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AN ANGEL AT MY TABLE

is a trilogy adapted from the three autobiographies of the distinguished New Zealand novelist Janet Frame.

*One of the greatest autobiographies
written this century*

SUNDAY TIMES, London

Janet Frame has often been associated with the world of insanity central to her most significant writing. **AN ANGEL AT MY TABLE** explores this myth with disarming honesty, telling the story of her childhood, personal struggles and genesis as a writer.

*Touching and memorable ...
imbued with gentle humour and great compassion*

VARIETY

PRINCIPAL CAST

Janet	KERRY FOX
Young Janet	ALEXIA KEOGH
Teenage Janet	KAREN FERGUSON
Mum	IRIS CHURN
Dad	K.L. WILSON
Myrtle	MELINA BERNECKER
Bruddie	ANDREW BINNS
Isabel	GLYNIS ANGELL
June	SARAH SMUTS-KENNEDY
Frank Sargeson	MARTYN SANDERSON
Patrick	DAVID LETCH
Bernard	WILLIAM BRANDT

PRINCIPAL CREW

Screenplay	LAURA JONES
Director of Photography	STUART DRYBURGH
Production Designer	GRANT MAJOR
Costume Designer	GLENYS JACKSON
Casting Director	DIANA ROWAN
Editor	VERONIKA HAUSSLER
Sound Design	JOHN DENNISON & TONY VACCHER
Composer	DON McGLASHAN
Co-Producer	JOHN MAYNARD
Producer	BRIDGET IKIN
Director	JANE CAMPION

Based on the autobiographies of JANET FRAME :

**TO THE IS-LAND
AN ANGEL AT MY TABLE, and
THE ENVOY FROM MIRROR CITY**

Produced by
HIBISCUS FILMS LTD

**Box 1852, Auckland, New Zealand
Tel 64 9 398 388 Fax 64 9 734 722**

in association with the New Zealand Film Commission,
Television New Zealand Ltd,
Australian Broadcasting Corporation, and Channel 4
Length : 2 h 38 mins

synopsis

Part 1 TO THE IS-LAND

Janet's childhood begins with the discovery of life's secrets, including the power of language, the pleasure of storytelling - and the mystery of sex.

But, tragically, her early life is marred by her brother's battle with epilepsy, and her flamboyant elder sister's shocking death by drowning.

Feeling hopelessly plain and unattractive, Janet becomes more isolated at school, retreating into a world of poetry.

Part 2 AN ANGEL AT MY TABLE

At university, Janet is a shy, serious student. Unable to cope with her growing sensitivity, she attempts a half-hearted suicide and is offered the rest and comfort she is seeking - but at a price. She is committed to a mental institution.

Diagnosis as a schizophrenic, shock treatment, the drowning of another sister all follow, and haunt her through eight desperate years.

Only Janet's writing saves her from an imminent experimental leucotomy. She leaves hospital and, with the help of a literary friend, establishes herself as a writer. She writes her first - extraordinary - novel, then, with a travel grant, begins her voyage to Europe.

Part 3 THE ENVOY FROM MIRROR CITY

Janet, in her own shy way, shares the life of the 50s avant-garde in London and Ibiza.

She enjoys her first romance - with an American poet - in Spain, copes with the resulting unplanned pregnancy, and later struggles to survive and write in inhospitable London. After a final stay in a psychiatric hospital, Janet is relieved of the stigma of her former diagnosis, told that she had never been schizophrenic.

On the death of her father, Janet returns to New Zealand - to the pleasures of her country, her work and her imagination.

JANE CAMPION

interview

After Jane Campion's debut feature, **SWEETIE** (selected **In Competition** at the 1989 Cannes Films Festival), she went straight into pre-production for **AN ANGEL AT MY TABLE**. Based on the autobiographies of novelist Janet Frame, this was a project Campion and producer Bridget Ikin had been developing with screenwriter Laura Jones over several years.

SWEETIE and **AN ANGEL AT MY TABLE** could not be more different in style from each other. **SWEETIE**, which has been described by Vincent Canby in the New York Times as *spectacular ... an original*, is tagged *provocative* by the director herself.

Her approach to **AN ANGEL AT MY TABLE** she says, is 'gentler, kinder - a humanist piece. It has also prompted me to reappraise the values of New Zealand, where I was born.'

Jane Campion's involvement with Janet Frame's autobiographies began when she read the first volume, **TO THE IS-LAND**, soon after it was published in 1983, and she found herself 'laughing and crying', surprised to be moved by such simple - seemingly naïve - writing.

'On meeting Janet I began to understand how it was possible - a unique blend of her direct childlike freshness, alongside a highly developed and thoroughly educated mind. The simple charm of the book was no accident; it had been deliberately crafted.

'Being a New Zealander, I grew up with Janet's fiction - her chilling and poetic first novel **OWLS DO CRY** - and the prevailing legend of Janet as New Zealand's "mad writer". We all knew of her supposed schizophrenia. Many believed her writings were inspirations of her madness.

'But the autobiographies painfully and truthfully unravel this myth. After reading all three books, I felt committed to making Janet and her style of story widely available to people.

'Janet's fresh exploration of her childhood and life opened up my own, stimulating many painful and funny memories that somehow under Janet's courage and beam of honesty no longer seemed so bad or so embarrassing.'

as JANET KERRY FOX

interview

There is a quality of stillness; of watching and taking things in, that Jane Campion recognised in 23-year old Kerry Fox from her audition. Despite her inexperience as a film actor, (Kerry is a recent graduate of the New Zealand Drama School), she was chosen for the lead role, and for eight months, Fox lived the character of Janet Frame.

‘Everything was so affecting’, says Fox of her experience. ‘Jane Campion kept saying, “I want you to peel off another layer - another layer of skin”.

‘My key into Janet Frame evolved directly from her novels and poetry. I saw my task as understanding every letter that she had written, in my own way; how it affected me and the images it created. I don’t believe that I was trying to *be* Janet Frame. I was portraying a character from the script, which is written from the books, which in turn, is Janet’s version of her life. So you wouldn’t say I was playing *the* Janet Frame.

When asked what it was like working with director Jane Campion, Kerry Fox speaks eloquently. ‘I think she’s a very rare and precious director. She would do anything within her - considerable - power to get the best performance. She believes that all actors will give a good performance if she allows them to. She was always allowing the actors to do that, by giving us a sense of trust. Jane gave me the ability to believe in my own working methods, absolutely.

The most profound effect of working on the series for Kerry Fox was comprehending the full import for Janet Frame’s lively mind and sweet disposition of being imprisoned with diagnosis of schizophrenia. At first, Fox had found Frame’s novel of institutionalised madness, **FACES IN THE WATER**, quite unbelievable.

‘After talking to Janet, the research I’ve done and the experience I’ve had, it’s not unbelievable at all’, she says. ‘As Janet states in her autobiography, she toned it down to make it acceptable. I imagined that I would be very upset portraying Janet’s mental institution experience. But it was much worse than I ever anticipated. It was so frightening and foreign - just like all the horror stories.

‘It’s hard to comprehend that someone actually experienced that environment and treatment. Janet had over two hundred shock treatments; as she said, “each one the equivalent in fear to an execution”. In Janet’s days there were no drugs, so the place was continually full of noise, of screaming and shouting.

‘I think that Jane Campion’s intention is to convey the essence of Janet Frame’s life. She wants other people to understand and appreciate her, and have an emotional link to what she went through. It’s an amazing story’.

DIRECTOR JANE CAMPION

Jane Campion was born and grew up in Wellington, the capital city of New Zealand. Her parents were both involved in theatre. As a child she put on many of her own productions, but later decided that theatre was too frivolous. At Victoria University in Wellington she did a BA in anthropology. At the age of 21 she left New Zealand to travel in Europe. She studied at the Chelsea School of Arts in London, and then completed the course at the Sydney College of Arts, where she started making Super 8 films. A year after finishing art school, she went to the Australian Film and Television School.

FILMOGRAPHY

PEEL (1982) 9 mins

Palme d'Or - Best Short Film, Cannes Film Festival 1986.

Diploma of Merit, Melbourne Film Festival.

PASSIONLESS MOMENTS (1983) 12 mins

Co-director with Gerard Lee.

Most popular short film, Sydney Film Festival 1985.

Best Experimental Film, Australian Film Institute Awards 1984.

A GIRL'S OWN STORY (1983) 27 mins

Best Director, Best Script, Australian Film Institute Awards 1985.

Reuben Mamoulian Award and Best Short Film, Sydney Film Festival 1984.

AFTER HOURS (1984) 26 mins

Best Short Fiction Film, Melbourne Film Festival 1985.

TWO FRIENDS (1986) 80 mins

Best Director, Best Television Film : Australian Film Institute Awards 1987.

SWEETIE (1989) 101 minutes

In competition, Cannes Film Festival 1989.

Georges Sadoul Award : Best Foreign Film (France) 1989.

Best Director, Best Film : Australian Critics' Award 1989.

AN ANGEL AT MY TABLE (1990)

AUTHOR JANET FRAME

Janet Frame is New Zealand's most distinguished author.

The three celebrated volumes of autobiography on which the series is based are **TO THE IS-LAND**(1983), **AN ANGEL AT MY TABLE** (1984) and **THE ENVOY FROM MIRROR CITY** (1985).

Of her ten award-winning novels, the most well-known are **OWLS DO CRY**, **LIVING IN THE MANIOTOTO**, **FACES IN THE WATER** and **A STATE OF SIEGE** (filmed by Vincent Ward in 1978).

Janet Frame seems to me the most considerable New Zealand novelist yet. Her innocent eye can show one the commonest object for the first time, her sensibility can convey, and has perhaps experienced, the bloodiest tortures of the mind.

PATRICK WHITE.

Janet Frame was born in Oamaru, in the South Island of New Zealand, in 1924. Her first collection of short stories, **THE LAGOON**, was published in 1951.

She has since won nearly every major award in New Zealand literature, including the Katherine Mansfield Memorial Fellowship, the New Zealand Book Award in 1980, 1984 and 1986, the Book of the Year Award in 1983 and 1985, the University of Otago Robert Burns Fellowship, and the Frank Sargeson Fellowship.

In 1979 she became an honorary doctor of literature at Otago University; she was made a CBE for her services to literature in 1983, and a Member of the Order of New Zealand in 1990.

She won the Commonwealth Writer's Prize in 1989 for her most recent novel, **THE CARPANTHIANS**.

She is published by New York's Braziller Press in the USA, by the Women's Press in the UK, and by Random Century in New Zealand.

SCRIPT WRITER LAURA JONES

Sydney-based Laura Jones is best known for her original script for Gillian Armstrong's **HIGH TIDE** (1987), and her many award-winning original television dramas for Australia's ABC-Drama, including **EVERY MAN FOR HERSELF**, and **COLD COMFORT**.

She is currently adapting two novels for the screen - her mother Jessica Anderson's **TIRRA LIRRA BY THE RIVER**, and Elizabeth Jolley's **THE WELL**.

The screenplay for **AN ANGEL AT MY TABLE** is published by Random Century in New Zealand, and Pandora in the UK and Australia.

PRODUCER BRIDGET IKIN

New Zealander Bridget Ikin is a strong advocate for an independent film culture and industry, and prefers to work collaboratively with directors on a small number of projects.

For several years, she has developed and produced short dramas, with new writers and directors, through her New Zealand company Hibiscus Films. These include the landmark series **ABOUT FACE** (7 x half-hour dramas, with co-producer John Maynard), and the fifty-minute drama **TALKBACK** (director Alison Maclean).

Again with director Alison Maclean, in 1989 she produced the acclaimed short drama **KITCHEN SINK**, which premiered In Competition at the Cannes Film Festival, and has since distinguished itself with awards from several festivals.

A horror fantasy worthy of Mary Shelley **VILLAGE VOICE**

A disgustingly lovely, Lynch-like study of the hairy object of a woman's desire
NEW YORK POST.

She is currently developing an original feature film script, **CRUSH**, with writer/director Alison Maclean.

She is now based in Sydney maintaining her company, Hibiscus Films, in both Australia and New Zealand.

CO-PRODUCER JOHN MAYNARD

John Maynard has achieved a truly international reputation with three consecutive films In Competition at the Cannes Film Festival - two directed by Vincent Ward, **VIGIL** (1984) and **THE NAVIGATOR : A MEDIEVAL ODYSSEY** (1988) and **SWEETIE**, directed by Jane Campion, in 1989.

THE NAVIGATOR is now also winner of eleven New Zealand Film Awards -including Best Film and Best Director, six Australian Film Institute Awards 1988, and several other international awards.

John Maynard, well known for the risks he has taken with new talent, is currently developing further projects with selected directors in New Zealand and Australia. He is also the Director of the Len Lye Foundation.