I am the author of the thesis entitled....Fundamentalism Meets... Feminism: Postmodern Confrontation in the work of...Janette Turner.

submitted for the degree of...Master of Arts.

This thesis may be made available for consultation, loan and limited copying in accordance with the Copyright Act 1968.

Full Name: ELIZABETH MAVIS NANNCHY
(Please Print)

Signed: ..............................................................

Signature Redacted by Library

Date: 25-3-00
DEAKIN UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

TO:  ALL USERS OF THIS THESIS

Please sign this form to indicate that you have used this thesis in accordance with the disposition signed by the author of this thesis.

Thank you.

SUE MCKNIGHT
University Librarian

Name  Signature  Date
SUSAN TRIGG
Signature Redacted by Library  21/10/02
NATALIE COWIE
19/07/04
TONI VERNON
Signature Redacted by Library  16/09/04
FUNDAMENTALISM MEETS FEMINISM:
Postmodern Confrontation in the Work of
Janette Turner Hospital

ELIZABETH MAVIS NANOLOY

Bachelor of Arts (Hons)

Master of Arts by Research

Faculty of Arts
March 2000
I certify that the thesis entitled: "Fundamentalism Meets Feminism: Postmodern Confrontation in the Work of Janette Turner Hospital" submitted for the degree of Master of Arts is the result of my own research, except where otherwise acknowledged, and that this thesis in whole or in part has not been submitted for an award, including a higher degree, to any other university or institution.

Full Name: ELIZABETH IVANIS NIANLOHY
(Please Print)

Signed: Signature Redacted by Library

Date: 25-3-00
CONTENTS

Introduction ........................................................................................................... i

Chapter 1 Theoretical Aspects ........................................................................ 1

Chapter 2 The Patriarchal Nature of Power ....................................................... 14

Chapter 3 The Danger of Dissent & the Nature of Reality ................................. 31

Chapter 4 Guilt, Morality, Politics & the Approach of the Millennium .............. 45

Conclusion ........................................................................................................... 63

Bibliography ........................................................................................................ 69
Fundamentalism Meets Feminism:
Postmodern Confrontation in the Work of
Janette Turner Hospital

Introduction

This thesis will explore the proposition that the experience of alienation and ideological difference arising from a strict fundamentalist religious environment during childhood impacts on the feminist concerns and postmodern narrative style of Janette Turner Hospital. It will uncover evidence of what Hospital has called 'my constant theme, the theme of the shadow self.' (Turcotte 84)

Hospital’s field of enquiry is metaphysical as well as physical and earthed. She asks: If an impulse for good brings about evil results, does it cease to be good? Are Governments justified in committing crimes against humanity in the name of a perceived greater good? Is morality relative, defined by our position in society, allegiance to Government or religious conviction? And finally, is there evidence of a patriarchal political imperative of dominance?

The thesis is based primarily on five of her novels, The Ivory Swing (1982), Borderline (1985), Charades (1988), The Last Magician (1992), and Oyster (1996). It aims to establish a direct connection between Hospital’s emphasis on the presence of patriarchal power in diverse religions, cultures and societies and a childhood in which traditional fundamentalist beliefs played a central role. She gives an insight into the role of religion in her early years in an author’s note to her short story, The Mango Tree:

Every Friday night, and every Sunday before the evening service, we stood in a circle on a city street corner and offered scriptural consolation through a megaphone to passers-by. (Disher 1)

In this ironic presentation of this practice offered by Hospital, the concept of spiritual comfort offered through the lyrical and challenging words of the Scriptures is shattered by the image of those words shouted through a megaphone on a street corner. The richness, beauty, and of course intimacy, are clearly lost, or at least lessened, by the method of their delivery.

It is necessary to identify the presence and the chronological development of the Judaic concept of Good and Evil in her work, relate it to her consistent atmosphere of brooding menace and to consider the multiple consequences of the early influence of a Fundamentalist Christian faith on the writer’s creative work. In an interview with Ron Store in LINQ, Hospital acknowledges the impact on her writing of an early immersion in the rich and often lyrical prose of the King James version of the Bible:

I think this has had a long-term effect on my prose rhythms and style. I think the King James’ version of the Bible is very much there in my sentences. It has an
incantatory effect and I like that particular King James cadence which still affects my prose all the way through. (18)

An example of this intense early influence occurs in her first and most realistic novel, The Ivory Swing, when she visualises the heroine’s secret dreams of escape. Drawing on that stored memory of biblical characters, Hospital appropriates the Bible’s rich imagery to suit a new scenario:

Sometimes she thought of Mary Magdalene with her wayward flaming hair sitting at the feet of Christ, her head resting on his goodness. The sounds of a party reach her, the sounds of bawdy revelry and political ferment, the whispered daring of the Zealots and the gypsy whirl of harlots at the tavern down the street. Beneath her penitent’s robe her foot begins to keep time, tapping with the urge to dance; her thoughts quiver with the delicious danger of subversion. (Swing 31)

Hospital’s long association with the resonances and images of the bible stories of her childhood and her demonstrable feminist concerns combine here in a contemporary reading of an old story. The sensual images and the subversive, political intrigue and passion, are perfectly appropriated to the wider plot line of her novel when Juliet’s sister, Annie, meets and becomes sexually and politically involved in the life of a young Indian student activist. A similar experience of early biblical influence on language has been cited by Edmund Gosse in his autobiography, Father and Son, which details his upbringing in the fundamentalist Plymouth Brethren faith:

The extraordinary beauty of the language - for instance, the matchless cadences and images of the first chapter - made a certain impression on my imagination, and were (I think) my earliest initiation into the magic of literature. (61)

Hospital raises questions of difference and alienation in the general community, and the multiple forms of blatant or subtle discrimination experienced as a result of it. The many faces of power and the impact of its abuse on the most vulnerable in society, cutting across countries and cultures, is one of her recurring themes. While her thinking is in part shaped by the austerity of conservative religious influences, she also regards the intense sensuality that she finds in the Queensland rainforest to be highly subversive of such early repressive experience. She is able to bring to her work a unique imagination and an abiding fascination with the power structures of society as they impact on the psyche of women in various cultures. Her fiction primarily explores the experiences of women and there emerges a fascination with the contrast between the woman who is damaged by these experiences and the one who survives them.

Hospital was raised in the Pentecostal Church, which requires continuous study of biblical text and regards as crucial the literal interpretation of the gospels as God-given directives for a Christian life. Within this discipline and acknowledging her parents’ devotion to these directives in her upbringing, her childhood was spent within a warm and
caring family atmosphere. Again she states in an author's note to her autobiographical short story, *The Mango Tree*:

... Unlike many puritanical families, mine was by no means lacking in warmth, humour and physicality .... Pentecostals are emotional and expressive, not dour. Besides, the mere fact of growing up in Queensland, with rainforest and surf on hand, is powerfully subversive of puritanism. (Disher 2)

Members of the Pentecostal Church however, were forbidden many of the activities that were enjoyed by other young people in the community. These restrictions - no Sunday sport, no movies, no school dances, no alcohol, no make-up or ornamentation - set Hospital apart from her peers. A dramatic demonstration of this difference came at a very early age, when some time during her first years at Primary School, an immunisation programme was carried out at the school. The Pentecostal Church believed that immunisation against disease showed lack of faith in God's power to protect its members, and as a result her parents refused to give their permission for her participation in the programme. As she notes in an interview with Candida Baker in *Yacker 2*, this refusal reveals 'one of the most disastrous side-paths of that kind of primitive faith...' (260). In apparent agreement with this view, in *Father and Son* Edmund Gosse records a similar, if more punitive, belief in God's power over the members of the equally fundamentalist Plymouth Brethren faith, noting that:

If anyone was ill, it showed that 'the Lord's hand was extended in chastisement', and much prayer was poured forth in order that it might be explained to the sufferer, or to his relations, in what he or they had sinned. (61)

The refusal of her parents to allow the immunisation of her brother and herself, as required by her family's religious convictions, led to a very negative reaction by her teachers. The young Hospital was ostracised by fellow pupils and when her brother later contracted diphtheria, she was accused of being a carrier of the disease and even a potential murderer. She says of this time:

At school, I discovered that being marked, visually and behaviourally, as different is to become a magnet for hostility, for bullying, for verbal and physical abuse...

(Disher 2)

Her brother's illness was a catalyst for these accusations but the difference due to her religious upbringing was the underlying reason for the abuse, physical and psychological that she suffered at this time. It was so traumatic that its effect can be seen in most of her work where the theme of alienation of the 'other' from the dominant culture is rigorously pursued. The religious power of the Pentecostal church to dictate the social behaviour of its members, the secular power of the State's educational establishment, and its failure to accept difference, promote understanding and generate attitudes of tolerance in its pupils, are both revealed by this event. The presumption that power is an intrinsic male prerogative and its use, and at times its abuse, is inherent both within religion and within society, and is
prevalent in many diverse cultures. Hospital reveals a concern for the patriarchal nature of this power and its effect on the more vulnerable members of these societies.

To attempt to understand this strong early religious influence on the development of this writer, a brief examination of the principles and beliefs held by her family as members of the Pentecostal Church in Australia is essential. The Pentecostal Church began in America at the end of the nineteenth century and was strongly influenced by Aimee Semple McPherson’s evangelistic Four Square Gospel Church. The four main elements on which this church was based, Salvation, Divine Healing by prayer, Baptism of the Holy Spirit and the Imminent Second Coming of Christ were enthusiastically received and embraced by the new church, of which W.J. Hollenwe said:

... they do not recognise a doctrine or custom as authoritative unless it can be traced to that primal source of church instruction, the Lord and His apostles.

The Pentecostals proclaimed their beliefs in what was called a Statement of Truth as stated by John Thomas Nichol in Pentecostalism, and quoted here in full for the purpose of clarity:

• We believe the bible to be the inspired, the only infallible authoritative Word of God.

• We believe that there is one God, eternally existent in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

• We believe in the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ, in His virgin birth, in His sinless life, in His miracles, in His vicarious and atoning sacrifice through His shed blood, in His bodily resurrection, in His ascension to the right hand of the Father, and His personal return in power and glory.

• We believe that for the salvation of the lost and sinful men regeneration by the Holy Spirit is absolutely essential.

• We believe that the full gospel includes holiness of heart and life, healing for the body and the Baptism in the Holy Spirit with the initial evidence of speaking in other tongues as the Spirit gives utterance.

• We believe in the present ministry of the Holy Spirit by whose in-dwelling the Christian is enabled to live a godly life.

• We believe in the resurrection of both the saved and the lost; they that are saved unto the resurrection of life and they that are lost unto the resurrection of damnation. (4)

As evidenced by this proclamation, Pentecostals are linked by many of these tenets of faith to other Non-conformist Churches. Nichol cites Conservative Baptists; Reformed Presbyterians; Wesleyan Methodists; Conservative Congregationalists and Mennonites, as having similar beliefs and adds: ‘It was, and is a holiness church - holiness in fact and holiness in name (7)’.
Nancy T. Ammerman, in her chapter on North American Protestant Fundamentalism, in *Fundamentalisms Observed*, offers a further clarification of the charismatic nature of Pentecostalism:

> Probably the most dramatic religious innovation of the day, however, was Pentecostalism... the power of the Holy Spirit was manifest in new ways, especially in the practice of speaking in tongues and healing... Although many of the groups placed great emphasis on the strict interpretation of Scripture and a morally rigorous lifestyle, each also signalled a significant departure from the past, claiming some new truth as revelation. (13-4)

She goes on to explain how, in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, Non-conformist religions began to reinterpret the doctrinal aspects of the established Protestant Churches. Branches like the Social Gospel movement began to address the problems of poverty brought about by crowded urban living conditions as workers were forced to congregate in the large industrial towns. She notes:

> These church people wedded modern convictions about the human capacity to shape nature and society to the doctrine of postmillennialism, which held that human efforts at righteous living would inaugurate the thousand year reign of Christ. Accordingly, they elevated fair labor practices and provision of decent health care to the spiritual status of church-going as evidence of righteousness. (13-4)

The influence of these principles of social justice, although not directly connected to the Pentecostal Church, must have been present in the religious climate of change out of which this Church sprang. The effect of Hospital’s early experience of Pentecostal beliefs is reflected in her continuing concern for these issues in her work. She is committed to the strong social and political attitudes that she discusses with Candida Baker in the *Yacker 2* interview, and which were also promulgated in the anti-war movement of the ‘sixties in America.

In her first novel, *The Ivory Swing*, Hospital explores the patterns of two different cultures and the options open to two women enmeshed in the expectations of both. At the centre there is the young Canadian, Juliet. She is a woman in emotional and intellectual crisis, who has traded her own high-powered career in political science for marriage to a fellow academic and the role of supportive wife and mother, accompanying her husband to India on his year’s research in comparative religion.

As the exotic foil to their North American experience there is the beautiful young Indian widow, Yashoda, raised by a liberal father and educated in the West but, since her husband’s death, under the autocratic supervision of his conservative, high caste Hindu family. The foreigner, Juliet, disturbed by the restrictive life Yashoda is forced to live, remembers her grandmother’s words about the solace of the Psalms, but she can only recall the line, ‘But how shall we sing in a strange land?’ (*Swing* 114) Here Hospital implies that the perceived injustices of a different culture cannot be addressed by a stranger and that too
often the interference of an outsider into such ancient and accepted customs may only be harmful. Reflecting on this cultural difference, she notes:

... it is not that one believes in the custom itself. One is however aware of the power of the society that believes. (Swing, 139)

The issue of the singer in a strange land, the outside observer, continues in her subsequent novels and she also returns in later work to the theme of two women, one who is irretrievably damaged and overtaken by the male-dominated structure of society, and one who is challenged and finally liberated from it. The concept of good and evil in religious myth as well as in society, is introduced, to be later expanded in succeeding works. In *The Ivory Swing* it is the Hindu belief in evil personified as a female spirit that Hospital presents. The character of David, the theologian, explains that the Hindu family’s harsh treatment of Yashoda is a result of their belief in the Yakshi:

‘A spirit, usually demonic, who takes the form of a woman of surpassing beauty to lure men to damnation... She lies in wait to seduce the sanyasin meditating in the forest. He can only remain pure by killing her in spite of her extraordinary beauty.’ (Swing, 43)

The idea of woman as the evil temptress surfaces in many religions and societies, and the strong Judaeo-Christian emphasis on women’s responsibility begins with the fall of Adam in Eden when he says of Eve: ‘...she gave me of the tree, and I did eat’ (Genesis 3:12). Gerda Lerner writes that the misogynistic concept that original sin was woman’s sin is the cornerstone of many religions, and its universality has been the source of patriarchal power in society since the transfer of divinity from female to male deities.

*The Ivory Swing* was written from Hospital’s own encounter with dislocation and difference while living in Southern India with her husband and children, although she insists that this is not a strictly autobiographical novel. In the Candida Baker interview in *Yacker* she says:

It isn’t, no more so than any of the novels, and in the way that none of them are but all of them are. (258)

This period of alienation, building on her childhood experiences of division from her own community arising from her family’s fundamentalist beliefs, would lead her to write in later work about the nature of difference and the experience of the dispossessed and alienated. In the same interview, she explains her interest in the topic:

Well, I remember how disoriented I felt for the first couple of months in a remote village - and yet I was there with money and family, and I knew that at any point I could leave. There were people around me that could speak English and I was learning Malayalam, so I could communicate, yet I was profoundly disoriented. (253)

Expanding on her theme of dislocation, multiple realities and the differing views of evil in society that are dependent on experience, Hospital spoke to Baker about her encounters in the
Masters Thesis
Introduction
Beth Naulty

ghettos of Boston that she frequented as part of her research for Borderline and the reaction of the people she met there.

At first she was largely ignored on her excursions onto the streets of the black and Latino districts, but when she persisted in asking questions she met with mistrust and even hostility. The local population suspected her motives, and felt that they were under surveillance. This experience in America made her imagine, even more strongly than her stay in India had, the very real terror of the illegal immigrant, particularly the political refugee. Fleeing imprisonment and torture, without friends or money, and unable to communicate, they were hounded by agents of the government from which they had fled. To add to their troubles, they were actively pursued by the immigration officials of the government of the country in which they sought asylum. Their alienation and helplessness were total, trapped between two equally powerful and ruthless forces. By making the escapee a woman, Hospital emphasises the patriarchal nature of political power and the special terror, with strong sexual overtones, that it holds for the women who dare to challenge it.

With Borderline, and particularly in the later novels, Charades and The Last Magician, with their concern for current ideas in physics of curved space and time, Heisenburg's Uncertainty Principle and the event horizons of Black Holes, Hospital's spiritual background in the metaphysics of religion is linked to new frontiers in physics as she enters new narrative ground. The chief protagonist, Charade, refers to 'Heisenburg's theory about uncertainty as the essence of science' (Charades 15) lending relevance to Hospital's use of the quotation by J. Robert Oppenheimer on the fly-leaf:

If we ask, for instance, whether the position of the electron remains the same, we must say "no"; if we ask whether the electron's position changes with time, we must say 'no'; if we ask whether the electron is at rest, we must say "no"; if we ask whether it is in motion, we must say "no". (Charades 2)

The convolutions in plot and the circular nature of time in her narrative is present in all her future work and the conventionally linear narrative style of earlier work like The Ivory Swing gives way to the influence of physics, relating it to the life of her characters. These later narratives of Hospital's, Borderline, Charades, The Last Magician and Oyster do not have a neatly linear plot with a logical beginning, a rational middle and a predictable end. On the contrary, they reflect a way of life that no longer can depend on the future being the same as the past. She acknowledges that life does not advance sequentially in an orderly progression of events, rather she explores the influence of one random event upon another in an almost aleatoric technique. Her work follows the post modernist paradigm described by Peter Barry in Beginning Theory, being:

... a rejection of traditional realism (chronological plots, continuous narratives relayed by omniscient narrators, 'closed endings', etc.) in favour of experimental forms of various kinds. (82)
This late twentieth century writing is more relevant to the present television watching, short attention span generation than nineteenth century linear narratives. Given the rigidity of her upbringing, it is tempting to see this fragmentation of the narrative as both a reaction to fundamentalism and a rejection of its certainties in the light of life experience. The lack of closure in all her novels reflects this uncertainty while retaining the power of the creator of the narrative to ‘own’ its outcome.

As in Borderline and Charades, Hospital’s The Last Magician further explores the singular nature of reality and image, demonstrating that truth is relative to experience and that linear time is a myth. The last magician of the title is Charlie, photographer, image-maker and guide to an arcane world of symbolism where even the observation of a person, object or event changes both the observed and the observer forever. Hospital reveals that the expectation of a particular reality is persuasive, is interpreted from the context of personal experience, and because our view of reality is governed by what the image-makers choose to reveal, that our conclusions about the world are dependent on them.

Although in life the truth is always relative to the perspective of the observer, in The Last Magician personal vision moves a step further away from reality when the other characters are forced to see through Charlie’s eyes only the images he chooses to record. His reality becomes their reality. His photographs are often clever collages in which the images are carefully manipulated and presented so that, to suit his own agenda, no element is missed that he intends to be seen. At the same time, through the character of Sheba, barmaid and part-time prostitute, Hospital puts the theory that the photographs make a statement about the photographer rather than about the image they present: by inclusion or exclusion the choice of image defines the image-maker. She also offers a parallel with the new age of information technology, where, in spite of a plethora of data, only those issues which accord with the current political agenda are presented and where the question of morality is no longer part of the equation.

The influence of her childhood exposure to fundamentalist belief in evil as a real presence in the world is first seen in Borderline, with its political overtones. It is repeated in The Last Magician with its social injustices but most particularly in Oyster, where an undefined but persistent feeling of danger pervades the text and a millenarian expectation of apocalyptic disaster is seen to threaten the protagonists. Hospital’s implied menace manipulates the reader into an anticipation of evil and the deliberate lack of closure when a particular agent of evil fails to emerge, leaves the reader uneasy and unsatisfied, with an expectation that the worst is yet to come, and with an unsettling resonance of further sinister possibilities. This textual strategy of uncertainty is but one aspect of the postmodernist nature of her work. Patricia Waugh writes of this strategy:

\[\ldots\] the sense of an ending has continuously to be revised through the endless deferral of repeated narrative reconstruction. There can be no experience outside
text. History is narrative. The End is the insight that there can be no ending, no beginning, no ground and no telos. Again, however, in this world of hyperinflated discourse (Newman 1985) one may begin to feel, indeed, that it is not the worst so long as we can say it is the worst, and thus to begin to question whose Apocalypse is being presented. (342)

In _Oyster_, her latest novel, there can be no doubt as to whose Apocalypse is being presented. It is apparent, even though we may survive to question it, that it is ours. The accumulated excesses of one small outback Australian town culminate in an apocalyptic millennial holocaust. Hospital enters new territory with this novel, both in a geographical and philosophical context. In this, the most painful and the most powerful work to date, the forces of good and evil are engaged in the fight for the collective soul of Outer Maroo.

In all her work, Hospital confronts questions of morality, but this is not to say that she ‘preaches’ to her readers. Her text is not didactic; rather, is it lyrical, sensual and evocative. A highly developed sense of social justice and a concern for the status of the disadvantaged and marginalised, especially women, is always present. There is also a sense of mystery, the enigma of unanswered and even unanswerable questions that deal with the essential nature of belief and the changing face of reality. She acknowledges the presence of the extraordinary in many apparently ordinary lives. Valmai Howe quotes her as referring to:

... a membrane between the ordinary person and the monster that lies dormant within each of us... (Toronto Globe and Mail)

This kind of belief in inherent evil is shared by other writers with a similar, if even more rigid fundamentalist background and Hospital’s presentation of religious excess and paranoia in _Oyster_ is not an isolated one. Lesbian-feminist writer Jeanette Winterson was reared as a member of the Plymouth Brethren, and in her autobiographical novel, _Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit_, some very harrowing events endured by the young heroine are narrated. She says in the Introduction:

_Oranges_ is a threatening novel. It exposes family life as something of a sham; it illustrates by example that what the church calls love is actually psychosis and it dares to suggest that what makes life difficult for homosexuals is not their perversity but other people’s. (xiii)

The early fundamentalist experience shared by these writers has led to individual revelations of family influence, the more extreme traumas resulting in deeply significant obsessions with alienation and difference. Advancing the notion of morality and the text is David Jasper in his book, _The Study of Literature and Religion_, when he writes of the novels of Jane Austen:

It is not that the novel explicitly teaches religious or moral truths. Rather, the narrative form of the novel enables us to realize the power of our beliefs and the possibility of unity and constancy in life, and to see the human story not in terms of
fragmentation or simple cause and effect but within a whole bounded by a 
fundamental and inescapable assurance of what is right and true. (55)

This thesis will argue that the narrative form of Hospital’s novels, while it conveys 
equally moral values, is very different from Jane Austen’s and Jasper’s views. As noted 
previously, Hospital’s work celebrates the fragmentation of human experience, and her 
inclination towards chaos theory denies that there is anything simple about cause and effect. 
She presents the relativity rather than the certainty of truth, the multiple nature of reality, 
the curved spatial effects of time and the millennial expectations of the late twentieth 
century as they encounter postmodernist theory. However, the early biblical influence on form 
and content still continues to impact on her later work, and ‘the power of her belief’ is 
discernible in the baroque characteristics of the text.

Baker’s interview with Hospital (1987) in which she discusses at some length the 
nature of the fundamentalist influence on her life as a child growing up in Queensland, 
provides one parameter for this thesis. The question is whether the feminist position 
discovered in her work as well as the postmodernist nature of the text itself, derives directly 
from the patriarchal nature of the religious fundamentalist framework within which she 
was raised. A close reading of her body of work reveals the enduring and multiple influences 
of these formative years.

An insight into her own attitude to her writing is provided in various interviews and 
personal author’s notes. Ron Store’s interview in LiNO (1988) provides speculation on how 
her family’s beliefs impacted on her childhood, particularly on her peer acceptance at school 
and in the community, and her recollection of fear is pervasive. In an interview with Diana 
Brydon (1991), Hospital discusses her prize winning novel The Ivory Swing and speaks freely 
of her feminism and the strong sense of justice and her political attitudes which relate to her 
childhood. The long interview with Baker in helps define the adult writer’s frame of 
reference and relate it to her childhood experience of fundamentalism, which surfaces in all 
the interviews read.

Elizabeth Perkins (1990) identifies Hospital’s feminist position as a political one, 
and as dealing with the patriarchal power of the state by writing ‘in defiance of the father 
or in the hope that he might come to read or understand’. Perkins’s silence on the source of 
Hospital’s concern fails to see the novelist’s need to communicate with the father as possibly 
deriving from a relationship founded in a fundamentalist childhood in a patriarchal 
religious household, or to point to the link between the power structure of the state and that 
of religion. My thesis will attempt to establish these relationships.

Meanjin (1988) carries Hospital’s own comments on Borderline: in a letter to her 
editor in which she stresses that to remove the ‘muddled, self-conscious and intrusive’ nature 
of the work which is ‘all bound up with my moral and literary purpose’ would result in ‘a 
much more conventional, traditional, rather banal and quite unoriginal book’. These remarks 
confirm the postmodernist impulses of her work, but make no mention of the argument I will
mount that there is a correlation between the moral standpoints taken in her work and a background in which morality was highly valued, even fetishised.

Christina Thompson (1989) offers further insight into Hospital’s postmodern theoretical framework, when she writes in *Scripsi*.

It would not be unfair to describe this as typically post-modern fiction. Indeed, given the convolutions, the uncertainties, and the extra-literary superstructures, it would be difficult to call it anything else.

but does not connect the fragmentation of Hospital’s text with her recollection of a similar fragmentation in her early experience of travelling between the different worlds of school and home.

David Callahan (1997) notes Hospital’s constant theme of alienation in *Ariel*, observing that ‘... inevitably one of the areas that the characters have to negotiate is that of extreme and alienating difference’ (25) but again, fails to tie this almost obsessive concern with ‘otherness’ to the early experiences within fundamentalism related to her own alienation which emerge as postcolonial and feminist writing in her novels.

Knight Temby (1995) does not see Hospital’s work as feminist, believing that she fails to empower her female protagonists in *The Last Magician* but presents them as victims. Temby claims that ‘The dominant forces in the text eventually destroy or effectively silence those who are oppressed...’ (48) and deplors the fact that these ‘dominant forces’ are not called to account in Hospital’s text. However, I will demonstrate that Hospital celebrates the power of women’s survival in the fulfilled lives of Lucy and Catherine.

Bruce Merry’s review of *Charades* (1990) offers another opinion on the feminist aspect of Hospital’s work as it relates to the use of language. Noting that ‘... none of this *basso continuo* of soft eroticism is particularly vital to the text.’ (157) Merry claims that by presenting in her discourse women’s sexuality ‘more racily’ than that of men, ‘The author wants to clear the deck of men by making women the real protagonists of the life drama...’ (157) Sue Gillett emphasises Hospital’s questioning of the reliability of memory in the quest for the father (1991), while Laurel Bergman speaks of Hospital’s commitment to feminism and a referential connection to the literary canon in a restructuring of the quest narrative (1996). Charlotte Clutterbuck (1993) addresses Hospital’s recurring theme of sin and redemption and the displacement felt by the expatriate but is silent on the source of these feelings, while Selina Samuels (1996) notes the unreliable gloss of memory in Hospital’s short stories.

In my need to understand the framework of fundamentalism, I gained insight from those texts that deal generally with the structure and practice of Christian Fundamentalism. Marty E. Marty & R Scott Appleby, present a wide study of world Fundamentalisms in five volumes, of which only the first deals exclusively with Christian Fundamentalism. Margaret Lamberts Bendroth’s (1993) study of the position of women within Christian Fundamentalism traces the struggle for the place of feminism in the church in the United
States, and, for the purpose of this thesis, Donald Dayton (1987) and John Nichol (1966) offer specific the theological base of the Pentecostal Church.


A Masters Thesis by Johnathan Redenbach of UNSW entitled Liminality in the Novels of Janette Turner Hospital (1997?) also privileges the postmodern elements in her work but fails to deal with the discourses of fundamentalism so pervasive in her work that are the focus of my thesis.

The works cited indicate that there is a place in the critical discussion of Hospital's work for further consideration of the factors which influenced it. This thesis will examine Hospital's discursive and experiential resistance to discourses she encountered within the Pentecostal Church, family and congregational social life, and their effect on the creative output and artistic concerns of the adult writer. Personal interviews give insight into the difficulties experienced by Hospital. The sense of otherness and displacement prevalent in her novels can be traced to her own early background knowledge of these states, and the response they evoke in the individual psyche.

The question of whether the patriarchal nature of fundamentalism had a real effect on the development of the adult writer will be explored and if Hospital's representations of the father figures in her novels can be seen as related to her conservative background. An attempt will also be made to show that the increasingly post modernist nature of the text derives from and helps to construct, her feelings of uncertainty regarding her place in the conformist social climate of Brisbane in the 'fifties, while it emphasises the postcolonial and feminist diversity of the 'nineties.

Her concern with the patriarchal nature of power within fundamentalism as well as in society as a whole, leads in her work to a feminist position on the disempowerment of women. She addresses their colonisation by church and state and its impact on their lives at all social and economic levels. These concerns lead inevitably to the socio-political overtones that can be discerned in her novels, and her experience in the Pentecostal church leads ultimately to the millennial despair of Oyster.

There is a critical need for a detailed critique of Turner Hospital's representation of fundamentalist values within her work, with a view to understanding her involvement in issues of morality, marginality and the centralised power of church and state. This thesis will present such a critique.
CHAPTER ONE
Theoretical Aspects

In this chapter I will explore some theoretical implications of Hospital’s work, and examine the concerns which lead to her position. This thesis seeks to establish that these concerns originate in the author’s partial acceptance of, and resistance to, early fundamental Pentecostal influences, societal experiences and changes in background and ideology, and to reaffirm that both writing and reception are contextually based. I see the theoretical structure of Hospital’s novels as deeply informed by a chiefly feminist position with a postcolonial inclination such as that which she has taken in The Ivory Swing, and moving to include a more self-reflexive and broadly socialist political stance in her later work.

I would argue that in this first novel the incident where Juliet is introduced to the absolute and essential nature of patriarchy in South India, signals Hospital’s intention to foreground cultural, postcolonial and feminist concerns in this work:

They speak to me as though I were a servant, Juliet fumed inwardly. ... Was this, she suddenly wondered, why South Indian women always went about with lowered face and averted eyes? (Swing 40)

The men are stunned by Juliet’s simple act of drinking tea with them, and ‘were in no way prepared for the outrageous ways of western women’ (Swing 41). The notion of women’s automatic assumption of guilt, despite intellectual awareness to the contrary, is presented clearly when Juliet ‘could not escape the sense of having committed some awful blasphemy even as she felt the wild injustice of their reaction’ (Swing 41). The presentation of this idea of assumed guilt, combined with many other instances of cultural and gender marginalisation and inequities that Hospital presents, and her empathetic treatment of Yashoda, delivers enough evidence of her feminist intent to refute David Callahan’s premise that her dominant feminist ideology may be compromised when he asks:

Is Hospital’s representation of Yashoda in The Ivory Swing yet one more in the long Western series of portrayals of Eastern women as sensual objects of male desire (as Graham Huggan suggests). . .

but to agree with his alternative suggestion when he continues:

. . . or is the representation of her sexuality an attempt to recuperate an active sexuality for women whose sexuality has been repressed and formally constructed by their own and other cultures? (Ariel 24)

In the same paragraph he goes on to ask if Hospital’s treatment of Yashoda is evidence of the difficulty encountered by all writers in ‘representing women’s sexuality in ways that have not been infected by centuries of male objectification’ (Ariel 24), and it seems apparent that it is. The
presentation of the similarities and differences in Hindu and Western culture in *The Ivory Swing* points to her awareness of feminist claims of the universality of patriarchal control, evidenced, for example, by Juliet’s outrage in response to Shivaraman Nair’s remarks about Yashoda:

‘A woman like that, so soon after the death of her husband, to show no respect. There is no goodness in her. Who can tell what such a one will do? You are not understanding that sort of woman, Mrs. David Juliet. Their thoughts wander after men, straying in all directions like the roots of the banyan tree. This rottenness will spread, everything will suffer.’

How unjust, she raged, shaking with suppressed anger. How primitively male!

(*Swing*,129)

There appears to be a strong reflection in Hospital’s writing of Kate Millett’s theory of patriarchy. Paraphrasing Millett in *A Reader’s Guide to Contemporary Feminist Literary Criticism*, Maggie Humm observes:

... patriarchal power is ubiquitous. There is a deeply entrenched politics of sexuality, beginning with the reproduction of patriarchy through psychological conditioning in the family, which operates in all cultural structures. Patriarchy is a fundamental part of all representations because these are permeated by male power. (44)

This view is corroborated by evidence drawn from Hospital’s many interviews in which she acknowledges the strictures of religious patriarchy, but reveals that in her own experience patriarchal control was tempered by affection and that her own family structure was filled with love and care. In the dedication to her novel *Charades*, she speaks of her mother and father as those ‘who taught me that love is rich and redemptive whatever costumes and guises it wears.’ It is possible that her awareness of the institutionalised patriarchy of religious fundamentalism led to her concern for the marginalisation of women, both in the Church structure and in society at large, and the injustice of masculine primacy and privilege. This concern leads to the cultural feminist position present in all her novels with a discernible emphasis on the politics of difference and the essential nature of equality. In response to a question in an interview with Beryl Langer in *Australian-Canadian Studies* (1991), on the reaction of feminist critics to her work, Hospital says:

... I suspect that I’m not considered ideologically sound in those circles, but having grown up in a fundamentalist Protestant family I’m inured to this. *There is nothing so like one fundamentalist as another fundamentalist, whether they’re Protestant, feminist, Marxist, or Islamic.* ... So that splintering phenomenon and the holier-than-thou/ideologically purer-than-thou aspect of fundamentalist feminism is something with which I am all too horribly familiar from childhood, and steer clear of anyway.

(149 my italics)
At this point in her writing Hospital first moves to embrace the socio-political aspects of feminism that she continues to address in her later novels. Firstly and powerfully in Borderline and particularly in The Last Magician and Oyster, she makes it clear that the gendered oppression within the institutions encountered in these narratives is cultural, political and universal. Maggie Humm, in Contemporary Feminist Literary Criticism, refers to Adrienne Rich's essay, "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision" (1971), and recalls that:

... the basic aim of feminist criticism: that feminist criticism should undermine the misogynist organisation of knowledge by exposing the political construction of that knowledge in the academy, in the media and in everyday society. (9)

Humm articulates a similar position to Hospital's novels, namely the exposure of the methods of oppression and the paranoia of political powers whenever their authority is threatened. That this gendered oppression begins very early is shown when Felicity recounts the harrowing rape scene in the school-yard, when she and the polio victim, Hester, are set on by a group of boys and gang-raped. These fellow students are out for revenge; on Felicity for being clever and a newcomer, and on Hester because her disability makes her different. The only superiority these young males have is superior strength and superior numbers but Hester, as an experienced victim, has a tested technique for survival:

I can make that part wooden too, I didn't feel a thing. ... You must never tell anyone.

Never. If you tell, they just do it worse next time. (Borderline 164)

Elizabeth Perkins in a LiNO article, notes that Borderline 'originates in every sense within the prison of the patriarchy', and that although Felicity has the initiative to 'take positive and independent action' at the border to help Dolores:

this action ... leads to her death, so that active or passive, she cannot escape the consequences of challenging the patriarchal power... Felicity becomes a victim of those whose power plays she acts to thwart. (53)

This is a position which applies equally to Felicity, the vulnerable schoolgirl and Felicity, the independent career woman.

In Charades, as in the other novels, Hospital links two women, one who is vulnerable and a victim, one who is strong and in control. In Ron Store's interview in LiNO (1990) Hospital says:

I'm constantly writing about pairs of women in all my novels: one goes under and one doesn't... . (20)

In this convoluted narrative where the present winds around the past like the lianas of the Queensland rainforest, which as a motif dominates the novel, the strong woman is Bea Ryan, 'the Slut of Tambourine Mountain'. Also known as 'Honey Bea', sexually amoral, generous with her body and her time, Bea acts like a magnet to the neighbourhood husbands, yet lacks one of her
own. In contrast to Bea is Verity Ashkenazy, holocaust survivor, who also draws all male eyes but evokes very different emotions:

... hair black as sin and that golden body begging to be manhandled and eyes that could set a man howling like a dingo .... (Charades, 72)

As Mick Donovan says:

"There's some women just waiting to be bruised... they give off something, you know?" (Charades, 72)

The occasion at Bea's twenty first birthday party where Verity is left alone among a crowd of men in a bar, strangers who are fascinated by her and who move to encircle her, recalls Hospital's similar experiences - often described in interviews cited in earlier chapters - both as a child in the playground and as an adult in a Boston street mugging, which have resulted in an almost irrational fear of such incidents. This fear is expressed in Verity's reaction described by Mick Donovan:

Shaking bad, like an earthquake has her. And she backs away, backwards across the verandah and down the steps and along the path, stumbling backwards, and shaking, never taking her eyes off all of us... We are sniffing at her fear, you can feel us getting madder and madder for having wanted her, a woman like that. Maybe we would have started to chase her, I dunno, if Bea hadn't appeared right then, with the Pommy bloke.

Bea goes crazy. Like a bloody Tasmanian devil she is, Jesus, I thought she'd have my balls in one bite. (Charades, 77)

This evocative passage exposes the dual nature of fear, that of the potential victim and that of her tormentors. The structural binary opposition promulgated by her protagonists - the terrified Verity is posited against the avenging Bea - is a feature of all Hospital's work which she explains in the interview with Ron Store:

I'm always writing in order not to be Verity or not to be Dolores or not to be Victoria or Yashoda - the women who don't make it in my books. (20)

In Borderline, as in all her work, Hospital employs multiple theoretical discourses and the fragmentation and lack of closure affirms the postmodernist position that began to emerge in The Ivory Swing. In the persona of Felicity she foregrounds the contracted reality which constitutes all fiction, and creates, as Sue Lovell writes in her LiNQ (1990) article, '"... a character who exists only as a being narrated by another character' and she goes on to say:

... with Borderline, we enter the realm of metafiction: narrating becomes an act like any other within the fiction and the content has developed to include discussion on narrative processes as well as Jean-Marc's search for Felicity's reality. (52)
This metafictional process is further evidenced in the deliberate disregard of linear time and in the intentional foregrounding of constructed reality. Speaking of Felicity, Hospital says:

She knew better than most people how simple it was to rearrange the past, that yesterday was an hypothesis existing purely by the grace of today. (Borderline, 131)

Hospital signals a symbolic pairing in the oppositional linkage of the names of the two main female protagonists Felicity and Dolores - signifying Happiness and Sadness. There is an equally intriguing duality in the two FBI agents with the occupational name of Hunter and the stereotypical Neanderthal, Trog. Jean-Marc is a self-centred male figure with an Oedipal need to defeat his father and an incestuous need to bed his stepmother, Felicity, and his self-absorption places him firmly within a patriarchal context. However, his role in the end, as seen by Elizabeth Perkins in her LiNO (1990) article, is to remain alive

... to canonize the opponents of social and political patriarchy as the 'Holy Innocents, los desaparecidos, the disappeared ones'. (58)

although, she states further:

He is not, however, a figure who can be identified as an opponent of the patriarchal power that informs the indivisible political and private concerns of the novel. (59)

Strangely, it is Gus, the philandering salesman, unable to remain sexually faithful to his wife, and exhibiting many signs of male chauvinism, who is seen by Perkins as standing

at the borderline of patriarchy, a liminal passenger ... emasculated by his suburban entrapment, his inability to sustain his role of pater familias, and separated from his childhood faith... (58-9)

The postcolonial concerns which surfaced briefly in The Ivory Swing, are more evident in Borderline. The treatment of the refugees by the alleged FBI agents reflects a neo-colonial attitude on the part of the United States government and is presented as being a part of the wider colonisation of women and other marginalised minorities by the dominant patriarchal-political cultures. As has been discussed in a previous chapter, this attitude is not confined to America and flourishes in the outback Queensland of Oyster as evidenced in some of the protagonists, their opinions and indeed treatment of the indigenous members of the community. In all the novels considered in this thesis, Hospital is mindful of the colonising nature of those institutions which form the cultural hierarchy - namely the state, the judiciary and the church, as well as patriarchy and its predominant societal view of the status of women.

Even allowing for the selective nature of memory, if the autobiographical information given in the various interviews with Hospital is an authentic account of her early life, it leads to a reading of Charades in which it seems valid to see in the childhood experiences of Kay a fictionalised revisiting of Hospital's own past. As the child from a Fundamentalist Church family she serves as a cathartic representation of Hospital's own early history. The atmosphere
of prayer in the home, the difficulties at school, the fear of mob violence, are all things that are discussed freely in previously cited interviews both here and in Canada. Hospital has also acknowledged the influence on her writing of the beauty and grandeur of the language of the King James bible, which Kay sees as ‘The beautiful shimmering Word... (Charades 115)’ In this novel, Hospital presents the effect adult beliefs can have on the life of a child and the confusion a literal interpretation of biblical images excites in a childish imagination. An example of such naive interpretation is the image the child Kay has of some of the formulaic biblical terms used by her grandmother.

The air through which she moved was thick with presences, for we are at all times surrounded, said the preacher, by a great cloud of witnesses. What else, therefore could she do but walk with them and talk with them and know them all by name and shape, even the Noisome Pestilence, whom she thought of as long-legged with a leer and bad teeth and fingernails curling like black smoke. When the Noisome Pestilence passed overhead there was a roaring in the air and flames fell. (Charades 116)

However, there was comfort in the image that came with her grandmother’s assurance that... they lived under the shadow of the Almighty. “He shall cover you with his feathers,” Grandma Llewellyn said, “and under his wings shalt thou trust.” Katherine looked up into the downy feather-breasted air. It smelled of warmth and pillows and of the Velvet soap her grandmother used. A dash of lavender drifted by, a twisting falling feather of fragrance... as it fell it cast a purple haze, the shadow of the Almighty. (Charades 116-7)

Despite this comfort, Kay’s parents’ beliefs excluded her from knowledge and practices that were considered elementary by her peers.

Most of her knowledge was of the wrong kind. She could, for example, rattle through the names of the books of the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, but could not produce the name of a single horse in the Melbourne Cup. She had never even heard of Phar Lap - “the legendary Phar Lap,” Miss Kennedy said, incredulous. (Charades 131)

The essential difference between knowledge sought and knowledge assimilated through the pores of one’s cultural skin is demonstrated when after Kay has found and memorised the information on Phar Lap in the encyclopedia and told the class.

There was an eerie silence.

They all looked at her very strangely, she could feel their stares like pins and needles on her skin.

“What would youuu know?” someone taunted.

Wwaiser, wwwwaiser, wwwwaiser! voices said.

“Youuu’ve never been to the races in yer life.” (Charades 132)
All Hospital's work seeks to identify areas of exclusion and to explore the many paradigms of difference and marginalisation occurring in an Australian context, which, combined with the problems of gender difference in society allows the predominantly feminist basis of this work to emerge clearly. Charade's quest for a father in Nicholas and a father-figure in Koenig adds a mythological element to the novel and Bea's final confession: "Verity's your mother. But me and Nicholas made you, that's the truth" (Charades, 338) confirms Bea's own mythical Earth-Mother status and can be read as exemplary of Judith Butler's inside/out performative theory: when one consistently acts as or 'performs' as an identity-sign, this identity 'gets established, instituted, circulated, and confirmed'. The female quest is resolved and it is only Koenig's hesitation and indecision as to whether or not to continue the relationship with Charade, now in Australia, that provides Hospital's customary ambiguous conclusion.

The same thematic concerns of difference and social justice are further explored in The Last Magician, another novel in which she probes the role of discursive exclusion demanded by patriarchal institutions. The power of institutions to control areas of exclusion is also noted by Foucault, who declares that the areas of tightest control

...are those of sexuality and politics; as if discourse, far from being that transparent or neutral element in which sexuality is disarmed and politics pacified, is in fact one of the places where sexuality and politics exercise in a privileged way some of their most formidable powers. (The Order of Discourse, 52-64)

by exposing the political corruption of the judiciary, and tracing it back to its source in the political hierarchy of the playground, where power lies in the acceptance by educators and pupils alike, of the economic and gender dominance of the privileged, Hospital brings closer that transparency to which Foucault refers. The formal 'institutions' to which he refers are not the only areas where his theory holds. The more informal but equally coercive expectations of peer groups to be found in everyday society also exercise and uphold these privileges. Hospital's theories concerning these power structures have engendered lively debate among critics as to the success or failure of her representation of social and gender discrimination. Although she can be regarded as merely another critic among many of her work, her own intentions must surely be foregrounded in any theoretical discussion of it. As he did concerning The Ivory Swing, David Callahan challenges the force of Hospital's feminist position in regard to the gendered nature of power in The Last Magician and questions the validity of Cat as a truly marginalised other, asking:

Is Hospital's representation of Cat in The Last Magician the intellectual's sentimentalization of the marginalized, a transgressor whose transgression is all attitude and little else, a transgressor whose closest friends after all are brainy
successes in the system? Or is Cat both a transgressor against the straight system as well as against the shadow codes in which transgression is generally enacted? (Ariel 26)

I would argue that Hospital emphasises Cat’s differences and non-conformity as a means of exposing the structures of power she rejects as irrelevant to her. Callahan admits:

She does not see herself as powerless and does not even relate to the system of classification on which hierarchies are established. She is untouchable by measurement, grading, sorting or any kind of ranking, and it this which both horrifies and attracts Robbie. Indeed, the novel is constantly interested in the ways in which power is both attracted and repulsed by difference. (Ariel 28)

Hospital herself has been quoted in Publisher’s Weekly as saying of The Last Magician:

Various establishment systems - the law, the academic world, the literary world - are all put on trial and found severely wanting... But it’s wider than that. I locate the quarry, a metaphor for the underside of the city, in Sydney, but I don’t mean it to be specifically Sydney or even specifically Australia. It’s really about the underside of Western society. (80)

The idea of the universality of the issues presented in this novel reinforces the notion of multiple discourses as she recounts her meetings with prostitutes both male and female, street kids and the homeless during her research for The Last Magician, and the recurring message was

...that among their regular clients were people whose faces they saw in the newspapers - politicians, judges, lawyers, and cops - and that paradox fascinated me.

Law keepers, the guardians of law, order and morality, consort all the time with the lawbreakers - that was what I wanted to explore. (80)

The sobering idea that Hospital presents here is the willingness of the members of the establishment to reveal their weaknesses to these fringe dwellers without fear of exposure. Even if such a disclosure were made, the tight network of their peers and their solidarity would ensure immunity from the consequences of such disclosure. She sees the security inherent in such power as enabling them to indulge in such practices with no thought of betrayal and in the certainty of the powerlessness of the outsider, as revealing their contempt for them.

The multiple strands of time, place and events that make up The Last Magician, the fragmentation of the narrative and the ambiguity of the ending seem incompatible with the certainty of the moral values. This allows the argument for positioning The Last Magician as a postmodernist text to rest on agreement with the definition given by Philip Rice and Patricia Waugh in their introduction to the section on Postmodernism in Modern Literary Theory:

We live in a pluralized culture surrounded by a multiplicity of styles, knowledges, stories that we tell ourselves about the world... The relativisation of styles which is postmodernism, throws into doubt the claims of any one discourse or story to be offering
the ‘truth’ about the world or an authoritative version of the real. Issues of ethics, law, equality and authority become deeply problematic in such a context ... (308)

With the possible exception of The Ivory Swing, and most particularly in the later novels, this plurality is discernible in Hospital’s presentation of multiple realities throughout her body of work. Her work therefore conforms to the critical notion of postmodernist writing and meets most of the criteria demanded by theorists, as varied and sometimes contradictory as they are. A close reading of her work, particularly her refutation of the essentialist views of women promulgated by a patriarchal society, and its strong political content brings it perhaps closer to Linda Hutcheon’s view that:

... postmodernism is a phenomenon whose mode is resolutely contradictory as well as unavoidably political ... the postmodern’s initial concern is to de-naturalize some of the dominant features of our way of life; to point out that those entities that we unthinkingly experience as ‘natural’ (they might even include capitalism, patriarchy, liberal humanism) are in fact ‘cultural’; made by us, not given to us. Even nature, postmodernism might point out, doesn’t grow on trees. (Politics of the Postmodern 1-2)

While her use of exotic imagery and somewhat eccentric characterisation, idiom and viewpoint is apparent, Hospital does probe beneath the surface to expose an extraordinary range of human experience, pitting individuals against institutions, and applying to all the moral values of her early influences. This process of examination has been identified by Patricia Waugh as one of the characteristics of postmodernism:

Like feminism, Postmodernism has been engaged in a re-examination of the Enlightenment concepts of subjectivity, truth and reason enshrined in the belief that human beings are collectively engaged in a progressive movement towards moral and intellectual self-realisation through the application to their situation of a universal rational faculty. (Modern Literary Theory 344)

Some contemporary feminist discourses engage in continuing debate within the postmodern framework, but from within this environment Hospital has taken a strongly liberal humanist stance. It is from this position that her postcolonial views are articulated, through her compassion for the sufferings of Yashoda, Verity, Dolores and Ethel. While compassion alone is not necessarily seen as feminist, her condemnation of the powers of the patriarchal systems that oppress them places her within the parameters of feminism. Charades can be seen as among the most postmodern of her works with its emphasis on theoretical physics, non-linear treatment of time, and her customary device of multiple realities. The compassion shown for the women who succumb to circumstances and the celebration of those who survive, posits this novel too as a strongly feminist text with multiple paradigms of feminism.
Hospital’s latest novel, *Oyster*, expands on the previous body of work. It holds all of the positions of the earlier novels, combined with an exploration of pre-millennial paranoia and apocalyptic expectation that may derive from her Fundamentalist Christian beginnings in which the expectation of the Second Coming was always present. Her postcolonial stance is manifested in the treatment of the character of Ethel and the exposure of the attitude of some members of this isolated community towards the indigenous fringe dwellers of Outer Maroo. The Aboriginal presence in the narrative is subtle but pervasive. In acknowledgment of their endurance and their silence, Hospital focuses on their situation, drawing attention to their treatment by the majority of the white population of Outer Maroo. They are jealous of the Murris’ long history with the land and fearful lest they claim it back and end centuries of exploitation. The town’s attitude to Aborigines is summed up by the publican, Bernie:

‘They can talk till it rains again,’ Bernic said, ‘for all I care. And as far as I’m concerned, they’re still Abos. They’re not getting any fancy new names outta me. I been watching black faces whingeing on TV ever since I got the satellite dish. Finders keepers, I say.’ ... ‘You know where they can shove their sacred sites.’ (Oyster 68)

And the grazier Andrew Godwin:

‘We don’t want any packs of feral black kids running wild around here... This isn’t New South Wales. ... Hell, everyone knows I’ve got nothing against the Abos’ - and we all thought of him fucking Ethel in the shed. “If they have a legal case, there’s the courts.”’ (Oyster 68)

These attitudes toward the Murris, expressed by Hospital’s characters in *Oyster* and the overt racism of some of its protagonists, reveal her postcolonial position, exploring the many layers of colonisation in Australia. Writing in her book, *Illusions of Identity*, Anne-Marie Willis argues:

> In the Australian context, Otherness has been defined from the point of view of the more numerous and powerful European, predominantly British, settler population. ... Settlers acted on the belief that the Aboriginal inhabitants of Australia had a lesser right to occupy the land than they did because they had not made it productive. (93-5)

Beginning with the concept of *terra nullius* this colonisation has continued to depend on defining as ‘other’ anyone not belonging to the dominant white male group. In apparent agreement with Willis’ view, Hospital foregrounds the position of the original inhabitants and their colonisation by a second wave of settlers, a society who were themselves colonised by an imperial power, England, and were therefore part of the British Empire. The experience of minorities dominated by such patriarchal institutions as church, state and judiciary are to be discovered in all her work. These experiences, related in *Oyster*, would seem to be little changed since the early days of settlement. The attitude of the Living Word church is no different to that described by editor of *Religion in Aboriginal Australia*, Max Charlesworth in his Introduction:
There was also the cultural myopia of European observers who viewed the Aborigines and their religion through white Western glasses, and the well-meaning but religiously chauvinistic view of the early Christian missionaries who could see no point of connection at all between the Christian gospel and the bewildering beliefs, myths and rites of the Aborigines. (3)

If colonisation means the assumption of control by force, then the institutional control of Aborigines, as evidenced by the government-sanctioned, church-approved practice of forcibly removing Aboriginal children from their parents, must qualify as such. Women also continue to be controlled by the patriarchy, despite the obvious political, economic, and some personal gains. In her book Woman, Herself, Robyn Rowland observes:

Through their control of the structures of society (economic, political, legal, religious), through language, through knowledge-construction, through ideology, and through force, men have confined women's self, defining her negatively. (152)

and this control demonstrates their colonial status. Hospital makes the point that individuals can be colonisers too and are answerable for the abuse of power that they have committed. Ethel says to the wife of her abuser, Andrew Codwin:

'There's a lot has gone on in shearing sheds, I reckon ... since olden times. Since back before the last beginning of this place. ... A lot of boss cockies always done what they wanted in shearing sheds. ... My grandma was shot in a shearing shed.' (Oyster 260)

Through this multi-layered narrative, Hospital explores both postcolonial and feminist issues, while foregrounding the dangers of religious fanaticism. In an atmosphere of dread and anticipation of the apocalypse, the women in Oyster are disempowered by events brought about by the testosterone-based culture of the outback and the essential conservatism of the religious Right. Except as 'outsiders' to be avoided at all costs, there is little evidence in this work of the established institutionalised hierarchies of state and judiciary that were present in the earlier novels. Hospital makes it apparent that even in the absence of these traditionally conservative structures, the masculinist culture of outback Australia essentialises the role of women and their place in that society. In this environment the Living Word Church and Oyster's millennial cult could flourish more easily. As Major Miner reflects:

Oyster ... was like one of those bacterial forces that blindly and ruthlessly seek out the culture that will nourish them. In Outer Maroo, he found it. (Oyster 413)

Hospital foregrounds the presence of pro-millennial tension and apocalyptic anxiety by creating an atmosphere of unspecified dread that envelops Outer Maroo. Her postmodern style, in which there is no longer a continuous linear sequence of events, evokes the distrust and even fear of its inhabitants and indeed her readers, keeping them slightly off-balance until the familiar base of certainty shifts beneath their feet like the earth tremors of an aftershock.
Without the certainty of direction and anticipation of closure, tension is fostered and sustained. More so than in any of her other novels, confident expectation is overtaken by events of such unimaginable proportions and consequences that acceptance of them is almost impossible. The fiery holocaust that envelops the Reef and its surroundings is an overtly biblical metaphor as is the escape from the inferno of Mercy, Nick and Sarah and their journey towards Brisbane, the fabled City of Gold. Just as Mercy’s mother had told her,

‘... it would be shining like the New Jerusalem, you know, in the Book of Revelation: and the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass (Oyster A32-3).’

But despite its final apocalyptic firestorm Oyster, like Hospital’s other novels, has an open ending. The frantic dash to escape the fire which engulfs the Reef and Outer Maroo is itself ambiguous. Is it really happening or is it merely a projection of Jess’s fervent hope? Hospital links a vivid scriptural allusion and the rich cadences of biblical language to a postmodern view of time when Jess paraphrases the benediction:

In the beginning is always now, and ever shall be, world without end, amen; and starting points are like so many cards to be shuffled. They change shape, they change in value, according to how they are dealt. (Oyster 50)

Hospital employs those stratagems of postmodernism that decentralise and unbalance her reader, and denies unthinking acceptance of the ‘essential’ verities of a male dominated culture. Her story-telling in Charades embraces multiple narrative voices; Charade, Bea, Kay, Verity. She explores multilayered time zones; the present in Boston and Toronto interwoven with the past of Brisbane and the Queensland rainforest and further back to the ghettos of Europe and the second world war in a non-linear treatment of time itself. This presentation of plural realities, dreams and memories engages her reader and ensures her narrative’s departure from the realist novel.

Through the lives and circumstances of her characters she reveals her concern for the disempowered in society and her examination of the pervasiveness of fear, the nature of reality, the relativity of truth, the function of dreams and the persistent abuse of power in all strata of society. These issues are also evident in Borderline. The Last Magician and Oyster and she appears to concur with Toynbee’s assertion, noted by Waugh (Modern Literary Theory), that we are ‘entering the fourth and final phase of Western History: one of irrationalism, anxiety and helplessness (341).’ These three states of mind are increasingly confronted in Hospital’s work and are articulated in Waugh’s view that:

Postmodernism... had shown that there is nothing for consciousness to be anchored to: no universal ground of truth, justice or reason, so that consciousness itself is thus ‘decentred’, no longer origin, author, location of intentional agency but a function through which impersonal forces pass and intersect... . (341)
Although there is consensus among theorists concerning the plurality of feminism, and the need to define these feminisms, there is debate about their role in postmodern literature. The shifting ground of postmodernism is challenged by feminism’s claims of universal truths, such as the continuing pervasive presence of patriarchy in society and the stereotypical presentation of women within literature. In her book, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, Linda Hutcheon observes:

While it is certainly demonstrable that both feminisms and postmodernism are part of the same general crisis of cultural authority (Owens 1983: 57) ... there is a major difference in orientation between the two that cannot be ignored: we have seen that the postmodern is politically ambivalent for it is doubly coded - both complicitous with and contesting of the cultural dominants within which it operates; but on the other side, feminisms have distinct, unambiguous political agendas of resistance. (142)

Hospital’s representations of women fall within these parameters. Juliet, Annie, Charade, Bea, Felicity, Lucy, Catherine, Jess and Mercy are all survivors. They are women who surmount the difficulties that beset them, women who have such ‘distinct, unambiguous political agendas of resistance’. The women who are presented as their opposites, the ones who fail to survive, also serve to draw attention to the role imposed on them by societal, cultural, or religious constraints.

By reflecting the current atmosphere of pre-millennial apprehension which she presents so vividly in *Oyster*, Hospital’s latest work also serves to warn against the excesses of religious practice manifested in Oyster’s extreme and literal view of End Time and his anticipation of the Apocalypse. She foregrounds the danger of excessive material greed seen in the ruthless pursuit of opal-generated wealth by Godwin, Prophet and Beresford that became obsessional, and the paralysing effect of fear that leads to complicity. Behind Hospital’s work is Heisenberg’s idea cited in *Charades*: ‘What we observe is not nature itself, but nature exposed to our method of questioning (*Charades* 341), and her ‘method of questioning’ is to submit the accepted truths of our culture to sharp scrutiny and extrapolate from them her alternative realities while according them both an equal possibility of truth. Perhaps one exception to this idea of equally valid realities is responsible for Hospital’s refusal to effect closure in her work. It is her resistance to the idea of Armageddon as preached by the Fundamentalist church of her childhood, and in *Oyster* it surfaces in the irrational fear that is expressed by Sarah: ‘I am frightened of endings. I am frightened of finding out how things end (*Oyster* 184).’
CHAPTER TWO

The Patriarchal Nature of Power

Androcentrism has been the accepted core ideology of the Judaeo-Christian tradition for thousands of years. The account of creation found in Genesis, has been translated into terms that disadvantage women and signal the direction that traditional theological and secular attitudes have taken. The interpretation of ancient laws found in the Old Testament permeates modern thinking and has strongly influenced the status of women. As Gerda Lerner, in her book The Creation of Patriarchy (1986), observes,

The stories of the patriarchs in Genesis offer some indications of a transition from matrilocal and matrilineal to patrilocal and patrilineal family organisation... (167) a circumstance which has resulted in the patriarchal accumulation of power in spheres well outside the family structure. Lerner goes on to note that Western civilization draws many of its leading metaphors and definitions of gender and morality from the bible. (161)

This bible-based morality of which Lerner speaks sees the co-existent forces of good and evil as the two power bases around which that culture is predicated, and the scriptural dichotomy of madonna and whore, which still pervades modern thinking, results from the gender roles in which women have been cast. Although the separation of myth and religion is difficult because of the antiquity of the source material, the belief systems which have evolved from them are on the whole very jealous of the authenticity and the primacy of their own particular interpretation of what they regard as divinely inspired material.

Given what G S Kirk describes in his book, Myth as:

...the tyranny of Christian inhibitions and preconceptions in matters affecting the investigation of the sources of religious feeling... (3)

The moral judgements, implicit or explicit, within the Judaeo-Christian Edenic myth, ensure that woman is held responsible for man's fall from grace, by introducing him to the knowledge of the binary opposites of good and evil. The belief in the adversarial nature of good and evil as an inescapable element in the structure of this particular universe is undeniable, and the contest between these forces in one form or another is forever unresolved without the invention and intervention of a saviour figure.

Traces of discourses made familiar during a childhood spent in the fundamentalist Christian Pentecostal church, where these tenets were regarded as a framework within which a moral life could be led, are to be discerned in the concerns that dominate Hospital's work. Among them is the reality of patriarchy in religion and in society and the power that it has to generate both good and evil. Added to this intrinsic propensity, the nature of both these states is essential and personal since they can only be identified from within the
context of individual socialisation and therefore the singularity of a particular view of good and evil must be considered as part of a larger belief system.

The general fundamentalist Christian position on sin is explicated by James Barr in his work, *Fundamentalism*, when discussing ‘the basic depths of sin’:

At most one might say that the consciousness of particular faults, a consciousness socially conditioned, plays a significant part in the sense of guilt, and the fundamentalist preaching of human sinfulness appeals to this sense of guilt. But in any fairly educated context, ... even extreme fundamentalist doctrine would lay the emphasis not on any list of detailed sins but on the universal and almost metaphysical character of sin. (26)

This fundamentalist view of sin as an abstract theological construct is part of the discourse made familiar during her fundamentalist childhood and Hospital’s consciousness of the presence and the power of evil may be seen to relate to this belief and to the congregational conditioning of the church in which she grew up. In view of this, the constant background menace increasingly evident in her work seems almost ideological while the Pentecostal millenarian ideology would account for the atmosphere of expectation and uncertainty in her work. Although she writes of a wider perception, outside her own theological roots, of the phenomenon of evil as it appears to a consensus in society, expanding the idea of the ‘universal and metaphysical’ nature of sin, she appears to agree with David Jasper’s statement that:

Evil, meanwhile, remains a fact and a problem - has, indeed, forced its way into the very core of the argument. (118)

Her preoccupation with relative reality may be seen to derive from childhood memories of the difference between her domestic and social experience. No longer a member of the Pentecostal Church, her role as mediator has nevertheless continued into Hospital’s adult life. In the Author’s Note to her short story *The Mango Tree*, she explains this role.

What was extraordinary was the crossover into the world outside home-and-church.

I have been a translator, a decoder of signs, an interpreter, a mediator of one world to another, from an early age. (Disher 1)

Negotiating this difference between the experience of life as it was lived inside ‘home-and-church’, with theological, ethical and moral parameters clearly delineated, and the blurred areas of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ behaviour that society outside expected, would raise questions of reality. Both worlds existed only while she moved within their particular realities, and the moving from one to the other served to emphasise even more strongly the subjective relativity of lived experience. The postmodernist nature of Hospital’s narrative is in total accordance with this constant fracturing of point of view, necessary to the interpretation of one world to another, an almost schizoid position from which both worlds can be inhabited in turn. The
rigidity of this division softens with the severed ties of maturity and somewhat inevitably, the physical separation from family and church culture and the proliferation of competing and parallel discourses encourages the suspension of belief. As noted by Nancy T. Ammerman,

“In a culture in which there is a great deal of stability and agreement on the way life should proceed, beliefs are part of the fabric of life. To be part of one’s culture and to affirm those beliefs are inseparable. In such situations, one is held by beliefs about ultimate reality. But once that culture is disturbed by change or outside intrusion or mobility, beliefs lose their taken-for-granted character. They must be consciously held.” (14)

Hospital’s retention of the basic values of those early ethical teachings of morality and justice have influenced her adult intellectual reality, and resulted in the production of novels which deal with the use of power implicit in both church and state. They address the issues of sin and redemption in society, and the effect of good and evil as they impact on the human condition. Her concern for the marginalised in society is apparent in her work and in an interview with Garry Disher she confirms this.

“We, and the other families in the small inner-city Brisbane congregation, were working-class and hard-up, and looking back from this distance I understand how the church gave validation and comfort to lives that were economically and socially marginal.” (2)

In this context, Ammerman’s statement is affirmed and Hospital appears to have abandoned the rigours of fundamentalism for a more liberal approach to these problems, but her concern for social justice remains informed by the essential values of childhood which are still ‘consciously held’ and are reaffirmed by her own life experience.

The power of evil featured strongly in such bible-based Fundamentalist Christian religions as the Pentecostal Church and it is not surprising that Hospital has carried into her writing the idea of the forces of good and the forces of evil engaged in a power struggle for the soul of humankind. The patriarchal nature of all societies and indeed of belief systems, ensures that power resides in the dominant male and this idea is emphasised by her choice of women as the marginalised ‘other’ in most of her work.

In The Ivory Swing, the lives of two women from vastly different cultures are explored and although initially they appear to follow very different paths, Hospital reveals how the power of diverse traditions as well as the power of diverse religious and cultural views impact on the lives of the two women. She presents a young Hindu widow, Yashoda, who struggles to assert her independence from the patriarchal domination of her husband’s family and their expectations for her future, from within the mores of their ancient culture. Her life is contrasted with that of Juliet, the wife of a visiting Canadian academic.
Into the tropical inertia of Southern India and the timeless rhythms of ancient traditions that restrict the life of one woman, the Western ideas and mores of another drop like stones into a still pool, the ripples spreading outwards to affect the lives of both women. Hospital examines the standards of behaviour demanded both by religious and societal expectations that eventually triumph over the acquired sophistication of Yashoda’s western education, and finds that the obligations of caste are as demanding and repressive as those of religious observance.

It is in The Ivory Swing that Hospital first demonstrates the inevitable fate of a sensuous, rebellious woman in an inflexible society. She likens Yashoda’s tragic death to that of a caged Bird of Paradise found dead on the floor of the cage, its gorgeous plumage ruined and destroyed. This theme is further explored and expanded to include the Canadian woman, whose experience as the wife of an academic living in the patriarchal inflexibility of university life in Canada is almost as stifling as the young Indian widow’s in rural India. The ultimate fates of the two women are very different, as are their cultural choices, but their shared desperation remains an indictment of women’s continued colonisation by disparate religions and societies.

For Hospital, the heat, lush vegetation and the fecundity of tropical growth seems synonymous with sexuality. Referring to a childhood spent in Queensland, she has said in interview with Garry Disher, that the richness and lushness of the tropics are ‘powerfully subversive of puritanism’. It is this subversion and the subsequent loss of power that patriarchy finds so dangerously threatening. Taking Genesis as a paradigm, Gerda Lerner points to the Edenic myth as the defining moment in Judeo-Christian culture when the act of procreation was transferred from women to men through the intervention of a male God. The role of women was thus diminished and the passive metaphor of the ‘ploughed field’ replaced the empowering image of the ‘fertile Earth’ which women had historically held in earlier goddess-oriented societies.

The intensely resonant sexuality of the Old Testament’s Song of Solomon has seldom been surpassed, yet the male hierarchy of the Judeo-Christian tradition, refuses to acknowledge its physical character, declaring it to have a purely sacred definition. The accompanying metaphorical statement, appearing in the annotated King James version of the Bible, sees it as representing, ‘The church’s love unto Christ, The mutual love of Christ and his church’ (Solomon’s Song 5:2-3). This imposes an interpretation that rejects the poem’s powerful message of sexual love between man and woman, and effectively denies woman’s role as an equal partner in sexual union, reinforcing patriarchy’s position of women as passive victims.

Two threads of sexual obsession dominate The Ivory Swing: Juliet’s husband, David’s for Yashoda, and Juliet’s sister, Annie’s for the young Indian student, Prem. Then there is the
less physical but nevertheless deeply felt attachment of the lonely widower, Matthew
Thomas for Yashoda, and Juliet’s dreams of her ex-lover, Jeremy.

In reality, Juliet is too exhausted by heat and housework to respond enthusiastically
to her husband’s sexual expectations, and too occupied with thoughts of her former lover to
notice his preoccupation with the lovely widow. Annie represents the independence that
Juliet craves but she can also be seen as a sexually aggressive female who has deliberately
seduced an inexperienced young Indian. Her pursuit can be seen as a kind of postcolonial role
reversal, an ironic comment on the sexual colonisation of Indian women by the Raj. Her
freedom to pursue Prem, the virginal activist, contrasts sharply with Juliet’s feelings of
entrapment.

In this first novel, Hospital uses a structuralist methodology, creating unusual
pairings that emphasise the similarity underlying difference. Different races, different
cultures and different expectations are joined in opposition, while similar emotions, similar
traditions and similar religions are separated by circumstance. Her characters are haunted
by the contrasts they encounter, whether political, societal, or cultural. Power is contrasted
with helplessness and endeavour with fatalism. Prem’s emotions on waking beside Annie are
a tangle of opposites. He thinks of the social inequalities between their worlds:

... men ate what meagre grain was available, the women and children drank the
cooking water. Meanwhile Canadian women daily threw out scraps that would feed
his family for a week. (Swing, 192)

In a further pairing of opposites his political and sexual turmoil is apparent as he sees his
lover as his enemy:

And now Prem was facing the enemy who leaned towards him with parted lips and
golden hair, beautiful as Radha. He was in a chaos of contempt and desire, anger and
hatred and yearning. She was woman. He had gone to sleep holding her hand. Last
night he had thought of her as a fellow struggler against Congress Party
hooliganism. This morning she was a Westerner. He was in anguish. (Swing, 192)

There are many more pairings in this work and Hospital’s point is well made: if we look
beyond the obvious difference we find fellow travellers.

Yashoda ultimately succumbs to centuries of traditional male rule and surrenders to
the supremacy of her own cultural mores over the acquired values of her Western education.
Hospital sympathetically reveals the sheer weariness that leads to the moment of surrender
and the belief in the inescapable retribution for sin:

Yashoda felt exhausted, as though she had arrived at the end of a long and dizzying
downward slide from a mountain peak that had been exhilarating... She had fallen
back into the world of stern uncles. There was no escaping. She had always been part
of that world too, and she had violated its terms. For great sins there are great penalties. (Swing 226)

In these words, Hospital reveals not only a Christian view of retribution for sin, but attributes to Yashoda a belief in the Hindu Karmic law. Huston Smith, in his book The World's Religions, explains this law and notes that the circumstances of the next incarnation depend on the way life is lived in this one:

... it commits the Hindu who understands it to complete personal responsibility. Each individual is wholly responsible for his or her present condition and will have exactly the future he or she is now creating. (64)

When the Westerners see the damage their interference and encouragement has brought to Yashoda, they are appalled. Seeing her sitting on the floor of her little house, her beautiful face hidden, her head shaved, her bangles smashed, stunned and traumatised, reconciled to her fate, they see the dark side of this bright figure:

Yashoda was unreachable, locked inside her fear and loss, the ravaging underside of her euphoria. (Swing 226)

Although it is the women of her husband's household who carry out her punishment for the perceived crime of entertaining a male friend in her house, it can be seen as a measure of women's position in a male world that forces them to share her shame by inflicting it.

An extraordinary rationalisation of this punishment is offered by the head of the family, Shivaraman Nair, when he says,

A woman's duty is to keep herself free of public speculation. Gandhi himself, Professor David, on his own ashram, commanded the head of a young woman to be shaven. Though she herself had done no wrong, she had by her carnal beauty caused lust and impurity to enter the thoughts of the young male disciples. Gandhi himself has seen the need to curb the carnal power of a woman. (Swing 230)

His words lead an apparently acquiescent David to realise that they share the shame of sexual desire for Yashoda and so Hospital gives us another of her unexpected pairings, the conservative Indian and the liberal Canadian. The ludicrous injustice of blaming a woman for inciting sexual excitement simply because of her beauty, does not apparently occur to either of the two men. A view reflected in the almost universal male view of women. As Sue Lovell notes in LiNO (1990),

Yashoda's helpless suffering foreshadows the exploration, particularly in Borderline, of the reality of hidden cruelty within cultures. (80)

There are no victors in The Ivory Swing, there is only an inevitable compromise; as Juliet realises at last the impossibility of living a dual existence:

It was, ultimately, fatal to careen between worlds... Her life was segmented as an orange, her fragments held together by the mere rind of her will. (Swing 250)
The novel ends without closure, as does all her subsequent work, and she reveals a view of life that she continues to expound in later works.

We are like trapeze artists who swing away from each other, she thought. It is a delicate act, full of balance and hazard. For such a long time we have been skillful, never falling though never certain. Will we touch on the next inward arc? Or will we miss? (Swing 252)

If Hospital’s work is indeed a highwire act, then she is working without a net.

In Borderline she expands her interest in the problem of alienation from the cultural, religious and geographical. Here she considers the areas of moral choice, political difference, and the danger of dissent, inevitably discovering postcolonial overtones in the process. Christina Thompson describes this novel as:

... an intrigue involving the illegal El Salvadorian [sic] refugees, the radical Left, the extreme Right, the FBI, the border patrol and a whole lot of dangerous others. (170)

In identifying and defining these perceived areas of concern, Hospital’s novel, inspired by a news item about an incident on the Canadian-US border, delves into the contradictory nature of the political representation of events. Christina Thompson observes that this work explores

The reality of experience to the reality of news, the reality of facts to the reality of fiction. (171)

Postcolonial ideas of marginalised societies and the patriarchal power base of large and influential countries, are set against a background of residual religious concerns.

Elizabeth Perkins points out, that this novel exposes

... what happens when a great nation decides to reinforce the corrupt and oppressive powers within a small neighbouring state because it is economically and politically expedient to do so... Both Canada and El Salvador assume the status of the female in a patriarchy controlled by the United States. (52)

From within the comfort and security of their Caucasian majority, most of the population remain unaware of the evil that surrounds them, the plight of political refugees and the atrocities from which they have fled.

In the Yacker 2 interview, Hospital makes it clear that to avoid what she saw as ‘moral presumption’, she chose a male narrator (255). Her inability to understand the male view was intended to mirror her inability to understand the life of a Salvadorean refugee woman. Dolores’ situation and motives were as incomprehensible to her as those of an affluent well educated Canadian male, Jean-Marc. Hospital tells the story through male eyes to establish a primary Other from the outset and Jean-Marc as narrator is as confused about events and ignorant of outcomes as is the reader. He is far from the omniscient God-
creator of the realist narrative and may reflect Hospital’s distrust of imposed certainties resulting from disillusionment with Fundamentalist inerrancy.

Hospital herself acknowledges a metafictional intention in this work. In a letter to her editor, published in Meanjin (1988), she explains:

It is meant to be muddled, self-conscious and intrusive. The structure of the book, the mode of writing, the tone - are all bound up with my moral and literary purpose.

(561)

The representation here of the powerlessness of even a male narrator, serves to emphasize the greater patriarchal power of the state, when even the customary dominance of the male protagonists is subjugated to a political imperative. The two FBI agents who persecute and finally destroy - we assume - Felicity and Gus, are seen as mindless thugs acting under the orders of a sinister, omnipotent power structure.

In the same letter Hospital comments further on her expectations of the effect of the text on her readers:

Now, I don’t expect all these literary-mythic-moral-political concerns to leap fully articulated into the reader’s mind. Art doesn’t work that way. But they are all there, and I do expect them to smoulder away and germinate below the level of consciousness.

Her expectations noted, it is nevertheless easy to lose oneself in the twists and turns of the plot. From the moment the real action begins at the border, to the ambiguous ending, we are engaged with the struggle of her characters against the overwhelming power of the state, a power all the more disturbing because its source is not specific.

In another sense of the word, power also resides in Hospital’s language which strongly evokes the situations met by the characters, personalising their ethical dilemmas and so raising awareness of these issues. The impact of the border incident is enhanced by the image she employs of a woman enclosed in a carcass, the symbolic birth of a new life for the refugee, emerging from the dead carcass in a scene of charnel house horror. Like Seymour’s paintings, Hospital’s work is full of symbols, signposts to a personal world where only she can read the signs and where the reader follows a tortuous path between worlds.

They stared at the carcass nearest them. Its unzipped front, wilting in the hot air, curled inwards - a caesarean wound around a fetus. Something, someone, was in there.

A woman. (Borderline, 35)

This woman, whom we will eventually know to be Dolores Marquez, is an extreme example of the marginalised and victimised. Other whose very existence is almost obsessively examined by Hospital in all her novels. The degree of difference and alienation of her protagonists has increased in each new work, as have the religious and moral dilemmas imposed on them.
As mentioned in the introduction, she spoke to Candida Baker about her encounter with difference in the ghettos as she researched Borderline. The result of this first-hand experience is evidenced in her insightful passage decoding the world of the poor living on the margin of affluence, only one subway stop away from the world of Harvard University with its deliberate, intellectual shabbiness. She sets Felicity in these streets, searching in vain for Dolores and realising at last the vast gulf between their worlds:

Felicity had thought that a cotton skirt and blouse would be sufficiently unremarkable ... Now she saw that she was marked. Conspicuously alien. This was far more than a matter of her clothing... It had also to do with the condition of her hair, her teeth, her skin... Every step advertised her foreignness. A woman on welfare walks differently from a woman with an earned income. (Borderline 179 my italics)

She has also documented in interview her fondness for what she calls ‘bad Catholic boys.’ Ever since suffering incidents of bullying at school and the discovery that it was only these so-called ‘bad boys’ who defended her, she has admired their ‘moral courage.’

Gus, then is just such a ‘bad boy’. A struggling Catholic and a travelling salesman who loses his fight with temptation on every trip, he suffers agonies of guilt. His weakness and vacillation emphasise the ideological patriarchy of the Catholic Church, and his uncertainties over sin are contrasted with the priest’s absolute conviction when he tells the police that:

‘You see, I’ve had this experience before. They always have to tell me obliquely. It’s a dreadful and violent thing, of course, but the sad truth is, they know they are partly to blame’... He knew it was the usual story ... ‘up to a certain point she had been willing’. (Borderline 82)

Finding the injured refugee women gone, Felicity tries to explain her danger to the priest, who on the evidence of two smashed wine glasses and a blood-stained bed, is certain of rape and abduction. From the Hindu uncle, Shivaraman Nair, in The Ivory Swing, to the French-Canadian Catholic priest in Borderline, the universality of this male-myth of female guilt is presented by Hospital for our consideration.

The myth is explored more savagely in The Last Magician, a sensuous mix of tropical rainforest, urban squalor, sexual and political power and an emotionally driven return to the past. Hospital exposes the soft underbelly of life in two Australian cities with vastly different cultures. The languid, moral laisser faire of tropical Brisbane and the egocentricity of a violent and greedy Sydney. As in all her work the characters she presents are the marginalised, the alien and the vulnerable. She is again the advocate for those who cannot raise their own voice. David Callahan writes:
In these encounters with strangers and the strange, Hospital is clearly committed to the contemporary validation of the Other, at least within the literary world... Her exploration of difference is multi-layered: there are the encounters of men with women, the encounters of people from different cultures, and, subsuming these two, the encounter of the powerful with the powerless. (23-4)

Hospital’s last magician is Charlie, an Australian-born Chinese, visually different, he is alienated and marginalised, a fringe-dweller. An outsider within the society he was born into, his magic is in his camera, with which he records events in that society that only he sees as significant. Step by step the seduction of this shadow world of minute and manipulated detail draws the reader into the arcane realm of the quarry. This metaphor for displacement and exile is taken from Dante’s Inferno, the multi-layered and graduated regions of hell. The quarry, even as a state of mind, provides a convenient place for the wealthy and powerful of the city to sweep the less fortunate out of sight. Hospital emphasises this symbolism by naming Charlie’s bar ‘The Inferno’, with its upstairs brothel patronised by upright members of the Establishment.

The quarry was inspired by a photograph of a goldmine in Brazil, where hundreds of workers toiled ant-like up and down dangerously rickety ladders, and over this powerful visual image, Hospital literally superimposes Charlic’s photographs of the underground shaft in Sydney. With this device she deliberately demonstrates the similarity between our culture and that of those we regard as not as democratic and morally enlightened as our own. The world of the affluent and the world of the dispossessed exists in all societies, and the exploitation of the poor and vulnerable is a universal attribute of power.

The possibility of the quarry existing as a reality somewhere under the sleazy world of Sydney’s red light district is disturbing, but the alternative interpretation of it as a metaphorical but parallel world of suffering within our affluent society is even more chilling. The effect of this dichotomy which seeks to interpret messages from the feral population of both worlds is to create a continuing imbalance. These two sides of society, are, as David Callahan notes, irrevocably linked.

... these two zones are intimately related for the quarry maintains respectability in some way, providing the terms through which respectability defines itself. (24)

Mainstream society defines itself in terms of its difference from the Other, distancing itself from those outside the establishment, and so reinforcing its own power base. Men define themselves as not female, the white middle class as not black fringe dwellers and so on. The quarry is necessary to the self image of the ‘respectable’ in society and Hospital subtly presents its inexplicable attraction for them as well as its predictable repulsion.

The baroque beauty of the rainforest takes on a sinister connotation when human remains are discovered there. The lost innocence of the young people who cavort in the forest
stream in Charlie's film lends a postlapsarian mythical element and Hospital's oblique references to chaos theory and the effect of minute displacements in nature are embedded in the text. The rainforest broods at the edge of consciousness, waiting in silence for the flutter of butterfly's wings to set in motion a turbulent train of events. She hints at a mystery early in the narrative, presenting the rainforest as a secretive and sinister place with conflicting images of rampant life, fetid decay, sex and death.

The main protagonists in The Last Magician, Lucy, Charlie, Cat, Catherine, Robinson Gray and Gabriel, are subjected to vivid images of the past. Memories of past emotions and experiences invade their day-to-day existence. In Lucy's case, an event she experienced as a girl and can recall only in a filmic mode because its bizarre quality defies reality, changed her perspective forever. Through her as narrator, Hospital describes what happened as 'shape-shifting'. The shock of seeing a derelict woman 'howling like a dingo', expose herself defiantly and derisively, on a train platform, catapults Lucy into a sense of seeing the world very differently. For a terrifying moment she becomes the woman, knowing the physicality of her fear, seeing the staring crowd as a pack of savage dogs. Then, the spell broken, she is herself again but knowing herself to be forever changed by the experience. This discovery of a parallel world, seen from inside the Other and looking out, influences Lucy's whole life and demonstrates the need for empathy as opposed to judgement. It is signalled by Hospital's quotation from Woody Allen which precedes Book One:

There is no question that there is an unseen world. The problem is how far is it from midtown and how late is it open? (Magician 1)

That Hospital's obsession with difference derives from her experience in childhood of religious difference within her family and gender difference within society is apparent from frank interviews she has given to Candida Baker and others. David Callahan suggests that her work also emphasises differences within ourselves:

In Hospital's work, then, we are always already Other to ourselves, and this constitutes the starting point for accepting and valuing difference in others. We all need to shape-shift. (31)

Charlie is shape-shifting when he weaves his past into that of his ancestor, Fu Hsi. As the adult photographer-magician, he recalls how, as the young Charlie Fu Hsi Chang, he read in a volume of ancient mythologies of China, the Book of Emperors. He entered in imagination its richly illustrated world where his tormentors could not reach him.

He enters the painting... he meets with friends, he records adventures, he consorts with swordsmen and courtesans. He consults the 'Book of Secrets' where the glittering future is revealed. (Magician166)

The power of the dominant culture is demonstrated in society's acceptance of the cruel racism and bullying of the boys in the street gangs. The experience lingers for Charlie, and
the legacy of his confusion when they forced him to agree that he was born in China, not Innisfail, lives on in his belief that there are no right answers, only the answers people want to hear. Reliving these early traumas through her characters is a cathartic experience for Hospital, and Charlie’s victimisation on racial grounds mirrors her own childhood exclusion because of her family’s fundamentalist religious beliefs. Her interviews are full of references to such happenings and her own solution to the resulting residue of uncertainty and panic is worked out in her characters.

Hospital uses Charlie’s fictional life to demonstrate how he resolves those feelings of vulnerability and exposure with his camera, which has become a tool to explore the lives of others. On another level it is a barrier, a defence against intrusion into his own life and he uses it to translate the messages that are his own imposed truths. His obsessive passion for Cat, as well as his love for Catherine, leads him to a world of captured images that enable him to ‘see what he has seen’, and to his search within these invented realities for clues to her ultimate fate. As Lucy says:

Charlie believed the world was thick with messages, you could hardly move for secret codes in Charlie’s world. (Magician 166)

Hospital is concerned with the paradox of power. Among the group of children from the Brisbane of the past, Robinson Gray, the private schoolboy, despite being handsome, rich and privileged, fails to gain acceptance in Cat’s group. Torn between his fear of and fascination with the wild free spirit of Cat, and the need to impress the coolly beautiful Catherine, he is disdainfully dismissed by both. So the power of his social position and the unstated power of accepted male dominance, is subverted and reversed by this humiliation. In his adult life as a judge, he, like Charlie, carries the unresolved hurt of his youth. Behind his mask of self righteous urbanity lies the savagery of the rejected schoolboy. A savagery that has been carefully hidden beneath his public persona of distinguished and powerful upholder of the law.

In this work of Hospital’s, full of symbols and signposts to understanding, Robinson Gray is the symbol of that ultimate power in society, the Rule of Law. But as Sonny Blue, a regular client of Sheba, the prostitute who works upstairs at The Inferno, he unconsciously reveals his obsessions in the photographs he takes of her. Sheba’s theory that photographs are less about the image than they are about the image-maker is reinforced. He is in turn hostage to the power of his sexual obsessions for Cat, his buried guilt for his part in the childhood death of her brother, and for his part in the subsequent tragedy of her life when she is blamed for it.

Robinson Gray’s son, Gabriel is an enigmatic figure. Gabriel’s difference, unlike Charlie’s is not only visual, but alone of Hospital’s characters, he represents the purity that is the antithesis of evil, connecting father and son in another of her unlikely pairings of
opposites. Charlie is fascinated by his beauty and makes many symbolic images of him as the angel Gabriel. Lucy mocks his concern for her, calling him 'The judge's son himself, all dressed up in his hairshirt, atoning for the sins of the fathers' (Magician 128).

Kate Temby sees Hospital's fascination with '...the nature and varieties of power... (47)' as the dominant element in The Last Magician, but is troubled by the damaging of those on the fringe of society, and doubts Hospital's claim that they too wield a kind of power:

Both the representations of marginalised people and groups and the understandings of power provided in the novel are ambivalent, as the marginalised are both oppressed and powerful, yet their power is impotent. (48)

Temby also doubts the integrity of Hospital's feminist position, reasoning that the impotence of her female characters holds out no hope for women to control their own destinies. However, I would argue that no empowerment is given to women by writers who portray as strong and victorious only those women who are endowed with economic, physical and societal advantages, and to ignore the oppressed and marginalised majority is to ignore the triumph of their survival and the tragedy of their defeat.

In her latest work, Oyster, Hospital explores areas of even greater difference. This is a novel of the millennium. An apocalyptic vision of religious fanaticism, with allusions to the Second Coming - with Oyster as Messiah.

It is the Beast of the Apocalypse run amok. This is the Day of Wrath. (Oyster 45)

The ultimate evil is presented in the person of a religious cult leader and the tangible line between perceived good and perceived evil fades as the question of judgement from within the context of a belief system is explored. The earlier presence in her work of unspecified evil lying in wait for the unwary, and a sub-text of the notion of sin, retribution and possible redemption that signals an early religious influence, has evolved into a focussed concern for the excesses of an identified power. Not until Oyster, does an overt personification of evil appear in her narratives along with an exploration of premillennial issues. In an Author's note to The Mango Tree she notes:

I grew up in a very religious, fundamentalist family which considered itself to be living always in imminent expectation of the Second Coming. (Disher 1)

Significantly, Oyster perceives his own role as that of Saviour and Messiah, his destiny is to lead his 'chosen people' into the new age. This millenarian concept can be seen in the light of the fundamentalist teachings of Hospital's childhood but more crucial to her latest work is her adult questioning of the phenomenon of patriarchal power in contemporary extreme religious cults and the total obedience of cult members to their leader. The fundamentalist millenarian position is put by Barr:

... the main emphasis in conservative evangelical religion, and even in quite extreme fundamentalism, is not on heaven and hell as the destiny of the individual after
death, but on the second coming of Jesus Christ in personal and physical form... and the transition to a new and different stage. (35)

By presenting in Oyster such a deviation from this traditional view, the transferring of the role of Saviour to a charismatic religious leader and the acceptance by the group of such extreme, even bizarre behaviour as is required of them, she is reviving memories of Jonesboro and Waco, and it is against this background that Oyster’s story unfolds. Above all Hospital is a great storyteller. She may not be easily accessible, but her postmodern style of narrative is worth the effort to understand and her underlying intent is always to generate debate on such issues as should concern readers.

This is Hospital’s most overtly religious work, influenced perhaps by the fundamentalist fire and brimstone preaching of her childhood, filtered through her own life experience and informed by her research into religious cult mentality. It is also about the capacity for evil of decent people when greed enters their lives. Greed for opal and greed for salvation, lust for power and lust for innocent flesh, and the all-encompassing and overriding biblical idea of the desert wilderness as a moral battleground.

In far outback Queensland’s opal country, where the permanent population of the tiny town of Outer Maroo numbers only eighty seven, a combination of the fundamentalist Christians of the Living Word congregation and hardened outback unbelievers, have lived for years in comparative harmony. Then there emerges like a mirage from the surrounding desert, the lost stranger, Oyster. In his wake arrives a steady stream of outsiders seeking salvation and the almost mythical mother lode of opal, rumoured to be just down the track from Outer Maroo, and now known to the initiated as Oyster’s Reef. The local people are soon outnumbered and uneasy and they begin to detect a sinister kind of mist emanating from the desert that affects people in strange ways. This symbolic fog of fear can be read as a metaphor for the collective burden of guilt and dread that they all carry to some degree.

Hospital describes it as:

... some terrible and indefinable emanation that suggested... but no one wanted to think about what it suggested. Some, in retrospect, claimed it was moral decay; though it was probably the simple stink of fear. (Oyster 4)

A kind of communal madness possesses all the inhabitants when this phenomenon that they call ‘Old Fuckatoo’ arrives with its faint smell of sulphur and the presentiment of evil. Against this background of unknown, unnameable fear the old questions about image, reality and time continue to be addressed. However, the emphasis is even more strongly placed than in any of her previous work, on religious experience, the need for belief, and the nature of religious cults.

Power is shared between the lecherous grazier, Andrew Godwin, the owner of the town’s only hotel, Bernie O’Donahue and the Living Word’s leader, the evangelical
hypocrite Dukke Prophet. Previously known as Mr. Dukke van Kerk of the South African High Veldt, he foresaw the inevitable end of apartheid and bought a cattle ranch in America, becoming an American citizen. When, as Hospital says 'social change' proved threatening to his view of life, he moved on to a more favourable social climate in outback Queensland. She concludes his history by saying ironically:

He owns 250,000 acres and is now a born-again Australian, passionately opposed, naturally, to any change in the constitution or the flag. (Oyster 80)

Making a fortune from opal smuggling and amassing a huge cache of arms, the purpose of which is unspecified but sinister, their power stems from the town's compliance, born of ignorance, apathy and fear.

Challenging this unholy trio, there is the growing influence and mesmerising power of the charismatic cult leader, Oyster, who draws to himself a group of young New Age followers willing to submit to anything he demands, including their own destruction. There is the power of faith and the exploitation of millenarian fear, and once again there is the power of sexual threat and Hospital's recurring theme of two women placed in identical situations; one who survives capture and rape and one who doesn't.

If the lushly seductive Queensland rainforest conceals an ominous presence in The Last Magician, its extreme opposit, the desert wilderness of the Queensland outback reflects an even more oppressive image in Oyster. As in Borderline, Hospital takes a postcolonial position, exposing the repressive history of European settlement and the destruction of an ancient culture. Against the image of a desert devastated and exploited by the mining of the infamous Oyster's Reef, is the spiritual presence of the bora rings, and the aboriginal woman Ethel, who is patiently restoring them while she waits for her true aboriginal name to rise from the stones.

She has been putting the scattered rocks back where they belong, filling gaps in the circles and in the centuries. They have been here, the bora rings, for over twenty thousand years ... it is only in the past hundred, a hiccup in time, that indifferent graziers and the treads of their four-wheel drives have scattered the stones. She is waiting ... for the name history took from her. She is waiting to meet her other self. (Oyster 44)

Against this acknowledgment of imperialism, there is again the notion of both religious and cultural colonisation of women as Grazier Andrew Godwin uses his position as employer to demand sexual favours from Ethel, his housekeeper. Sixteen year-old Mercy Given, daughter of the deposed pastor of the Living Word congregation, and Jess, known as Old Silence, are the two female voices through which we hear this chilling tale of absolute male domination, but the majority of their dialogue is an interior discourse. The real language of power is employed by Hospital through her male characters, and varies according to their position in
the hierarchy of the town. Religious authority, economic authority and just sheer male authority informs their speech. Of the biblical authority of the Living Word elders, Mercy notes:

The elders cannot help themselves... They must always speak this way, it is like a disease. They reinfect one another at every prayer meeting and become incurable.

(Oyster 37)

Everyone in Outer Maroo knows about the opal traffic and the guns, no one wants foreigners to share in it and so no one speaks of it. However, it is with the assumed authority of Revelations that Oyster speaks when he tells them that God has gathered the chosen inside the fold and the gates of the city should be shut. This pattern of exclusivity towards others and protection of identity is a familiar part of the methodology employed by cult leaders. This isolation is necessary in order to ensure absolute loyalty and compliance by their followers to their fundamentalist beliefs, as evidenced in the studies of Ammerman:

Feeling this identity to be at risk in the contemporary era, they fortify it by a selective retrieval of doctrines, beliefs, and practices from a sacred past. These retrieved “fundamentals” are refined, modified and sanctioned in a spirit of shrewd pragmatism: they are to serve as a bulwark against the encroachment of outsiders who threaten to draw the believers into syncretistic, a religious, or irreligious cultural milieu. (835)

So when the town’s schoolteacher Susannah Rover, both a ‘foreigner’ and a woman, challenges the conspiracy of silence in the town, she reinforces both the religious and secular fear and provokes a savage reaction. Hospital links the power of Oyster’s words to the power of male opinion in the town and exposes the danger to women who ‘cross the line’. Confronting the drinkers in Bernie’s Last Chance hotel, Susannah Rover is mocked mercilessly:

“Big words, big fits, and too big for ‘er boots”, someone said. There was raucous laughter. (Oyster 69)

Hospital continues to expand upon the nature of this power:

Not a man would have prevented her from entering the bar if she had chosen to; not physically. But the air would have changed, the mood would have changed. It would have changed radically. She had crossed those lines before... She was familiar enough with all that: the boisterous warmth, the rough gallantry, the jokey sexual come-ons and their silky undercurrent of threat. (Oyster 57-8)

The voice of economic power comes from Bernie when he reminds Susannah that he pays her salary, and warns her to ‘just stick to what you got hired for (Oyster 52).’ She is employed by the three power brokers to teach the town’s thirteen children, because to send them to government schools outside Outer Maroo would risk the secret of the opal traffic leaking to the authorities.
Inevitably, the 'undercurrent of threat' surfaces and Susannah Rover, with her reckless accusations, is surrounded.

... the men closing the circle a little. There was a dreadful, mad, animal smell... and there wasn't much time, that was clear. (Oyster 71)

The schoolteacher's disappearance is a mystery which persists throughout the novel, creating a nagging sense of incompleteness and undiscovered catastrophe. From then on, Miss Rover appears only in Mercy's head, through the journal she left behind. Her words and Mercy's thoughts mingle in delicious subversion of the Living Word's teachings. It is tempting to see Miss Rover as Hospital's voice of reason:

Since her departure, Miss Rover has taken up permanent residence as a sniper inside Mercy's head... A belief in powerlessness is seductive, Mercy, and so is belief in a Higher Power. They both let me off the hook too easily. (Oyster 128)

The cult leader, Oyster, is the result of Hospital's research into the phenomenon of fundamentalist cults and the psychology of those who lead such movements and those who follow them. Father Paul Collins notes in The Australian's Review of Books:

The history of millenarian groups is mixed. Some are peaceful and retire into a self-engrossed yearning for salvation. Others espouse an ideology of violence and are prepared to kill in order to bring on the end of the world. (18)

Certainly in Oyster's Reef, the two ideologies live side by side. Oyster preaches an end-of-the-world scenario in which all those who refuse to accept his Messianic role are not only excluded from salvation, but are destroyed in the apocalyptic event. The peaceful members of the group are unable to escape from the Reef or to change the direction in which Oyster's greed for power is leading them. The mystery of the destruction of the Reef is unresolved as is the real motivation of Oyster, but Hospital offers an insight into the paranoid behaviour of such cult leaders in the words of a survivor:

He seemed to believe he was God, he felt embattled, he thought almost everyone else was Satan in the end. Maybe he thought he was taking his chosen few to the Promised Land. I don't know. I honestly don't know. Nobody knows. (Oyster 412-3)

The nature of patriarchal power then, is explored by Hospital in these four novels. The power of dominant cultures and religions in The Ivory Swing, the power of political imperative in Borderline, the power of the established order in society in The Last Magician, and finally, the ultimate power of a Messiah who promises immortality in Oyster, but in all four, there is a sense of a gendered power that sees difference as vulnerability, and otherness as an excuse for domination. In the following chapter the idea of this domination and the danger surrounding any challenge to its authority will be explored as will the nature of the perceived reality in which such dissent is located.
CHAPTER THREE
The Danger of Dissent and the Nature of Reality

For the characters in Hospital's work who resist the power of dominant cultures or religions there is always a price to be paid. She reveals a deep distrust of established systems as manifested in their treatment of those who, while marginalised and vulnerable, yet have the courage to rebel. That this attitude may stem from her own childhood experience of schoolyard bullying, unchecked by authority, and the fate of the few who defended her, has been documented in interviews published in LiNQ and Yacker 2. Hospital has an abiding concern for survivors of prevailing systems and the compromises they must make to accomplish this self-preservation.

In The Ivory Swing, dissent is presented in several ways and the reaction to it is just as diverse. In a hot and overcrowded Air India office, Hospital's main protagonist, Juliet, experiences the polite yet obdurate bureaucratic response to an inquiry regarding a parcel she has been sent. Her Western impatience with the perceived indolence of the staff leads her to exert a kind of residual colonial power over the superintendent. (Swing 52) Although Juliet is from Canada, a settler colony, Hospital allows her to assume the psychological power of the coloniser. With the implication of patronage in high places, Juliet appears to have overcome the Indian superintendent's traditional inertia. The official returns fifteen minutes later only to apologise profusely, but denying most politely the existence of any parcel, and effectively restoring the status quo in a non-threatening manner. Here Hospital is dealing with the social phenomenon of a postcolonial India struggling to cast off imposed western mores and systems of bureaucracy and return to its own traditional values and methods. Her own interpretation of this incident appears unclear. She could be seen to sanction the old colonial arrogance and attempted intimidation of the superintendent, or equally, to applaud the Indian's subtle victory.

A strong ethical sense, gained from her early years spent within the teachings of pentecostalism, leads her to reveal that other forms of dissent are not dealt with so smoothly. In the incident of the bus caught up in a riotous demonstration by opposing political factions (Swing 176), she shows that political protest by the population is ruthlessly suppressed. Juliet, David, Annie and the children are participants in a moment of India's history, but Hospital makes the point that, given the choice, most people would prefer to stay in their own comfortable environment, sympathetic, but safely removed from the necessity of action when Juliet reflects:

.. it was not, after all, so pleasant to be caught in the clutches of history, that she would prefer to be watching it, abstract and detached, on a television screen somewhere in the suburbs of another world... (Swing 176)
Her point concerning the different reaction to dissent and flouting of traditional values, is made even more strongly in the case of the rebellious young widow, Yashoda. The power of her uncles is totally reinforced by the power of cultural tradition, religious practices and State apathy, if not co-operation. In an interview with Ron Store, Hospital observes that in India she found:

'It's a very precarious existence for women, very frightening, and that's an issue very close to my heart; you know, how women survive with the sets of social expectations they're given. (27)'

Hospital's repeated concern with the contrast between the woman who is a survivor and the 'damaged woman' begins in this first novel with the harassment, persecution and finally, death of Yashoda. This is the climax to which the narrative has been building, and there is almost a feeling of relief in that her death, tragic as it is, releases the rising tension and serves as a catalyst which forces Juliet to reassess her life. Hospital's linking of the two women reinforces the notion that Juliet's own cultural and religious background has equipped her differently. She is educated, comparatively affluent and protected by her own society's view of the position of women, all of which allows her to make choices not available to Yashoda. David Callahan observes:

'To a limited extent, then, there is not simply "understanding" the Other going on in this novel but a degree of cohabiting with that Other, an attempt to reel it in from its oppositional margins. This is what marks Hospital's most successful explorations of different cultures encountering each other, and, as Margaret Schramm points out, Yashoda and Juliet operate as doubles in a typical Hospital strategy of twinned characters, each a version of the other. (27)'

But Juliet is empowered by her culture as Yashoda is not. Juliet is the survivor.

In the interview with Ron Store, Hospital reveals that it is in order not to become like the damaged women in her books, of not being overwhelmed by events, that she writes as she does, and that this fear of not being in control is the fear of the 'shadow-self'. The shadow-self is that self we may have become if the circumstances of our lives had been different. Outcomes can depend on such simple choices as turning a corner or walking straight on, or in the case of Felicity in Borderline, on helping someone in need or not becoming involved. However, Yashoda and Dolores are victims of societies which offered them little choice and no chance of controlling their outcomes.

Hospital relates her own experience of women friends who, although privileged, made unfortunate choices, and observes that although education, wealth and social standing can empower women, these criteria are by no means a guarantee of survival. Many of her friends who appeared to have all these advantages, became casualties of the system. She tells Store:
I have a long history of association with very intelligent, super-intelligent, very sensitive women who are dead. My closest friend in high school was very, very bright, became a doctor... then in her early twenties killed herself... My other best friend in high school is dead by her own hand... I'm always writing in order not to be Verity or not to be Dolores or not to be Victoria or Yashoda - the women who don't make it in my books. (20)

These experiences inform the philosophical base of her novels, in which she uses a postmodernist methodology to establish a theoretical feminist position that resonates with, and in opposition to, her early background of fundamentalism.

In Borderline, Hospital once again writes about two women in very different social, economic and political circumstances. But unlike Juliet in The Ivory Swing, there is no survivor in this cautionary tale of dissent and rebellion against the patriarchal power of the state. The moral issues in Borderline reflect Hospital's early fundamentalist Christian teaching and the crisis of conscience experienced by Felicity the American and Gus the Canadian, exposes a frequent dilemma in democratic cultures. The question she poses is whether intervention on behalf of a stranger in the name of morality is justifiable in view of possible damaging consequences to the innocent families of the rescuers. Hospital theorises that morality can have more than one face, that the impulse to act morally does not always produce a moral result, and in the process she calls into question the position of both Church and State.

In the exchange at the border between the border guard and Felicity, Hospital exposes an officially sanctioned cynicism:

'Nothing stops them,' the officer said. 'They'll cross twenty states, God knows how, bribe their way out of anything. You wouldn't believe. Fear of death, they try to tell you, but it's the green stuff they want.' He rubbed his fingers together. 'Not enough to go round down there, so they come to nibble at our pie. Tens of thousands in Boston and New York, and now it's spreading to us. All this economy needs' (Borderline, 38).

This censorious attitude posits political refugees as economic refugees and absolves the state - and its citizens - of any responsibility for the consequences of their deportation. The harsh reality of the refugee situation is outside the more fortunate life experiences of those to whom refugees will always be alien intruders on their own comfortable reality. The possibility also exists that the cynicism is a protective mechanism on the part of the border guard, to whom the daily contact with state indifference to human suffering is just too painful to acknowledge.

In a letter to her editor, Hospital reveals that the question of dual realities and moralities form the basis of her narrative. She writes:

The shadowy interplay of reality and unreality (and its political, social and moral dimensions and implications) is the major theme of the book... (560)
She also draws attention to her fascination with the courage and endurance of dissenters, which, as noted above began in her childhood, and expresses her regard for those possessing... 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. (560)

At the same time she confesses to her own feelings of presumption at speaking for those refugees. She tells of this dilemma in an interview with Candida Baker,... it finally seemed to me that the least arrogant way to handle the material was to use a male narrator, with whom, after all, I had a lot more in common than I have with a female Salvadoran refugee whose marginality was so total that it was quite foreign to me. (255)

The difficulty of finding them a voice leads to a significant silence in this work. Writing to her editor Hospital observes:

(Note that Dolores speaks only once in the book, and that’s in Spanish, which is unintelligible to her listener). (561)

A parallel theme that surfaces in Borderline and later novels is the position of the artist as creator and the role that he or she fills within society and on other levels, the relationship of reality to art, the reliability of images, and the notion that a work of art changes its reality with each viewer. Felicity is the novel’s chief female protagonist and a gallery curator. She was the model for the notorious artist, Seymour, as famous for his amorous feats as for his sensuous and flamboyant art works. In Felicity’s dreams she has no reality save that of Seymour’s paintings of her. His power is the power of the creator, without the painting she has no existence. An expatriate from Queensland, Australia, with a childhood experience of tropical beaches and rainforests, she feels in the austerity of Canada’s climate the emptiness of loss. From the reality of a similar background, Hospital describes Felicity’s dream figure as trapped in Seymour’s stylistic black outline:

She fitted snugly inside her black outline but there were 144 square inches missing from the middle of her torso. Between her breasts and her pubic hair, the viewer could see straight through to the tropics: mango trees, coconut palms and white sand... Jasmine in fluted letters across her thighs announced: This is not a real woman.

(Borderline 19)

In this one paragraph she evokes the tyranny of borders, the expatriate’s empty core that holds her memories and an ironic allusion to the surrealist painting of a pipe by René Magritte entitled The Betrayal of Images. (Calvocoressi pl 30), which incorporates the famous line, 'Ceci n’est pas une pipe.'
In an interview with Garry Disher Hospital reveals that this plurality derives from her early social experience of what she calls the 'crossover' between her 'home-and-church' life and the necessity of interpreting one to the other and mediating conflicting points-of-view.

Felicity's rebellion comes after years of being defined by Seymour's paintings of her, of being objectified and commodified by them. When he finally leaves his wife she is labelled contradictorily by the media, as both seductive temptress and 'a missionary wail'. But a past of apparent dependency on male protection, and vivid dreams of capture within Seymour's parameter of framed canvas, Felicity has the outward appearance of sophistication. Her travel between India, Australia, Canada and America has brought a familiarity with airports and borders which lends these border encounters an ease of manner. A new independence comes with a new lover with whom she has a relationship that does not include possession of the loved one, and she leaves him for a solitary weekend across the border in Canada.

As well as posing a moral predicament for her protagonists, Hospital takes the opportunity to expose the sometimes brutal, sometimes merely oppressive patriarchy of the state in its dealings with the dissenter. It is at the border that Felicity takes the decision to become involved which ultimately leads to her death at the hands of the state. Her fate as a dissenter in democratic America is no different from that of Dolores as a dissenter in the totalitarian San Salvador. One example of the American government's persecution and punishment of those who demonstrated against the war in Vietnam, is documented in a television report by Nina Rosenblum (Through the Wire, 1990) concerning a detention facility purpose-built to detain women protesters who still remain in custody today. Surely this is a situation that is little better than the death squads in San Salvador. As a moralist, Hospital does not differentiate between the two systems of government, but makes a strong comment on the power structure of both, and her feminist position suggests that it is no accident that both victims are women, reinforcing the idea of oppression by a patriarchal state apparatus.

However, Hospital brings another dimension to the dissent debate in the character of Gus, the flawed Catholic who is in constant fear of being found out in his genuine or vicarious sins. His guilt, both real and imagined, leads to disturbing nightmares in which his sins are discovered and punished. That Gus risks all for a stranger at the border, reveals his innate decency despite his philandering ways, and his devotion to his family makes his decision even more courageous, as he has more to lose by it than does Felicity. Hospital continues to address the question of whether a strong religious and moral upbringing survives to influence the actions of the adult, and using Gus as an example, writes,

He wondered if remorse and compassion were tumescent for all men, or only for those trained by the Christian Brothers to keep morbid score of lusts for release in the orgasm of confession. (Borderline 59)
The deliberate prurience of her metaphors suggests that the sexual repression inherent in a strict religious childhood, regardless of denomination or creed, does indeed surface to influence adult attitudes. She addresses the question again, when she writes of his dreams and sexual fantasies that are always guilt-ridden and punitive and concludes that,

*Only Catholics had dreams like that... We’re marked from baptism, he thought.*

We’re trained to spend our lives in hell so we’ll consider purgatory a good deal.  

*(Borderline 66)*

Her admitted affection for ‘bad Catholic boys’ resulting from their defence of her as a child, is apparent in her sympathetic understanding of the moral dilemma faced by Gus. But she makes it clear that it is not an isolated state for him. His whole life is a moral dilemma.

However clearly Hospital appears to explicate her theme of patriarchal persecution by the state, the verity of her narrative is hostage to a metafictional device which posits two of the main protagonists as the creation of a third. This emphasises the relative nature of reality, which is one of her recurring themes. It is through the voice of Jean-Marc, the artist’s son, that we are presented with a reality that can be told only from within his own context and experience, and above all, from his own need. The only version of events is to be gathered from his memories and fantasies, which are themselves influenced by his passion for Felicity and the Oedipal overtones of his jealousy of his father. Hospital calls this ‘shadowy interplay’ the main theme of her book and makes very clear that she regards as essential to her intent the quotation at the beginning of her book:

*Once Chuang Chou dreamed he was a butterfly,*

*a butterfly flitting and fluttering around.*

*He didn’t know he was Chuang Chou.*

*Suddenly he woke up and there he was,*

*solid and unmistakable, Chuang Chou.*

*But he didn’t know if he was Chuang Chou*  
*who had dreamed he was a butterfly*  
*or a butterfly dreaming he was Chuang Chou.*  

*(Borderline 10)*

The motif of constructed reality is repeated in the paintings of Felicity by Seymour, her image of Dolores as La Magdalene and in Gus’s erotic dreams and wistful fantasies of himself as a good husband and father. The ultimate fate of the three dissenters is itself unclear, as if Jean-Marc cannot bear to surrender his power as creator in a final separation.

However, there may be a clue to Hospital’s thinking in the Ron Store *LiNO* interview and to her ideas as to the inevitable fate of her protagonists. She relates the ‘event horizon’ in astronomy to the point of no return in life experience:
Black holes eat stars. The star gets sucked into this totally dense matter so that once they cross the event horizon, they can't reverse, they can't back-pedal. (34)

The event horizon for Dolores, Felicity and Gus is the incident at the border, and their fate at the hands of the authorities is the black hole into which they disappear.

The twin concerns of reality and dissent continue to be explored in later work and reality is again the question in *The Last Magician*, as is the fate of those who fight against the status quo. Hospital's concern with difference and alienation is stronger than ever in this book. David Callahan believes that,

As a moralist, Hospital appears to see in the encounter with difference one of the principle moral problems of our time, a source of self-knowledge and - more dispiritingly - of violence. (24)

As in *Borderline*, the phenomenon of created reality is used in this work as a device to explore the multi-layered experience of difference. The sinister presence of the 'quarry' which Callahan sees as 'the underworld of the marginalised', penetrates the reader's consciousness and is the background against which the narrative insinuates its message of the gendered nature of power and the consequences of opposition to the hierarchical patriarchy.

The narrative of *The Last Magician* is structured from various subjective realities. These different layers of experience are inhabited by a cast of characters linked by a shared past which they cannot escape and which inevitably overlap. It is this cross-over into other realities, this almost surreal sense of *déjà vu*, that brings to this work a metafictional dimension. To Rosemary Jackson this quality in literature is reached by,

... imitating a dream world or a fractured external world, not breaking structures of the real within the text: neither metafictions nor purely surrealist fictions break the axis of the real: for them it is already broken. (165)

Despite this aura of unreality, Hospital's agenda is to expose the very real nature of power structures in society and to again warn of the seductive danger of dissent for those on its margin. Kate Temby, however, doubts the efficacy of her method and finds that:

... the novel's self-conscious questioning and metafictional narrative form subvert the possibility of providing a comprehensive or effective critique of oppressive power structures. (47)

Temby goes on to say that the power that Hospital attributes to the oppressed and marginalised in her narrative is impotent as there is no evidence of their final victory. I would argue that Cat, surely the novel's most oppressed character, marginalised from childhood because of the circumstance of poverty, class and gender, nevertheless continues to wield a persistent power over the other protagonists. Her memory serves as a constant source of guilt and desire in the case of Robinson Gray, loss and desire in the case of Charlie and loss alone on the part of Catherine and
her power is confirmed by their continuous search for her. Cat’s strength lies in her unforgettable character, in her dare-devil bravery and her unquenchable defiance of authority. This defiance is exhibited as a child when she speaks her mind at the inquest over her brother’s death, and which leads, inevitably, to her incarceration in a convent school for wayward girls. Hospital writes:

... then there was the inquest, and that was where Cat broke some unwritten rule. It was odd how the inquest turned into the trial of Cat. (Magician 216)

Cat challenges the class and gender bias of the judge when she accuses Robbie Gray and his friends of being responsible for the accident:

‘It wasn’t Willy they wanted to hurt, it was me. They knew they could never get me... it made them wanna spit chips’. (Magician 219)

Charlie’s memory of her bravado leads him, years later, to tell Lucy:

‘They couldn’t forgive what Cat knew about them, and they couldn’t forgive her for being articulate. They wouldn’t have minded if she’d screamed and sobbed... but they wouldn’t forgive Cat for despising them’. (Magician 223)

It is the memory of these qualities that influences her friends and subverts the authority of her enemies. Hospital confirms her centrality and acknowledges her power when she writes:

There was Cat’s kind of power which came from not caring if you got hurt and not caring what people thought of you.... In its way Cat’s power was absolute; yet people with a different kind of power... despised the kind of power that Cat had, ... they did not acknowledge that it was any kind of power at all. And yet, it seemed to Charlie, they were also afraid of her power. They ignored it because it made them uneasy, because it didn’t acknowledge their kind of power. (Magician 202)

This acknowledgment does not weaken the warning of how dangerous defiance of the dominant power structures can be, but lends a kind of hero status to those who openly dissent, no matter what the outcome. This unequal stratification of society leads to the expression of Hospital’s abiding concern for the vulnerability of those whose otherness and difference is visually apparent and is fuelled by her own childhood in which, as a member of the Pentecostal congregation, she was marked as different by her peers. The passage in which Charlie recalls schoolyard bullying is a revelation of her own experience:

... they do that in Australian schools, bash the difference out. Deviation from the ordinary is not permitted here except as a source of amusement (What’s matter, can’t you take a bloody joke, mate?), bewilderment is no excuse, certainly not in frightened little boys encumbered with arcane social rituals and bafflements and bed-wettings and sheer foreignness, which is a terrible liability in Australia. (Magician 77)
In *The Last Magician*, Cat is a pervasive presence whose indomitable spirit in the face of grim circumstances is held in vivid memory and, as Callahan notes:

... both Charlie and Catherine are represented as being in some way merged with Cat, as having Cat as part of their psyche. (29-30)

and her disappearance is the mystery central to this narrative and her presumed death is seen as the ultimate consequence of dissent.

As Callahan notes, Hospital is fascinated by both the attraction and the repulsion of difference shown by the powerful in a society. She demonstrates this difference by observing the various manifestations of power as well as in the ways her protagonists react to it and seems to infer that power and vulnerability are inevitably linked as binary opposites. Judge Robinson Gray wields great power in his judicial role and position in the hierarchy, but as Sonny Blue, in his need for sexual gratification he surrenders that power to a prostitute, one of the most vulnerable members of society. It is possible to view Robbie Gray’s secret sexual deviations as dissent against the ‘normal’ sexual mores of the establishment, but a stronger case can be made for the notion that he is a victim of his own memory of his part in the death of Willy and the ruin of Cat. His role on the bench must remind him every day of his own guilt and need for atonement, and leads to his sexual compulsion to be punished. His clandestine visits to Lucy ensure safety and anonymity because she is a prostitute. Hospital stresses another meaning of difference as well as the subjective nature of reality, when Gray’s idea of himself is contrasted with Lucy’s knowledge of his sexual dependency:

...the judge sees himself framed by ferns in the mirror above a sideboard, an elegant gentlemen in the prime of life, approaching fifty to be precise, a man of private sorrows and public distinction, a man of whom biographers will surely speak well, a man for whom his difficult son will one day write an anguished posthumous lament. (Magician 111)

To Lucy, however, ‘knowledge is a kind of power’ and in *The Last Magician*, Hospital is concerned with the transfer of power, a reversal of power positions which leads her to paraphrase Shakespeare and reflect,

What a piece of work is man! How weary in all seasons, how infinite in abasement, in action how like a child. ... lust is a frightened manchild in the dark. (Magician 116)

The women to whom the powerful entrust their sexual secrets are diminished by that knowledge, demonstrating as it does the low esteem in which they are held. They are considered not worth prevarication. Hospital finds still another element in these clandestine transactions, and in observing that:

Upstairs at Charlie’s Inferno the men are safe, and they sense it, for the very nature of the power of the women upstairs weakens the women. They are moved to pity. And are
they also moved to contempt? Rarely in fact... Ask not for whom the games are played, for whom the whips are prepared. Upstairs the women are silent, keeping the secret of communal shame. (Magician 116-7) she equates the guilt and shame of these encounters with their subsequent exchange of power and role reversal.

The familiar theme of the ‘damaged woman’ is very strongly pursued in this work. Even as the women realise the inevitability of their pain they are powerless to avoid it and condemned to repeat it. Their acquiescence in their own abuse reinforces the power of the abusers, whether the abuse is personal or institutional. As Lucy says, ‘How stupidly, haplessly we head for grief the way moths head for the flame’ (Magician 304). Most women in The Last Magician play dual roles, and are required to decode signs and portents beyond the first layer of meaning. The theory of ‘Six degrees of separation’, the notion that everyone on the planet is connected to everyone else through just six other people, appears to gain credence here as the plot progresses through many layers and is more pervasive and privileged than the more popular chaos theory.

The novel ends with the discovery of bones that may or may not be Cat’s and the reported deaths of Charlie and Gabriel that may or may not be the final act. Although Hospital’s postmodern concerns ensure an open ending to this work and her ambivalence seems to encourage speculation of an alternative narrative, the satisfaction of closure is lacking. As with Borderline and Oyster, this absence raises speculation that in disassociation from early fundamentalist inerrancy, she turns away from any resolution in her work.

Hospital continues her warnings of the consequences of dissent even more strongly in Oyster, her millenarian novel. As in her previous novels, those whose voices are raised or those who rage silently are women at the margin of communities. In Oyster, the dissenters are shown to be Other, whether they are ‘foreigners’ like Susannah Rover and Sarah Cohen and her daughter Amy, or locals like Mercy Given, her mother Vi and Jess, known as Old Silence. Even, ironically, that most marginalised and silenced of all in her own country, the Murri woman, Ethel. All are marked by otherness and all challenge in some way the status quo of male authority.

The subjective nature of reality is again explored and in this work is linked strongly to religious perceptions, reinforced by the illusional quality of desert mirages and experienced through the uncanny actuality of isolation in outback Queensland. The quality of silence engendered by this isolation is very significant to Jess and she describes its almost tangible intensity.

Out here, silence is the dimension in which we float. It billows above us like the vast sails of galleon earth, ballooning into the outer geography of the Milky Way; it washes below us where the opal runs in luminous veins; it stretches west as far as the
shores of the Ice Age, with nothing between then and now but rusted and powdering rock. (Oyster 149)

By presenting silence as a separate dimension within which lies the possibility of dissent, Hospital compels us to think of it as a corporeal element. But she also implies a spiritual connection with aboriginal stewardship of the land through a divergence of past, present and future and time and space as a metaphor for eternity.

The consequences of questioning the male authority of both power bases in the tiny town of Outer Maroo are felt most disastrously by the town’s schoolteacher, the outsider Susannah Rover. She wears her otherness like a badge of protection but eventually her questioning of the ways of The Living Word Church and its pastor, Mr Prophet and her open suspicion of the town’s opal and arms dealers and their connection to the self-styled cult leader, Oyster, lead to her disappearance. This ‘transfer’, is announced as a fait accompli and is sudden and permanent. Suspicion hangs over Outer Maroo like the evil smelling miasma of Old Fucksatoe, a foul sulphur-laden mist that emanates from the opal mine of Oyster’s Reef, but dissent is silenced. This conspiracy of silence is endemic in small towns, but Susannah Rover is an outsider and she crossed the line.

She spoke of something the whole town knew about, but she breached a taboo...

Everyone harboured suspicions.... Everyone’s hands were in the till, everyone was involved one way or another with Oyster’s Reef.... Everyone also feared that the rush would spread... More foreigners had to be kept out. (Oyster 62-3)

The Australians’ fear of foreigners is stressed again and again as it was in The Last Magician and is perceived as an ingrained resistance to difference and change. One of Hospital’s strongest memories of difference is her father’s daily habit of reading the Scriptures, and in Mercy Given’s father we see his counterpart and in Mercy’s reaction perhaps a glimpse of her own experience when she describes,

...the racy pace of Mercy’s blood when her father speaks to her in that particular way, in that tone of voice, or when he parcels out the world by the Laws of the Medes and the Persians, an immutable system, beyond challenge, received by direct private line from God. (Oyster 139)

This may mirror Hospital’s own feelings recorded in the Yacker 2 interview when she says,

It’s impossible, for instance, for my father to end the day without ‘a word of prayer’, and I sit there writhing, particularly if he does it in front of other guests. I get so angry - I can feel my blood pressure rising just talking about it - that everybody has to be subjected to the way he thinks. (263)

At the same time she feels strongly protective towards him and this attitude is seen again in Mercy when she recalls,
... her constant anxiety for her father and mother, the sense that she has had for as 
long as she can remember that she has to protect them, that only she stands between 
the harsh world and her parents' vast and frightening innocence... (Oyster, 139)

In this work Hospital explores not only the danger of dissent but probes its nature. Mercy Given is 
a young girl emerging from the strictures of her fundamentalist upbringing, impelled to stretch 
herself to meet the new experiences available through the teaching of Susannah Rover. The 
idea of her teacher, even when she is no longer there, is kept alive in her journal, with which 
Mercy has an ongoing silent dialogue, and her influence continues to fuel her pupil's rebellion. 
Hospital seeks to explain the reckless excitement that accompanies the defiance of authority: 
Mercy can feel a sudden throbbing in her arms, she can feel her spirit of rebellion 
heating its wings... She understands, suddenly, what Miss Rover was drunk on... that 
day of her transfer, she understands what kept her so apparently lighthearted, 
what kept her so calm... It is a dangerous calm... What is most dangerous of all about 
this glittering shimmering state is that it pushes up inside her like a cyclone and she 
cannot resist. (Oyster, 227)

Against the allure and dangerous excitement of defiance, Hospital presents the seductive 
appeal of the cult leader, Oyster. It is an attraction and curiosity that will change to sickening 
fear once his motives and methods of salvation are known. Her knowledge of the psyche of cult 
leaders and their methods of control is evidenced by her descriptions of life at Oyster's Reef. She 
gives a chilling account of Mercy's degradation and repeated rape by Oyster after he forces her to 
perform oral sexual acts while he demands that she 'eat of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge'. 
This unusually graphic example of the abuse of power is followed by the implication of essential 
supremacy when she is told that she must be 'broken' like a wild brumby. In a deliberate 
 juxtaposition by Hospital, this act of sexual dominance is set against a charismatic prayer 
meeting, where a bleeding and dazed Mercy is forced to kneel with the exhausted acolytes of 
Oyster's Reef in an all night vigil, battered by Oyster's voice:

...and he is preaching and preaching and reading the Bible and explaining and 
everyone is saying Amen, amen and sometimes lifting their arms and waving them 
and then everyone is singing and rolling on the ground... everyone is exhausted... and 
they all just want to sleep to sleep to sleep... . (Oyster, 400)

This view of the techniques of control employed by some of the more extreme cults is validated in 
a passage in Willa Appel's book, Cults in America: Programmed for Paradise:

As is characteristic of brainwashing, in the Unification Church nutrition and sleep 
patterns are altered, promoting a state of exhaustion, which lowers intellectual and 
emotional resistance... There is a large store of horror stories about life in the cults -
about rape, sexual humiliation, starvation, child abuse, beatings, forced labor, unattended physical illness, and personal degradation. (83 & 168)

Mercy’s flight from the Reef is arranged by yet another of Hospital’s rebel ‘bad boys’, enabling her to escape the final consequence of dissent, her death, and returns her to her family. In contrast to Oyster’s violently millenarian interpretation of the Scriptures which nominate him as the Messiah, the Living Word Church appears almost benign, and the strict fundamentalism of her father, the deposed pastor, a safe refuge for her damaged body and spirit. Many of the members of Oyster’s cult fit neatly into the terms of Appel’s study of them:

Cult members today, for example, are not from the traditionally disaffected classes. The overwhelming majority are young, white and middle class. Why these, the privileged members of American society, should be abandoning the mainstream is perplexing. (9-10)

A clue to the success of Oyster’s methods of brainwashing, the isolation, loss of identity and denial of past experience, is summed up in the words of Nick. Australian-born of Greek parentage, marginalised by the Australian attitude to difference that Hospital exposes. Now known as Gideon within the world of the Reef he denies allegiance to his country,

‘But that’s an old life,’ he says irritably. ‘I’m done with that. I’ve been born again and my country is Oyster’. (Oyster, 399)

In view of Nick’s experience of alienation within society outside the Reef, a possible explanation for his involvement with the cult is offered by Appel in this passage:

Millenarian activity is a classic response when people feel frustrated and confused, .... People who are firmly rooted in society - in kinship, community, and political groups - are less likely to become involved in millenarian alternatives. Marginality, in short, is a key factor in millenarian appeal. (8-10)

It is tempting to conclude that the more bizarre incidents in Oyster are directly linked to Hospital’s religious childhood experience, and to speculate that in this work she enters into the psychosis of fundamentalist practice, because the resulting trauma suffered by her protagonist has a ring of truth that seems to reveal personal, if anecdotal, knowledge. If the traumatic effects of other fundamentalist sects were avoided by the young Hospital due to her family’s warmth and affection and their membership in the less restrictive Pentecostal Church, she was almost certainly aware of the existence of more extreme sects within the fundamentalist sphere and the danger inherent in opposing them.

The nature of multiple realities in Oyster is demonstrated by the use of non-linear time and simultaneous action as well as various narrative voices and as in Borderline, Hospital explores the power of silence. But here the silence of Dolores, which is absence, is replaced by the sinister code of silence demanded of Oyster’s followers and the conspiracy of silence entered into
by Ma Beresford to prevent word leaving Outer Maroo, whose effect is shown in the despair of those who come searching for their silent children. The varieties of silence presented include women's silence which condones and colludes in the reality of male domination in Oyster as it does in all her work. The silence of the women and the spiritual quality of the desert silence leads to a discussion of the religious significance of the desert in a further chapter, exploring the extent to which Hospital's fundamentalist background continues to influence her writing.

The idea of silence as a form of dissent is not new, but Hospital sees it as a safer and less dangerous option than the direct defiance of Yashoda, Felicity, Gus, Cat and Mercy and demonstrates clearly the danger inherent in opposing the patriarchal power structures. Whether those structures are religious or political, Hospital shows that the consequences of dissent can be catastrophic.
CHAPTER FOUR

Guilt, Morality, Politics and the Approach of the Millennium

In this chapter I will examine Hospital’s claim in the Hobart Mercury that she has retained “all of the moral inheritance and none of the consolation” from her fundamentalist childhood in the Pentecostal Church. This statement confirms the evidence in her work that she has moderated some of the paradigms of fundamentalism and actively resisted others. The strong attraction to moral issues in her work, for example, has its basis in those beliefs which she has retained, but she demonstrates her resistance to other fundamentalist teachings in her exposure of women’s acceptance of the notion of guilt and atonement. These ideas have their origins in the assumption of women’s guilt within the Judaic tradition and flourish in the climate of gender-based, socialised guilt that transcends class and economic circumstance in a patriarchal culture. Her female protagonists bear the weight of this assumed guilt and the ways that it impacts on their lives and consciousness is one of her core themes. Against this, she posits male guilt and self-justification, and male behavioural attitudes based on societal presumptions of gender difference. This exposure seems to be a reaction to her early experience of patriarchal inerrancy within both fundamentalism and society. Hospital’s tendency to treat male and female sexuality differently has been noted by Bruce Merry in his review of her novel, Charades, in LiNO (1990), seeing her treatment of female sexuality as ‘this basso continuo of soft eroticism’, which...

... contributes to a subdued feminist manifesto that trickles under the stream of the prose. Women, it proposes, are more honest and more conscious about the sexual functions than men. The males in the text all seem to have a flaw, more or less serious according to the degree of irritation of the observing (or naked) female. (157)

Certainly there is a refreshing sexual honesty to be found in Charade’s Bea. In Merry’s view, although she is uneducated, even ignorant,

... Bea Ryan is also the repository of life’s longest secrets. She knows that men see sexual desire as an itch. She knows that love is an illness of which you suffer one terrible bout in a lifetime; the rest is insignificant. (158)

In The Last Magician, Cat too, has a shrewd honesty regarding her own unselfconscious sexuality that men, from the inquest judge to Robbie to Charlie, find disturbing. Even when little more than a child her kisses have such a powerfully erotic effect on Charlie that he is ‘... very much under her spell, willing to do anything she suggests (171)’.

By her examination of the gender differences of sexuality, Hospital subtly draws our attention to what Elaine Showalter has identified as:
... the paradox of a cultural bondage, a legacy of pain and submission, which none the
less generates a sisterly solidarity, a bond of shared experience, loyalty and
compassion. (96)

In The Ivory Swing for example, both Juliet with her Western background of comparative social
and religious freedom, and Yashoda with all the social and religious restrictions of her position
in a Hindu society, experience feelings of guilt. The different intensity of these feelings reflect
the personal moral interiorities which have been formed by those cultures. In an interview in
with Turcotte in Writers in Action, Hospital identifies one of these cultural differences when she
says:

You know, when we talk about things that are axiomatic we mean in the Western
Judeo-Christian tradition, more or less. We mean axiomatic for us. ... even things like
the US Constitution’s “universal right to the pursuit of happiness” - that is a very
Western concept - that is not at all a Hindu concept. A far more relevant question
would be the universal right to fulfil your dharma properly. (84)

Processes of atonement and guilt, then, are also dictated by one’s own backgrounds and while for
Juliet it lies in escape to a different place and situation, for Yashoda it can only lie in death - in
the fulfilment of her dharma or religious duty. Elaine Showalter’s comment on women in
nineteenth century England is easily applicable to Yashoda’s position in twentieth century India:

Her role, however, is a passive one; severely constrained by her womanhood ... there is no
way that she can wrest a second chance out of life. She cannot master events, but
only accommodate herself to them. (94)

The consciousness of their perceived guilt by the two women in The Ivory Swing, is
contrasted by Hospital with the guilt-free denial or rationalisation of David and Shivaraman
Nair. Unlike the two women, they do not actually commit the sins by which they are tempted,
but in treating their sexual fantasies as real infidelities, Hospital is making a moral point, and
emphasising the different expectations for men and women in both cultures. When David resists
Yashoda’s sensuous advances, he recognises, even through his self-congratulation, the
immorality of ‘transposing’ his wife’s body for hers:

... when she held out her hands to him, like a princess begging, he heard again that
wild high note of absolute power, felt himself to be straining against the bonds of his
entire life and culture... “No,” he whispered, kissing her hands. “I cannot.” He stood
up, feeling as self-disciplined and as foolish and as life-denying as a monk... That
night he made love to Juliet with a guilty passion of transposed desire. (Swing, 209:
10)

Hospital’s judicious use of words reveals her thoughts on male power and sexuality.
Phrases such as ‘wild high note of absolute power’ express both a climatic excitement and the
thrill of sexual control and the image of 'a princess begging' reinforces the stimulation derived from a submissive female. The paired opposites formed by these two states of power and vulnerability lend themselves to a structuralist reading of the text, and the opposition of words like 'power' and 'begging', 'self-disciplined' and 'life-denying', produces the terminology of feminist discourse and leads to a poststructuralist reading of the work.

Again in a later passage, Hospital's careful use of words is significant, when the Hindu, Shivaraman Nair, likens Yashoda to the honeysuckle which wilfully lures the bees. Words like 'flaunted' and 'shamelessly' carry a connotation of guilt, and she gives an insight into the assumption of women's guilt in this culture when she discloses his thoughts about his kinswoman. Shivaraman Nair, however, does not practice such commendable self-denial as David. His frustration is imposed on him by the presence of the Westerners and the peon, interrupting his plan of selfless seduction:

'It was undeniable that she flaunted her beauty shamelessly. She was indifferent to family honour. And yet after all, she was a woman. What could one expect?... But he would be, as it were, the aristocratic bee, who would keep the honey of her youth pure and free from contamination. He would offer himself to her in a gesture of noblesse oblige, for the sake of her need and the honour of the family name.' 

Swing 212-3

Shivaraman Nair has rationalized his physical lust into a noble duty, but the frustration of his failed seduction leads to blame and punishment for both Prabhakaran and Yashoda, resulting in their deaths at the hands of a drunken mob of labourers.

They seized that yakshi and her consort, who was also thin and slight as a spirit.

They twisted and pounded and smashed out all that evil, purging the world. (Swing 240)

After Yashoda's death, Shivaraman Nair seeks to blame the labourers who had merely carried out his wishes, fate for conspiring against him, and the foreigners for their interference, and of course Yashoda herself. At last, he experiences the first twinges of guilt amidst the self-justification.

And the woman herself - she was surely guilty. How could he forgive her when he had so cherished her beauty and purity, when he had been so moved by it, had known so well how it would tempt men to lust that he had sought only to preserve and protect her from being sullied...

Yet he had not, certainly he had not, intended her death.

And still he was responsible. (Swing 242)

Hospital acknowledges the similarities and differences within Hindu and Christian morality when the perplexed Anglo-Indian Matthew Thomas also blames himself for Yashoda's death, but with a stronger sense of personal accountability and acceptance of sin and without the
comfort of Shivaraman Nair’s belief in *karma*, or a preordained destiny, to justify the result of his actions:

> I have caused terrible destruction, he thought. I have sinned against God and my family. I have caused even an innocent child to die... I was not ready for so many changes. I am glad I will die before I can no longer recognise the world... I am always bewildered. (*Swing* 243)

The next to feel the impact of Yashoda’s death is David, who perceives his fault to be one of omission, that he failed to protect both her and Prabhakaran. Annie recognises that she destroyed where she had intervened, through well-meaning ignorance, in a culture she did not understand. Prem, the political activist realises that Yashoda’s wealth did not save her from death, and that there are other kinds of oppression than poverty. Finally, Juliet acknowledges and accepts the reality of shared guilt:

> We are implicated, Juliet thought... We are not innocent of these deaths. We are implicated... (Had they interfered too much or too little? Were they culturally arrogant or excessively hesitant?). (*Swing* 244)

The question Hospital poses here of intervention by outsiders, however well-meaning, is one that is answerable only in a cultural or religious context. The Western Christian view that it is morally incumbent upon them to intervene in such a situation, is quite opposite to the Hindu belief in *dharma* and personal responsibility, or for that matter, *karma*. As Huston Smith writes:

> *Karma* decrees that every decision must have its determinate consequences, but the decisions themselves are, in the last analysis, freely arrived at. (65)

Given this belief, Yashoda would have accepted her fate at the hands of Shivaraman Nair, and left him to his own *karma*. However, Hospital, from within the Christian tradition, generally seems to define men’s guilt, as opposed to women’s guilt, as easier to rationalise because it has not the unconscious universality of assumed guilt.

While the perception of Yashoda’s sins are imposed from outside, Juliet’s own sense of guilt originates in her sexual fantasies of a former lover and a hostile and debilitating nostalgia for the intellectual stimulation of a former career. These suppressed emotions conflict with the moral and ethical obligation owed to her husband and children, and lead to her feelings of displacement and alienation in the stagnant backwater of an Indian village. Hospital acknowledges this dilemma of dual loyalties when Juliet reflects resentfully on the contrast between the past and present:

> But is it really Jeremy I crave?... Or is it just the vibrant echo of youth... any testament to that other lost self. (Once I soared, once my career was marked “fast track,” once a small world turned on my opinions... And then David, his star rising, obliterated everything else)... . (*Swing* 14-5)
But when Juliet admits: 'And the real trouble was, she wanted both, she had always wanted both (Swing 75)', Hospital reveals the weight of social expectation that impacts on women when they want both marriage and a career, and she exposes the dominant male's reaction to women's ambition with the comment: 'He did not mean for the rules to be played both ways (Swing 75)'.

However, it is in Borderline that Hospital seriously begins to pursue the theme of morality and politics, sin and atonement and with an added redemptive element in the sacrificial role of two of her protagonists. The notion of redemption can be traced back to ancient fertility rites and harvest rituals. In general the idea of a real or symbolic sacrificial death, was found in the ritual death of old kings to be replaced by the young king, thus achieving a renewal of life or, at the very least, regeneration of the earth's bounty. Although these early myths have not withstood the test of the centuries in their original form, they have been subsumed by other world views and religions. Barr explains the fundamentalist Christian view of the essential character of sin and redemption:

...the characteristic emphasis is on a substitutionary atonement ... The emphasis is also sacrificial in character: the death of Christ was a sacrifice for the removal of sin, seen on the pattern of the sacrificial atonement rituals of the Old Testament. Moreover, it is believed that in the events of the death of Christ God's anger against sin is operative; in this sense there is a penal character in the atonement. (27-8)

This idea of atonement is to be found on a personal level in the actions of Gus, the flawed Catholic who jeopardises his wife and family, his job, and ultimately his life, in an impulsive act of compassion for a total stranger. In an interview with Store in LiNO (1990) Hospital states:

I believe in redemptive moments. I believe that deeply flawed people are capable of, at moments, doing things that completely change someone else's life.

This statement appears to enact a secularised reading of redemption, ignoring the necessity of an epiphany as advocated by Evangelical Christian churches to which the Pentecostal Church belonged. Hospital's early memories of evangelical attitudes on the process of sin, atonement, redemption and salvation may emerge here as a secular discourse on the philosophy of morality, the original religious perspective having been either unconsciously repressed or deliberately refused. That redemption is a cornerstone of Christianity is affirmed by Rudolf Otto in his book The Idea of the Holy, when he states:

The 'religion of Jesus' does not change gradually into a religion of redemption; it is in its whole design and tendency a religion of redemption from its earliest commencement, and that in the most uncompromising sense. (165)

The characters of both Gus and Felicity reflect this view, but as the narrative unfolds death is again proposed as an appropriate atonement. Writing in LiNO (1990) about ritual sacrifice in Borderline, Elizabeth Perkins puts this view of Felicity's role:
Her attempt to escape ... leads her directly to a rite of passage in which she will eventually sacrifice herself for another woman, and for a cause which may be identified with female helplessness against the male and masculinist power of the United States. (54)

Perkins notes Hospital's positing of this redemptive behaviour firmly within a religious context. It is achieved by Felicity's symbolic linking of the refugee woman, Dolores, with Perugino's painting Magdalen, as well as with the on-going interior dialogue of Gus, the guilt-ridden lapsed Catholic. Gus is apparently killed in a high-speed car chase while being pursued by FBI agents and his death is seen as his only possible redemption. Speaking to Candida Baker in Yacker 2, Hospital reinforces the connection between religion and politics she discovered while researching the fate of refugees:

More often than not they were caught dead, or caught and sent back, which is the same thing. Then I became aware that there is an underground railroad, reminiscent of the old slave underground that used to help runaway slaves get to Canada, and which crossed from the Mexican border to the Canadian border. By the way, churches are running this escape route, and invoking the ancient concept of 'sanctuary' - which has led to recent prosecutions ... . (253)

However, offsetting this positive role of the church is the priest, Father O'Dowd. Confident of his help, Felicity tells him of the border incident, Dolores' story, and the whereabouts of the illegal refugee Angelo, the nun Sister Gabriel, and even gives him a photograph of Dolores' family. Believing that 'Misguided compassion could be a form of heresy' (Borderline 250), the priest betrays Felicity to the authorities, since, as she is not Catholic, he is not bound by the laws of the confessional. Later Sister Gabriel reveals that Angelo has been deported and then executed and that Father O'Dowd betrayed them all because:

'His duty to report, he believes. He hasn't lived there, you see, so it's all black and white... For him, they are all tainted with the wrong ideology, they're all part of an Absolute Evil'. (Borderline 253)

The priest, acting morally according to his own convictions, raises one of the questions posed in the introduction: 'Is morality relative, defined by our position in society, allegiance to Government or religious conviction?' Hospital sees her role as presenting alternatives that stimulate her reader's moral and political conscience, as she makes clear when speaking about Borderline to Christine Hamelin in Australian and New Zealand Studies in Canada:

That is where for me moral and political commitment of the writer lies. I have no objection to people knowing what my personal stance is ... I simply want to stir my readers to feel they do have to reach a political stance... (107)
Hospital does not write overtly political novels but she does seek to engage her readers at an intellectual level on areas of social responsibility, and the moral responsibility of governments. In *Borderline* the idea of sin and atonement in a religious sense is linked to the expediency of a political outcome. The amoral political actions of a powerful United States and its puppet government in San Salvador are seen in contrast with the moral apolitical actions of Felicity and Gus. The price for their redemptive behaviour seems to be extreme, and we are finally left with choice, uncertainty and lack of closure. While their deaths are never unequivocal, she scatters enough oblique references to sinister forces on both sides of the border to ensure that Jean-Marc’s expectations of at least Felicity’s survival remain wildly optimistic. However, while the final outcome of their interference in, to them, an unacceptable situation, politically motivated and ruthlessly pursued, is undeniably tragic, some comfort can be taken in Michel Foucault’s view in *The Foucault Reader* that:

... no matter how terrifying a given system may be, there always remain the possibilities of resistance, disobedience, and oppositional groupings. (245)

These possibilities are explored again in *The Last Magician* in an even more multi-layered Hospital narrative in which these same questions of morality, both societal and political are examined. In the same interview as above with Christine Hamelin she states:

When you have intimations from all levels, from people you’ve known personally, from people you’ve talked to on the underside of Sydney, that there are issues of massive corruption, involving perhaps murder, from very powerful people in high places, you set about exploring how this could come about. (107)

It is moral and political corruption which leads to an underground population of refugees fleeing from an oppressive regime and hiding from a complicit United States government in Hospital’s *Borderline*, and it is the same morally impoverished condition of the power structure that provides Sydney with the ghetto known as ‘the quarry’ in *The Last Magician*. Hospital’s apparent need in all her narratives is to explore the multiple and varied examples of oppression by society’s most revered institutions by exposing the lives of those who resist them. Her strategy is validated by Foucault’s opinion that liberty is not achieved by a single act of resistance but by continuous vigilance:

Liberty is a *practice*. ... The liberty of men is never assured by the institutions and laws that are intended to guarantee them. This is why almost all of these laws and institutions are quite capable of being turned around. Not because they are ambiguous, but simply because “liberty” is what must be exercised. ... I think it can never be inherent in the structure of things to guarantee the exercise of freedom. The guarantee of freedom is freedom. (245)
When she writes about the quarry, the question of whether it is a refuge for the alienated in society as a material fact or a state of mind has no bearing on the impact its inhabitants have on the life of the city. Its existence in either configuration is a continuing source of concern for the affluent and powerful, and their fear is exposed when they are alone or in the company of those they consider to be inferior or unimportant.

The elements of mystery and the sinister undercurrents of menace of the tropical rainforest in this work have been noted previously in the Introduction, and the source of the urban danger can be traced to the power of the patriarchy and its tool, the judiciary. David Callahan, writing of The Last Magician in Ariel... (1997) quotes Aamer Hussein:

... it is also a tragedy that subverts for its purposes the form of a murder mystery, in which corpses disappear or cannot be proved to exist, and the secret assassin is the brute power of society. (33)

It is a truism that society gets the system of governance that it deserves and Hospital does not allow those without political influence to escape her scrutiny. When Charlie says:

‘There are compensations’ ... It’s like being a hooker or a restaurant manager. You see without being seen.’ (Magician 44)

Hospital is saying that there is power in anonymity and it lies in the knowledge that can be gleaned from those who are oblivious to the presence of the listeners. And knowledge, as can be demonstrated by the success of salacious memoirs of servants of the powerful, is power. She insists that there exists more than one kind of power and seeks to find a relationship between institutional power and that peripheral power, which Kate Temby aptly calls in her Westerly article, ‘relationship of the power of the centre to the power of the margins’ (47).

Further, I would argue, as demonstrated in the quote from The Ivory Swing... mentioned earlier, that it is the Christian philosophy of the collective responsibility of society for its less fortunate individual members, that was the cornerstone of Hospital’s religious upbringing. This results in her inclusion of the disempowered and disenfranchised in her work and providing them with the voice that society denies them.

The way that guilt is apportioned and perpetuated by the system is demonstrated in the courtroom scene at the inquest of the death of Cat’s brother Willy. The manipulation by the judge of the testimony of Cat, Catherine and Charlie ensures a bias towards the Grammar boys involved. Those at the margin are disadvantaged and Hospital traces the development of the institutional power of society’s privileged back to the physical power of the schoolboy bully from whom it comes. The deceptive fatherly kindness of the judge when he asks Charlie to point out those of whom he was afraid does nothing to reassure him:

Charlie looked at the faces of the Wilson boys. They looked back with bland neutral eyes. Between their eyes and Charlie’s, a regiment of boots and knuckles marched,
left right left right left right, he could see hobnails and knuckledusters and sharp brass rings, he saw broken windows in his parents' shop, a promise of future harm. "I don't know, sir," he said. (Magician 217)

Hospital's demonstrates the colonial attitude towards its non-anglo citizens that still flourishes in postcolonial Australia when the judge condescendingly replies:

"You're a foreigner in this country, young man," the judge explained, "and I make allowances for the fact that you do not, perhaps, fully understand our Australian commitment to fair play". (Magician 217)

and in this way she exposes the kind of unthinking, marginalisation of the visually different, and agrees with Foucault's statement that

...it was no longer the offence, the attack on the common interest, it was the departure from the norm, the anomaly; it was this that haunted the school, the court, the asylum or the prison. (199)

The Last Magician stresses the idea of atonement and even cites a biblical reference when Lucy taunts Gabriel with the words: "The judge's son himself, all dressed up in his hairshirt, atoning for the sins of the fathers" (Magician 128). It is Gabriel's unselconscious morality that is contrasted with the corruption and hypocrisy of his father, Robinson Gray.

Gabriel's integrity, too, was of the daunting kind: he could never understand the dishonourable action, nor quite comprehend it as temptation... Gabriel lived in a moral riddle. (Magician 134)

In one sense, Hospital uses the Queensland rainforest as a metaphor for sensuality and even sexuality in much the same way as Thomas Hardy used the lushly rampant garden of the dairy in Tess of the d'Urbervilles (113). But where Hardy's passage, while overtly sexual, retains a kind of natural country innocence, Hospital's words evoke a different experience. A much darker inference stems from her Queensland rainforest, it is a prophetic passage of obsession and death and the need for atonement.

The wood is dark, and full of the soft rot and manic growth we call rainforest. The rainforest has always spawned secrets. Light itself is clandestine here. Under the matted canopy the sun becomes furtive, it flickers, it advances by stealth, it hides, it is coy, it sneaks down through the tangle of treetops, creepers, leggy bird’s-nest ferns, lilies, orchids, battling its way earthwards through layers of aerial clour, slithering below ground fungi to breed green yeast. The rainforest smells of seduction and fermentation and death. It smells of Queensland. (Magician 3)

Hospital's language in this passage is the language of religious discourse and carries within it the judgemental moral values inherent in its. An almost medieval poetic evokes a place of seduction and danger, of an erstwhile Eden which conceals in the green gloom the seeds of
betrayal and damnation. The other site of religious metaphor in *The Last Magician* is, of course, the Quarry. In contrast to the rainforest, the Quarry, like the evil contained within its confines, is totally man-made. Although medieval religious imagination is transposed to accommodate twentieth century atheistic reality, this underground place of iniquity and despair borrows images from Dante’s *Inferno*. The presence of evil is so palpable that Lucy tells Charlie,

“When I lived down there, I used to check my shoulders for wing buds every night. I reckoned if they sprouted they’d be black, and they’d be barbed at their scalloped tips”. (Magician 16)

By the invocation of this gargoyle-like image and the purgatorial reference of the Inferno, Hospital is drawing on both the religious and literary canon.

Hospital’s intense connection to the rainforest also plays a vital role in her novel *Charades*. Her positing of Bea as an archetypal earth-mother has prompted Laurel Bergman’s description in her *ALS* article:

She is warmth, light, honey, overflowing into the world. Bea is Demeter, connected to the rainforest, a fertility symbol. Even her room ‘was rank as a forest’. (357)

Hospital allows us into the mind of the child, Kay, and her vernal fantasies of Bea are again reminiscent of Hardy’s Tess in the garden of the dairy:

She saw Bea’s hair spreading and spreading, she saw it growing grape leaves that reached out and touched the grass. She saw Bea growing into the buttercup patch, she saw bunches of grapes, she saw stickiness and juice. She saw Jean the Baddleship Man: how he walked without seeing, how stickiness pulled him, how Bea’s tendrils could wind themselves around him until he wouldn’t be able to move. ... Bea’s fingers and toes were sprouting little green pads, that her hair was green, that she was part of the plum tree and the buttercup patch ... . (*Charades* 126)

This linkage of the sexual metaphor of rainforest and rampant growth in nature with the darker consequences implicit in a post lapsarian reading of them, the idea of punishment for a perceived sin and the banishment from the Eden of the rainforest, may again be related to Hospital’s early moral environment. There is yet another element in Hospital’s vision of the rainforest. It is the repository of dreams as well as nightmares. In *Charades*, Kay finds a body there and as it decays into a skeleton she claims him as her lost father:

When he was clean and white inside his muddy clothes, when he smelled as sweet and yeasty as moss, I put flowers in his eyes. You can be my father, I told him. (*Charades* 48)

Hospital’s vision in *The Last Magician* of the rainforest as a place of death as well as seduction, is shared by Australian poet Judith Wright. In a poem titled *The Last Man*, from her collection *The Gateway*, that seems to resonate with religious references, she writes:
To reach the pool you must go through the rainforest -
Through the bewilder ing midsummer of darkness
lit with ancient fern,
laced with poison and thorn.
You must go by the way he went - the way of the bleeding
hands and feet, the blood on the stones like flowers,
under the hooded flower
that fall
on the stones like blood.

To reach the pool you must go by the black valley
among the crowding columns made of silence,
under the hanging clouds
of leaves and voiceless birds.
To go by the way he went to the voice of the water,
where the priest stinging-tree waits with his whips and fevers
under the hooded flowers that fall from the trees like blood,
you must forget the song of the gold bird dancing
over tossed light; you must remember nothing
except the drag of darkness
that draws your weakness under.
To go by the way he went you must find beneath you
that last and faceless pool, and fall. And falling
find between breath and death
the sun by which you live. (83)

The similarity of this representation with Hospital's image of the rainforest pool where Cat's bones were found makes it desirable to quote the poem in full. Wright's poem suggests a reprise of Christ's journey to death along the Via Doloroso, with its imagery of bloody scourging and suffering. However the sensuality of Hospital's rainforest is missing from Wright's vision.

The idea that atonement must be made for sexual immorality is an old one. The civil law - derived from Judaic law - demands punishment for the prostitute, but not for her customer. Hospital exposes the irony of this division by presenting the customers as respected members of society, including the judiciary, but the prostitutes come from the marginalised world of the quarry and the Inferno. She also makes it clear that immorality is not confined to a sexual interpretation, that moral behaviour covers all aspects of societal living and that corruption at the highest level has real political significance. In this work, Hospital concedes that the
propensity to behave immorally is universal. Human frailty is dealt with empathically but it is perhaps her early experience of religious instruction that leads her to agree with Stephen Diamond when he notes in *Devils, Demons, and the Daimonic*:

Much of the evil we see 'out there' in the world, and in others, is in some measure a reflection of ourselves: our own human potential for, and unavoidable participation of evil. (85)

In the pursuit of this idea of an ubiquitous presence of evil, she stresses that the cruelty and abuse aimed at the marginalised in society is not confined to adults. Driven by memories of her own childhood suffering at the hands of her peers, she produces some of the most harrowing scenes in a work which contains many such disturbing indictments. That these privileged young tormentors are allowed by society to grow into an even more privileged adulthood and acquire positions of responsibility and influence without a diminution of their inherent immorality, is a strong condemnation of a system which encourages such economic and ethical double standards. In *The Last Magician*, although the usual lack of certainty and coherence in her closure is apparent, she goes a long way towards answering David Jasper’s criterion for a literary work of religious merit expressed in *The Study of Literature and Religion*:

Has the narrative sat in moral judgement...? Has its unity and coherence of form, its structural closure even, so created an ethical coherence in the life and experience... that the reader is persuaded of the substance of its categories of good and evil, truth and dishonesty...? The shaping of the fictional narrative has perhaps brought about a rediscovery, even a reformulation of the categories and forms of religious belief. (60)

Hospital does expose the human potential for evil in *The Last Magician*, but at the same time she gives us enough evidence of good in her characters to prevent despair. However, she does not bring about 'rediscovery' or 'reformulation' of 'religious belief'. On the contrary, in her next work, she makes a virulent attack on the more extreme religious groups and exposes the corruption at the heart of a fundamentalist cult.

This most comprehensive study of these aspects of the human condition to date is in *Oyster*, where the conjunction of evil, guilt and atonement takes place in an outback desert setting of almost biblical wilderness. Immorality in *Oyster* is shown to range from the smallest infringement of moral standards, such as Mrs Dorothy Godwin’s kleptomania (*Oyster* 24) to Oyster’s Armageddon of mass murder at the Reef:

They were all lying flat on their faces with their arms stretched out, their hands praying... . . like Oyster ordered them not to move or something... . (Oyster 411)

Hospital shows how each step in the process of the apocalyptic destruction that overcomes the Reef and Outer Maroo accrues onto the next. It is this process which finally engulfs an entire community and ensures that no one can be completely free from guilt. The self-styled Messiah,
Oyster, offers redemption and glory and the lure of eternal life is too much for his followers. They cannot find the courage or will to resist his evil practices and they convince themselves that these are necessary for salvation. The lure of great wealth proves equally strong for the trio of opal smugglers and gun-runners, and the townsfolk are uneasy but unwilling to defy them. Those who deny the reality of evil and do nothing to stop it are seen to be almost as guilty as those who engage in it and compromise is shown as immoral. As usual in Hospital’s work, there emerge a few brave souls who defend the most vulnerable and in Oyster, Pete, who tries unsuccessfully to save Susannah Rover, and Donny Becker who rescues Mercy from the Reef, join Borderline’s Gus, in representing ‘the bad Catholic boys’ from her past mentioned in Ron Store’s interview (16). Her early fundamentalist conditioning is tempered by her obvious feminist concerns, and in this work, the invidious position of women within a fundamentalist millenarian cult is exposed without apology.

The patriarchal nature of such phenomena places women members of the group in an inferior position. The role of women at Oyster’s Reef is made clear when Oyster leads an unsuspecting Mercy through the underground tunnels of the reef to his quarters before he rapes her:

They enter a large chamber where women, kerchiefs on their heads, peel vegetables at trestle tables. Others bend over steaming cauldrons on the electric plates of great stoves. The faces of the women gleam with sweat. They do not talk. They look at Mercy briefly and guardedly and then lower their eyes. (Oyster, 390)

Domestic labour and sexual availability are seen as their duty and their highest gratification is deemed to derive from ministering to the leader, while theological and intellectual activity is the male prerogative. In their work Fundamentalisms Observed, Marty and Appleby assert that fundamentalism holds

...certain understandings of gender, sex roles, the nurturing and educating of children, and the like. They will fight for their conceptions of what ought to go on in matters of life and health, in the world of the clinic and the laboratory. (ix)

However, this situation is not confined to the more unorthodox groups. Although not as radical as regards domestic and sexual roles, the attitude of the hierarchy in the established churches towards the ordination of women into the clergy demonstrates that the entrenched patriarchal system found in secular society flourishes equally in ecclesiastic power structures.

To someone of Hospital’s religious background, the desert wilderness of Western Queensland fits very comfortably into the metaphorical framework of biblical experience. The devil’s temptation of Christ took place in the desert wilderness of the Middle East, the forty days and nights of soul-searching meditation before He embarked on His ministry took place there, and it is to this metaphor of spiritual testing that Hospital turns at the end of Oyster. Her
protagonists are either destroyed by the apocalyptic fire storm that engulfs the Reef, Oyster and all the cult members, or they emerge from their desert experience, tempered by the fire, to begin their lives in another place. The exception to this departure is Ethel, the Murri woman who is seen with her Bora rings at the end as at the beginning. The ancient Queensland desert is a place where the present retreats into the past and merges with the future. Hospital writes that it is a place where:

... the First Ones speak to Ethel in lost tongues, where she hears corroborees from the last millennium, where the Old People sing of the ocean that used to lap these inland rocks, where the fire scorches yesterday and will burn several tomorrows... time does not run in a straight line and never has. (Oyster 47)

She recognises the special spiritual nature of the relationship of Aboriginal Australians with the land and their enduring identification with it, agreeing with Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin in their postcolonial study, The Empire Writes Back, that their position ‘...is a special one because they are doubly marginalised - pushed to the psychic and political edge of societies ...’ (144). Ethel’s place in this narrative is largely a symbolic one as she represents that awareness of the vastness and antiquity of the land that lurks unrecognised at the heart of the Australian psyche.

Hospital’s recognition of the approaching millennium is apparent in Oyster and the knowledge raises the level of anxiety and expectation as she explores the connection between messianic cults, fundamentalism and millenarianism. In the interview with Ron Store cited in the Introduction, Hospital mentions an article in Toronto’s Globe and Mail listing her as one of Canada’s most religious novelists and confesses feeling ‘some chagrin about it’ (LiNO 1990). That this classification should be applied to her should come as no surprise, and although the influence of her fundamentalist childhood has been apparent in all of Hospital’s work, Oyster is her most overtly religious work to date.

In this novel she openly explores the effect that a charismatic church has on an intelligent child raised within the confines of its beliefs and the difficulty that teachers have in introducing science to a mind steeped in biblical inerrancy. She reveals the point at which the interests of corporeal and spiritual power intersect, and the seduction of fundamentalist solutions for a bewildered people. All these ideas are pursued within an atmosphere of pre-millennial anxiety and expectation.

Given these strong millenarian concerns and Hospital’s background in biblical narrative, it would seem to be no accident that Oyster is located in the remote Queensland outback, where the desert wilderness is seen as the symbolic spiritual battleground for the ultimate fight between good and evil. Although the dictionary definition of ‘the wilderness’ is ‘a place of isolation’, which would include her other wilderness, the rainforest, it is the biblical image of
the arid desert of Oyster’s Reef that is the setting for the apocalyptic conflagration that closes this novel. The desert has always held a singular provocation for Australians, with its silences, its dangers and its mythical sense of antiquity. In her book about the Australian desert and its representation in art, literature and film, Seeking the Centre, Roslynn Haynes defines this unique quality:

In our collective imagination the site of ancient myth, of spiritual dimension and cultural rebirth is peculiarly the desert... (1)

With the setting for these fin de siècle events in Oyster established, it is worth exploring recent definitions of millenarianism. The history of millenarian cults and eschatological sects is well-documented and with the approach of the third millennium, scholarly and popular writings on the subject have escalated. Willa Appel in her work, Cults in America: Programmed for Paradise, defines the term:

The term millenarianism derives from the prophesied millennium, the thousand year reign of Christ ... they assume there is a grand plan to history and that present events are building to a pre-ordained catastrophe. (4)

To many thousands of believers then, the year two thousand means much more than just the beginning of a new century.

The almost paranoiac insistence on silence and secrecy in Hospital’s Outer Maroo about the events at Oyster’s Reef, can be linked to an irrational fear of Government agencies shared by members of many fundamentalist groups, particularly in America. Hospital’s Dukke van Kerck, or Mr. Prophet, grazier and pastor of Outer Maroo’s Living Word Church, imported the conspiracy theories and distrust of government agencies of the American Religious Right, and in replacing Mercy’s father as pastor, exploited the fundamentalist fears he found in Outer Maroo. By encouraging his congregation’s participation in the town’s code of silence against government regulatory bodies or indeed any outsider, he advances his hidden personal agenda of profit from tax-free opal sales. The introduction of this suspicion in a fictitious outback Australian town, has its beginnings in the real deaths of David Koresh and the Branch Davidians in Waco, Texas, and the role of government agents in the siege there, seen by some American fundamentalist groups to lend credence to these fears of government intervention. In his book on millenarian cults, The End of Time, Damian Thompson quotes historian Garry Wills:

However these groups differ among themselves - some espousing violence, some not; some religious, some secular; some millennial, some pragmatic - they all agree in their intense fear of the government, and they have framed a complex analysis of the machinery of government repression, one that even non-extremists share on this point or that. (279)
Hospital demonstrates that although Oyster himself was not overtly connected with the Living Word Church, its fundamentalist teachings provided a reasonable chance of acceptance for his messianic message. She is aware that the state of world-wide unrest and the disillusion and disaffection experienced by many young people make the assurances of a new beginning given by charismatic figures like Oyster appear very attractive. Recruitment was achieved through word-of-mouth and the distribution of pamphlets in the great cities of the world. Of this phenomenon of world-wide millenarian angst among middle class youth, Hospital writes:

I have a hunch that stories such as this one are too common for comfort these days.

They will get worse as the decade advances. They are breeding in the dank millennial air, they are multiplying like rabbits and not just out here, west of the dingo fence. In plain common sense, there are things it is better not to know because the knowing makes living too painful. If people choose to give themselves like moths to a flame, what can be done? (Oyster 8)

The pamphlet handed out by Oyster’s recruiters read:

OPAL: THE VISION SPLENDID

Pure light and pure truth preserved in the womb of

Mother Earth.

Opal is the Logos made manifest.

Prepare ye the Way of the Lord.

Join the seekers and ye shall find.

Contact Spiritual Quests Unlimited (phone and fax below). (Oyster 12)

Hospital’s fictional pamphlet, with its melange of Christian and New Age hyperbole punctuated by a descent to technical practicality, with the mention of phone and Fax machines juxtaposed against biblical quotations, appears to be a common factor in actual recruitment advertising among sects who seek isolation to await the millennium, whether they are religious or political extremists. For example, in his work The End of Time, Damian Thompson cites the American Vietnam veteran, Gritz, a hero with sixty two citations for bravery, who sells land in rural Idaho to members of a ‘survivalist’ sect who believe that their government is plotting to imprint its citizens with the ‘mark of the beast’ through computer terminals. In a Newsletter that reads like a cross between a religious tract and a real estate advertisement, Gritz says:

I highly recommend you secure a place; a refuge in a time of Lot, an ark in a time of Noah. If none of these signs are true, the Bible is false and God is dead; we are still left with a magnificent home in a secure environment to enjoy the days of our lives. Call Jerry... for details, plot maps and information. (317)
Bizarre as it sounds, the American press, perhaps inevitably, found a comic element in these end-time predictions. Then, as Thompson observes: ‘... the Oklahoma bomb exploded and America discovered its militias (318).’

Although Hospital never actually discusses the possibility of armed militias operating out of Outer Maroo, she does drop a hint or two. Of the three men most influential in the town, those most involved in the illegal opal trade, two are most suspect. Miss Rover asks: ‘Why would two graziers appear to be involved in a private arms race (Oyster 64)?’

When the opal miner, known as Major Miner, discovers that a dozen boxes of explosives have been stolen from his shack, he blames himself for the dreadful explosion at Oyster’s Reef in which a lot of young people were killed. Hospital then makes it clear that a culture of violence exists when Jess tells Major Miner:

There was enough stuff to blow up the country already at the Reef, and in Andrew Codwin’s bunker, and at Dukke Prophet’s, and in Bernie’s shed, and who knows where else. (Oyster 347)

Hospital is careful to stress that, like many actual cult leaders, Oyster was mindful to establish his authority gradually. It was while spreading his religious beliefs among the Murris living near the Reef, that he learned their ancient secrets.

In the beginning, he sat in the riverbeds with them. We share our secrets, he told Major Miner. We are all God’s children. At the End of Time, the First Ones will be there, as they were in the beginning... In the beginning, a lot of Murris moved into the burrows and tunnels of Oyster’s Reef. They gave their hearts to the Lord, they sang hymns, they listened to Oyster’s Bible lessons, they showed Oyster where the opal ran. (Oyster 338)

Hospital’s research for the character of Oyster, the charismatic cult leader, must surely have included the previously noted David Koresh, leader of the Branch Davidians and the siege at Waco, Texas. In his work, The End of Time, Thompson describes the tragic event that took place there:

... the wooden compound known as Mount Carmel outside Waco, Texas, built by a little-known fundamentalist sect called the Branch Davidians. On 28 February 1993, Mount Carmel was raided by armed federal agents looking for illegal arms. Four of them were killed. A fifty-one-day siege followed, which ended abruptly when the government lost patience and sent in tanks and CS gas. A mysterious fire swept the building and within minutes eighty apocalyptic believers were dead. (281)

Thompson goes on to note that although the sect had been in Mount Carmel since the 1930’s, with an apocalyptic theological base in the Seventh Day Adventist Church, it had strayed a long way from those teachings at the end. He observes:
However inoffensive the original community might have been, it had fallen under the sway of a madman whose eschatology actually required the destruction of Mount Carmel by fire. (286)

He also reveals that David Koresh's real name was Vernon Howell, a rock-guitarist whose semi-literacy sat oddly with his detailed knowledge of the Bible and an obsessive interest in the Book of Revelations. Like the fictional Oyster, he would preach for hours to his exhausted followers and Thompson writes:

As for sexual morality, there is a familiar feel to the complex theological arguments which prescribed free love for David Koresh and strict celibacy for everyone else...

(284)

Although Hospital's Oyster shares many of Koresh's characteristics, and their fate is very similar, she did not depend on his story alone. In an interview on Caroline Baum's television programme, Between the Lines, Hospital traces her interest in the subject to her fascination with a news report about a Canadian cult leader. This man amputated, at the shoulder, the arm of one of his several 'wives' and removed the appendix of another, both without benefit of anaesthetic. When he was arrested, charged and sent to prison, these women travelled miles to be near him. Hospital's curiosity about the power that this man exerted over the women he had so ill treated led to her creation of the enigmatic cult leader, Oyster.

In this work Hospital seeks to decode the world of the religious fanatic and the millenarian visionary and to find common ground with secular interests in which greed, politics and survival dominate. Father Paul Collins, writing in The Australian's Review of Books, notes that:

The visionary represents the extreme view of faith held by many today. These people see faith as a kind of rupture of normal life, whereby the supernatural enters into human experience with transforming results. This is often expressed in terms of a conversion that leads to a significant change in one's lifestyle. This is incomprehensible to the liberal, postmodern intelligentsia who have no understanding of the world of passionate belief and end-time theology that characterise those who espouse various forms of apocalyptic fundamentalism. (18)

Hospital appears to be the exception to Collins' view of 'the liberal, postmodern intelligentsia', of which she is undoubtedly a member. Her background in fundamentalism has led to a less dismissive attitude toward the passion and propensity to violent solutions that characterises followers of such charismatic cult leaders. In Oyster, she demonstrates the inevitability of their apocalyptic destruction. The effect of these attitudes on Hospital's theoretical position will be discussed in the next chapter.
CONCLUSION

This thesis has argued that the feminist and postmodern directions of Hospital's work can best be discerned in reference to the remnants of her repeatedly acknowledged, early fundamentalist and working class origins.

This has required a mapping of Hospital's feminist position as well as a definition of what constitutes a 'postmodern' text, both the subject of much passionate theoretical discussion. Linda Hutcheon (The Politics of Postmodernism) believes that both feminisms and postmodernisms are part of a general crisis of cultural authority, agreeing with Chris Weedon. But she concludes that the main difference between the two schema is a political one. Hutcheon goes on to say:

Postmodernism is not [a politics]; it is certainly political, but it is politically ambivalent, doubly encoded as both complicity and critique, so that it can be (and has been) recuperated by both the left and the right ... (168)

Hospital is primarily a postmodern storyteller not a theorist, yet her feminist ideas are privileged in her novels. Patricia Waugh maintains that the reason many women writers use 'postmodern strategies of disruption' as a means of presenting their fictional worlds is that 'women have always experienced themselves in a 'postmodern' fashion - centred, lacking agency, defined through others' (352). However, Hospital's narratives are concerned with the empowerment of women through the acknowledgement of their own sexuality and she works within her novels to politicise the male perception of ownership of the female body. She also privileges social justice, cultural practice, and institutional patriarchy, both religious and secular. It is not possible to define her work as representative of a single feminist objective and this diversity is reflected in the postmodernist devices she employs. Hospital does indeed present capitalism, patriarchy and even liberal humanism as cultural constructs. Her exploration of multiple realities denies these cherished concepts the infallibility they would claim and so throws doubt on all the patriarchal verities. She embraces a circular rather than a linear view of time which helps to emphasise the anxiety and uncertainty of the postmodern view. In her Scripsi article Christina Thompson argues that:

... these days plots do have to double back on themselves, characters do have to disappear and reappear, paths do have to fork and ruins to circle if they want to make (post?) modern sense. (168)

Hospital's plots certainly fulfill Thompson's criteria.

An exploration of Hospital's work which questions the effect of a fundamentalist upbringing on the subjects she problematises through her narratives, has produced a conclusion that sees the involvement with these concerns as a legacy of her childhood. That she continues to privilege themes of morality and social responsibility points to the longevity of the early
influence of the church on these questions and the lyrical and evocative language she employs. That ‘rich and baroque’ language, she attributes to a childhood steeped in her father’s daily readings from the Bible.

Conversely, her questioning of other articles of faith learned in childhood point to a change in beliefs which she recognises as having begun with the broadening experience of her time at university. There for the first time, she found freedom in the exchange of ideas and the introduction to different ideologies and world views. However, in an interview with Giles Hugo, Hospital reveals the extent to which her earlier influences have endured, acknowledging their effect in her non-judgemental attitude to her characters when she says:

I’m sure it has a lot to do with my fundamentalist childhood, from which I’ve spent a great deal of my life extricating myself... I’d call myself a lapsed post-Christian who is still very much a Christian in my aesthetic heritage but not at all doctrinally or dogmatically. (Hobart Mercury)

This statement clearly points to the continuing engagement with early moral and ethical values that is apparent in her work. The issues which arise from what Hospital has referred to as ‘this moral inheritance’, form questions to which answers are sought but not always found. There is much critical concern about the validity of attributing the autobiographical experiences of an author to a fictional work and Hospital gives an insight into this question when she has Charade say: ‘What I am is an editor of my own past. I collect versions of my prehistory, arrange them, rearrange them, and then tell them to you’. (Charades 173).

The feminist writer Jeanette Winterson is one of Hospital's contemporaries who shared a similar early experience of fundamentalist influence, and whose childhood in the religious stricture of an evangelical home is also in the public domain. Her first work in particular, Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit, has been subjected to critical questioning as to its autobiographical nature and in an interview with Andrea Stretton on The Bookshow (SBS 1993) Winterson speaks of the reality of the creative imagination surpassing the recalled truth of personal history. Through Jeanette, (the character, not the author) Winterson says:

... to create was a fundament, to appreciate, a supplement. Once created, the creature was separate from the creator... . (Oranges 45)

Again she declares in an essay on Gertrude Stern:

‘Against a daily insignificance art recalls to us possible sublimity. It cannot do this if it is merely a reflection of daily life. Our real lives are elsewhere. Art finds them. (Art Objects 59)

While both Winterson and Hospital were raised in the febrile atmosphere of charismatic fundamentalism, Hospital appears to have resented the effect that her family’s religious beliefs had on her life and to blame her marginalisation at school on the differences it
caused. On the other hand, (if Oranges is even in part autobiographical) Winterson feels only puzzlement at the school’s incomprehension of what she sees as universal truth, and blames their ignorance for her experience of difference, while her own certainty is derived from total immersion in her Mother’s beliefs. Hospital left the fundamentalist church of her own accord, disillusioned with its teachings, while Winterson, a successful and inspired preacher, was expelled because of her sexual orientation. However, it is hard to compare the two writers’ recollections of their fundamentalist religious childhood because while Hospital talks freely in interviews of her early experiences within the Pentecostal Church, Winterson declares, in the SBS interview, only that she has spent the years since Oranges was published denying its autobiographical nature. Nevertheless, a conflict arises when she admits in the introduction to the presence of elements in the novel of her past history but she offers an insight into the writer’s position on the question of ‘autobiographical fiction’ when she writes in Art Objects:

How each artist learns to translate autobiography into art is a problem that each artist solves for themselves. When solved, unpicking is impossible, we cannot work backwards from the finished text into its raw material. (106)

In the case of Turner Hospital, this personal aspect is even harder to ignore since she has freely spoken of its place in her novels, particularly in Borderline and Charades. The possibility of the writer’s subjective view of her past and of selective memory must always be held in mind but the author’s own words cannot help influencing critical opinion. In the interview with Giles Hugo she notes:

Probably because my childhood was that of a fundamentalist family, and I was therefore marked out as a kid, it was a long, long time before I could bear to look at it. And once I had lifted the lid off it in writing Charades it was like opening the floodgates and I realised I had this intensely vivid material available from the past. (Hobart Mercury)

One of Hospital’s continuing concerns is to examine the impulse for good which unintentionally brings about evil results, implying but not posing the question ‘Does it then cease to be good?’ The strongest example of this theme is the experience of Felicity and Gus in Borderline which provides a site for further debate of this moral dilemma. The initial impulse of the main protagonists in this narrative, where the political and religious patriarchy of a dominant culture are subjected to scrutiny, is one of undeniable compassion. In a fateful moment, an opportunity arises to intervene, a decision is taken and three protagonist’s lives are changed and eventually forfeited in a failed attempt to save an innocent victim of oppression. Failure is assured by the collusion of two powerful governments and achieved with the help of the dominant established churches of both cultures. The result of this impulse for good is the disintegration of Gus’ family as well as his eventual death, the capture and death of not only the
escapee, Dolores, but her fellow refugee and contact in the United States, Angelo, and the persecution and disappearance of Felicity. Nothing is gained by the sacrifices of Felicity and Gus except the example of their positive reaction to the moral imperative which is itself subsumed by the political pragmatism of a dominant power. These issues in Borderline also feature significantly in Charades, The Last Magician and especially Oyster, and relate to the consequences of the impulse for good, one of the areas of Hospital’s concern noted in the introduction.

The second question raised in the introduction was that of Hospital’s exploration of governmental and institutional morality, both religious and secular and the committing of crimes against humanity in the name of the perceived ‘greater good’. She follows this enquiry in her work by weaving into her narratives situations where the empowerment of her characters is under the control, or at best, influence, of one of these institutions. Laurel Bergman observes:

Throughout her work, Hospital is vitally concerned with the oppressed, the victims, the scapegoats of all orders; ... In The Ivory Swing, it is the position of Indian widows that is the central focus; in Borderline, illegal immigrants in the United States; and prostitutes in The Last Magician. Charades is concerned with victims of the Holocaust, especially in the contexts of certain recent attempts to deny the Holocaust. (367)

In Swing, Charades, Borderline, and Magician it is clear that the patriarchal mandate of governments and institutions allows the decisions as to what constitutes the ‘greater good’ to be within their jurisdiction. It is also clear that, through her narratives and her diverse cast of characters Hospital interrogates this mandate and throws doubt on its validity. At the risk of being seen as a moralistic as well as a political and feminist writer, she explores the connection between those institutions of government, church and judiciary and finds the commonality of patriarchal privilege to be a strong link between them. This conviction is particularly apparent in Borderline, her most overtly political novel. She sees in the connection between two - presumably - diametrically opposed political regimes, and their connection in turn with the dominant religious establishment, a collusion in the deaths of the innocent for alleged crimes against the state. Evoking images of the Death Squads and the Disappeared Ones of the totalitarian states of South America, Hospital answers the question of justification posed in the introduction to this thesis with a thoughtful negative. Conceding that the priest informant believed he was only doing his duty, believing that ‘...they’re all tainted with the wrong ideology, they’re all part of an Absolute Evil.’ (Borderline, 253) leads to the third question. Has the concept of morality become totally relative, defined by social position, religious conviction and political allegiance? It seems obvious that Hospital, as a postmodernist writer, accepts this relativity and clearly foregrounds the view in her work as the above arguments indicate. An
affirmative answer to the final question posed in the introduction concerning a patriarchal political imperative of dominance is to be found in the characters and institutions of her narratives: Shivaraman Nair and the Hindu caste system in *The Ivory Swing*, Seymour and the complicit governments of Salvador and the United States of America in *Borderline*, Nicholas and academia in *Charades*, Robinson Gray and the judicial establishment in *The Last Magician*, and in *Oyster*, a fundamentalist cult leader, arms dealers and the closed male culture of outback Australia.

One further aspect of her work that is totally in accordance with the 'moral inheritance' of her youth is her exploration of post colonial issues. David Callahan (1997), notes that the treatment of Yashoda in *The Ivory Swing* constitutes for some critics a view exposed by Edward Said in Salusinszky's *Criticism in Society*, of Western stereotyping of Eastern women as a 'mysterious, duplicitous, dark Other'. (125) However, it is Hospital's feminist concerns that dominate, as she reveals the extent to which women are oppressed by the inescapable patriarchal practices of their religious and cultural life. It is in *Oyster* that the predominantly male racist attitude of outback Queensland society is foregrounded and the culture of dominance present in post colonial societies such as Australia and in the case of *Borderline*, the United States of America is exposed. Hospital addresses these concerns with race and ethnicity in her work and explores the questions through her characters and her narrative themes. This indicates that her own sense of ethical behaviour and moral values concerning justice and equality derives from her early influences and despite the argument that the values taught by the church reflect and affirm those of government, these values continue to inform her work.

Her feminist convictions, beginning with the experience of repressive practices by the male dominated hierarchy of the church, have developed with her later discovery of different cultures and her resistance to dominant patriarchal societies. The feminist precepts of female agency include the right of a woman to give her body for pleasure or gain without the censure of society. Hospital exposes the judgemental opposition of diverse, but similarly patriarchal cultures towards women's sovereignty over their own bodies and the price exacted from them for such temerity. She simultaneously celebrates the eroticism of sexual passion and marital fidelity, while offering the alternative, and more pragmatic notion of physical propinquity, opportunity and even obsession to her protagonists.

In seeking to identify the development of a Judaic concept of Good and Evil in Hospital's work as a legacy of the centrality of Christian Fundamentalism in her childhood, I have found that the theme grows stronger and more overt in each successive novel. From the religious and culturally based cruelties of *The Ivory Swing* to the millennial madness of *Oyster* she has presented the problem of evil in religion, society, the State and the judiciary and arrives in this
last novel at the question of great evil perpetrated in the name of a religiously sanctioned greater
good.

In dealing with difference, which is understandably a strong recurring element in her
work, Hospital presents her dominant concept, that of 'the shadow-self'. For each woman in her
narratives who survives the trauma of being 'other' to the mainstream of society, and emerges as
strong and independent, there is one who succumbs to the pressure; Hospital's version of 'the
madwoman in the attic'. These pairings occur in The Ivory Swing with Juliet and Yashoda; in
Charades with Bea and Verity; in The Last Magician with Catherine and Cat and in Oyster
with Mercy and Susannah. In Borderline the pairing of Felicity and Dolores results in the fall of
both, perhaps in a bleaker way revealing the helplessness of individuals who fight political
systems.

That the narratives in her work are autobiographical is debatable, but that she is
influenced by, and writes in part from, her early experience is undeniable. The exclusion of some
events and the inclusion of others is necessarily arbitrary, and the extent to which she selectively
draws on her past cannot be known. However, by acknowledging and exploring Hospital's early
encounters with fundamentalism that resulted in those childhood memories which continue to
influence her work, we also learn that unless women write in some part from their own experience,
the quality of their imagination, which is the element that makes those memories transcend
mere recording, cannot reach its full potential. As Helène Cixous wrote in Laugh of the Medusa:

Woman must write her self: ... Woman must put herself into the text - as into the
world and into history - by her own movement. (1981)

Ultimately, the question of whether good and evil exist in the world as sites of real
power properly belongs in a religious discourse and the fact that Hospital has posited it, even
privileged it, in her novels emphasises the lasting influence of the strong beliefs imposed by her
Fundamentalist Christian childhood.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

WORKS CITED


---, "Untying the Text", The Order of Discourse, Ed, R. Young, n. p.


---, *Charades*. University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, 1988

---, *Borderline*. University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, 1992

---, *The Last Magellan*. University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, 1992


---, Interview with Caroline Baum. *Between the Lines*. ABC Television, Sydney, 1998

---, Interview with Misy Daniel. *Publisher's Weekly*, vol. 239, 1992

---, Interview with Christine Hamelin. "Novelist As Urgent Quester" *Australian and New Zealand Studies in Canada*, vol. 9, 1993

---, Interview with Giles Hugo. *Hobart Mercury*, 1998


---, Interview with Ron Store. *LiNO*, vol. 17:1 (1990)


Lovell, Sue. "The Pygmalion Factor: Creativity in the Novels of Janette Turner Hospital". *LiNO*, vol. 17:1, 1990

Merry, Bruce. "Review: Janette Turner Hospital's Charades", *LiNO*, vol 17:1 1990


Tomby, Kate. "Gender, power and postmodernism in The Last Magician", *Westerly*, No.3, Spring, 1990

Thompson, Christina. "Janette Turner Hospital: Certain Uncertainties", *Scripsi*, vol. 5:2, 1989


Wallis, Roy. Ed, *Millennialism and Charisma*, Queen's University, Belfast, Northern Ireland, 1982


Willis, Anne-Marie. *Illusions of Identity: The Art of a Nation*, Hale & Iremonger, Sydney, 1993


---. Interview with Andrea Stretton. "Four Feminist Writers", *The Bookshow*, SBS, Sydney, 1993
WORKS CONSULTED


Davis, J. “Come On In, The Water’s Fine: Janette Turner Hospital’s Short Prose Fiction, Jisobars”, *LiNO*, vol 17:1, 1990


Devlin-Glass, Frances, and Comte, Annette. *Flying ‘In Between’.* Deakin University, 1997


---. *The Canadian Postmodern.* Oxford University Press, Toronto, 1988
Lamberts Bendroth, Margaret. Fundamentalism & Gender, 1875 to The Present, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1993.