chaucer, who is, in her third marriage, united to William de la Pole, count/marquis/duke (as the novels progress) of Suffolk, one of the most ambitious men around the king. In the same novel, Frevisse also impresses Bishop Beaufort, one of the most powerful men in the country. Out of these relationships come various missions in which Frevisse must assist Alice, Beaufort, or both in protecting various interests at the royal court. A character who occasionally appears is Joliffe, a man with a mysterious past.

Frazer's second set of mysteries, also set in 15th-century England, feature "Joliffe the Player", a spin-off character from the Dame Frevisse series, appearing first in *The Servant's Tale* and crossing paths with Frevisse again in *The Prioress's Tale*, *The Bastard's Tale*, and *The Traitor's Tale*. The Joliffe series is set in the mid-1430s; thus these novels sometimes feel like "prequels" to his appearances in Dame Frevisse novels set in a later decade.

The first three Joliffe novels present the life of an acting troupe traveling through the English countryside, with Lord Lovell as their patron after the end of the first novel. In the fourth, *A Play of Lords*, Joliffe is recruited as a spy for Bishop Beaufort and becomes involved in the political intrigues leading up to the Wars of the Roses. The fifth book, *A Play of Treachery*, takes him away from the players to France on behalf of Bishop Beaufort.^[3] When Joliffe again crosses paths with Dame Frevisse in *The Traitor's Tale*, he is employed as a spy for the Duke of York, after the death of Bishop Beaufort.

The sixth Joliffe mystery, *A Play of Piety*, is set in an English hospital where the actors' troupe has taken refuge. In this setting, strong personalities contend: women against the men who are supposedly in charge; a female *medica* or herbalist versus the male physician; and a toxic narcissist against everyone else. Playing the atypical role of a servant to

the nursing sisters who run the hospital in open defiance of those who would dominate them, Joliffe solves the mystery.

Margaret Frazer was a Herodotus award winner, two-time Minnesota Book Awards nominee, and two-time Edgar award finalist.”

Eigenvorstellung:

“To begin with, ‘Margaret Frazer’ was two people, both interested in writing and in medieval England, one of them with modern murder mysteries already published, the other with file drawers, shelves, and notebooks full of research on England in the 1400s. They met in a historical recreationist group called the Society for Creative Anachronism and joined forces to write *The Novice’s Tale*, the first in a history mystery series centered on a Benedictine nun, Dame Frevisse, of a small priory in Oxfordshire. Both character and setting were chosen for the challenge they presented – a cloistered nun in a rural nunnery: how does one go about being involved in murders in that situation? — and the chance to explore medieval life from a different perspective.

During their collaboration, the authors worked together by first laying out the general idea of a story. Then the ‘Frazer’ half of the team developed the plot and characters in detail and wrote the first draft. The ‘Margaret’ half then re-worked that into a second draft, the ‘Frazer’ half re-worked that (and it helped they lived five miles apart and couldn’t hear what each said about the other during these stages!), and then they did the final draft together, never able to argue over it too long because by then there would be a deadline closing in. The collaboration worked well through six books and two award nominations – an Edgar for *The Servant’s Tale* and a Minnesota Book Award for *The Bishop’s Tale* – before the ‘Margaret’ half grew tired of the series and amicably returned to the 20th century, leaving the ‘Frazer’ half to continue the series, with an Edgar nomination for *The Prioress’ Tale*.

I write stories set in medieval England because I greatly enjoy looking at the world from other perspectives than the 20th century. My brief college career was as an archaeology major with writing intended as a hobby, but with one thing and another, my interest came down to medieval England with writing as my primary activity, only rivaled by my love of research. But why medieval England, especially for someone who grew up without any interest in knights in shining armor and ladies fair? That’s a tangled tale but the final steps were seeing a production of Shakespeare’s *Richard II* and soon thereafter reading Josephine Tey’s *The Daughter of Time*. The complexities of honor and duty and betrayal, mixed with a curiosity as to how the high tragedies of the 1400s came about intrigued me and to understand more I needed to understand how people then saw their world and why they saw it that way. That set me into learning about medieval English politics, religion, philosophy, sociology, economics — all the multi-layered elements that go into making the lives of people in any time period. I wanted to know the landscape of the time not only outwardly – by way of many trips around Britain – but inwardly – how the world looked and felt to the people who lived then, rather than how it looks to us now. And when the chance came to write a mystery series set in medieval England, I wanted to do it from as far inside medieval perceptions as possible, to look at medieval England more from their point of view

than from ours, because the pleasure of going thoroughly into otherwhen as well as elsewhere — the chance to move right away from the familiar into a whole other way of seeing and behaving — has always been one of my own great pleasures in reading. As a writer I deeply want to give that same pleasure to others.

So – in everyday life, I'm Gail Frazer, living in the countryside north of Elk River, Minnesota, with four cats and not enough bookshelves. Over the years I've had a rag-tag of various jobs, including librarian, secretary, reseacher for a television station, gift shop manager, and assistant matron at an English girls' school. Married once upon a time but not anymore, I have two well-grown sons who become uneasy if I read books about poisons at the supper table and refuse to turn their backs on me when I say I want to try something I might use in a story. I write more days than not, and when once I moaned that "I have to get a life," my loving family informed me, "You have one. It's in the 1400s." That seems to sum up things rather nicely."

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