

Reappraisals



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“A Heart to Speak of”: Authorial Sacrifice in Janet Frame’s “Jan Godfrey” and Other Texts



This essay examines Janet Frame’s “Jan Godfrey” with a view to demonstrating that its author-figure writes a story that is not a story as long as she hesitates to grant her (re-) created Other full access to the speaking position she occupies. The idea explored in “Jan Godfrey,” that non-stories of avoidance are in fact narratives of ontological decimation will, then, be shown to tie in with Frame’s belief that true art occurs at the edge of non-being.

When world-renowned Jane Campion directed her filmic gaze away from the “new” world scene to nineteenth-century England in *Bright Star*, her spatiotemporal leap was cushioned by a preserved focus on women’s lives, from Janet Frame in *An Angel at My Table* (1990), to Ada McGrath in *The Piano* (1993), down to Fanny Brawne in *Bright Star* (2009).¹ Not only do *Bright Star* and *An Angel at My Table* intersect at the crossroads of Campion’s imagination, but they also meet in the love nourished by their respective protagonists for John Keats’s person or poems. Interestingly, recent studies have shown Keats’s poetics and the Zen Buddhist epistemology to be closely related.² The implied relevance of the Keatsean or Buddhist systems of thought to analyses of Frame’s early fiction verifies the author’s conviction that interpersonal encounters cannot occur under the rule of the sovereign ego which appropriates, rather than shares, its chosen place of being. Pondering the nurses’ eagerness to “move into [her] ‘changed personality like immigrants to a new land staking their claims,’”³ Istina Mavet in *Faces in the Water* (1961) for instance regrets that “much of living is an attempt to preserve oneself by annexing and occupying others.” (193) The opposition which is drawn in the title story of *The Lagoon* (1951), Frame’s debut collection, between the appropriation of (Maori) life-narratives by the dominant culture (as embodied by a scandal tabloid named *Truth*) and the blurring of identities experienced by the four generations of women story-tellers the moment they voice the family litany (a coded version of their history),⁴ further conveys the idea that both ontological and cultural imperialisms are “essentially a freedom from otherness” (Drichel 196).

To pursue the point further, I would like to suggest in this essay that Frame’s poetics of dissolution shows no evidence of a distinction between fictional and other encoun-

1. Kerry Fox starred as Janet Frame in Campion’s *An Angel at My Table*, and later played the part of Fanny Brawne’s mother in *Bright Star*.

2. R. Benton, who analyzed the proximity between Keats’s poetics and the Zen Buddhist epistemology, insists for instance that “the suppression of self” in Keats is a genuine loss of identity which it is a mistake to assimilate with Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge or Shelley’s yearning for a “limitless expansion of their egos” through “the removal of all that hinders self” (33). For a biographical and textual delineation of Frame’s interest in Buddhism, see my forthcoming article in *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*. In an article also focusing on “Jan Godfrey,” Marta Dvorak draws attention to the proximity between Janet Frame and T. S. Eliot whose *Waste Land* is permeated with “echoes from eastern and western thought, from the *Upanishads* and Buddha’s Fire Sermon to St. Augustine’s *Confessions*” (148).

3. Istina’s “changed personality” refers to the leucotomy she is to undergo and which should normalize her just enough to enable her to sell hats in a shop.

4. As the narrator quotes the family litany by the end of the short story, she is unable to determine from whose consciousness it has originated: “Was it my aunt speaking or was it my grandmother or my great-grandmother who love a white lace dress?” (*Lagoon* 7) For further information on the four women, and on the Maori, coding and transmitting history through an ostensibly childish litany or through American folk songs, see Gabrielle “Poetics.”

ters, so that the artist who walks towards a character also leaves behind his or her ego. Hence, to counter the claim made by some critics that the author's characters are barely disguised versions of herself, Frame, quoting Keats, says of her own writerly praxis: "I am always 'filling some other Body,' giving some other opinion" ("Visionary View" 109). Since Frame first considered possibilities of reciprocal overlaps between life and art in the seminal "Jan Godfrey" from *The Lagoon*, an examination of this particular short story in connection with a Keatsian negative capability will serve to delineate the notion of the artist's duty in Frame's writing. It shall then be complemented by openings to other texts from the author's extended corpus. Lest my recourse to Keats should seem like an innocuous species of poetic reverie, and not a dismantlement of "the whole structure of consciousness," (Benton 38) I have kept the association with the "Great Death" of the ego in Buddhism, also described as the "process of dying to ordinary life [...] in order to get beyond the world of distinctions" (Benton 43). In the light of the complexities of "Jan Godfrey," it will be shown that Janet Frame concurred only partially with Roland Barthes's hypothesis that "writing is the negation where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing," (142) insofar as she maintains that authorial sacrifice is not a given but a choice. Yet, should an author-figure fail to entomb the self while writing, the resulting stories or, rather, non-stories, will be tales of avoidance and of ontological decimation for, in narcissistic mode, the artist produces nothing other than copies of his or her own narcissistic self.

First published in the second 1947 issue of *Landfall* under the title "Alison Hendry," "Jan Godfrey"⁵ recounts the story of an author-figure lost in a desert of no-words and who repeats, like a mantra, "I am wanting more than anything to write a story" (*Lagoon* 129). Eventually, she states that her artistic agenda for the next days or years is to portray her roommate, Alison Hendry. On the much-discussed status of Alison Hendry in relation to the author-figure, Janet Wilson, Vanessa Guignery and others have proposed that she and the narrator are one and the same person (Wilson 130, Guignery 308 and Rhodes 127), and that the narrator's inability to prove that "she is not me" (93) is an illustration of the arbitrariness of names and other signifiers which "as labels create only superficial differences between people who are alike." (Wilson 130) While it is certainly the case that Alison Hendry is a figment of her roommate's imagination, the assumed sameness of creator and creation is problematized by the narrator's declaration that "I cannot prove [...] it is me" (133). To say that the narrator and the other woman are not-two and not-one, or "nondual" in Buddhism (see Davis 127), is to recognize that, for all her fictionality, Alison Hendry has been granted the status of a full-fledged other and must be considered thus by the reader. It is my belief therefore that readings which deem that in "discussing the tall, quiet woman who knits on the bed opposite, [the author-figure] is in fact discussing that very person" (Evans 44), or which consider that the author-figure moves beyond "a bad case of writer's block" (Braun 93) with "the help of her roommate" whom she uses "as a springboard for her imagination" (Braun 95), fundamentally neutralize the otherness of the "alien inside" (Braun 97) and thus fail to grasp the full complexity of the author's creative anxiety.

In accordance with Guignery's perception that the "solid and stable syntax" in the first half of the story "could be likened to the straight architectural lines that delimit

5. Jan Godfrey used to be one of Frame's *noms de plume* and was mistaken for the title of the short story in *The Lagoon* (King 85).

the frame within which the narrator wants to tell a story and from which she should not stray," (307) I will argue for my part that the woman's mysterious propensity for diverting the attention from her original endeavour by rambling on about a series of seemingly unrelated anecdotes partakes of a comparable impulse for containment, a desire to hinder the emergence of Alison until the close of the text. As a result, watertight structures of self and syntax are secured against leaks or invasions of otherness and this, indeed, can be seen to convey the narrator's reluctance to be immersed in, and perhaps submerged by Alison Hendry's life. Writing a story that is not a story because she fears her own dissolution, the author-figure in "Jan Godfrey" would very much like to believe that otherness can be spoken of from a safe distance. However, as the "Zen-inspired artist becomes the thing [s/he] tries to visualize or conceive," (Benton 44) so the poets in Frame "are not afraid to drown" (*Pocket Mirror* 56). "To write, you have to be at the terrible point of loss," (72) the author-figure in *Living in the Maniototo* further explains, and this is why, she further adds, "a writer invokes characters at her peril [...], at the cost of self-erasure" (158).

In "Jan Godfrey," the narrator's inability to grasp that artistry and self-dissolution belong together goes on a par with her relief at having escaped from a bedroom and workplace which teemed with evocations of death:

I should have got up in the middle of the night and written my story. I am like a dead person typing now. I am looking at my room. It is small, but not as small as the other room where I felt like Juliet lying in a vault. You see there were shelves all round the walls, and sometimes I could feel the prickly feel of artificial flowers that are made into wreaths and covered with a bell jar, and put in the tomb with the dead people. [...] I have no picture on my walls yet. There are only the bunches of blue and pink flowers on the wallpaper. (130)

Despite her apparent move out of Juliet's vault, the inescapability of the death-like condition inherent in true artistry (a view held by Keats, Barthes, Buddhism, and Frame herself) is hinted at as the artificial flowers braided into wreaths in one room find a counterpart in the flowers printed on the walls in the next. The narrator's nagging impression that she is still "like a dead person writing" in the new room, while her torpor is ascribed to a spell of insomnia, serves also as a supplementary reminder that the space of authentic creation is always a locus of dissolution.

What this short story further conveys is that, as in Buddhism, selflessness is a fine artistic seed latent in *all* individuals (Moacanin 281) so that, when children fake death in their games, they too experience a provisional burial of the self. Musing upon this, the narrator reflects that "it is a terrible thing to be commanded to die by Charlie or anyone else" (131). Although she is isolated in her bedroom, the woman feels at Charlie's mercy, for the boy is:

a poem of himself and everybody else, an awful poem certainly, but a sincere one because it's unconscious and a beautiful one because what the heck you've got my football, garn you're meant to be the enemy, die go on die. (131)

Supporting Marta Dvorak's statement that, in Frame, "the individual, authentic speaking subject [is] replaced by a ventriloquist's dummy through which the always Other speaks," (8) the narrator's and Charlie's first-person voices are adjacent in this passage, yet they do not exist simultaneously, as though the emergence of the latter was conditioned by the disappearance of the former. As a "poem of himself," Charlie is both an Other and

a creature of words; he is an alien inside who, to have a voice, must occupy the vacated speaking position of his author while she steps into the antechamber of death.

Another “poem of [herself] and everybody else” in the short story is the little girl who, at some point, invaded the narrator’s private space and drew “scribbles with a HB pencil that [she] lent her round and round with her fat dirty hands, and afterwards the landlady said, my best wallpaper, oh my best wallpaper” (129). The narrator’s entrusting the child with the authorial pen triggers off a highly symbolic transfer of power which signifies that the character, and not her author, is in control of the artistic production and may, if that indeed is her fancy, draw scribbles on the wall. When the author-figure is commanded to die by Charlie or by the little girl, she obeys without much ado, but she shrinks from the idea of facing Alison Hendry, perhaps because her roommate has nothing in common with these children:

Alison Hendry. Margaret Burt. Nancy Smith. We cling to our names because we think they emphasise our separateness and completeness and importance, but deep down we know that we are neither separate nor complete nor very important, nor are we terribly happy (Alison Hendry, Margaret Burt, Nancy Smith, children) playing mud-pies by ourselves in a tiny backyard when other kids are out in the big playground over the fence, look what I’ve made, race you Charlie, tell tale tit your tongue shall be split and all the little puppy dogs shall come and have a bit.

You can tell that the kids in the playground haven’t got names. (131)

Since Charlie is one of the children “out in the big playground over the fence,” this entails that he has no name. Paradoxical as it may sound, the boy’s namelessness simply illustrates that, to the isolation inherent in playing mud-pies on his own, Charlie prefers to form a chorus of beings with the other children where names (and the sense of ontological separateness they induce) are unimportant.

To fully understand the nature of the author-figure’s unease towards the numerous human beings who, unlike Charlie and the other children in the big playground, insist on maintaining what Buddhists call “the false view of the ego,” the “illusory belief in a solid, concrete, separate entity, independent and disconnected from any other phenomena,” (Moacanin 284) one needs to interrogate more closely Frame’s fascination for

the mysterious unexpected nature of guests and their relation to hosts [...] with a guest as originally a host, a stranger, hostis, an enemy [...]; a guest as parasite sheltered by the host, the host a sacrifice and ultimately blessed food. (*Maniototo* 133)

This assumes an even greater significance if we consider that, from a metafictional perspective, the characters or guests in a writer’s fiction are akin to “parasites feeding for life upon their host” (*Maniototo* 108). In their capacities as full-fledged others who slumber in the midst of their author’s cities of self, creatures of words pose a threat that is not only fictional. In *Living in the Maniototo*, the artist Tommy is literally eradicated by the Blue Fury (a detergent) but, while Tommy’s creation is the principle of dissolution itself, Alison Hendry, Margaret Burt, Nancy Smith and the children in the tiny backyard fear dissolution, and so, transactions between selves. Hence another author-figure’s insistence that a writer should never overlook the fact that many people live in a world in which other selves are not necessarily a given, or that they have “five claws and four folds of eyelid, that feathers are dipped in oil, that skin is naturally waterproof” (*The Reservoir* 48). Should these shielded identities receive an invitation to sojourn in a foreign

house of self, they would be likely to try and purge the unwelcome presence of their host, “a stranger, hostis, an enemy” (*Maniototo* 133).

Seen in this light, it is hardly surprising that the narrator in “Jan Godfrey” should be anxious to lock parasitic creatures of words – those others who are already inside her self – in narrow ontological cages:

hell
me
me
me (131)

is the clamour which becomes audible when one puts “a wise ear to the keyhole of [the narrator’s] mind” (131) as though an alien inside – who both is and is not her – was indeed knocking against the walls of the narrator’s syntax, and self. Whether or not the outburst hell/me/me/me translates into “help/me” through “paronomasia” (Guignery 308), what is certain is that the narrator’s interiority amounts to a hellish mindscape of containment, which she promptly hides by cutting short the vertical line with a horizontal narrative of surface: “I am writing a story about a girl who is not me. I cannot prove she is not me. I can only tell you that her name is Alison Hendry” (131). As Guignery notes, “the verticality of the first four lines followed by a horizontal plane [...] form[s] the letter ‘L’ which, in turn, echoes the ‘hell’ of [the narrator’s] private self” (308).

Deriving from a fear of physical disintegration, the narrator’s creative anxiety is enhanced by the well-worn association in the Western world of madness with the created (Zinato 19). This state of affairs is, rather ironically, exemplified by the “spontaneous” recourse to psychiatric models (especially that of schizophrenia) in a number of discussions of the coexistence, in the short story, of several voices in one individual (see Braun and Rhodes). While this angle of approach has its relevance, it must be emphasized that Frame was also familiar with Jung’s theories of the unreal, which she studied at university (*Autobiography* 174), and with his oft-acknowledged debt to Buddhism, especially to *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* which, in his view, “makes the surprising and [...] completely correct move of maintaining that [...] the projected deities of the mind are ‘only psychological’ (as the modern European would put it) but also *real*, since the process of the mind is real” (Coward 263). To return to the short story itself, the narrator’s assertion that “there is nothing so real as the funny twisted people out of Giotto,” (130) implying that that the created is real enough, suggests that her aesthetic explorations have brought her close to a Jungian or Tibetan epistemology. Yet, she is also painfully aware that relinquishing the distinction between real and unreal others is utter madness in a society where everything is “named, labelled and parcelled,” and where you have to “prove” that other packages of self are not you (135). She is right in this for, as she divulges in one of her many digressions, she has been institutionalized on several occasions by those who “go into shops and buy and get parcels wrapped for them” (135). There is irony also in the fact that she then became a “shipment of something [...] going from port to port” (132) or from one psychiatric hospital to the next.

Though she is caught in a double bind since the creative anxiety itself is a risk and a cause for further anxiety, the narrator nevertheless finds the courage to poise herself at the edge of non-being, so that the authorial power is at last transferred to Alison Hendry who “is sitting on the bed over there, tall and dark and *quiet* like a big mouse” (133-134, my emphasis). Beyond this point, distinguishing between the two women becomes

a perilous venture. On the whole, Alison is identifiable by her lack of self-confidence and experience. Indeed, she complains that her “head pokes forward [from her] shoulders” and insists that she has “never been away from her home before” and has lived in the country where “the gorse is in bloom now and the new lambs wag their tails as they suck and the calves have knobbly knees like in a cartoon, *but that is not what you know*” (134, emphasis mine). Also, because of her excessive timidity, Alison hardly interacts with the other woman: “I sit and sew and do not speak” (134.) At this juncture, the original voice tentatively resurfaces in the narrative as though interrupting Alison’s flow of thoughts. Presumably, the following outburst – “I speak all the time though there are not many words to my speaking” (134) – does not emanate from taciturn Alison but from her roommate who, as was noted above, is an expert non-story teller, someone whose narrations broach the self-same but not the Other. Soon, however, Alison breaks free from the parenthesis in which she was held captive: “I tell you I speak all the time, I say, why are they afraid, but what will I do I am too tall when I went to school the teacher said, shoulders back don’t poke your head” (135). It is emblematic of the interplay between host and guest that the first-person narratives of the two women should be juxtaposed in the quoted lines. However, the emphasis on country life and landscapes in the last two paragraphs of the text, which is not what the author-figure knows, is a clue that the shift from the original voice to that of Alison Hendry is at last final.

Taking full advantage of the author-figure’s most unusual silence, Alison accounts for her current feeling of estrangement and homesickness. She also reminisces about her mother and this arguably determines the outcome of the struggle between original and invited voices in the text. Importantly, it occurs to the young woman that her mother is “in the Institute, buying little frilly cake-papers, cake-papers, cake-papers” (135). This utterance has been interpreted in terms of a de-creative momentum, as carrying a hint that Alison is “trying to pack in as many words as she [can] within the space she is given, until the number of words that she has, poor in her opinion, is exhausted and she is left repeating the same thing over and over again” (Braun 97). In my view, however, the protagonist’s verbal paralysis mirrors the paroxysmal fear of someone who has been struck by the enormity of her predicament: her mother too “buys” the illusion that everything can be labelled and parcelled. Should Alison Hendry fail to demonstrate her ability to differentiate herself from the author-figure or the remainder of the world, she would be likely to be labelled as insane and “shipped” away to a mental institution (132). Unwilling to follow in her roommate’s footsteps, the young woman reasserts the separateness of her identity at the very close of the tale by blurting out: “My name is Alison Hendry” (135).

If “Jan Godfrey” – a narrative of avoidance, a non-story – is eventually turned into a story by its narrator, sometimes entire texts are articulated around the absence of true communion between author and character and each of them underlines that artistic narcissism is, essentially, a decimation of otherness. “Flu and Eye Trouble” for instance concludes on the declaration made by the recluse woman-writer that “each night in the shape of a spider,” she hangs “woven traps across [her] doorway” to prevent “the entry of the living and the dead into [her] heart” (*Reservoir* 100). In *The Edge of the Alphabet* (1962), Thora Pattern’s control over her creatures of words is such that they are mere “paper dolls,” (208) dangling on the other end of their creator’s “umbilical cord” or “strangling rope” (214). Surely it is no accident that, in *The Edge of the Alphabet*, Thora,

who has no intention whatsoever to “let mythology [...] take control,” (154) claims that she lives in a “death-free zone,” (118) for it may well signify her reluctance to let otherness trickle inside her house of self. The little responsibility she feels for her characters, as well as her tendency to intimidate them (if not more) into submission and speechlessness carries forward Frame’s condemnation of non-stories of avoidance which, within the terms of her vision, amount to narratives of ontological decimation. Frame’s idea that an authentic species of art is one in which the artist, as in Buddhism, “come[s] in touch with [the known] personally” (Suzuki 168) is again suggested in a recently published piece of fiction about fiction which recounts a chance encounter between a male character from *Living in the Maniototo* and his author:

[Author] “You mean you’re...”

[Character] “Of course. I don’t know why novelists imagine that as soon as they finish with a character and the book is written and published that [the] character vanishes or dies [...].”

[Author] I looked questioningly at him.

[Character] “Yes. I observed and knew you, also, and I’ve known that you’ve been longing to write one of those stories where the author meets a narrator who then takes over, and day by day [...] the story is told, the mystery solved, whereupon the author and the narrator part company and most likely neither sees the other again.” (“Meeting a Character,” *In Her Own Words* 251-2)

Again, the reality of the aliens inside in *Living in the Maniototo* and “Meeting a Character,” and their related capacity to exist as aliens outside, suggest that, from her early fiction to her later writings, Frame places imagined (or dreamed) others and their real counterparts on the same footing, with all the ethical implications this may have in terms of an author’s duty to account for the otherness of the world and of other selves.

In *The Carpathians*, the novel that followed *Living in the Maniototo*, Frame goes some way towards writing a story in which an author, Dinny Wheatstone, meets a narrator, Mattina Brecon, who then takes over the narration. In the Wheatstone manuscript, Dinny’s voice is audible in the first few pages and then re-emerges only on two other occasions but in parentheses. Always bent on complicating the picture, Frame swaps the two women’s roles outside the Wheatstone manuscript so that, in the larger scope of the novel, both Dinny and Mattina function as the alien inside and outside in the other’s story/life. If one is to take Mattina’s words at face value, sharing a speaking position with an alien is by nature fraught with violence. On her deathbed, she says that: “I had to fight for my point of view with Dinny Wheatstone and now I must surrender it” (164). It seems contradictory, however, that Mattina should equate her willingness to remain in parentheses with fighting for her point of view insofar as, unlike the author-figure in “Jan Godfrey,” she never actually tries to regain control over the speaking position. The two protagonists peacefully resume their former roles the moment Mattina closes Dinny’s manuscript. This paradox is echoed in a similar fashion much earlier in the novel when Dinny explains that, as an Imposter Novelist, “you have to fight for your point of view as if you were dead” (44). Again, the statement is oxymoronic so that “fighting as if you were dead” comes to mean surrendering to the “enemy” or temporarily lying down in Juliet’s vault. Of equal significance is the idea tackled in “Meeting a Character,” that a creature of words should usurp its creator’s throne and, since silence for an author is an epistemological death, authentic artistry in this short piece is once again located in the realm of non-being.

Pace Thora and all other demiurge-like characters, “Meeting a Character,” *Living in the Maniototo* and *The Carpathians* all testify to the fact that host and guest can part company in peace once the story has been told. The idea that the annihilation of the ego is not necessarily lethal is good news for all the authors who hesitate on the brink of dissolution although, conversely, several texts by Frame suggest that the testing of a protagonist’s negative capability may occur in the afterlife. According to Delrez (“Eye” 132), a number of hints indicate that the artist-figure in *A State of Siege* (1966) is already dead at the onset of the novel, i.e. when she begins to be haunted by presences clamouring for entrance into her “room two inches behind the eyes” (14). In a similar fashion, the snowman in “Snowman, Snowman” yearns for the sea, or for dissolution, *after its own melting* as a snowman:

As almost the only snowflake left on that spring morning I whirled suddenly into the air meeting the Perpetual Snowflake who had guided me in my life [...]. I survived the battle. I died once yet I survived. I wait for spring, the sun and the snowdrops and the daffodils, with as much fear as when I was a snowman. (*Lagoon* 102-103)

The violence of the encounter between the freshly deceased snowman and the long-dead snowman that preceded it, now called, rather ironically, the Perpetual Snowflake, indicates that the snowman has not merged with its disembodied mentor, but has forcefully appropriated its speaking position; it has killed its host. Powerless and diminished, the new Perpetual Snowflake knows with terrible certainty that the next generation’s snowman will stab it in the back with the sharp blade of identity; it knows that what is perpetuated in the death-free zone it occupies is not a union of snowmanly souls but the never-ending replacement of one ego with the next. Thus, before or beyond death, in art or in life, world-proof consciousnesses automatically subscribe to an ontology of decimation also called “the Scorched Earth Policy where the enemies face each other with no man’s land between where nothing ever grows again” (“Flu and Eye Trouble,” *Reservoir* 48).

The suggested disjunction between physical death and the Great Death of the ego has several far-reaching implications. The first is that the enduring idea among critics, in the wake perhaps of Jean Delbaere-Garant’s groundbreaking article, that human beings “are unfinished and will not be completed before death” (147) is fundamentally over-optimistic and yet, perhaps paradoxically so, very much in keeping with the tendency displayed by critics to indict Frame for her unrelenting bleakness. Indeed, the repeated suggestions in Frame’s texts that physical disintegration does not necessarily bring to a close the quest for psychic wholeness are so many hints that the dismantlement of modes of being and of knowing that are based on discrimination is the responsibility of the individual (and not something one automatically gains in dying) and is so crucial an undertaking that it must be pursued after death if necessary. What this implies, importantly, is that Frame’s poetics of dissolution is of a piece with an ethics of alterity which, again as in Buddhism, extends well beyond the outside world (or Levinas’s world beyond the grasp of the narcissistic self⁶) to include the realness of the imagined and the other side of life.⁷ In keeping with the author’s belief that the artist has a “responsibility to everything and everyone” (*Autobiography* 197) and must attend to the world in

6. On Levinas and transcendence, see Drichel.

7. To my knowledge, the only religious belief to have speculated on the different stages of ego dissolution in the afterlife is Buddhism, especially in its Tibetan variant. On that topic, see my article forthcoming in *ARIEL*.

its largest sense, it is a writer’s duty to embrace *any* other – be they living or dead, real or unreal, parasitic or peaceful. It is very significant therefore that the author-figure in “Jan Godfrey” transcends her writer’s block the moment she resolves to open up to the dangerous Alison Hendry, for it seems to me an oblique condemnation of, as Frame writes in “My Last Story,” the kind of writing which purports to “[tell] about people” – “he said she said he did she did” – “but you never know what they think” (*Lagoon* 181). Frame’s poetics invalidates the idea that, through writing, women authors “build the walls of their private house of fiction” (Braun 101), or that their art “is always on the verge of jeopardy” because “alien forces [...] threaten to break through the fabric of the text” (Braun 93). On the contrary, she maintains that the real cannot be known, let alone lyricized, so long as the perceiver remains at a distance from the perceived, enshrouded in the protection of private rooms and other ivory towers. Human beings’ habits of division and categorisation, their reliance upon processes of self-definition by means of exclusion, have laid the foundations for an existential no-man’s land separating one individual from the next, and it is this dualism between self and world that the artist must necessarily annihilate if s/he is to have “a heart to speak of” (*Lagoon* 183).

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