
THE PARADOX OF THE MARGIN IN THE NOVELS
OF JANETTE TURNER HOSPITAL

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OF JANETTE TURNER HOSPITAL

By

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Abstract

This thesis will explore the work of Janette Turner Hospital. Her work reveals the attempt to mediate between two levels of reality. The first may be described as that which comprises the world of objective reality, of everyday life, of western culture and the perceived centre. The other level is perceived to exist on the margins of the first, and encompasses the subjective, the unconventional, the Third World and the supernatural. The awareness of this dichotomy, which has connective roots to Hospital's experience in both Australia and Canada, has led her to search for the integration of these two worlds. The difficulties of this quest form a central issue in Hospital's novels. These difficulties include the belief that the world of the margin cannot be truly known, especially from the perspective of the centre, and that, because the two levels of reality coexist, they cannot be separated.

Introduction

Since 1982, Janette Turner Hospital has written four novels and two collections of short stories, and many more of her short stories have been published in international magazines. She has won numerous prizes, including the Seal First Novel Award for The Ivory Swing (1982). Despite this success, Hospital has still to make a name for herself in academic circles. Partly because she is still a relatively new author, criticism of her work has (up to the present) been confined to book reviews. This paper will therefore examine all four of her novels in considerable detail: background criticism will be used to expand upon the issues raised by the texts, as well as to suggest a critical framework within which her work may be placed.

Reviewers of Hospital's work generally agree that she is a gifted storyteller, and that she has a prose style which, as one reviewer put it, "crackles with energy and imaginative excitement" (Loewinsohn 15). This aesthetic brilliance has led some readers to consider her a conventional storyteller, a "good read". At the same time, however, her ambitious creations radically challenge the conventions of storytelling: her novels, particularly Borderline and Charades attempt to combine disparate areas of human thought. Responses to these attempts seem to be equally disparate: as Loewinsohn, for instance, said in his review of Charades, "in trying to wed the human and the cosmological, Ms. Hospital boldly goes where no one has gone at least since Newton demonstrated just how mercilessly mechanical our universe is" (15) For other critics, however, Hospital's radical attempts to

challenge convention undermine the very skill with which she writes. In her review of Charades, Anne Collins writes that Hospital's "specialty...is 'credible melodrama' delivered with a lushness of language and use of symbol that just evade overkill" (66). Yet, Collins feels that "witnessing Hospital's structural contortions and game-playing in this book is watching a writer trespass against her own gifts" (67). Collins seems to feel that Hospital's talent for beautiful prose diminishes our ability to take her seriously. Collins clearly regards Hospital's 'structural contortions' as inconsistent with her ability to write 'credible melodrama'. Underlying this belief is the suggestion that Hospital should stick to conventional writing and should abandon experimentation in her writing.

Critics like Collins seem to be ambivalent about whether Hospital is to be regarded as a commercially-motivated writer or as a 'serious artist'. It is clearly unfair to suggest that there are writers who do not have commercial concerns, or that if they do have such concerns, such writers are not serious in their art. Such attempts to categorize any author as either conventional or radical are often based upon a host of underlying assumptions: on one hand, novelistic convention often valorizes aesthetic value to the extent that the content of a novel is subordinated to the interests of a "good story"; on the other hand, the contrived and fictional nature of a text can be equally dismissed by the ideals of "serious art".

The tendency to dismiss Hospital as a conventional author, as well as her own determination not to be considered as one are revealed in a letter that she wrote to an editor of Borderline. In this letter, Hospital responds to the editor's attempt to omit much of the novel's "unorthodox material" ("Letter" 560):

Sure, it would be a faster read if some of Jean-Marc's exploratory meditations and moments of self-discovery were cut. But that would be someone else's book. (It would also then be a much more conventional, traditional, rather banal and quite unoriginal book.) (561)

In response to the charges of conventionality, Hospital also challenges the categories that novels are placed in by combining in her novels what seem to be incongruous concepts and areas of thought. Charades is the most obvious example of this inclination. In Loewinsohn's opinion, Hospital

manages to combine images from our Judeo-Christian myth of origin—the Garden of Eden story—with metaphors and concepts from quantum physics and cosmology: quantum leaps, paradoxical wave-and-particle theories, Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle, the Big Bang. She then braids both these strands into a narrative framework of Scheherazade's 'Tales of a Thousand Nights and a Night'. (14)

Collins writes about Charades that “the slot machine hits tilt on the score of profound intentions before Hospital's story is even begun” (66). While many critics are able to accept and admire Hospital's ambitions for this text, others are less convinced:

There is something immensely appealing in an attempt to mirror the machinery of the universe in an intimate story....But

the writer must make a choice: either to follow one system of comparisons to the end, narrowing the similarities to one propitious metaphor, or to allow the story a far vaster canvas on which to follow specific leads, to give them more room than the 304 pages into which Hospital has tried to cram her heroine's cosmic voyage of discovery. (Manguel 20)

Manguel is missing one very important point, however: that is, that Hospital intentionally disrupts each “system of comparison” because each one in itself does not contain the answers to the questions that are asked of it. For example, while *Charade* explores a number of avenues (including the Uncertainty Principle and the resource of memory) in her attempt to ‘know’ Nicholas, all of these paths are inconclusive. The success of the search is always interrupted by the fact that Nicholas is unknowable. Even Hospital, who earnestly attempts to discover the reality of Dolores Marquez, admits her own failure in this pursuit. She writes that Borderline began as “a novel that was going to be about what gave people the courage for such desperate measures of escape, and what kept them going through a marginal, fear-haunted, impoverished existence (without foreseeable hope of change) in North America” (“Letter” 561). In attempting to answer these questions, however, Hospital realized that her own middle-class perspective would interfere with the attempt to “know the other”:

After about 100 pages, I abandoned this in despair....In spite of the days of roaming Central Square and observing refugee life from the sidelines, I asked myself: How can *I* (safe, fed,

housed, my family all alive and with me) possibly presume to know what keeps a person going after she has been stripped of language, country, basic necessities, family, children, safety?

Clearly, this was not a novel I could write. (“Letter” 561)

While Hospital is aware of her inability to know the life of the margin, she nevertheless attempts to give life to that reality in her texts. In order to do this without appropriating that reality, she tends to present reality simultaneously with unreality, the knowable with the unknowable. Dolores Marquez, for example, “the unknowable one” is both a highly contrived and ‘unreal’ image, and a volatile and powerful character who frustrates our desire to dismiss her as fiction. Dolores works on both the fictional level as a mirror for Felicity and Gus, and as the representative of a real, physical, political situation which needs to be brought to middle-class awareness. Cameron also considers the political content as confrontational. She says of Borderline:

Margaret Atwood in Bodily Harm (1981) took a naive Canadian into the heart of Third World chaos; Hospital, whose fictional strengths are almost exactly opposite to Atwood's, brings the Third World with all its violence and duplicity into the comfortable complacency of Canada.

Borderline is a coup for Hospital. She brings to the fore political issues that seemed slight and redundant in her first two novels (though not in some of her stories), and through

symbolic parallels integrates their startling relevance with her almost existentialist musings on the nature of reality, perception, art....The novel overcomes her earlier tendency to retreat from the political to the aesthetic. (58-9)¹

While I do not agree with Cameron's statement that political issues in The Ivory Swing and The Tiger in the Tiger Pit seem "slight and redundant," I maintain that Hospital is more conscious of the political implications of her use of narrative in the later two novels. She always seems to be sensitive to the idea of otherness, and to the political problem of western appropriation of third world marginality. In The Ivory Swing, Hospital deals with the problems of 'knowing the other'; David, for example, asks questions which are very similar to Hospital's questions regarding Dolores in Borderline:

It had seemed to him, after that, that he should never presume to comprehend intention or cause and effect or the inflections of another's thought. His own motivations baffled him sufficiently. So what could he expect to know of Juliet who was simply the most intimate of strangers? And what did he know of himself? Of how he would defend himself against past ghosts or future losses? (79)

Yet, while Hospital deals with the problem of knowing through the *content* of The Ivory Swing, she uses an omniscient narrative perspective through which the reader *knows* 'the inflections' of Matthew Thomas's thought.

Through this perspective, Hospital has the same access to the Indian man's thoughts as she does to Juliet's, the novel's affluent western heroine:

In the chair opposite, a gentleman in late middle age was looking at her with a kind of fixity he might give to assessing the ripeness of a jackfruit. (47)

~

The problem which demanded attention, and which Mr. Thomas turned over and over in his mind, peacefully and appraisingly as he might examine one of his coconuts, concerned both his married daughter in Burlington, Vermont, and the western woman waiting in the chair across from him. (49)

In giving the 'other,' Matthew Thomas, a voice which mirrors Juliet's, Hospital risks appropriating his reality and of denying his distinctiveness from western culture. Yet, because Hospital gives the inner realities of Matthew and Juliet equal attention in the novel, she also treats them with equal respect. The connection which Matthew makes between his daughter in Vermont and Juliet also draws a parallel between himself and the heroine. In this way, Hospital's use of an identical narrative perspective for both characters is less presumptuous than it would have been if, for instance, Hospital had used Prabhakaran in Matthew's place.

Hospital is keenly aware of how difficult it is to represent reality: the problems associated with the attempt to know or discover a person or phenomenon are central in her novels. There are a number of issues and concerns which preoccupy Hospital: they appear so consistently, in fact, that

one could regard them as obsessive. Anne Cameron summarizes these issues in the following way:

The unreality of some realities, the way our imaginations impose the self on the world, and, most of all, the bizarre, nightmarish timbre of human existence...she insists we look afresh at life and admit the horror of the ordinary. (57)

To Cameron, Hospital asks incessant questions about the nature of reality:

Are events real or imagined? When 'facts' are juxtaposed, must human beings project their idiosyncratic fantasies onto them to force meanings, no matter how wrong? Can fear and paranoia cause events to take place? Are some realities so painful that in self-defence we invoke amnesia and deny their existence? How, in fact can we *know* anything? (58)

The obsessiveness with which Hospital asks these questions, and the consistency with which she weaves them into her novels suggest that, regardless of the fact that they cannot be answered adequately, they are nevertheless very important to ask. This touches upon a further dimension: the unknowable and the unreal form the basis of a search which, although it leads to no resolution, is necessary. At the same time, however, 'facts' which seem to be knowable are also inscrutable, even though they indisputably exist. In this way, Hospital gives respect to both the unreal, fictional and hallucinatory aspects of reality and the real and horrific realities which affect

us daily. In her letter to the editor, she outlines her intentions with

Borderline:

I am concerned primarily with two things:

a) the essential *unreality*, for us in the safe and insulated North American middle class (typified by the aunts), of many real and verifiable and quite horrific events which go on daily all around us in the world.

b) and at the same time the intense *reality* of many quite trivial things (fantasies of a Corvette for Therese), and of many much worthier but quite intangible things (e.g., of a perfect and idealized love for Gus and Jean-Marc). (560)

Hospital also gives respect to both sides of the reality/unreality paradox by extending this theme to include various levels. One such level has already been touched upon: that is, the perspective through which reality and unreality are viewed. In choosing narrative omniscience, Hospital explores the ways in which knowledge is gained, and through which reality is understood. The objective stance claims to equate itself with the real, and with truth; it makes the deceptive claim that, in using proper scientific method, the truth it uncovers is superior to all others. Subjectivity is seen as unreal in the sense that it is too irrational to be described or verified. These two myths can be explored not only in terms of narrative perspective, however: when applied to theme, the issues extend to include the objective/real and subjective/unreal experiences of characters. For example, subjectivity is to be regarded in the present paper as roughly equivalent to

the foreign: unexplainable phenomena and dreams. Objectivity is largely associated with the status quo, scientific method, and physicality. While objectivity holds itself up as superior to the irrational, in Hospital's novels it also has the power to validate the real horror of characters who, like Dolores, would otherwise be dismissed as fictions. By insisting on irrationality, however, subjectivity also competes with its opposition. It tends to dismiss even horrific events such as the holocaust as merely fabrications; as a result, such 'facts,' along with any of its victims, do not receive the validation they deserve. Thus, Hospital consistently maintains that both levels of reality are equally important.

A second way in which the reality/unreality paradox will be viewed in this paper is in relation to the ideas of the centre and the margin. The real is often held up as superior to the unreal because it is observable and verifiable and hence pronounced to be 'true'; as a result, the unreal is marginalised in much the same way that the subjective is. For the centre, what is real is then regarded as a primary goal or preoccupation: the unreal is then said to exist on the margins of this. The centre/margin paradox reflects an overtly political phenomenon. The centre, which is regarded by western culture as affluent, white and male, focuses on verifiable truth in an effort to dismiss the horror of those 'others' who do not conform to this profile. In this way, these 'others' are subordinated and overwhelmed by centric orientations and power, and hence become excessively foreign and 'unreal'. While Hospital attempts to decentre her narrative, the ideal of this is not to discard the centre altogether: for, in the centre, there is language, comfort and security. While the margin may seem attractive to those in the centre who are attempting to escape the expansionist and homogenizing influences

of the western world, Hospital suggests that complete marginalisation involves the loss of power and access to language. Certainly it is important not to exaggerate the horror of the margin because this in effect can lead to the objectification of marginalised groups; however, the margin, like subjectivity, does not offer a realistic or attractive escape.

Hospital is relentless in her quest to integrate what seem to be opposing worlds: reality and unreality, objective and subjective, centre and margin. Personally, she “grew up feeling like a mediator between worlds,” and she says that she is “always trying to find a connecting thread that makes sense” (Cameron 58). This relates to her experience living in Australia (where she grew up), and in Canada (where she now lives and writes): because these nations both share colonial roots, they are in a sense simultaneously centric (because of their relative affluence), and marginal (because they still retain the psychology associated with colonial domination). Because of her post-colonial experience, her texts will be considered in the following paper with the aid of current post-colonial theory.

The idea of integration, however, contains its own complexities; for the attempt to combine two worlds runs the risk of sacrificing multiplicity and difference to a single, unified cosmology. So, although Hospital may be obsessed with integration, she continually disrupts the ideas of closure and finality in her texts in order to avoid homogenization. The result is often a labyrinthine narrative style which, instead of moving in a linear direction toward a specific goal, continually doubles back on itself.

While Hospital is preoccupied with integration and with problematic and paradoxical notions, it may seem difficult to unravel the complicated tales that she spins. However, between the various tangents

which her narratives go off on, there are consistent links. The subjective/objective and margin/centre paradoxes are conceptual frameworks within which Hospital's philosophies of art and reality can be viewed in her novels. These two frameworks are hence linked by Hospital's belief in the impossibility of fully *knowing* anything. The problems of attempting to know manifest themselves through narration and within the characters of her novels. Like reality and unreality, these two areas under consideration cannot easily be separated: for the individual psychology of characters inevitably interferes with the ability to narrate, and the need to narrate is often connected to an obsessive desire to control and know. However connected narration and character are, it is nevertheless necessary to handle each separately in the present paper. In chapter one, I will examine the ways in which Hospital uses narration to exercise the reality/unreality paradox: the way that she decentres narrative control, her use of conventions of plot, and the ways in which she uses both objectivity and subjectivity in narration. Chapter two will address thematic concerns through an examination of character: the issue of post-coloniality and character, Hospital's handling of the political/aesthetic split, the disruption of closure, and the position of characters with respect to the centre and the margin.

NOTES

¹ Diana Brydon discusses the division between political commitment and artistic endeavour in her article “‘The Enemy Within’: Political Commitment in Contemporary English-Canadian Literature”:

The idea of the uncommitted writer, like that of the totally objective scientist, is a myth. And the writer who insists that he or she is ‘committed’ to complete objectivity—to making no commitment—already participates in upholding the ideological status quo. That status quo has insisted—until recently—that political commitment and literature were incompatible. Political commitment led to propaganda; aesthetic commitment to great art. But contemporary theory has challenged these divisions to assert that aesthetic judgements are themselves political acts based on political participations. A society based on possessive individualism has valorized the great author as producer of his own texts. (34)

Labyrinth of Narrative: paradox, control and the centre

Narration is something that we all do on a daily basis: tell stories. While this may appear to be a simple exercise, the nature of reality, and the text itself, inevitably interfere with the attempt to set a story down in writing. The way in which a story is told is always influenced by the agent of that story, and by the agent of all agents, the author. The narrative agent's claim to responsibility for the process of narration varies according to the extent to which the author chooses to call attention to his or her narrator's presence. Omniscient narrators often deny their part in the relating of story by claiming a transparent or non-existent presence, while first-person narrators often insist in taking complete responsibility for the stories they tell. The issue of narrative control is a contentious one: for, on one hand, it is important for the author and his or her narrator(s) to claim agency in the story and to take responsibility for its creation; on the other hand, there is no way for either the author or the narrator to claim complete control over that story. The author's claim of complete control over his or her text also risks being an arrogant statement of god-like authority which could deny the reader the act of interpreting that text.

This problem exists for readers as well: while they may feel that they are being told a story, the process of reading also involves the act of interpreting, which is in itself a kind of 'telling'. Plot and novelistic convention also play roles in narration: the reader, the narrator and the author are all controlled by the various familiar patterns which work to

shape the story. Because the acts of reading and writing involve a partnership between the text, the reader and the author, any attempt to give exclusive control over the story to any of these three will inevitably result in the denial of power to another. While Hospital is aware that, as she writes about Borderline, “there are undoubtedly themes in the book that I'm not yet fully conscious of myself” (“Letter” 563), she asserts that both the author and the narrator maintain conscious intentions which need to be respected. As well, with any creative act comes responsibility: as Jean-Marc says, “even dreams you dream up are dangerous and should never be written down without due regard to the consequences” (Borderline 4).

In Telling Stories, Telling Lives, Joanna Frye is less ambivalent about narrative control. In her opinion, the act of narration should involve taking control over one's life. Because she believes that women have been controlled by narrative and by old, worn out plots, Frye recommends that women writers find new methods of writing through which they can assert control. Part of the problem has been that the realities of women have been denied by convention and by the over-use of the authoritative objective perspective. Frye maintains that the problem with the objective or third person perspective is that it claims superiority and universality; in this the specific subjective realities (particularly of women) are denied. Frye suggests that female writers use the female subjective narrating presence as a way of subverting stereotypes and of asserting a specific female reality, rather than a generalized image:

When the protagonist of the novel is made her own narrator, she thus achieves a kind of agency and a capacity to renew our

notion of plot. She is the agent by which events come into being as part of her story: she makes the selection as to which information is relevant to the plot she constructs; she sets the context for the causal links in her own life. She cannot, of course, claim total control—the fictional history posited by her author contains the material limitations of the information she can construe into narrative, and this history is always framed in interaction with her social context. But she does have the freedom of construction that lies at the heart of the human need to narrate, and in using that freedom openly, she subverts the convention of plot as an inevitable unfolding of causal relationships. (56)

Frye goes on to argue that the female narrating 'I' also "resists the notion that identity can be complete or that it is a unitary concept bound by her gender" (63).

While it may be easy to see that the female narrative 'I' often subverts notions of identity and conventions of plot,¹ it is more difficult to accept Frye's assertions that the use of the third person 'she' creates the opposite effects. According to Frye, the fundamental differences between first and third person narration are the following:

If a female pronoun occurs throughout the text, it repeatedly reminds us of cultural expectations for what it means to be female; it reminds us, inevitably, of the femininity text. The 'I', by contrast, reminds us only of a subjective narrating presence,

a nameless agent; it asks us only to remember its subjective agency. The 'she' can easily lull us into complacent and conventional expectations; the 'I' keeps us conscious of possibility and change. (65)

While Hospital stresses the importance of asserting narrative control for women, she is also aware that her characters do not have complete control over their own lives, let alone over the stories that they tell. What she is most concerned with here is that respect be given to both the objective and subjective conditions of both her male and her female characters. The problem with Frye's valorization of the subjective perspective for women is that she seems to want to relegate women to this world exclusively. This could result in the denial of the right to receive validation for 'real' verifiable phenomena and events. Perhaps this is the point that Hospital is making when she chooses to avoid the use of the subjective 'I' for her female characters altogether. This is especially pronounced in The Tiger in the Tiger Pit, in which she gives both first and third person voices to all of the male family members (including twelve year old Adam), but only third person narration to Emily, Victoria and Elizabeth. Yet, I would object to any claim that this consistent use of 'she' lulls Hospital's readers into 'complacent and conventional expectations'. Hospital is more concerned with the attention which is paid to the subjective realities of all of her characters than with the voice in which this is told. The positive side to the objective perspective is that through it often comes validation; conversely, the subjective condition is often associated with madness and dismissed as 'unreal'. Women have often been relegated to a subjective reality which

renders them helpless, insane, and powerless. In Hospital's novels, equal attention is given to both the subjective realities and the objective realities of the female characters. Yet, there is an important distinction between the exploration of subjectivity in male and in female characters: the subjective realities of female characters is shown exclusively through the third person perspective, while often male characters (like Jean-Marc and Edward) narrate by mediating between first and third person perspectives. In this way, Hospital does not relegate her female characters to the subjective condition: while allowing them to be distanced by third person narration, they do not become objectified by the narrative 'she'. Within her male characters, she gives equal attention to both conditions, but in their case, she allows them to narrate subjectively as well. This suggests that Hospital is aware of the danger that, in relegating women to the subjective world, she might reinforce the female stereotype of irrationality.

While Frye maintains that the use of the narrative 'she' leads the reader to think of female stereotypes rather than of the specific presence which is linked to the subjective 'I', Hospital presents her female characters as defying and confronting cultural stereotypes. For instance, Juliet, Emily, Felicity and Charade are all more comfortable in movement than in stasis: their movement is away from the home, away from the peaceful suburbs and countryside in which women traditionally are placed. The Ivory Swing is framed by a romantic plot in which a bored young housewife is transported into exotic India. Although we may anticipate that Juliet be awakened and captivated by the local traditions and culture, instead she pines for

those places that inspire editorial laments in newspapers: the

derelict overcrowded arteries of sprawling cities that heave untidily with history and event and garbage strikes and miraculous chance encounters. (68)

Elizabeth also defies the stereotypes which are placed on her by her patriarchal husband, Edward. He stereotypes Bessie by stating that her calm is “not natural,” and that it suggests “a dimming of intelligence” (16). For him, she is static because she never wakened from motherhood (13). Terrified by her sexual energy on their wedding night, Edward is “pleased that in time she became a lady again, white and still and intoxicating” (48). Despite her husband's rigid assumptions about her, however, Elizabeth manages to tell her own story independently of Edward's authoritative voice: rather than being asleep from motherhood, as Edward imagines, she sees herself as being “busy with birth and mending” (125). Told through a third person voice, Elizabeth's stories are filled with a colourful variety of voices, all of which are her own. She is not addressing the text or the reader, as Edward does; rather, she speaks to herself:

Shouldn't we drift on in the more or less comfortable present, puttering in the garden in the morning, reading to him after lunch, playing the piano in the evenings? Coaxing him into serenity, tempting him with little pleasures of each day, maundering toward death like two indolent afterdinner drowsers.

Not sure, never sure I know what I'm doing, copperface, but it has to be done. Not for me, but for them. She pointed an

accusing finger at her shadow-self: You conceived of this family gone so badly out of tune. Fix it. (20)

Elizabeth's story really emerges at the end of the novel as a rival to Edward's: in fact, it forms the climax of the text, and this leaves the reader with the impression that *the* story is actually hers: "she is moved to tears. It has sung itself well, she thinks. She likes this ending" (242). Elizabeth is, in fact, a composer, and she 'writes' in third person as much as Edward does in both narrative perspectives:

In the final movement, a slow rich one, a resolution of all themes, they were all present and at peace, old and young in one another's arms. It will happen that way, she thought, her hands still resting on the keyboard. I'll write it that way. (22)

Elizabeth's ending is motivated by her subjective needs: she is driven by the need to bring comfort and happiness to her family and to mend their fragmentation. In fact, "Prospero is [her] middle name" (105).

There are two major narrators in Hospital's novels who use the subjective perspective of narration: Jean-Marc in Borderline and Edward in Tiger. Both of these men alternate between the subjective and objective perspectives: in both cases, this fluctuation reveals the inadequacies and strengths of each perspective. Although Jean-Marc attempts to write down the story of Felicity with scientific accuracy, his attempt to be truthful is undermined by his subjective needs and his frequent interruptions of his own story. Like Jean-Marc, Edward attempts to sort out his life in retrospect: yet, in the subjective first person he calls the reader's attention to the fabrication

of his 'objective' conclusions. Jean-Marc is the only character in all of Hospital's novels who claims to have control over the text. Edward, on the other hand, does not claim such authority, for he does not have access to the thoughts of other characters. Because Jean-Marc explores the difficulties of narration to a considerable extent, he seems to be a good place to begin to unravel the major issue of narration in Hospital's novels.

There are at least two main stories in Borderline: one is the story which Jean-Marc writes in retrospect (one year later) of Felicity, Gus and Dolores Marquez. The other is Jean-Marc's present story through which he attempts to come to terms with Felicity's death (or merely her absence). Both stories intertwine with one another, and both are told through the voice of Jean-Marc in his attempt to sort out both his and Felicity's past. Although the reader is made to be conscious of Jean-Marc's voice and presence during the telling of Felicity's story, we are also aware that he is neither omnipresent nor omniscient. He has very little information with which to tell his story:

This is what I have done: the phone calls, such dates as we can vouch for, the occurrences real or believed to be real, have all been committed to file cards, a boxful of three-by-five-inch information. The cards have been shuffled into chronological sequence. It was satisfying this ordering and shaping of memory. Three lives on tap. The bald facts. (16-17)

He also admits that the story he writes is based on very little personal involvement and a lot of imagination, and that there are a number of

motivations for writing it:

The moral of this, Felicity would say, is that even dreams you dream up are dangerous and should never be written down without due regard for the consequences.

Nevertheless, I *am* going to write it all down before it goes. For Felicity's delectation when she reappears.

And partly, of course, for Kathleen, who needs to invent her missing father.

But mostly, I confess it, for myself. To try to make sense of what happened. Not that this is going to be easy, since I have so little to go on: a few encounters, a handful of phonecalls, a jumble of out-of-sequence information, and of course a lifetime knowledge of Felicity. (4)

Although he claims to rely on the resource of his 'lifetime knowledge of Felicity,' Jean-Marc is at a loss about how to convey the story of her. The 'bald facts' that he has do not compensate for the poor resource of his memory. While Jean-Marc and Edward often strive to obtain truth by way of an objective path of investigation, the form of this objectivity is complex in both novels: for, both narrators are aware of the problems of obtaining truth with only the limited resource of memory. Felicity is also aware of the inadequacy of this resource when she confesses to her reflection in the mirror, "I am often distressed...by the gulf between experience and the possibility of representing it in any medium other than memory" (12). This medium of memory is problematic: in fact there *is* no objective record of

personal history, because the retrieval of memory is always affected by the subjective conditions of the present.

The ability to narrate is also influenced by the subjective condition. Both Jean-Marc and Edward experience conflicting motivations in their desire to tell a 'true' story. While Jean-Marc writes that he "quite simply resent[s] anyone else writing about her at all. No one else (besides myself) is *qualified*" (6), he openly admits that the main reason for writing the story is to fulfil his own quest 'to try to make sense of what happened'. Edward also attempts to make sense of his life, "to edit and revise his life, to compose a variant past, to approach death from a different and more bearable direction" (15). This direction, which is creative and subjective, motivated by the need to feel that he has lived his life fully, conflicts with his unequivocal judgements and authoritative stance. In one passage in Tiger, Edward's first person voice and subjective condition subverts the authority with which he writes:

And in the passive aloof way she has gone on submitting for these fifty years to my fever of possession, my frenzy has been reborn over and over again. To possess the unpossessable. That is why I married her. Married into them. To ruffle their calm.

None of this is true. None of it. The medication makes me maudlin. I married a plain girl out of pity, a proud plain girl, gaunt as a fencing wire, who came to me on our wedding night with a gauche vitality hoping to please. I was offered a promotion, a schoolhouse, and gracious living. Away from the city her bogus intellectual interests withered. She was bookish

but withdrawn, eccentric. An ordinary uninteresting vegetating
housewife and mother. (48-49)

While neither story of Elizabeth is flattering to her, the break in Edward's own narrative signals to the reader that his position as a narrator has been one of power and authority. We were, to a certain extent, *believing* his story: for whatever reason, however, he sees the story as insincere, and can no longer bear to tell such lies. Of course, at this point, the reader has been introduced to Elizabeth and we know that the second 'true' story about her does not match what we know of her. Yet, the story which he claims to be untrue strikes the reader as true because Emily believes a similar version of this story about her mother (32).

Edward is more comfortable with third person narration than with the subjective 'I' because it distances him from both the subject matter and his subjective present. We know that he is more comfortable in the third person perspective because he self-consciously escapes from subjectivity into the safety of the past tense third person voice. For example, when he begins to tell the story of when he first met his wife, he interrupts with "but this requires a detached perspective..." (44) and begins to tell the story in the alternative voice. He often switches between the two voices in this way in order to suit his own personal agenda, and to comment on what he has written. He also conducts experiments with narrative, claiming that "it is important to reconstruct objectively, it is important to conduct research from different perspectives, looking for clues" (65). His first person evaluations of these experiments, however, reveal that Edward fails to achieve an objective account. What is more important, though, is that he succeeds in giving

alternative versions of the same story. After his first experiment, Edward evaluates what he has written:

Yes a fair account, I think. A fair account, and an honest one, though other versions are possible. Perhaps I flatter myself, perhaps I overdo the insecurity and the innocence....Revised editions possible, no doubt, and maybe even beneficial. Try again, begin again. Fast forward in time. (71)

What follows is another version, but this time it is of “things as they *might* have happened” (71). By using versions in this way, Hospital destabilizes the ideas that there is only one story, and that there is one ideal way in which it should be told: although experiment number two is Edward's fantasy, it is in no way inferior to the first version which claims to be purely objective. The one continuing thread throughout the versions is Edward himself. Yet, the possibility of other versions (perhaps an infinite number of them), and the immediate movement into a radically different version suggest that his identity is not unified, and that there is no ‘real’ story to which he is progressing.

Jean-Marc's method of narration is equally continuous and revisionary, even though he begins with a sophisticated vision of objectivity. Early on in the novel, he approaches his job as story teller in much the same way as he tunes a piano; he sees himself as “tempering” the “real” events into written form, rather than as creating fiction:

The tastes of the concert pianist must be taken into account, the

pulse of the hall or a room taken, a quantum leap made into the souls of the composer and the performer and the tuner, into their dark corners and most secret desires. The absolutely accurate is too narrow; it is false and imperfect. I am after something more organic: the truth. Which, as Oscar Wilde said, is never pure and rarely simple. I am after the whole of it, the messy unpresentable fantasies, I am going for the well-tempered heart of the matter. (16)

His drive to obtain the truth, however messy or impure it may be, is based upon the belief that a narrator can in fact make a quantum leap into the souls of his subjects. This desire is problematic: however much Jean-Marc (and, by extension the author) may want to know what it is like to be another person, this may never be fully known. Jean-Marc's story of the woman "who was convinced that the CIA had implanted transmitters in her kneecaps" (39) acts as an illustration of this difficulty in narration:

But no one can deny that the woman's bizarre behaviour was logical once one accepted her premise; and her biographer would want to know, indeed would have an obligation to understand, how it felt to the woman herself when electronic impulses buzzed in and out along her calves.

This is my problem, compounded by the fact that the protagonists are dear to me, and apparently of sound mind.

(39-40)

Jean-Marc's conscientious concerns about understanding and tempering reality reflect his attitude toward the task of narration. Although he has very little information with which to write the story, he would rather consider himself a biographer than an 'artist'. He refrains from calling himself an artist because he associates the artist with Seymour and with vanity: "I distrust art for reasons that must be obvious. What else would you expect of the Old Volcano's son?" (4). As a piano tuner, he sees himself as working behind the scenes rather than in the artistic role of creator:

And yet I am, you will point out, an attendant lord. True. There are, in my opinion, far too many composers and performers, too few piano tuners. Too many prima donnas, not enough people to hold the props, clean the paintbrushes, build the perfect harpsichord. (4)

Because of his contempt for his father, Jean-Marc has difficulty coming to terms with his father as artist: it is much easier for him to deny his own status as artist than it is to address his ambivalent feelings for Seymour. Seymour is, after all, a very disagreeable man. As Hospital remarks about Seymour in her letter to the editor of Borderline, "(the arbiters of reality, whether in painting or in society, in the novel or in politics, are frequently manipulative and obnoxious human beings)" (562). Seymour (at least as seen through the jealous and angry eyes of Jean-Marc), attempts to control and 'fix' Felicity as an artistic object. As he says to her, "you're an idea of mine, remember that. You should never put on clothes" (78). Speaking of her father, Seymour says to Felicity "you think you're free to invent him as

you wish. I know more about both of you than you'd ever dream" (77). Because Seymour denies Felicity the right to invent her own father, we see that he is far more controlling than is his son; yet, they are far more alike than Jean-Marc would like to admit. Jean-Marc begins to identify with the artist-blood in himself, and admits his narrative is an act of creation:

I temper, I stretch, I embroider.

And then self-hypnotism sets in. (Form, after all, is important. One is concerned with the shape of the whole.) One begins to flex new muscles, to sense power, to acquire a taste for it. This is the Pygmalion factor: one falls in love with one's own creation, one rather enjoys playing God.

(A confession: The piano tuner is getting a yen for the stage.)

Perhaps, when Felicity finally calls, she will disappoint.

Perhaps I am better at her lines than she is. (181-2)

While Jean-Marc would like to centre and 'fix' reality into the written text, this desire becomes destabilized by his own psychology, and by the endless possibilities for narrative that exist in his own faulty memory bank. At least part of his motivation for writing about Felicity is his obsessive need to know that she is alive, that she will return, that she is true and real. When she appears at his apartment, Jean-Marc rubs his eyes "in case [her presence] was just a wish in full bloom" (81). Although he claims to know Felicity well enough not to hope that she will ever stay in one place, Jean-Marc dreams of her return:

They are the kind of people who lose track, Felicity and Augustine. Who trail off in mid sentence. So I do not necessarily believe that they have disappeared permanently. I resist believing it. I begin to ask myself if I dreamed the entire course of events. Every time the telephone rings I expect it to be Felicity. She will be calling from New York or Rome or Mexico City or wherever. (She travels a lot. It has always made her nervous to stay in one place for too long; she is at ease only in transit.) (2-3)

The reader never knows the extent to which these needs dictate how he characterizes Felicity or tells his stories. While his motivations in telling the story disrupt the truth of it, they also make the act of storytelling a therapeutic experience. Storytelling then becomes a vehicle through which the subjective world of the narrator is addressed, rather than an interference with the attempt to achieve the much valorized objectivity. The therapeutic capacities of narrative are not contained in the story itself, but in the process of telling. Against Seymour's prohibition of Felicity's right to invent her father, Hospital gives her characters the right to create stories for themselves.

Although she is not in control of the text within which she writes to the extent that Jean-Marc is, Charade also tells and creates stories in order to work through her loss. Her stories are all based on the same quest: the search for her father that she never knew. Like Edward, she creates an endless number of possible variations of story, all of which are significant, and none of which is conclusive:

That is Charade's favourite version of the origin of herself, immaculate confection and changeling extraordinaire, bluestocking, semi-orphan, second brat of the Slut of the Rainforest; but she has others, one for each day of the week, one for matins and one for evensong, one for before exams and one for the long summer holidays that stretch across December and January, one for cyclone weather, one to tell the bone man down by the curtain fig when the sun is hotter than the black stump that is back of beyond in Alice Springs. (73)

Sefton's description of Nicholas also adequately describes Charade:

a compulsive talker, a storyteller—only it was the same story over and over again, a thousand versions. A thousand pseudonyms, too: the same story under different names, set in different countries. First in magazines, then in books. A compulsive neurasthenic type...Bit of Lord Jim, he was. Saw himself a tragic hero, had to be always on the move, have a woman in the bed at night, talk or write stories all day to keep the dogs at bay. (242)

As with Edward's experiments, endless variations of story subvert the ideas of closure, finality and centrality upon which, as Koenig calls it, “the simple narrative line” (164) depends. Plots, as Charade insists, “do have to double back on themselves: there's no other way” (164). In *Labyrinths of Voice*, Robert Kroetsch admires precisely this kind of generative and repetitive

storytelling. For him, retelling is a way in which to avoid and reject the snare of the centre:

We are moving to a greater interest in the manifold, in the many. We want to decentre rather than to centre. We don't want that centre which encompasses, which entraps. I think our use of the word 'entrapment,' as a basic property of godgames, has turned out to be very important. One version of entrapment is simply being dead centre, being caught in any dead centre....You stay alive by moving around those edges where you risk meaninglessness all the time. That's one of the risks you have to take on the edge, that it might be just totally meaningless. When you disallow the centre, you take that risk. We have sought out the decentering rather than the centering function of myth. There is a paradoxical notion, which shows up in Beckett, that a circle can exist that has no centre. All we know is its circumference. Now existing on the circumference rather than in the centre excites me. It is a way to resist entrapment, to resist endings and completion. On the circumference we can defer meaning and other finalities. I want to avoid both meaning and conclusiveness. And one way to achieve this is to keep **retelling**, keep transforming the story.

(130)

While Kroetsch seems comfortable with the ideal of decentering altogether, Hospital maintains and supports the idea of centrality. The alternative to the centre is, after all, complete marginality, and, as Kroetsch points out,

meaninglessness. This is clearly a problematic position to be in and to strive towards. He may be correct when he says that in staying on the circumference we can 'defer meaning and other finalities'; yet, the margin is as trapping as the centre is. Because the centre encompasses language as the key to meaning, truth and power, being on the periphery inevitably means remaining silenced, without language or power. While the margin does not, strictly speaking, exist without containing a trace of the centre, it is easy to see that Dolores Marquez and Victoria represent the furthest extreme of marginality in Hospital's novels. The world in which they dwell, however, is not to be celebrated, at least in part because both of these women are denied the full use of language. Dolores speaks only through another's consciousness, and Victoria spends much of her time trapped in a world in which language and objective reality are inaccessible to her. In the medium of water, Victoria knows that it is "futile to speak," and that only touch and "certain vibratory patterns set up by fin rhythms and telegraphed to receptive minds" could communicate (76). In the medium of air, however, Victoria is able to surface into communication: "She surfaced gasping and the air was soft and clean as childhood. She ran and stumbled up the beach, laughing, and gathering [Jason] into her arms" (76).

Although Hospital does decentre her narrative and attempts to avoid absolute closure in her novels, the physical world of communication and human suffering is equally important, especially for Victoria and Dolores: as Dolores says to Felicity, "I could care less about your integrity or lack of it. I'm bleeding out here in the woods" (30). While Kroetsch would ideally like to discard all forms of rational conclusion, Hospital maintains that there is, as Katherine tells Charade "a rational explanation if we could

just put our fingers on it” (12). She does not go so far as to concur with European academics who, as Charade tells Koenig, “solemnly delineate [that the holocaust was] a mass hallucination. [That] there is proof that the Second World War was a hoax” (37).

Hospital's stories lead the reader through a circuitous route which focuses on the act of storytelling itself, rather than on the moment of climax or closure. This route is similar to what Wilson and Neuman define as the model of the labyrinth, upon which the three person interview of Labyrinths of Voice is based:

this labyrinth is constructed of our voices, of fragments of discourse, of a ‘mouthful of air,’ but it is essentially labyrinthine. It requires turnings, imposes abrupt stops, suggests backtrackings, offers illusive vistas and, perhaps, a path to the centre. (xii)

One of the therapeutic purposes of labyrinthine re-telling is that it allows for countless possibilities for endings, rather than having to demand adherence to the finality of linear models.

Gus is another character who narrates his own invented stories, through which he can become redeemed. Unlike Felicity, though, who avoids making conclusions, Gus imagines his redemption to manifest itself in the form of a happy, closed ending which reinforces the ideals of the centre. The plots of his stories are therefore linear and closed:

Although unspeakable things had been done to the woman (the

doctor would undoubtedly reveal this), she had been blameless throughout, virginal in spirit; she would recover. Wise men from the upper reaches of government would offer gifts that would include a work permit. Certainly she would not be deported. A doctor, bewitched, would worship from far and then near, showering her with many Catholic children and a gabled house with backyard barbecue and wall-to-wall plush, the deepest velvet kind, top of the line in the Sears catalogue. There would be a silk dress for every rip in her shapeless black tent. Her son would become a Supreme Court judge or possibly Prime Minister, one of her daughters would become a nun, and the rest would marry well. On the living room mantel of her later years there would be a row of framed portraits—the granddaughters in First Communion dresses that took the breath away, so fragile with lace and purity. And when, after a full rich life, La Magdalena died, the flowers would come in truckloads, a whole city in the cortege, tributes to immigrant success in the True North strong and free, requiem masses in Latin and French and English, her grandchildren rising up to call her memory blessed. (59-60)

This story about La Magdalena is one of absolute closure, and reflects Gus's desire to be in the centre as a successful American-style business- and family man. All of Gus's stories fail to secure him a place as the romantic hero, father and husband of the plots that he invents for himself and others, because they are based on a false ideology which works to make him an

“optimistic pessimist” (58).

In contrast, Felicity's stories disrupt closure and finality. This coincides with her attempts to leave the suffocating and centred worlds of art, her aunts and her lover. Dolores Marquez exists on the fringes of these worlds, living a life of fear and exposure. Because of this movement away from the centre and towards Dolores, the stories told of Felicity tend either not to end, or to end in a way which subverts the reader's expectations of closure. Although we are told that in Didiji's stories to her “the demons always lost; the Untouchables, whose *dharma* it was to eat the carrion, were fed as they should be; and the will of the gods triumphed” (34), Felicity disrupts this conclusion by asking “but what about the cow, Didiji?...it was still alive, it was writhing in pain” (34). The question is a cry “into the past” which acts as a narrative bridge into the present; in this way, the story is continuous, rather than closed. The story “survives entire in [Felicity's] memory” (34), and is relived in the present until Gus awakens her from her daydream. In opposition to Gus, who continues to uphold beliefs which involve stasis and closure, Felicity insists upon open endings. When she was told by her grandparents that she would not see her father again, she refused to believe the finality of the story:

she had said over and over—but apparently in Malayalam—to her distressed grandparents: I don't believe you, it isn't the whole story, Didiji will tell me the truth. He is only out in a fishing boat, he will be back when the tide turns. (37)

While it may be tempting to regard the avoidance of closure

(associated with Felicity) as superior to Gus's tendency toward it, Hospital does not privilege one type of narrative over another. Felicity is no better off in refusing to believe that her father has died than Gus is in his happy endings. Both characters invent endings to their stories in order to deal with the emotionally charged subject matter of them. While Gus needs to believe that all will end well, Felicity needs to believe that, in the end, anything is possible. What is important in the novels is that Hospital draws her reader's attention to the idea of closure and the devices used to conclude any narrative. She uses the closed ending as much as she makes her reader question the assumptions upon which it is based. In Borderline, Hospital establishes the reader's expectations for closure and unity by using the conventional plot patterns of the murder mystery, the spy story, and the biography. The endings of these demand closure in order to be judged successful: the detectives solve their case, the spy completes his/her mission, and the biographer completes his/her story. Hospital undermines these expectations by putting into question all of the "facts" upon which these plots rest. Jean-Marc is an unreliable biographer who is attempting to fulfil his own needs and desires by writing the story of Felicity, and he has so little information on the plot that he invents most of it. As detectives investigating the murder mystery, both Felicity and Gus are on almost entirely different tracks, none of which is conclusive. Even if Felicity does seem to come close to solving the puzzle of La Magdalena's disappearance, the reader is always aware that this story is being invented by Jean-Marc on the basis of a few telephone calls. The spy story introduces overtly political issues into the novel, yet it is parodied as a "cloak-and-dagger scheme" (207), typified by Trog and Hunter's good-cop, bad-cop routine during their false interrogation

of Felicity. Nevertheless, Hospital's subversion of these conventions does not mean that she discards them altogether. Her use of traditional novelistic devices asserts that she regards these centering influences as important: while it may seem cliché to use melodrama, mystery and spy narratives, these are nevertheless familiar enough to a reader that they are a part of his or her experience.

Hospital also uses and disrupts the notion of a closed narrative pattern in Borderline through the more subtle use of the cliché 'narrative line'. The story which "ends" with Hunter's attempted rape of Felicity ironically begins as a conventional seduction story. Hospital underlines the danger of these conventions by casting the scene as a dream-like reverie into which Felicity has self-consciously slipped:

The fog of talk that rose from Hunter drifted around her, muddled with caffeine, opaque. Here and there, single beads of words were becoming visible in the mist: 'tranquillity,' 'irresistible,' 'erotic.' Now, accidentally making contact, he was tracing something on her wrist with one finger. These were hieroglyphs she knew. Comfort and protection in many forms were being suggested. She watched his eyes for a specific translation.

'Seizing the moment,' he said, 'especially two people whose inner vibrations,' etcetera, 'and so deeply attracted...'

Felicity winced. An ongoing puzzle: why men always assumed that attraction was reciprocal. And why so many, on no discernible evidence, convinced themselves that she had

mysteriously summoned them, felt themselves impelled to present what she thought of as a Galahad face: devout, confessional, confident of intense consummation, embarrassing.

And yet, at this moment, she was tempted. Partly because once a certain point was reached, it was simpler to get away afterwards than to extricate oneself before. (134-5)

Far from being romantic, this scene is scripted along familiar lines, is routine and ritualistic. Finally, however, Felicity wakes up from the fog of sexual enticement: "as an alarm clock rips through the tissue of a dream, she took stock of where she was" (136). This arousal exposes the conventions of this plot:

But now the whole tiresome ritual of extrication had to be gone through; and she would have to acknowledge, from sheer habit and some strange inability to do otherwise, every one of the old taboos: no damaging of his esteem; no hint of sexual rejection.

(137)

The plot which we are so familiar with relies upon the reader's acceptance that the female character fully and willingly reciprocates the hero's advances; however, in order for the woman to do this, she must become numb, docile and conciliatory. Despite the carefulness of Felicity's rejection of him, Hunter's attempt to rape her flips the traditional ending of sexual consummation into an ironically dangerous conclusion. The reader expects that the scene will lead to a happy ending; yet, we are alerted to the danger

of this when we too awake from the 'fog of talk' when Felicity panics and escapes from the car.

Whether the story is closed or open, what Hospital stresses in her novels is the need to take control over one's life, often through narration. Aside from the fact that Hunter attacks Felicity, the problem with his intention to 'close' the story between himself and Felicity is that Felicity loses control over her own story: although she responds to Hunter's advances, she does not, like Gus, write her own scene. She feels "aroused yet drugged, as though she had consented to hypnotism" (135). In contrast, Gus's story about Dolores is a harmless bit of invention which creates in him a feeling of satisfaction, a "virtuous lassitude...an earned drowsiness" (60). While both characters are in a state of drowsiness, it is the element of control over this state which makes the difference here.

Hospital and Frye would seem to agree that control over one's story is important for female protagonists; yet, they clearly have different ideas about how this may be achieved. While Frye maintains that it is only through the subjective narrating presence that a woman can truly write her own story, Hospital deals with the issue more broadly. All of her characters are given the right to invent their own stories, in as many versions as they please. One may argue that the catharsis which the characters of Hospital's novels feel is superficial because it derives from the individual's own mythology rather than from actual fact. That, for example, Gus's happy stories create only a temporary feeling of elation in him which merely postpones the disaster which will inevitably befall him, that they are versions of the same mythology which seduces him into continuing on in failure. Yet, Hospital has said in conversation that what she is keenly

interested in is the mythologies that people create about themselves and others. Each version of a person's life is equally important: just the fact that Charade dreams that Kay is her mother is enough to warrant its articulation. Yet, this story is also embedded in the 'real' version that Bea is her mother: it reflects the fact that Charade is almost a reproduction of Kay (they are both searching for Nicholas, they both left the Tambourine Rainforest, they are both intellectually gifted) and that Kay is as obsessed with Nicholas as Bea is. In other words, a union between Nicholas and Kay is as plausible as one between Nicholas and Bea. In using versions in this way, Hospital subverts the idea that one can actually reach a final conclusion about what the 'real' story is. One cannot choose between the endless versions of story which are generated by the imaginative mind. While the free invention of story is a way for her characters to attempt to heal their old wounds, Hospital does not relegate her characters to this route: equally important, although equally elusive, is the path of objectivity and of verifiable reality.

NOTES

¹ See for example the nameless and possibly insane narrators in both The Yellow Wallpaper and Surfacing, whose presences make the reader question the very foundations upon which the stories are based. In each story, the plot and characterization are filtered through subjective and highly unreliable voices, so that the idea of the 'real' is confronted by the subjective condition.

‘Trapped in a painting’: theme and character
within the context of artistic convention

Hospital insists that the reader consider both the subjective and objective conditions of her characters. Yet, because they are characters in a text, their reality is paradoxical: objectively speaking, while they represent ‘real’ people, their fictional status within the text makes them ‘unreal’ from the perspective of the subjective condition. Obviously, the way that we regard their reality depends upon whether they are considered from the perspective of the text or of the ‘world’. Hospital suggests that the real-world reality (political, emotional and economic) of her characters be considered alongside their fictional, two dimensional status. Although the physical, everyday world has until now been considered in relation to narrative, this chapter will address this world thematically through character. At the same time, individual characters will be examined as fabricated constructions within the texts.

In her novels, Hospital is aware that no matter how hard any writer may try to bring his/her characters' experiences to life, this attempt is limited by the fact that the characters are created and are therefore not ‘real’. Jean-Marc is well aware of both the unreality and reality of the characters in his story; for, although he knows that he invents them freely, they are very real to him. The reader is also aware of this paradox when he or she realizes the artificiality with which Jean-Marc writes, as well as the sheer futility of his attempt to discover retrospectively the truth of what really happened. Jean-Marc offers the reader a voice with which to express this:

All right, Mr. Piano Tuner, you say. Enough of red herrings. Enough of disarming admissions about dreaming Felicity's dreams and remembering her memories, about putting on the masks of Gus, of Dante, of all the flounders in dark woods.

We will not be so easily fobbed off, we will not be deceived. Do you think we cannot see through that chapter of conceits in Central Square, the games, the false trails, the elaborate smokescreens, the entire futile hunt to find out what happened to Dolores (Hester, Felicity)? Confess now. The whole truth. Let us hear you say it: *Felicity herself, c'est moi.* (184)

This does not mean, however, that Jean-Marc's entire project is a "red herring". At the same time that the characters are elaborately contrived, they do have a kind of reality, even if they are only real to Jean-Marc:

In any case, all this conjuring is both true and not true. There *was* a Rosalind, there *was* a Beatrice, there *is* a Felicity. How many changes can be rung on the human condition? Is it surprising that I feel at home in Felicity's skin? That sometimes she slides into mine? The truth is, I seem to know more about Felicity's life than about my own. I understand hers better. I've given it more thought. This seems also to be true with Gus and with all of the characters I record. I seem to *recognize* them, I remember the view from their eyes, as though I were a salamander that slips into the envelopes of other people's lives. (184)

The status of characters as simultaneously 'real' and 'unreal' is demonstrated in Felicity's nightmares of being trapped in a painting. In these, Felicity is made into an object by the artistic construction; the problem with this is that, as Charade says "any object looked at steadily and intently for too long begins to disintegrate before the eyes" (Charades 8). In effect, Felicity loses her humanity:

This was not a real woman.

Felicity slipped out of her painting and moved discreetly among the navel-gazers, staring through the tropical hole in her guts along with them listening to comments. What does this mean? she heard on all sides. According to the guidebook, someone said, the view could be of South India or the Queensland coast of Australia. Felicity considered sticking small flags into the canvas to mark the sites of her hometowns. If you scratch the crotch and sniff, someone said, you can smell papaya.

No touching please! called a guard.

There was a stain on the floor below the painting....

Once the inspector arrived, it was all over. You again, he said, back you go. The man with the brush was waiting as usual and they pasted her back on the canvas, flattening the curves, elongating here, twisting there, making free with the placing of her eyes. She had not even settled herself properly around the empty space—through which the surf hissed and writhed—when the frame was clanged shut around her. Locked.

All borders in place. The man with the keys shook the bunch in front of her face. (9-10)

However, despite her attempt to escape this constructed image, she is as much a part of the fictional world created by Jean-Marc and by Hospital as she is of the 'real' world. Jean-Marc explores the difficulty of separating the constructed images of Felicity from the 'real' Felicity. In his view, they are intricately connected to one another:

Of course it is difficult, even for me who knew her so well—*knows* her so well—to separate Felicity from the welter of visual interpretations, footnotes, capsules of biographical speculation. Too many galleries and too many private citizens own an early work by Seymour (the Old Volcano himself). Far too many people have stared at *Blue Woman* or *Reclining Nude* or *Eve Fragmented* and read their catalogues and thought they knew something about Felicity: the childhood in India, the Australian grandparents, the Boston aunts, the famous affair much photographed in *Vogue* and *Life*: 'Artist leaves wife of many years for missionary waif.' (Journalistic nonsense, it goes without saying. God only knows how many women came in between my mother and Felicity.) (5)

Although Felicity is largely constructed by others, Hospital does not advocate that the reader deal with characters as exclusively fictional: indeed, we are encouraged to question the 'welter' of images, roles and stereotypes which are

placed upon Felicity or on any of the other characters. Felicity leaves the painting to examine the image of herself along side the “navel-gazers”; in a sense, then, both the subject (Felicity, the image) and its viewers (the reader) enter into an examination of the constructed image, rather than into collusion with the guide-book attempt to know Felicity. In this way, the nightmare acts to confront the objectification and manipulation of Felicity through art by exposing the devices of the image's construction. In order to strengthen this, Hospital challenges the reader to consider Felicity as a subject at the same time. After all, this is a recurring nightmare of Felicity's which, we assume, reflects her subjective, rather than objective condition. In other words, we are aware of both her psychic reality (although we will never fully know it, nor will we be able to separate it from the constructed images of her) and her fictional status simultaneously.

Charade's status as fictional is emphasized in much the same way that Felicity's is. However, Hospital draws considerable attention to the *construction* of reality within Charades: as a result, the novel articulates the relationship between the construction of ‘reality’ and the reality itself in a more formal way than Borderline does. This issue takes the form of the wave and particle theories of energy (25-6) which run throughout the novel. Each offers a different approach to dealing with unknown phenomena. For example, the particle theory of Nicholas's life is his “particular history” (25), or, the collected data on his life:

Hypothesis number one: My father, Nicholas Truman, was born in England and shipped to Australia as a boy; he may or may not have returned to England when he disappeared; he may or

may not continue to spend his life as a global nomad, writing books, filing stories under a thousand different names. (25)

Felicity's wave theory of her father, however, focuses on the constructed image of him:

Hypothesis number two: My father was never more than a Platonic conception, an idealized object of adoration, in the minds of various people, most notably my mother and my aunt Kay. He glides forever on the crests of their imaginations. (25)

Like Felicity who is both human and fictional, Nicholas exists on both plains of reality, and both are equally important. Verity Ashkenazy, too, both “existed and didn't exist, in the same incompatible way that the wave theory and the particle theory of energy coexist and were once thought to refute each other” (26). This refutation has commonly taken the form of the idea that scientific method and artistic endeavour are or should be separate or split; that is, as Katherine tells Charade, “either we're all slightly mad, we've all hallucinated our own pasts (which is a reasonably tenable theory, I think), or else there's a perfectly rational explanation if we could just put our fingers on it” (12). Later, however, Charade rejects this split. As she tells Koenig,

Anyway, up till now I've thought that Aunt Kay and my mother were either right or wrong about my father, and that eventually, if I was persistent enough, I'd find out which. But after what

you said about Heisenberg—I mean, if electrons can exist and not exist at one and the same time—well, maybe the stories about my father and Verity Ashkenazy (the famous Other Woman in the piece), maybe they could be right *and* wrong. Both.

(14)

Although science and metaphysics are equally important, Charade nevertheless chooses to “track down the odd-numbered days, the days when my father exists. I'd like to find him in his particular Nicholas shape, as his particle self” (26).¹ Because Koenig represents the scientific world, Charade is drawn to him as a possible aid in her search for the Nicholas that really existed:

‘Koenig,’ she whispers on a low husky note of entreaty. ‘I've run into dead ends. But surely, I keep thinking to myself, anyone who has a handle on the issues of quarks and black holes, on space that is void space...anyone who can say that the selfsame photon is sometimes a particle and sometimes a wave, *depending on the context*...well, surely such a person has some answers.’

(26)

If Koenig were to produce answers for Charade, they would come from a subjective/wave orientation, rather than from a particle analysis. Linear thinking is something of an embarrassment to Koenig, for it runs counter to his academic training in quantum physics, through which he is well aware of the irrationality of time and space. He admits that he “is still addicted to the habit of assuming temporal chains, to ferreting out cause and effect, even

when the route maps go haywire as they usually do” (29). He also admits in the thick of Charade's convoluted story telling that, “I know it's not logical for a physicist, of all people—but I have this old-fashioned craving for a simple narrative line. Time curves—it can't be helped—but I don't see why plots should” (164). In this way, Koenig is caught between what he believes to be true on an intellectual level, and his craving for simplicity and linear resolution. His work attempts to combine both of these motivations:

Koenig works late. He is pushing back, mathematically, to that busy stretch of time between the Big Bang and a specific point occurring 10^{-35} of a second later....He works at the borders, at the junction of astrophysics, particle physics, cosmology. What he is obsessed with is cross-fertilization, the braiding of disciplines. (18)

Yet, Koenig seems more comfortable functioning in the subjective/irrational/wave reality and occasionally has trouble breaking out of the fog he is in:

Sometimes it is sufficient to bury himself obsessively in work; at other times Rachel—his former, his first, his only wife—hides inside every equation. Then it may be necessary to draw up someone else's body like a screen, which may or may not help....The fracturing of chalk, mid-formula, he has long ago discovered, is a particularly effective way to break out of fog: suggestive of fission, of lunatic Einsteinian energy, of

intelligence fizzing and spitting under pressure. Then to turn to the class and smile gently, wearily; to hint at the physical cost of descending from rarefied air to the foothills of explanation. He turns, he smiles. He feels faint. (27)

Hospital has established an opposition between Koenig as particle 'discoverer' and Charade as wave 'inventor'; yet, this is subverted both by Charade's declaration that she intends to find Nicholas's 'particle self', and by Koenig's acute awareness of wave theory. In this way, the distinction between objective/particle and subjective/wave becomes blurred.

Both Charade and Koenig create various theories on both the subjective/wave and objective/particle level, and these also work to obscure the division. The final chapter leaves Koenig "working obsessively on several theories" (298) about the story which has just been related. Rather than contradicting one another, however, the theories exist side by side, connected only by his imagination. Two of them are wave theories which question the subjective imagination of the story's creator: "the theory that he invented Charade in order to explore, absolve, assuage his desertion of Rachel" (298) and "that it was not he who invented Charade, but that he is being slept, or dreamed, and that she invented him" (299). The final particle theory posits the external reality "that Charade does indeed exist and that he is in fact in love with her" (300). None of these three theories is conclusive or contradictory because each is followed by a lengthy investigation of the opposing stance. Koenig explores the first two wave theories scientifically by suggesting that for the first theory, "experimental evidence certainly exists to suggest that Charade is *hologram* rather than *substance*" (299). The second

theory that Charade invented him leads Koenig to explore “niggling doubts” (299) about Nicholas: he takes a “scientific and quantitative approach” (299) and uncovers two papers which were written by Nicholas and presented at academic conferences. The particle theory that Charade does exist leads Koenig to search for her metaphysical essence:

There is a somewhat alarming hypothetical correlative, which is that he could contact her and that she might (that is, if of course she still thinks of him with any sort of fondness, or indeed if she still thinks of him at all), that she might be persuaded to...?

(300)

By layering the approaches in this way, Hospital again suggests that both the objective and subjective conditions are important, and that each interpretation is simultaneously true and not true. While the story which has just been told is real in the subjective minds of the creator and the reader/listener, it is nevertheless unreal from the objective perspective that it is an invented story, the events of which did not *really* happen. The story, then, is both hologram and substance, and to accept only one of these interpretations would mean denying the existence of the other.

Contrary to Hospital's rejection of the split between the subjective and objective, Joanna Frye seems to have accepted it, and to have equated them with female and male, respectively. As a result, she privileges the path of subjectivity for female protagonists over its polar opposite, (male) objectivity:

[I]n learning to say 'I,' as a woman—even in isolation—[the protagonist] threatens the very assumptions of male-dominant thought. When she says 'I' in full subjectivity, she disrupts that privileging as she disrupts external notions of essence, of sameness: the culture text of femininity, which has made her, as a woman, into an 'object,' cannot accommodate her subjective voice and presence. As the 'I' speaks for itself and of itself, it necessarily insists on the contradiction between internal and external definitions of self and hence on that 'surplus of humanness' that always provides an entry into the future, a resistance to fixity. (Frye 50)

Even though *Hospital* does explore Frye's premise by insisting that the reader consider the subjective realities of all of her characters and question seriously the underlying tenets of objectivity, she does not attempt to reject objectivity altogether. Charade's search for her father's "particle self" suggests that, contrary to Frye's premise, the objective, rational route offers a valid alternative for women to subjectivity. This quest for external information may seem incongruous to Charade's unreal, hologram-like appearance; yet, the two oppositions are contained within her without causing her considerable conflict.

Although Frye discusses objectivity and subjectivity in terms of narrative perspective, her ideas can be extended to include methods of investigation of character. In other words, the terms objective and subjective can be used to describe two opposing paths which are taken in the examination of character in *Hospital's* novels. If narrative were to be

considered a search for story, and for those themes, characters, and plots which are contained within that story, we may be able to reduce the issue of perspective to one general question: From what vantage point do we write, analyze and interpret? We may extend this by asking, where does this get us, and how do we get there? These related questions suggest that the direction which the search for story may take, and the purpose of that search, should also be addressed. For Hospital, direction and purpose present paradoxes which are similar to the objective/subjective one. This may be illustrated through an investigation of the paradox in each of two extreme paths: the objective, and the subjective. From the objective stance, which claims to demonstrate a truth and reach a conclusion, the direction which narrative and character takes ought to be linear and conclusive. The idea of purpose in this case presents a metaphorical or physical destination or centre from which this movement is located, or towards which it is moving. On the other hand, subjectivity, in its most extreme (and mythical) sense, claims a high degree of fluctuation and inconsistency: narrative and character are centred in an individual subject's consciousness. Because of this centering, the subjective narrative is not dependent upon consistency and universality in the way that the objective narrative is. As in an individual psyche, contradiction between opposing motivations is acceptable and to be expected. Its conclusion, then, can only be interpreted on an individual level, and its direction is one of indirection and surprise twists and turns. Because of this indirection, purpose becomes an almost absurd idea which is overwhelmed by the chaotic world of subjectivity.

These two interpretations of direction and purpose are combined in Hospital's novels; as with perspective, neither side of the opposition exists

without the other, and a preference for one over the other would mean denying the existence of its opposite. Charades presents this paradox most vividly. Charade recalls a professor's description of her: "He said I was driven by cerebral curiosity and greed, although he found me lamentably deficient in direction and purpose" (21). While Charade's non-linear direction (or her indirection) aligns her with the subjective condition, she is also able to reason scientifically, which is a much valorized characteristic associated with objectivity. While Charade admits that her professor may be correct when he says that she has "a grab-bag theory of knowledge and a first-class grab-bag mind," she nevertheless suggests that this approach is "good scientific method" (24).

The professor, however, is disdainful of Charade's lack of direction because, as Charade explains, "academic supervisors, they like straight lines" (23). Underlying his viewpoint is the idea that indirection is incompatible with serious scientific method. This is yet another reflection of the split mentioned earlier between scientific method and artistic endeavour (which is often prescribed as free and meandering). Charade embarks upon a lengthy defence of erratic and indirect behavior as a response to her professor's evaluation of her that she "was 'brilliant but erratic'" (21):

But my considered response is that *erratic*—in its pristine and original sense—did not have a negative connotation. No, that's comparatively recent, a shift in etymological history. I have nothing against *erratic*, myself.

Errare, to wander, right? And by extension to make mistakes. But that's the human condition, isn't it? Not to

mention the best pedagogical method—the meandering mistake-making self. Don't you agree? That's what makes life bearable. I'd say history comes out highly in favour of erratic folk. (21-2)

Charade cites the example of James Cook as an illustration of erratic behavior. This is an interesting example, because most explorers like Cook are usually painted as straight-line thinkers who use purely scientific methods to reach their destinations. According to Charade, however, his discovery was an accident:

Well, if Cook had been less erratic, if he hadn't wandered round the Pacific and bumped into the east coast of Australia—this was in 1770—he wouldn't have landed at Botany Bay and planted a flag and claimed the entire coast of the land mass for King George III. (22)

Charade is not the only character in Hospital's novels who confronts the idea of linear movement; Juliet (Ivory Swing), Emily (Tiger), Felicity and Charade all demonstrate a tendency to flee from its constraints. These characters repeatedly change their direction; this causes a disruption of the finality and imminence of any conclusion. As mentioned in Chapter One, these characters are more comfortable in transit than in stasis; their movement, however, is erratic rather than steady, compulsive rather than consciously planned. For all of these characters, moving in a linear direction toward a final conclusion and purpose presents the paradox of continuity: on one hand, it offers peace, comfort and promise; on the other, however, it

threatens to trap and stifle. Emily associates 'settling down' with claustrophobia and strangulation; yet, at the same time, love presents a problematic pull:

She thought of love as a kind of refugee act, akin to handling a live grenade, something to be engaged in while poised for flight. Always claustrophobia and imminent bloodiness waited in the wings like hobgoblins in a morality play while the euphoric pull of sensual comfort had its foolish little moment on stage. An old gazebo choked with honeysuckle would rear into her dreams, a shadowy portent, her lover's eyes in every leaf, his breath heavy in the creamy blossoms, his limbs in its throttling branches. She would have to break out, escape, flee the country.

England was her fourth country of residence. (24-5)

By contrast, the escape from linearity offers anonymity, flux and independence. Often it is the city which characterizes this haven of chaos: "New York was chance itself—city of random encounter, of the unexpected event, of the indiscretion without repercussions, of blissful anonymity" (Tiger 29). Juliet, too, longs for the city: "*any* city, any real metropolis, gritty and boisterous: tidal waves of unknown people, of anonymity, of excitement; the huge ebb and flow of life lived avidly" (IS 14). In the city, one can be in the centre of activity without being trapped by linear stasis: in this way, the city is paradoxically linked with both the centre and the margin. Felicity in Borderline "felt at ease in airports and in the hearts of great cities. Because, she said, they are full of other people who don't belong—my closest relations"

(5). This confronts the idea that one must be either central (like the Aunts, in the city) or marginal (displaced, roaming the countryside like Dolores). Felicity's 'roots' are both marginal (woman raised in South India and Australia) and centric (white and middle class, living in North America): in this way, her identification with 'other people who don't belong' and with 'the hearts of great cities' is fitting.

Juliet is also in a paradoxical position in relation to both the centre and the margin; although she is treated with more respect than are the slaves in India because of her western status, she is degraded and dismissed by virtue of her status as woman and non-Indian. As a result, she swings between the two realities as both oppressor and oppressed, never able to extricate herself from either, never able to get off the swing. This problematizing of the relationship between oppressor and oppressed, centre and margin is common to all of Hospital's novels. Like the objective/subjective paradox, there is no easy way to separate any of these oppositions. What seems like the centre for western culture becomes the margin for eastern culture, and vice versa; those who seem to be the oppressors are in turn oppressed by another group, and so on.

Like Felicity and Charade, the post-colonial nations of Australia and Canada are somewhat on the sidelines of European and American power; yet, they identify themselves more with the western centre, than with the third world margin. The history of these countries (and by association of both Charade and Felicity) includes being displaced into a colony by Imperialism; yet, it has also included becoming the agent by which aboriginal peoples have themselves been displaced and victimized. In this sense, the position of Felicity and Charade as both victimizer and victim reflects the

political status of their country of origin, Australia. Hospital weaves this issue into her texts to a considerable degree; because of this relation to post-colonial concerns, the reading of her novels may be expanded by the consideration of post-colonial theory. Like Charade, Hospital asks “incessant and unanswerable questions about the nature of psychic damage, about the role of victim, about blame and responsibility” (Charades 299).²

In Charades, Charade incorporates the narrative of James Cook into her own: through her criticism of his journal, the reader is invited to examine the Imperial vision of Australian Aboriginal peoples which is internalized within it. Ashcroft et al identify explorer fiction as the first stage in the development of post-colonial literatures. Their description of such texts as Cook's is especially helpful in outlining the assumptions upon which these are based:

During the imperial period writing in the language of the imperial centre is inevitably, of course, produced by a literate elite whose primary identification is with the colonizing power. Thus the first texts produced in the colonies in the new language are frequently produced by ‘representatives’ of the imperial power....Such texts can never form the basis for an indigenous culture which already exists in the countries invaded. Despite their detailed reportage of landscape, custom, and language, they inevitably privilege the centre, emphasizing the ‘home’ over the ‘native’, the ‘metropolitan’ over the ‘provincial’ or ‘colonial’, and so forth. At a deeper level their claim to objectivity simply serves to hide the imperial discourse

within which they are created.

(5)

Such an imperial discourse, however, is only thinly disguised in Charade's discussion of Cook's journal: the exaggerated sense of the 'other' contained within it makes Cook's identification with the imperial centre violent and perverted. Charade uses the text, in fact, to confront Koenig on his voyeurism:

'He got himself trapped inside the Great Barrier Reef, and strafed the underside of the *Endeavour* so badly that he had to decamp on the North Queensland beaches. Where of course the crew saw Aborigines.

'*Quite naked*, Cook wrote in his journal, which would have made the point, don't you think?

'*Without any manner of clothing whatever*, he added, just a little fascinated, I'd say.

'*Even the women do not so much as cover their privates*, he wrote. Hmm. *They never brought any of their women along with them to the ship*, the old perv went on to complain, *but always left them on the opposite side of the river where we had frequent opportunities of viewing them through our glasses.*

She shakes her head. 'What a bunch of voyeurs!

'I can't think,' she says archly, 'what brought that to my mind. Should I cover my privates?' (22-3)

Despite this criticism, however, Charade is not exempt from

responsibility on the subject of victimization. She has chosen to put herself on display for Koenig as much as he has chosen to watch her. Her position as object is as much a position of power as is his position as watcher: who is doing what to whom remains an unresolvable dilemma rather than a clear-cut division between oppressor and oppressed.

While Felicity, Charade and Juliet are in ambivalent positions of power with respect to both the centre and the margin, Hospital makes this point by placing these characters between those who are clearly centric and those who are marginal. In Borderline, Dolores Marquez and Hester are clearly marginal characters with whom Felicity identifies. However, while both of these women live by the maxim that “if you tell, they just do it worse the next time” (154), Felicity is aware that she conforms to the notion of the North American centre on the levels of class, beauty and race. At the same time, she is marginal in having grown up in South India with her father, and later in post-colonial Australia, and in being a woman. Because of her paradoxical status as both centric and marginal, Felicity feels guilty towards the marginal groups of Hester and Dolores (and the refugees):

‘I have too much’...

All the fifteenth century at her beck and call, she meant. And her own niche in art history; and the aunts and the Old Volcano and me. I can read her sighs. She had never gone hungry, she meant. She had never offered a dead child to the crows. She had never had to flee for her life in a refrigerated meat truck. She was born in a goddamned hairshirt. She had her father's God-hungry blood in her veins. (241)

Perhaps partly out of guilt and partly out of identification, Felicity takes on the role of defender of both Dolores Marquez and Hester. Jean-Marc suggests that Felicity fulfilled this historic role when she rescued Dolores at the border:

I make discoveries as I write; I wonder why I did not think of this when I began: that meeting (or vision or misapprehension or whatever it was) at the border, that moment when Felicity first saw La Magdalena, she must have thought of Hester. She was defending Hester again. When the car was off the road, it wasn't the cow and the crows she was thinking of, it was Hester. Though how do I know what she thought? (154-5)

Although Hester is raped twice in Felicity's presence, in neither case is Felicity assaulted. When Hester is raped by the boys under the tree and by the girls in the bathroom, Felicity takes the position of the voyeur: this position, however, does not absolve her from responsibility for the rape. She watches "with the same awful fascination as everyone else" (147) as the girls beat Hester on the leg. Felicity shares the fear and feeling of revulsion towards Hester which leads to and justifies her rape:

Just above where the leg cage passed through a metal garter, the left hip and buttock were unnaturally shrunken. Felicity thought of a balloon that has gone down, even though its neck is still tied—how it becomes a spongy wrinkled smallness. Disgusting, somehow. And contemptible. Around this

shrivelled-up bum there was a system of metal bars and leather straps tying the whole contraption to the waist, and the skin that showed was horribly pallid—the way skin goes under a Band-Aid that has been worn for several days.

Everyone felt slightly sick, and then, for some reason, angry. Perhaps that was why someone began kicking. (147-8)

In the second rape, Felicity comes closer to being raped herself, but is saved from the kind of violence inflicted on Hester by one of the boys' insistence that "first,...you gotta watch what we do to little Miss Ironpants. Just so you know what's coming" (152). This voyeurism, however, is forced on her by the boys, where in the first rape Felicity watches of her own accord: "one of her captors sat on her legs, and the other, who had his hand over her mouth, forced her head sideways to make her see. But she defied them, she closed her eyes, she couldn't watch" (153). In being made to watch the rape of another, Felicity is paradoxically forced to internalize the victimization of another, as if she were also the perpetrator. Her own underpants, which are stuffed in her mouth to stop her from screaming, also reinforce Felicity's internalization of the process of victimization by suggesting that she is in some sense her own enemy.

These rapes are also significant in that the rapes are committed by both males and females, each rape being as brutal as the other. The suggestion here is that the clear opposition between male victimizer and female victim does not work as a model where the problem of victimization is both internal and external. Hunter's attempted rape of Felicity also problematizes the relationship between these oppositions because of her

compliance with his 'seduction' of her. It is only through Felicity's non-compliance that the reader realizes that this scene is a rape scene, rather than a love scene. Her initial compliance, however, does not deny the objective reality that Hunter's attempt to rape her is external to Felicity's subjective reality: in other words, she did not in any way cause the event. Again, Hospital stresses the importance and truth of both the subjective and objective worlds while at the same time these worlds are not related by cause and effect.

Like Felicity, Gus is also in an awkward position with respect to the centre. Gus is caught between his dream of middle-class success and the reality of his marginal existence on the borders of it:

He was groping through anxieties: overdrafts, mortgage renewal, the stink of adultery on his underclothes, the dread of Therese's sharp nose, a rainbow of guilts—and all in a pitched battle with a valiant little guerrilla flank of self-confidence, a novelty this, his fix from a sales conference. Success, success: it could be pulled from the air like dandelion puffs. So the speakers had promised....

On the other hand, difficulties would not surprise Gus unduly. Sooner or later he would be caught and punished for something, his dreams were full of disaster. He knew what caused this. His pathology had been defined in amazing detail only yesterday, in the conference room of the Grand Hyatt in New York: negative thinking. The source, said the speaker, of all evil. Gus knew he was addicted. This came from being

Catholic and Canadian; no one could say it didn't make a difference. (18-19)

The difference that Gus's status as a Catholic Canadian makes is that while he is constantly attempting to move into a central position as both a father and a salesman, he always remains on the borders of both American sales propaganda and Roman Catholic virtue. In his effort to provide a secure and happy environment for his family, Gus is controlled by the ideologies of both Catholicism and the religion of success which is championed by his employers. Although these conflict with one another, they both appeal to Gus's sense of duty to his family and his need to provide well for them. The teachings of the church insist that fidelity in marriage is an essential ingredient in a happy homelife, while his work teaches that in order to have a high sales record "you can't afford to listen to anything but the words in your own head" (112). Gus fails to live up to both of these expectations: he repeatedly commits adultery, and his conscience only allows him to sell modest insurance packages to those who are unfortunate enough to need it. So, he is too virtuous to be a sleazy salesman, and too sleazy to be a virtuous Catholic.

Although the Church and Bob Wilberforce create a battle within Gus, they are linked to each other by the control that each has over Gus's thoughts and actions. Bob Wilberforce preaches success and positive thinking in much the same way that Catholicism preaches fear of evil:

Mr. Wilberforce, finger on the pause button, looked over his lectern at the sales force. 'I want that to sink in,' he said

devoutly. He leaned on his pulpit and his eyes rested on the members of his congregation one by one. 'The essence of higher sales is right there. I want everyone just to concentrate on those words while I rerun Reggie for a bit.'

With bowed heads and reverent demeanour, the sales force reflected on the week's First Lesson. (112-13)

American baseball player Reggie Jackson is held up as an icon of success, and baseball becomes a metaphor for the world of insurance sales. Although Gus may feel that the doctrine of success which his employers have pummeled into him is essentially for his own benefit, the company's motivation for preaching in this way is clearly selfish:

It was expected that they would all gain yardage. It was expected that each and every one of them would hit a few out of the ball park. It was expected that collectively they would meet the new company objectives, set a new branch record, and win Bob Wilberforce a week in Barbados. (119)

Because Gus has failed as a businessman and a father, the reader may be inclined to attribute this failure to the indoctrination of Gus by both the Church and the insurance sales business. However, viewing him as such a complete victim denies Gus any responsibility for his own actions. He is, after all, a compulsive adulterer and paedophile, and an alcoholic. In this way, Gus is a victim in the same way that Felicity is, because he is both a perpetrator and a victim. Yet, his marginal status is in some senses less

pronounced than Felicity's is. Both Gus and Felicity are sexually promiscuous: yet, this empowers Gus and marginalizes Felicity. For example, despite Therese's confrontation of Gus's philandering and his earnest desire to cease this behavior for her, his sexual freedom is reinforced by the status quo: much of Gus's power in fact comes out of his promiscuity. On the other hand, Felicity's sexual freedom is repeatedly threatened by status quo misogyny—and, with Hunter, this leads to the almost complete subtraction of her power. Felicity is a wealthy, attractive and educated person who has the advantages of success and money that Gus does not; yet, it is Gus's status as a man which elevates him into a position of power which is relatively equal to Felicity's.

While Felicity's relationship to the margin is explored through her relationship to Hester and Dolores, Gus's contact with the clearly marginal Dolores is equally important. With both Gus and Felicity, then, identification with the clearly marginal acts to confront the placing of blame, the role of the victim, and the individual's responsibility for victimization. Gus's relationship to Dolores is similar to Felicity's relationship to Hester. He takes on the role of her defender when he receives her screams and sees her in visions. At one point, Dolores's voice intrudes into Gus's thoughts and motivates him to move away from the familiar business world of the doughnut shop:

Jillian from *Jillian's Flowers* came sashaying in.

And La Magdalena chose that very moment to manifest herself in a glazed double-chocolate doughnut. How *could* you? she asked. And so soon after leaving me? I meant *nothing* to

you.

Gus was so agitated that he knocked his cup of coffee off the counter, scalding his arms and legs. Flustered, he mopped at the mess with paper napkins, keeping his burning face low, crouching and running along beneath the counter's overhang to the door. He escaped to his car before Jillian realized he was there.

He did not know until well after he had turned into the onramp for the 401 that he was heading east for Montreal and L'Ascension. And then he realized he had been planning to ever since he woke on Saturday morning. (120)

The opposition between the American dream, which is personified by Reggie Jackson and the marginal existence of Dolores is clear here. Wilberforce's carefully constructed sales 'pitch' relies upon Gus's need for reassurance, and his belief in miracles. Dolores's words to Gus, "do not abandon me" (114), interrupt the staff meeting, with the result that Gus sees the sales pitch as ugly and horrifying:

On a flip chart Bob Wilberforce was drawing forceful lines with a black felt marker. The lines gathered themselves up like twigs and began to whirl in front of Gus's face, faster, faster, their black skirts rising over long white legs soaked in blood. He could not contain his sense of dread, he needed air, he rose to his feet, his chair made an unseemly comment on the floor. (114)

If he were to believe in and follow his boss's propaganda, Gus would, in fact, have to abandon Dolores, along with his sense of ethics and moral principles. For those who are caught up in the American Dream, who buy lottery tickets and believe in miracles, people like Dolores are invisible and mute.

The incident at the border demonstrates that Felicity is far more willing than Gus is initially to accept the reality and the horror of the contents of the meat van. While Gus looks away "half afraid for himself" (21), Felicity looks straight on: "Felicity had certainly seen more distressing sights. Or almost certainly. It was so difficult to be sure on a continent where no one believed in the unpleasant" (21). Felicity, in fact, believes in the unpleasant because she has herself witnessed considerable horror:

At the time of her birth, in another country, people were killing one another over issues of land and language. You were riot-induced, her father said....

Still, by the age of five, she herself had seen children die in the streets. Before her eyes, sores had flowered and unfolded like peonies on the skin of beggars. She had watched as a girl of her own age tore apart a dead rat and ate it raw. (21)

Yet, Hospital is careful to make the important distinction between experiencing and witnessing. No matter how much Felicity may attempt to identify with Dolores, she has not *experienced* Dolores's horror; for, such a claim would equal the appropriation of Dolores's unique experiences. Although she defends Dolores, searches for her, and attempts to save her, Felicity is challenged in a significant way by the refugee's presence.

Her first inclination is to insist upon Dolores's status as an artistic object rather than as a real person:

Felicity had a fantastic sense of everything being outlined in light, or in some antique emulsion of gold leaf and egg white. It was happening again: a painting incarnating itself, Perugino's *Magdalena*, which was hanging at this moment in Florence. It was because she was negotiating for it, interfering with history; because she wanted it on loan in her gallery. (37)

From the moment that Felicity identifies Dolores as a figure in a painting, however, Hospital qualifies the dangers of treating the woman solely as an object. For, at the same time that Dolores is even more of a fictional construction than Felicity is because she does not speak (at least not in quotation marks), and is rarely a part of the physical action of the novel, she nevertheless maintains her own unique (and hidden) reality. Felicity's label of 'La Magdalena' is challenged almost from the minute it is established, as Felicity debates with the voice of Seymour in her head its appropriateness for Dolores:

It's suspect, Seymour would say, this retreat to the luminist past. They were all escapists, those fifteenth century painters. Inappropriate for today. These are violent times, my dear.

And indeed, the woman was all blacks and bruised purples, an impasto of savage techniques. Pure Seymour, the latest phase.

But look, Felicity argued, the attention to minutiae. That isn't modern at all. Look: the small mole, a fleck of dark velvet, high on the right cheek near the outer edge of the eye. The high cheekbones. The eyes (brown-almost-black) that skitter in demented flight patterns. The black cotton dress that is badly torn at the bodice....

Felicity, hypnotized by eyes that seemed to be casting about for which language to say nothing in, thought dizzily: she is not a Perugino or a Seymour. She is a memory of myself. (37)

A violent reminder of Dolores's physical status solidifies the danger of labeling her solely as an artistic object:

Gus reached out tentatively and touched the woman's cheek with his fingers, the merest feather-brush of an offering of concern. The woman recoiled, her mouth formed the shape of a scream though no sound came out, her muscles tensed so violently that the ears of her rescuers braced themselves for the splintering of bones.

And then slackness...

Unconsciousness.

'Jesus,' Gus whispered.

'It was when you touched her,' Felicity said sadly. 'I think she's been raped.' (38)

The image of Dolores screaming silently reminds the reader simultaneously

of both the artistic construction of the character (because it reminds the reader of Edvard Munch's famous painting *The Scream*), and of Dolores's painful reality.

Felicity also speaks to Dolores in much the same way that Gus does: the woman's voice enters Felicity's head in a confrontational manner. Despite Felicity's inclination to accept the horror of Dolores's situation, this dialogue reveals Felicity's distrust of the refugee; as well, speaking with Dolores challenges Felicity's desire to ignore the woman's reality:

But where had the woman found the strength to crawl away and hide? And what of her trail of blood?

With a flamenco swirl of her torn black skirts, La Magdalena alighted in the passenger seat. I am inconvenient, she said.

Felicity, sniffing at the smear of blood on her fingers, conceded: I would much rather have imagined you.

La Magdalena rattled her castanets. I have offered you a moral reprieve, she said.

Felicity laughed: I don't believe you. I can feel your hooks in my flesh. There's a catch somewhere.

There was rattle of drums. I am inconvenient, La Magdalena said again, but I don't coerce. You are as free as you wish. (78)

By putting Dolores's voice into Felicity's head in this way, Hospital also attributes the voice to Felicity's consciousness: in other words, it is as much

Felicity's as it is Dolores's. The dialogue is thus both confrontational and self-confrontational. When Felicity speaks with Dolores, we see that she is ambivalent towards the refugee: on one hand, she wishes to be compassionate towards a woman who is in a great deal of distress; yet, on the other hand, she is afraid that she may be "gobbled up" into selfless martyrdom. While she feels a certain amount of responsibility for Dolores, Felicity has a tendency to dismiss this on the grounds that Dolores is an invention, or that helping her would be inconvenient. This is yet another manifestation of the problem of victimization for the person who stands between the oppressor and the oppressed. Felicity is like many non-indigenous Canadians who feel a certain amount of responsibility for the harm done to Native peoples, yet do not feel that they are the cause. By the same token, many feel that they can identify with being the victim, because this too is a part of the history of settler populations of Canadians. This confrontation also acts to suggest again that blame and responsibility are complicated issues that need to be worked through, rather than dismissed by a clear-cut designation of the victim and the victimizer. Like Juliet and Charade, Felicity is placed between the opposition of on the one hand, Dolores and Hester, and on the other hand, her aunts—both sides of which represent strong forces within her.

While Dolores and Hester, who represent extremely marginal realities, function to confront the privileged and centric side of the characters of Gus and Felicity, the Boston Aunts function in the opposite way. The aunts clearly represent the centric side of Felicity: they are firmly based in North America, and are strongly associated with the aesthetic, rather than with the political. The aunts insist upon Felicity's centrality:

On account of your deplorable childhood, their litany went. You were conceived in a pagan country, born into riots. And then your mother (of whom we know nothing, who was not even an American) abandoned you from Day One. Then your father went chasing obsessions while you grew into ruin. Who could say what the years in India had wrought? And then Australia. Now how could any place so remote not do harm? You acquired a very unreliable view of the peripheral in those countries, they said. You give it undue importance. All this before we managed to bring you home, and not without legal complications. You were thirteen already. It's been uphill work. (105)

Like other North Americans, the aunts do not believe in unpleasantness. To them, Felicity's marginality is merely an artistic invention, as we are told after the graphic description of Felicity's childhood:

Years later, of course, the aunts in Boston said she must have imagined such things. Felicity, they told their friends, is so theatrical. Such taste for the macabre. She will become an artist or a writer. (21)

The aunts stress the fictional and artistic aspects of Felicity, as Felicity does with Dolores: in fact, they appraise her as they would any artist and his or her work:

'Her imagination has always been extraordinary, though a trifle

melodramatic.' Ernestine might have been speaking of one of her prize-winning African violets. 'She has a fine sense of the symbolic.'

'That's what makes her an excellent curator. Wouldn't you say this is what distinguishes her exhibitions? A mythic dimension?'

'And a startling originality, of course.' (105)

We can see that Felicity's tendency to evaluate on a purely aesthetic level is what she learned growing up with her aunts. Both the aunts and Felicity are guilty of denying an other's political and physical reality by focusing only on the artistic reality. However, because Felicity is one of those 'others,' she is more aware of politics than are the aunts. While the aunts insist upon the split between politics and aesthetics, Felicity is far more aware that these cannot be separated. When Aunt Norwich tells Felicity that they are not "indifferent" to those people who, like Dolores, live on the margins of western comfort, she adds "we make the appropriate donations, we take our own kind of action. In all things, the proper channels should be followed" (106). They have no sense that making a charitable donation is, in fact, a political act; instead, it is a matter of etiquette to them. Felicity does not agree:

But sometimes, Felicity protested, 'the proper channels seem to be on the wrong side. Or else dreadfully, if not willfully, misinformed.'

'It is not nice, Felicity, to impute anything but the purest of intentions to the people in charge of the proper channels. It is

not our place to question. It is simply not done. It is impolite.’(106)

During a conversation with Trog and Hunter, Felicity claims herself to be “not political” and insists that neither are her aunts. Yet, it is Trog who confronts this split between politics and aesthetics:

your family has made numerous donations—substantial donations—to numerous political groups. Your aunts are very wealthy women with financial and political clout.

My aunts, Felicity replied, are even less interested in politics than I am.

How then did she account for their donations to a number of Central American social agencies and church groups, many of which were known to be fronts for political groups?

Their reasons, Felicity said, are purely humanitarian and charitable, not political.

With reference to Central America, Trog said, there is no such thing as nonpolitical. (127)

For Hospital, too, there is no such thing as nonpolitical. The Boston aunts represent an elite group of colonialists, who, like James Cook, look steadily toward the centre and deny that anyone will be hurt by conquest. While they claim that Felicity has an unreliable sense of the periphery, by the same token they have an unreliable sense of the centre. Although they believe in the centre partly because they are privileged, the aunts are as naive as Gus is in maintaining their faith in the benevolence of

the world:

Certain things were simply not permitted. No guest under their roof could sustain a belief in anything they disapproved of. You would think, Felicity told them dryly, that Beacon Hill was the gateway to heaven. The aunts did not see this as irony. Well, they said modestly, we have found that all things, when looked at from the right angle, lead to contentment.

Nevertheless, nevertheless, Felicity worried. 'Whether you look at them the right way or not, there are certain things, certain intractable things...If you'd *seen* La Magdalena's face—'

(105)

NOTES

¹ Charade is continuing here from her idea that “on odd days, my father is somewhere but keeps vanishing without a trace. And on even days he doesn't exist and never did”(14).

² Diana Brydon has observed that

Canadians do not recognize themselves in the imagery of oppressor and oppressed that works for many peoples in South America and Africa. Our experiences have been different. Even our Japanese immigrants and native peoples who have certainly suffered oppression in this country appear to reject this clear-cut oppositional imagery in their art. Canadians do not have the horror—some would say the luxury—of a clearly definable enemy out there....For our writers, writing is not an act of aggression against an oppressive state but rather an enabling act, bringing to articulation what has been silenced in our lives....The politically committed Canadian artist focuses on the ‘enemy within’—the distrust of ourselves that prevents Canadians from perceiving what lies in our own best interests.(35-6)

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