Contemporary Literary Criticism

CLC 321

Volume 321

Contemporary Literary Criticism

Criticism of the Works of Today's Novelists, Poets, Playwrights, Short Story Writers, Scriptwriters, and Other Creative Writers

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Contents

Janette Turner Hospital
1942-

[Also wrote under the pseudonym Alex Jupiter] Australian novelist and short story writer.

The following entry presents criticism on Hospital's career through 2010. For additional information on her life and works, see *CLC*, Volumes 42 and 145.

INTRODUCTION

Considered a major voice in twentieth-century Australian literature, Hospital is hailed for her examination of displacement and identity in the modern world. Utilizing sumptuous, highly descriptive language and evocative literary allusions, Hospital's novels and stories focus on characters that inhabit the fringes of society. At the same time, these characters are willing to traverse social boundaries to recover secrets buried in the past, thereby revealing the origins of crises that have been obscured by time and trauma.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Hospital was born in Melbourne, Australia, to Adrian and Elise Turner, devout Pentecostal fundamentalists. She moved with her family to Brisbane when she was seven. Growing up in a strict, religious household, Hospital felt alienated from the secular world. She received a B.A. from the University of Queensland in 1966. While at college, she taught high school English in Brisbane from 1963 to 1966. In 1965 she married Clifford G. Hospital, a scholar of comparative religion and a specialist in Sanskrit. She and her husband left Australia, and from 1967 to 1971 she worked at Harvard University as a librarian. In 1973 Hospital received an M.A. from Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario, with an emphasis in medieval literature. She went on to teach English at St. Lawrence College and Queen's University from 1973 to 1982. She moved with her husband to India in 1977; her experiences there inspired her first novel, *The Ivory Swing* (1982), which received Canada's Seal First Novel Award. During the next two decades, she taught at such renowned institutions as the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the University of Ottawa, the University of Sydney, Boston University, and the University of East Anglia, England. Her first collection of short stories, *Dislocations* (1986), won the Fellowship of Australian Writers Fiction Award. She garnered the Queensland Premier Literary Award for *Due Preparations for the Plague* (2003). In 2003 Hospital received Australia's prestigious Patrick White Award. She joined the faculty of the University of South Carolina in 1999.

MAJOR WORKS

Marked by energetic prose and intricate, twisting plot dynamics, Hospital's fiction demonstrates a prevailing concern with the intangibility of the past and the circumstances that compel the searching individual. *Charades* (1989) concerns Koenig, an American scientist studying Heisenberg's uncertainty principle—a theory that posits the impossibility of ascertaining the specific location of physical particles. One night Koenig is accosted by an Australian woman named Charade Ryan. She has embarked on a quest to find her father, and she wants to tap into Koenig's expertise regarding the difficulties of pinning down an elusive subject. The novel is comprised of Charade's stories about her past and Koenig's loosely related attempts to break free from his ex-wife. A kaleidoscopic investigation into identity and memory, *The Last Magician* (1992) features Lucy Barclay, a prostitute who descends into the labyrinths beneath Sydney's suburbs—a realm that intentionally echoes Dante's *Inferno*—to piece together the history of a group of people whom she has recently befriended. Her journey becomes intertwined with that of Charlie Chang, a photographer who roams the underworld in pursuit of a mysterious figure called Cat. Packed with metaphysical speculation and dense prose, *Oyster* (1996) revolves around Outer Maroo, a remote town in the Australian outback, and a charlatan known simply as Oyster. When Oyster arrives in Outer Maroo, the town is largely populated by opal miners and religious zealots. Seizing upon the situation, Oyster establishes a cult based upon an ostensibly impending apocalypse, and the town soon falls under his sway. The paranoia that overtakes Outer Maroo accelerates when two parents show up in search of their missing children. *Due Preparations for the Plague* traces the aftereffects of a 1987 terrorist hijacking of an Air France plane. As a child, Lowell Hawthorne lost his mother in the

hijacking, and he sees the failures in his adult life as a consequence of his inability to cope with her death. Samantha, the child of another person who was killed in the hijacking, convinces Lowell that the government has censored the truth about the incident. When Lowell discovers evidence that lends credence to Samantha's claims, the two set out to uncover the mystery behind the event that has shaped their lives.

CRITICAL RECEPTION

Critics have steadily lauded Hospital's fiction for its innovative and insightful social analysis. For instance, they have maintained that Hospital's frequent emphasis on the natural world serves to counteract the potential for social influence to restrict the individual. Scholar Donna J. Davis has contended that Hospital's depiction of nature as a "dominant influence" constitutes a "postmodern approach to addressing, resisting, and successfully subverting colonial linguistic, economic, technical, race-based, gender-based, and epistemological agendas." Furthermore, commentators have mentioned *Due Preparations for the Plague* alongside Andrew McGahan's *Underground* and Richard Flanagan's *The Unknown Terrorist* for its portrayal of a government that turns legitimate fears of terrorism into an excuse for exerting social domination. Moreover, reviewers have interpreted *Oyster* as a critique of isolated communities as well as an illustration of the tension between chaos and order that undergirds Western society. Likewise, they have viewed *The Last Magician* as a work of social commentary. Asserting the prevalence of double-meaning and the deconstruction of dichotomies in the novel, critic Sue Lovell claims: "By then blurring the boundary between art and life, the represented and the real, Hospital shifts a project of literary representation to one of cultural analysis." In addition, Hospital's fiction has been praised for its structural dynamism, particularly with regard to the multiple narrative strands in *Charades* and the imagistic analysis of the limitations of language in *The Last Magician.* The critical approbation that Hospital has enjoyed over the years is a testament to the richness and depth of her work.

PRINCIPAL WORKS

The Ivory Swing (novel) 1982
The Tiger in the Tiger Pit (novel) 1983
Borderline (novel) 1985
Dislocations: Stories (short stories) 1986
Charades (novel) 1989
Isobars: Stories (short stories) 1990
A Very Proper Death [as Alex Juniper] (novel) 1991
The Last Magician: A Novel (novel) 1992
Collected Stories, 1970-1995 (short stories) 1995
Oyster (novel) 1996
Due Preparations for the Plague (novel) 2003
North of Nowhere, South of Loss (short stories) 2003
Orpheus Lost (novel) 2007
Forecast: Turbulence (short stories and memoir) 2011

CRITICISM

Russell West (essay date 2001)

SOURCE: West, Russell. "'Multiple Exposures': Spatial Dilemma of Postmodern Artistic Identity in the Fiction of Janette Turner Hospital." In *Flight from Certainty: The Dilemma of Identity and Exile,* edited by Anne Luyat and Francine Tolron, pp. 177-90. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001.

[*In the following essay, West suggests that the quest for geographical and ancestral belonging undertaken by Hospital's characters is symbolized by spatial representations of surface and depth.*]

The Australian novelist David Malouf was asked whether he believed Australian culture included a specific experience of space. In reply he mentioned instead an experience of time: that of being woken in deep of night by callers telephoning from European daytime. Malouf's reply, far from avoiding the question, directly addresses the question of contemporary Australian experiences of space by placing the issue in a global context. Australia, rather than being the land when any news from Europe is already six months old upon arrival, as one character observes in Malouf's most recent tale of the early years of white settlement, is intimately linked to the rest of the world (Malouf, 204). The "tyranny of distance" is eradicated by the communications technology of the satellite telephone link, only to be replaced by the temporal confusion revealed in the inevitable bewildered enquiry: "What time is it there?" Australia's place within shrinking planetary dimensions produces temporal rifts of an unexpected sort.

Precisely this experience of intercontinental telephone calls is a frequently recurring feature of fiction by the Australian-Canadian author Janette Turner Hospital, such that it attains an emblematic value within her

novels indicative of the deep contradiction generating the narratives. In her fictions, Australia is no longer a place on its own, but merely one of several sites where the action occurs, thus generating a divided consciousness and a pluralisation of structures of meaning. In the closing pages of ***Charades*** (1988), the young protagonist rings her step-mother in Queensland from Boston, Massachusetts, driven by a sudden intuition regarding her real mother's identity. The conversation triggers the daughter's decision to return "home" to a substitute family accepted despite the absence of "blood" relationships. At the end of ***The Last Magician*** (1992), two phone calls, from the narrator Lucy in Queensland and her best friend Catherine in London, and between Catherine and her ex-lover Charlie in New York, illustrate the same tension: that it is indeed a phone call from Charlie is only presumed, as the caller utters no word, and the communication between the two women heralds a return to a Queensland charged with the painful memory of vanished loved ones. In ***Oyster*** (1996), this global communication and the potential ruptures it might bring with it are abruptly reversed in the opal town of Outer Maroo by the virtual impossibility of contacting the outside world by telephone; when contact is made by dissident member of the small mining community, it signals the apocalyptic collapse of the siege-mentality basis of social identity in the township.

Janet Turner Hospital insists on the tension between shrinkage of spatial dimensions and the accompanying disruption of previously accustomed modes of presence and fixity which is a hallmark of modern global society; in particular, her work dramatises versions of Australian identity based on scattered domiciles and divided cultural loyalties. Her early novels, she has said, are "about people constantly obsessed with places other than where they are at the moment . . . Even on a pragmatic level, when one has family in Australia, one is always aware of the two different time schemes: here and there. It affects my perception of things all the time" (Brydon, 21).

Martin Albrow claims that the increasing proximity of formerly discrete cultures and societies in the new global geography has produced a collective identity crisis, where citizens of the global village ask themselves: "Who am I, where am I, where do I belong and to whom?" (Beck 182). Similarly, Fredric Jameson speaks of a loss of the capacity for "cognitive mapping", that is, of the capacity of our minds to map the global, multinational, communication networks in which we find ourselves caught up as individual subjects, only vaguely sensed as "this latest evolutionary mutation of late capitalism towards 'something else' which is no longer family or neighbourhood, city or state, nor even nation, but as abstract and nonsituated as the placelessness of a room in an international chain of hotels or the anonymous space of airport terminals that all run together in your mind" (Jameson, 44, 116). In series of recent publications, Paul Virilio has described a culture in which dramatically increased mobility of transport, linked with a revolution in the media by virtue of which the technology of representation operates at constantly increasing speed, such that distances are cancelled out, places erased—in a process characterised not only by communicational possibilities opened up by the ubiquity of Internet connections, but also the coercive potential inherent in military technology and surveillance (*Vitesse et politique: Essai de dromologie* [1977], *L'Espace critique* [1984], *Esthétique de la disparition* [1980/1994]). Ulrich Beck has drawn attention to the increasing heterogeneity of the "transnational" communities created in the wake of revolutions in transport and communication, the resistance of localities to total assimilation in global entities such as multinational concerns; dense networks of international contacts also ensure that received notions of identity, meaning and values are levered open by contact with other cultures (something that every expatriate has experienced in trying to negotiate the pitfalls of intercultural codes, even between the various linguistic communities of the English-speaking world) (Beck 1997). It is thus increasingly urgent to deal with textual, and in particular literary manifestations of postmodern shifts of spatial sense. In Janette Turner Hospital's fiction this process is foregrounded under the sign of difference and plurality, going beyond the traditional geographical parameters of the nation-state. The overlap between the spatial mobility of the writer, with its corresponding complications of national or cultural identity and geographical multiplicity can of course be placed in the context of current debates touching upon the rapidly changing spatial paradigms of Australian identities, particularly regarding relationships with trading partners and international neighbours in the Pacific region and the issue of Aboriginal land claims.

Jurij Lotman has asserted that a narrative event is generated by a character's transgression of the boundaries of a semantic field, a observation which may be particularly pertinent in relation to Turner Hospital (Lotman 350). Roughly the same thought is articulated by her: "The arrival of any foreigner changes the map"—with the significant addition: "and foreigners spell the beginning of the end" (**O** [***Oyster***] 11). Turner Hospital's narratives signal attempts to rearticulate space, to re-plot the reference points of

increasingly mobile (inter)national identities which disturb the spatial certainties of an earlier era. Significantly, Australia is always open to the outside world in these novels, always linked to other places whence the characters come or where they yearn to be. Her narratives register often disturbing and unwelcome changes in the topography of Australian identity. Both ***Charades*** and ***The Last Magician*** evoke the anglocentric, xenophobic Australia of the 1950s and 1960, where "all good little Australians" in the world of academia and letters would be "rewarded with Oxford", and when the schoolboy Charlie Chang's confident announcement, "I was born in North Queensland, Mr Brady. I'm a true blue Aussie" could earn him the teacher's retort, "Because a man's born in a stable, that doesn't make him a horse" (***Charades,*** hereafter **C,** 139/***The Last Magician,*** hereafter **LM,** 43). In ***Oyster,*** at the end of the 1990s, the graziers and Outback town-dwellers of Outer Maroo are instilled with a siege mentality which harks back to the times before Feminism, Republicanism, Aboriginal land-rights and the coming of "foreigners".

Janette Turner Hospital's fiction signals the demise of a form of Australian identity based upon a determination to "bash the difference out" (**LM** 77)—but whose decline is not without numerous rear-guard skirmishes and a degree of resistance: in the Outback town at the end of the 1990s, a Greek-Australian visitor realises that: "It's *difference* that Australians hate . . . Melbourne or Athens, they're much the same to people out here" (**O** 118). The multinational, multicultural composition of Turner Hospital's narratives constitutes a sharp rejoinder to this aggressive parochialism.

Spatial Confusion

Shifts in spatial references points, whether geographic, subjective or linguistic, generate confusion and insecurity. In Turner Hospital's fiction, the paradigmatic expression of this confusion is that of losing one's way. Her most recent novel, ***Oyster,*** can be seen to determine this theme retrospectively when the narrator Jess, a surveyor in an earlier life, describes the confusion of the motorist searching for Outer Maroo: "Somewhere far ahead, according to his map, are the dotted lines of the South Australian and Northern Territory borders, but he can see no sign of these poignant ideas of order. They leave no trace on the land . . . The translation of these markings from map to landscape is a psychic skill, in the exercise of which earnest map-readers may go astray and may wander into Outer Maroo." Significantly, the *only* travellers who find the Outback opal town are those who have lost their way (**O** 5, 6).

Reading Janette Turner Hospital's decidedly postmodernist fiction, which scrambles dream and reality, swaps various time planes and rocks from one fictional place to another, the reader gains the impression of total abandon of stable narrative orientation, of generalised spatial confusion. But a modicum of order can be introduced into the experience of disorientation which characterises these novels. A distinction can be made between spatial confusion caused by perception of contradictory aspects of reality, and spatial confusion produced by the contradictory character of artistic *representations* of that reality. The frequent feeling of *vertigo* which so often assails Turner Hospital's characters, designating the intensely physical experience of a loss of fixed spatial coordinates, stems from two quite distinct sources.

The first variety of vertigo is precipitated by her characters' abrupt awareness of the contiguity of radically incompatible or conflicting social spheres, contradictory worlds which nevertheless share common borders. The photographer Charlie Chang descends into the quarry, a massive open-cut pit which plunges hundreds of meters deep beneath the impoverished inner-city Sydney suburb of Redfern, and extends into a complex of underground tunnels and passages running under the city. He is overcome by "dizziness. He has to crawl back, he has to lean against the cliff face" (**LM** 93). The quarry gives concrete form to the social injustice of an Australian society of the near future, and at the same time, the threat which this underworld presents to the privileged ruling classes.

A second form of vertigo is provoked by the work of art. In ***Charades,*** disorderly verbal narratives convey the chaotic form in which events are perceived and registered in human memory. Young Charade, listening to her Aunt Kay's erratic account of the improbable sighting of Charade's long since vanished father, cries: "'Wait, that's a switchback jump. I can't. . . . How did we get to Toronto?' . . . 'Aunt Kay, don't do this to me. We're in the refectory with my father, and then suddenly you're—'" (**C** 156-7). Charade's own lacunary syntax points up the inability of verbal language to deal with the acceleration of the narrative and the consequent spatial rifts that are thus opened up. Lucy, an older Lucia, experiences a new form of vertigo upon seeing one of Charlie Chang's postmodern arthouse films, a "mutational collage" of Queensland rain-forest, Salgado photos of Mexican open-cut mines and paintings from the Vatican. The voice-over commentary shocks her: "It is unmistakeably Charlie's voice. It reaches me from outside of time, it echoes, it causes vertigo and pain . . . The lens catches the

braided water where it twists into a whorl around two boulders. I am looking into the eye of the whirlpool . . . Now, as though swaying or drunk, I seem to lose my footing or perspective . . . very clever, Charlie, though you're making me lose my sense of balance" (LM 58). Charlie's film juxtaposes places geographically separate, and peoples them with persons long since vanished, persons who never met in reality; the connections made deeply disturb Lucy's sense of order and reality. The narrator of ***Oyster*** is aware of the same potential of narrative topsy-turvy, warning the reader that "the facts may seem to float loose in a sequence of their own devising, much as a bunch of helium-filled balloons, their strings all reached from the same hand at the same moment in time . . . will certainly not reach you in a cluster . . . Some will veer north or south and never reach you at all. Some will spin on contrary winds and come back to you, days later, from further on" (O 6-7). In this novel it is not only the characters who are confronted with bewildering narratives; the reader too is explicitly identified as being caught in the same dilemma. The very idea of vertigo as an aberrant experience suggests that the *desire* for spatial order is deep-seated, rooted in a physical sense of orientation long before becoming affective or psychological. That characters such as Charade express dismay at the odd twists and turns of her Aunt Kate's story, that the narrator of ***Oyster*** believes it necessary to warn the reader of impending narrative dispersion, speak for the strong urge, in Turner Hospital's narratives, to put things in their right place, to understand the world.

The Hermeneutic Drive

The forms of vertigo provoked by spatial dislocation in these novels presume a spatial order in representations of the world, but paradoxically, testify to the illusory character of that order: the moment of giddiness arises from the discovery that assumptions of spatial fixity are inadequate versions of reality because partial, in the double sense of *biased,* on the one hand, and of *incomplete,* on the other. Jess, for instance, claims that linear narrative is based on an occlusion of the narrator's view point; if a different viewpoint is chosen, the linear progression which will emerge will be very different: "I do know that time does not run in a straight line, and never has. It is a capillary system, mapped outwards from whichever pulse point the observer occupies . . . To put this another way, stepping into a story or constructing a map are much the same thing" (O 47). As John Berger has said, "It is scarcely possible any longer to tell a straight story unfolding in time. And this is because we are too aware of what is continually traversing the storyline *laterally*" (quoted in Soja, 22).

This collapsing of linear narratives into dispersed localised places where versions of reality are constructed perhaps accounts for the frequent switching between first, second and third-person narrative in Turner Hospital's fictions. Yet the idea that apparent linear order is a mere facade to be torn away to reveal an underlying spatial dispersion nonetheless implies the assumption that this underlying disorder also has a governing logic, if one not immediately apparent. The inadequacy of maps to describe the situation of Outer Maroo actually transpires to be motivated by an illegal economic order: Outer Maroo has been erased from the maps so that outsiders will not investigate the shady opal deals taking place there (O 64). It is for this reason, then, that Turner Hospital's novels are inhabited by a powerful hermeneutic drive despite their apparent vitiation of such a paradigm.

The quest which drives the plots of Turner Hospital's fictions ("I'm looking for someone" Charade announces to Koenig at their first meeting [C 64]; Lucy is searching for Gabriel, Catherine for Charlie, Charlie for Cat, Mercy goes searching for Brian, Sarah and Nick are searching for their children Amy and Angelo respectively—and the author too describes herself as an "urgent quester" [Hamelin, 106]) is a search for a single, stable place. Lucy is tormented by the problem of determining an originary chronological site where a linear narrative can be anchored and thus made to offer up a logical explanation of subsequent events: "I cannot start there" she says, thinking of Cedar Creek Falls, where Cat's bones were discovered (LM 3). The same search for origins drives Gabriel's similarly spatialised investigation of the underside of Sydney wealth and power. It is the haunting enigma of his parents' estrangement which propels a second version of quest in Turner Hospital's fiction, the question of "how to read meaning in appearances", which Deborah Bowen sees as the author's "fundamental concern" (Bowen, 184). Gabriel's effort to uncover the reality behind appearances leads him into a wider-ranging interrogation of "something lurking beneath his father's dogma: heresy perhaps; a countertruth; a lie" which in turn becomes a dangerous investigation into the covet "backroom-back-stairs-off-the-record" activities of Sydney's respectable ruling classes; when his investigations into business concerns become too penetrating, he himself vanishes into the obscurity which conceals the criminal activities of the rich (LM 265-6). The vertical metaphors of interpretative depth are ubiquitous: "Gabriel mapped the quarry", "the city's *underside*", the literal underside of the illegal operations of the likes of judge His Honour Robinson Gray, just as the underground opal mines of Oyster's Reef are the literal underside of Andrew Godwin's

and Dukke Prophet's shady financial dealing with American hamburger concerns, Singapore jewel wholesalers and arms traders (**LM** 265, 199; my emphasis). Lucy as temporary prostitute and erstwhile quarry-dweller claims to have "always wanted to mail my own notes from underground. I want to see the nether side of our cities and send back word" (**LM** 19). Finally, the search for chronological origins or the reality behind appearances takes on an ethical as well as an interpretative character. Says Lucy: "You do actually meet people who make you want to keep on looking"—"Looking for what?"—"Oh you know, *goodness, meaning,* crap like that. One throw in a hundred" (**LM** 33). This assertion of "redemptive" meaning, as Charlotte Clutterbuck has noticed, is the apex of the paradoxical prominence of search in narratives which otherwise display purely contingent, constantly shifting spatial parameters (Clutterbuck, 121).

These narratives do not dispute the reality of the historical events which generate their narratives or their narration. In ***Charades,*** the disappearance of Verity Ashkenazy's parents in the concentration camps, which indirectly leads to Charade being abandoned by her parents Verity and Nicholas; in ***The Last Magician,*** the death of Willy, the rape of Cat and Charlie and Catherine after Cat's trial, and the subsequent presumed murder of Cat; in ***Oyster,*** the arrival of Oyster in Outer Maroo and the destruction of his religious clan—these are the traumatic events out of which the narratives flow, and without which narrative would not be initiated. But their traumatic force, generating pain and guilt, is such that they can never be related with any semblance of factual objectivity. Such events can only ever be told from several mutually exclusive narratives vantage-points, and often at several removes.

Thus the hermeneutic urge has an extraordinarily problematic position in the fiction of Turner Hospital. It presupposes the capacity of narrative to offer up identity, truth, unambiguous chains of causal connection, and distinct separation of time and place at which and in which events "take place". But this urge is embedded in a narrative whose voices are multiple, dispersed, contradictory, and which never tire of pointing this out to the reader. To foreground such narrative relativity and plurality clearly strips away the facade of fallacious objectivity, but it may also vitiate the possibility of any reliable place from which a critique of illusion and ideology may be launched. Kate Temby claims of ***The Last Magician,*** "the novel's self-conscious questioning and metafictional narrative form subvert the possibility of its providing a comprehensive or effective critique of oppressive power structures" (Temby, 47). The erosion of singular spatiality in her fiction also furnishes a new and unexpected variety of truth guarantee. The resolution of this contradiction can perhaps be achieved, though never completely, her texts suggest, by playing off the spatial disruptions of narrative art against the spatial disruptions of social reality.

Spatial Interpretation

Most forms of identity are structured by an exclusive either/or: A = Non-B. Janette Turner Hospital resists such dualistic constructions of truth. Professor Koenig, for instance, is fascinated by the idea that two mutually contradictory theories can both be right, and consequently comes to the paradoxical conclusion that he was, on the one hand, never married to his elusive ex-wife, and on the hand, will never cease to be married to her (**C** 94, 210); likewise, Bea says to Charade, at the end of the novel: "Verity's your mother. But me and Nicholas made you, that's the truth" (**C** 285). The wealthy citizens of Sydney delude themselves that their comfortable neighbourhoods are safely sealed off from the threatening world of the quarry, and implement such wishful thinking by a ruthless politics of "triage". But in reality, Lucy claims: "The quarry is leaking into the city, and the city is slipping quarrywards. Everyone knows this, but everyone denies it. The quarry is growing, imperceptibly, relentlessly, inch by inch". Dualistic social order is based upon the officially sanctioned violence of "containment"; the mutual contamination of these two opposed terms cannot however be halted (**LM** 89-90). These versions of truth based on binary oppositions are replaced in Turner Hospital's fiction by less reductive triangular structures.

Charlie's obsessive photography expands the dual subject-object gaze into a third dimension as the original moment of perception is re-run and subject to scrutiny: Charlie claims to take photos ("So I'll see what I've seen." **LM** 36). Lucy's narrative opens with a similar example of self-reflection: "In the middle of the journey, I came to myself in a dark wood where the straight way was lost . . . *Ah, how hard a thing it is to tell of that wood*" (**LM** 3). Her self-recognition, self-recollection is provoked by the mediating influence of Charlie's film, and reinforced by the emphatic secondary mediation of Dante's epic, and by more discrete mediation of her own problematic attempt at narrative. Whether the doubling of the self by virtue of the mediating instance (listener in the case of narrative, or photograph in the case of visual art) the same effect ensues: with the creation of self-reflexivity, distance, a new form of self-knowledge is produced.

Not only self-knowledge, but also knowledge of others, can be gained in this way. Both Charlie in ***The Last Magician*** and Jess in ***Oyster*** are silent characters whose reserve provokes others to "colonise silence with their unburdenings" ("Silence, Charlie said, seduces"), "a wall or a boulder, or perhaps as a rock cavern in the breakaways, hollow, receptive, capable of the infinite absorption of sound, a black hole that gave nothing back" (**LM** 83, **O** 165). Faced with an apparently impassive silence, the garrulous reveal themselves. The listener is at once intercalary surface (like Koenig for Charade) and careful observer. A more active form of production of knowledge, and another clear example of triangular structures of knowledge, is that utilised by Charlie with his enigmatic Chinese riddles, or equally, his photographic collages.

These conundrums oblige the hearers or spectators to create a meaning out of the rebus with which they are confronted, a meaning is of their own making. The riddle-teller or artist can then read off the meaning produced out of the interaction between art, spectator and artist-observer. Charlie's photo-montages offer various potential meanings which are not directly stated, but which the spectator must assemble her—or himself: "There is no order, no sequence . . . The sequence is determined by the viewer, a magician of sorts, who must shuffle the crossed destinies and read the cards. Meaning is in the eye of the beholder . . ." (**LM** 243). Accordingly, a New York neighbour in the same apartment building feels himself publicly exposed by one of Charlie's photo exhibitions which unwittingly features the children he has sexually abused; similarly, Robinson Gray tacitly admits guilt when confronted by Lucy's juxtaposition of photos of Gabriel, of Sheba with Cat's hair clip, and of herself at Cedar Creek Falls. "So you know", says Gray, producing, by his own implicit confession, the potential knowledge to be gained from the photos' mute contiguity and suggestion of causal connection (**LM** 233, 339). The references to Hamlet in this novel are no coincidence, pointing as they do towards indices of guilt (**LM**, 32, 71).

Charlie's collage art produces knowledge by a process of combination and juxtaposition (one thinks of Nietzsche's "Denken ist ein Herausheben" [Nietzsche, 301]). The description of Charlie's flat might equally well apply to the artworks it contains: "Space. That is what the apartment celebrates: the mysterious quality of space, and the way it draws attention to single objects placed judiciously within it, and the way these isolated objects, in turn, give space a form" (**LM** 46). Both the relations within the artwork, and between artwork and spectator are productive of knowledge. Here, knowledge is not an inert pre-existent entity to be absorbed in the way one might learn facts or dates or vocabulary, but is produced in ways that cannot be predicted or controlled by contingent interactions and relationships. Charlie's collages exemplify a form of spatial knowledge based on relations of contiguity, rather than the relations of identity inherent in "objective" knowledge (see Pred). The collage method is thus entirely contextual, both in the possible relations asserted by the mute juxtaposition of images, and by the specific, local place of production of knowledge. Robinson Gray's "So you know" proves nothing, it is not a form of objective knowledge; it is far more subjective, or better, intersubjective. It is no coincidence that Turner Hospital cites Werner Heisenberg—"What we observe is not nature itself, but nature exposed to our method of questioning" (**C** 288)—for the mode of triadic knowledge which her fiction dramatises is productive, local, contingent and always inherently social.

Janette Turner Hospital's fictional artworks offer a riposte to the pessimism of a critic such as Peter Zima, who claims that Brechtian *Verfremdung*, as an exemplary form of the cognitive-critical role played by art in the era of modernism, has today lost the stable site from which it could unmask ideology: all that is left to it is to cater to aesthetic enjoyment or to figure as "provocation without truth content" (Zima, 255). Her fiction points to a way out of this bleak alternative. Accepting that there is no "outside" of textuality, or of the power mechanisms of late capitalism, for that matter, Turner Hospital creates a new form of the "critical distance" upon which, according to Fredric Jameson, left cultural politics has traditionally depended and which seems to have been abolished in the cultural space of postmodernism (Jameson, 48; see also Chambers, xi—xx). Turner Hospital herself comments upon the situation of her narrators *in media res* (**"Letter to a New York Editor,"** 562) or as Lucy says, "the way the teller inserts herself into the tale" (**LM** 71). She renews aesthetic critical distance by installing a refraction of disparate vantage-points within the shifting and multiple outlooks of contemporary culture. It is a mode of knowledge which, like her novels, offers no final answers, no dialectical closure or resolution of contradictions, but rather an open-ended dialogue and experimentation: a mode of knowledge which is thus resolutely postmodern, following Hutcheon's anti-dialectical characterisation of the concept. (Hutcheon, x). As Lucy says, "All I can do is feel my way, advancing, retreating, positing theories, testing, rejecting, going in circles and always