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'The alluring patina of loss': Photography, Memory, and Memory Texts in *Sixty Lights* and *Afterimage*

> [I long] to have such a memorial of every being dear to me in the world. It is not merely the likeness which is precious in such cases – but the association and the sense of nearness involved in the thing … the fact of the very shadow of the person lying there fixed forever! It is the very sanctification of portraits I think – and it is not at all monstrous in me to say, what my brothers cry out against so vehemently, that I would rather have such a memorial of one I dearly loved, than the noblest artist's work ever produced.
>
> (Elizabeth Barrett Browning in a letter to Mary Russell Mitford, 1843)

> Photography is an elegiac art, a twilight zone … All photographs are *memento mori*. To take a photograph is to participate in another person's (or thing's) mortality. Precisely by slicing out this moment and freezing it, all photograph's testify to time's relentless melt.
>
> (Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, 1977)

Writing about historical recollection and material culture, Elizabeth Edwards asserts that 'photographs are perhaps the most ubiquitous and insistent focus of nineteenth- and twentieth-century memory' (Edwards, 1999: 221). It is fitting, then, that many contemporary historical novelists return to the Victorian origins of photography to explore history, memory and the Victorian era.[1] They dramatise the value that attaches to photography as a memorial medium, its promise, as Elizabeth Barrett Browning suggests in the epigraph above, to erase distance, to

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cheat time, and allow access to the past, the resuscitation of the dead. Their novels return to the inception of photography in the early Victorian period when it was greeted as a ghostly medium that could supplement memory, function as time's receptacle, and pledge to remember in the face of loss. This chapter examines Gail Jones' *Sixty Lights* and Helen Humphreys' *Afterimage*, which exemplify the way in which, for many neo-Victorian novels, memory, history and fiction come together in the trope of the photograph. Employing a lexicon of haunting and spectrality to represent the photographic medium, *Sixty Lights* and *Afterimage* are concerned with recognising the persistence of the past in a present cut off from linear models of inheritance and memory, symbolised by the dead mother. Ghostliness becomes a metaphor for a past both lost and, paradoxically, perpetuated, endlessly returned or repeated in the present. The mediums for this haunting are photographs, maps, bodies and, importantly, novels and stories. Contrary to the prevailing notion that we can only know the past through its documentary traces, these novels deploy the ghostly figure of photography in order to posit the persistence of the past as uncanny repetition and as embodied memory.

Significantly, the novels use the language of spectrality to also position themselves as revenant. They resuscitate, or, to use Hilary Schor's evocative phrase, 'ghostwrite' (Schor, 2000) Victorian literary texts and mediate Victorian culture in the present. This chapter connects the vocabulary of photography as a memorial and ghostly trace with that of memory discourse, particularly as it is deployed by scholars such as Patrick Hutton and Pierre Nora. Particularly, it makes use of the distinction between history as willed recollection, and memory as unconscious repetition, to explicate the novels' exploration of the persistence of the past and the ways in which we can recognise it. The chapter closes by considering the implications of these historical fictions as 'memory texts' (Jones, 2005) arguing that they are not, primarily, concerned with metafictional or metahistorical reflections. Rather they offer us shards of the Victorian past, a family album of images and repetitions, mimicking the features of memory as it is depicted in the novels. These novels invoke the Victorian past as a cultural memory, our heritage and inheritance, and the origin of features of our own, contemporary culture, in which the period continues to exist as repetition.

I

When it emerged on the Victorian scene, photography was greeted with excitement and widespread enthusiasm, stemming from its promise of

objectivity, its capacity for verisimilitude. Eschewing the narratives of photography's origins which focus upon the invention of chemical and technological processes,[2] Geoffrey Batchen attributes the invention of photography to the desire for objective knowledge, a desire that, by the nineteenth century, had become a social imperative.[3] The camera's mechanical 'eye' functioned as a guarantee of its objectivity, establishing what Scott McQuire has called its 'aura of neutrality' (McQuire, 1998: 124) and inveterately tightening the knot which had connected seeing and knowing for centuries.[4] The unerring camera stands in place of the erring human subject, guarantor of authenticity and accuracy. As Helen Groth suggests, 'the photographic image appeared to manifest the mimetic ideal of the arrested moment rendered transparent by the observer's gaze' (Groth, 2003: 7). This 'transparency' implies that the photograph provides knowledge beyond its own image, that image and understanding are coeval and power accrues to the photograph as an unauthored representation.

Such was the power of a medium professed to be 'synonymous with fidelity' (McQuire, 1998: 13) that histories of photography have often described its advent in terms of a transformative rupture. For example, McQuire argues that 'the invention of the camera marks a threshold beyond which representation is itself irreversibly transformed' and that 'belief in a mimetic power *beyond all previous jurisdiction* constitutes the camera's codex' (ibid). And Roland Barthes discusses the advent of photography as an epistemic rupture that transformed the individual's relationship to history in similar terms to those deployed by Hayden White in discussing the impact of the French Revolution and Napoleonic wars. As we saw in Chapter 1, these events are thought to have transformed history into a mass experience and to have prompted the realisation that the individual is intimately affected by history. For Barthes, photography transformed the perception of history so that it no longer took 'the form of myth' but was granted 'evidentiary power' via the camera's lens (Barthes, 1984: 87). Photography was invested with the capacity to stand in the place of individual memory and substantiate events. It made history visible to the ordinary individual. Moreover, Barthes interprets the democratising effect of photography upon portraiture, formerly the privilege of the wealthy, as granting each individual the capacity to see 'oneself (differently from in a mirror): *on the scale of History*' (ibid.: 12, emphasis mine).

The nineteenth-century invention and popularisation of photography complicates and transforms thinking about historiography, too. The photograph's intimation of unmediated knowledge and absolute

veracity, its perceived incapacity to lie, promised itself to positivist history's project of depicting the past 'as it really happened', pledging to provide ultimate representation and authentication for the historical record. Indeed, photography held this promise well into the second half of the twentieth century, even as challenges to the assumed objectivity of historiography were beginning to emerge in history theory. Writing about his own discovery of nineteenth-century photographs as historical sources, Raphael Samuel observes that, for himself as for other social historians during the 1960s and 1970s,

> the discovery of photography was over-determined … It corresponded to the search for 'human' documents … It also seemed to answer to our insatiable appetite for 'immediacy', allowing us to become literally, as well as metaphorically, eyewitnesses to the historical event. It also promised a new intimacy between historians and their subject matter, allowing us if not to eavesdrop on the past … at least to see it, in everyday terms, 'as it was'. (Samuel, 1994: 319–20)

Samuel argues that the discovery of these seemingly transparent historical sources revitalised the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as research interests for historians. Green-Lewis, too, partly attributes our current fascination with the Victorians to their continuing visibility in photographs: 'The Victorians are visually real to us because they have a documentary assertiveness unavailable to persons living before the age of the camera' (Green-Lewis, 2000: 31).

For the idea of the photograph as unauthored, as pure image, is one that slides easily into the idea of the photograph as an object that stands in for that which it represents. More than a mirror, the photograph, because of its 'invisible umbilicus joining image and referent' (McQuire, 1998: 15), was, and is, conflated with its object: 'a photograph stood not only for but occasionally as the very object itself (Green-Lewis, 1996: 61–2). Indeed, more than having its eye 'fixed on the past' (Barthes, 1984: 87), the photograph is thought to inhere the past in a unique way. In a sense this is obvious; the actual material photograph did originate in a moment in the past. However, the 'symbiotic connection' (McQuire, 1998: 13) between the photograph and its object pledges a more direct access to the past. The medium of the photograph grants its subject, to return to A. S. Byatt's phrase, a 'demi-eternity'. As Roland Barthes observes, 'the realists do not take the photograph for a 'copy' of reality, but for an emanation of *past reality*: a *magic*, not an art' (Barthes, 1984: 88).

This depiction of photography as magical is present in some of the earliest reviews of the medium. Thus, one English reviewer, writing for *The Athenaeum* in 1839, called its effects 'perfectly magical' (qtd. in McQuire, 1998: 13). Mary Warner Marien argues that in the earliest stories of photography's origins the technology that made the science of photography possible is couched in mythical, magical language, making of photography a mysterious and hybrid form. She gives the example of stories about Louis Daguerre in which accident, or fate, becomes a character. Daguerre receives a vision of the camera obscura during a dream and a spoon in his cupboard is darkened by mercury fumes overnight. These serendipitous accidents, or fateful events, become as important to Daguerre's role in the invention of photography as his technological successes engendered by hard work and scientific knowledge and experimentation. Such stories, suggests Marien, 'pitch mystery, magic, and alchemy against banal technological accounts of photography's advent' (Marien, 1997: 54).[5] Green-Lewis calls this 'realism's romance with photography', and suggests that in a culture dominated by realism and the desire to reveal, the depiction of photography as magical allowed it to be romanced as the ultimate in proof, as unbiased truth (Green-Lewis, 1996: 9–10).[6]

It is the photograph's association with perfect representation that, for Linda Hutcheon, makes it attractive to historiographic metafiction. In *The Politics of Postmodernism* (1989) she links fiction and photography since 'both forms have traditionally been assumed to be transparent media which paradoxically could master/capture/fix the real'. She argues that in historiographic metafiction photographic models become metaphors for 'the related issue of narrative representation – its powers and its limitations', particularly for the telling of history (Hutcheon, 1989: 39).

However, this focus upon the camera's perceived capacity for representational veracity elides the other capacity for which photography was enthusiastically welcomed and celebrated in the nineteenth century. The magic attributed to photography also allowed it to be romanced as a memorial. Barrett-Browning's celebration of the photograph as 'the very shadow of the person lying there fixed forever' is echoed in the late twentieth century by Susan Sontag, for whom the photograph is 'something directly stenciled off the real, like a footprint or a death mask … never less than the registering of an emanation'. More than realist representation, here the photograph contains the 'trace' of its subject, is a 'material vestige' (Sontag 1977: 154). More than correspondence, the photograph inheres its subject. As Green-Lewis

argues, 'photographs, after all, have sometimes been perceived not as simply telling the truth so much as being a part of it, physical traces of passing moments' (Green-Lewis, 1996: 5).

The photograph as a representational medium has been used for classification, historical knowledge, for surveillance, and as a witness. The photograph as a memorial medium establishes an affective relationship to its object, and functions as a souvenir. It promises time arrested, loss restored, home returned. Or, as Kate Flint describes it, the photograph promises 'the continuation of the past into the present … the poignant hope of an impossible endurance' (Flint, 2003: 534).

Interestingly, historians' discovery of old photographs seems also to have corresponded to the emergence of memory in historical discourse in the last decades of the twentieth century, in which memory becomes an affective metahistorical category contrasted with a problematised history. Samuel identifies a flood of books from local and community presses, and from the public libraries, which opened up the old photographs from family albums to public view, and calls these 'We Remember' books, instead of 'personal history' or 'local history' books (Samuel, 1994: 321). Indeed, photography merges the conventional antinomies of history and memory in a unique way, by effacing the gap between past and present, public and personal. As Groth puts it, the photograph enables 'the simultaneous experiencing of past and present in a single encounter with a frozen moment in time' (Groth, 2000: 32).[7] And this is true whether the past is recent, or several generations previous. The photograph positions us as observers of scenes and events even if they occurred before our birth. By offering up history to our sight, it gives it to us as memory, as though we had, indeed, witnessed and experienced it. This is especially the case because of the materiality of the photograph. Framing a photograph for display, placing it in an album or carrying it on one's person suggests a relationship to the photograph's object and imparts a sense of its being one's own memory. As Edwards observes, the photograph is 'deemed significant as a bearer of memory'. Photographs 'can be handled, framed, cut, crumpled, caressed, pinned on a wall, put under a pillow, or wept over'. Indeed, she notes that the display of photographs in albums, in framed collections or on top of televisions and mantelpieces lends the form 'shrine-like qualities', and that Victorian photograph albums were bound to look like family bibles or devotional books, with relief leatherwork and metal clasps' (Edwards, 1999: 226). The photograph produces an affective relationship to its object, even if that object is a past not personally experienced. In this sense, photographs do indeed function, as

Edwards suggests, as 'surrogate memory' (ibid.: 222). Moreover, when the photographs' object is history, the Victorian past, for example, history becomes personalised; the past is established in a particular, affective, relationship to the present. History becomes memory.

It is the photograph's perceived capacity to fix the fleeting moment, to remember it, that is the focus of *Sixty Lights* and *Afterimage*. The staging of the Victorian emergence of photography in these novels signals a foregrounding not, primarily, of a problematics of representation, as Hutcheon's category of historiographic metafiction suggests, but of memory discourse, invoking its vocabulary of presence and restoration: 'as much as the photograph marks a site of irreducible absence', McQuire observes, 'it is frequently the talisman signaling the possibility of return' (McQuire, 1998: 7). In these novels, as in other examples of neo-Victorian fiction, photography is invoked as a memorial, or shrine, and as a tool to combat transience and loss. As the fictionalised Charles Dodgson reflects in Katie Roiphe's *Still She Haunts Me* (2001), the photograph promises that 'everything that flickered could be made permanent' (Roiphe, 2001: 8).[8] Photography becomes a vehicle for exploring the attempt to restore the past via word and image.

II

Set in the early 1860s, *Afterimage* tells the story of a young Irish orphan, named Annie Phelan, who works as a maidservant for the Dashell household. Eldon Dashell reads books and makes maps while his wife Isabelle is an amateur pictorial photographer, modelled loosely on Victorian photographer Julia Margaret Cameron. The novel explores the merits of reading, cartography and photography as media for image-making and examines their respective capacities to restore the past, to offer a means of return. Annie, who befriends and beguiles Eldon while becoming Isabelle's muse, is caught between the conflicting possibilities represented by Eldon and Isabelle, and stories and photographs, respectively.

The novel links photography to death. Eldon gives Isabelle her camera after their third stillborn baby (54) and Isabelle, formerly a painter, is reborn as a photographer. In Isabelle's mind, the birth of her children and that of her photographs are linked. She thinks of her babies in terms of 'their blood-slick bodies, slippery as fish, having swum from their dark ocean out into a light that killed them' (99), and, when developing her photographic image, '[s]he has to let it go into darkness and then she has to believe it will return … It swims under the light in the

glasshouse, limpid, the dull colour of blood seen through the water' (135). This memory makes processing, or birthing, her photographs acts of faith in the face of potential loss:

> it is at this moment that the image is truly gone. She cannot make it stay. She has to let it go into darkness and then she has to believe it will return. It takes so much strength from her, to believe this. To believe that it still lives, that it will flutter towards her … It swims under the light in the glasshouse, limpid, the dull colour of blood seen through the water. (135)

The novel embraces images of imminent loss, so that even the garden at the end of summer, although still in full bloom, signals only impermanence, erasure and the plea for remembrance:

> it is this time of year, the moment even, when the garden is most fully alive. It is the moment right next to the one where everything begins to die. Flowers lose their hold on the air, curl inward, hold their small, dry, rattling thoughts to themselves. *Don't forget me. Don't forget me* … A garden in winter is a state of oblivion. (133–4)

Yet photography is not, chiefly, a means for Isabelle to immortalise a moment she does not wish to forget. Hers are not souvenirs of people and events she wishes to hold onto but pictorial photographs with which she seeks to immortalise her artistic vision. Isabelle's pictorial photographs are of other people's stories, or of abstract sentiments. Annie poses for her as Guinevere, Ophelia, Grace, Humility, Faith and the Madonna. Seeking refuge in telling other people's stories, instead of her own, Isabelle does not pursue photography as a means to restore her dead children or her lost childhood friend, yet her pictures are, nonetheless, memorials to the grief engendered by these losses.

Her photographs are a means for Isabelle to push away the thought of her dead children, 'she wants to forget them. She wants to cancel their image entirely' (123), by literally producing new ones. Through art she seeks to assert her control over loss: 'what she can create. What she can control. Life is accidental. Art is thick with purpose' (133). In her photographs, Isabelle seeks 'the vision [she] had, made flesh. It is a work of art, her art. It is a miracle' (38). Isabelle fears that what she can create will melt away, or die, as her children did. '"Art is like light', she says. She almost says, like *Love*. 'Isn't it? Always burning with the same brightness, no matter how long we've been gone from the room?'

Isabelle opposes art, which is permanent, to nature, which is ephemeral, always threatening loss and destruction (85, 133).

The novel's protagonist, Annie, also seeks control through photography, first as a model for Isabelle's portraits and then, briefly, as a photographer herself. As a maid habituated to being inconsequential and overlooked, Annie rejoices in the attention that Isabelle lavishes upon her when she models (153). Accustomed to having no control over her life and circumstances, she rejoices, too, in the moments when she realises she has rearranged her pose and so has changed the photograph, resisted Isabelle's control (127). When she photographs Isabelle, the sense of control is more palpable: 'she had been in command of four and a half minutes. This world, for that time, had been hers and she had never felt such a sense of possibility for herself, a sense that she was someone apart from what she did, that she was real' (97). When Annie looks through the lens, at the way it delimits and truncates the scene before her she thinks 'it is a small enough world … that it can be easily controlled. That is something to want' (226).

Throughout the novel, photography is associated with this kind of controlled seeing, which is not necessarily linked to knowing: 'Isabelle Dashell has looked so hard at Annie Phelan and has never once seen her at all' (346). Isabelle's pursuit of photography as a memorial of her own vision, as the creation of layers of images to paper over the more painful images that threaten to surface in her memory, is associated with a kind of death or, at least, is depicted as something divorced from life. 'What if art is not the greater power? What if art is an excuse to hide from life?' wonders Isabelle in one of her less assured moments (133). This possibility is foregrounded by the scene that frames the novel, providing its introduction and then, from a different perspective, its conclusion. A young boy, with fiery wings strapped to his body, leaps from the high window of Isabelle's burning house and flies through the air. At the beginning of the novel, it is rendered as the boy's memory of the event, much later in life, when he has grown into a man. Dressed as an angel for one of Isabelle's pictorial photographs, he had been admiring himself in the mirror when the house caught fire and rapidly burned. He remembers that Annie rescues him by throwing a mattress to the ground below and holding him over the edge of the window sill. 'I've got you, she says. And then she lets him go' (1). It is a moment when he is rescued from death and falls back into life. At the end of the novel, when this scene is repeated from Isabelle's perspective, as she watches from below, we know that while Annie has been in the house rescuing the boy, and Eldon has been attempting to rescue Annie,

Isabelle locked herself in her dark room, away from the house and wilfully oblivious to the cries and screams that filter through to her. Again, the scene is motion, capturing only the boy's flight through the air, not his landing: 'it is the falling moment. Unrecorded' (248). To Isabelle it represents life, and her inability to create anything other than still life:

> it is the perfect photograph, and she has missed it. This is what she has always feared. That she will not be able, no matter how she wills it or orchestrates it, to create an image as pure and true as this. That what she does is not really about life, about living. It is about holding on to something long after it has already left. Like grief. Like hope. (248)

Sixty Lights, too, is a novel coloured and shaped by death and grief. Its protagonist is, like Annie, an orphan and migrant. The novel tells the story of Lucy Strange's brief life and, like *Afterimage*, explores the potential of words and images to restore loss. In *Sixty Lights* Lucy, like Isabelle, becomes a photographer to assuage loss. In this novel, photography is also associated with death, but it becomes, too, a celebration of life. Lucy's philosophy is built upon the notion of photographic seeing, which is a 'celebration of the lit-up gaze' (142).[9] It echoes Barthes' assertion that 'the Photograph is never anything but an antiphon of "Look," "See," "Here it is"' (Barthes, 1984: 5). Lucy exemplifies this philosophy of photographic seeing well before she is introduced to photography. Photography crystallises what she has already begun in her notebook, in which she records 'special things seen', aware that the act of recording them confers a special status upon ordinary people, places and occurrences. Lucy's passion for photography stems from the desire to hold onto that which would otherwise be neglected or forgotten, those images that are overlooked because they are apparently commonplace: 'the commandment of ordinary things to look, and the countervailing sense of the world's detachment, troubled and distressed her. Lucy wondered how she might tell this, or to whom' (83). Photography lends significance to the otherwise unremarkable. It grants permanence to the otherwise forgettable. The act of photographing asserts the significance of the ordinary.[10] Although, like Isabelle, Lucy considers herself an artist, her photographs are of the people and places she encounters in life. Lucy comes to think of photography as 'a shrine', 'of objects inverted, of death defeated. She thought too of the glass plates that held the envisioned world – in eight by ten inches – returned to itself, as an

act – surely – as an act of devotion' (154). Elsewhere in the novel the photograph 'is another form of love, is it not, the studied representation? It is devotional. Physical. A kind of honouring attention. I think of photography – no doubt absurdly – as a kind of kiss' (200).[11]

Jones has said that Lucy's philosophy of seeing was inspired, in part, by Sei Shōnagon's *Pillow Book*. Shōnagon was a Japanese courtier in the eleventh century, whose philosophy held:

> what we should notice are the things that 'make the heart beat faster' and that we should drag them away from what Sontag calls 'the relentless melt of time'; this awful sense that everything's dissolving into a dark space behind us as we live, that there's a beauty in securing one little image … that's enough, that those moments of attention are what aesthetic experience is about and what makes life meaningful. (Jones, 2005)

Connected to the securing of one little image, one that makes the heart beat faster, photography is linked with life and meaning, and also with light, the 'diffuse and glimmering light, [Lucy] has seen inherent in wet collodion and silver-nitrate photographic prints. … It is the light of memory, and of the earliest petals of gardenia. It is the blurred aura, perhaps, between concealment and unconcealment' (46).

Jones invokes the Victorian understanding of the photograph as recovery, as return, in contrast to contemporary theory about photography that links it to melancholy, loss and death. In a novel about the Victorian period which contains relatively few specific references to it, she borrows from the era the excitement attaching to an emerging medium that, in Jones' words, Jones invokes the Victorian notion of photography as memorial, when it 'seemed not to be about loss but to be about recovery … Photography, at a particular moment in its history, must have seemed so life-affirming, so much to return us to the real rather than take it away from us' (ibid). This desire, to return to the real, is what Green-Lewis calls the 'will to authenticity' which, she argues, 'may be understood in part as a desire for that which we have first altered and then fetishized … most frequently experienced and figured as a desire, or a sickness for home' (Green-Lewis, 2000: 43).

In both *Sixty Lights* and *Afterimage* it is the body of the mother that becomes the focus of this nostalgia for origins, the figure for the real and the symbol of a lost past. Each novel is infused with dead and irretrievable mothers; each of the characters' mothers has died or is irrevocably absent. The trope of the dead mother is a self-conscious

appropriation of a device familiar to Victorian fiction. Indeed, in *The Maternal Voice in Victorian Fiction: Rewriting the Patriarchal Family* (1997), Barbara Z. Thaden, refers to the 'long litany of dead mothers in nineteenth-century fiction'. And Carolyn Dever argues that in Victorian fiction the dead mother 'motivates a formal search for "origins" … And symbolically, in fictional worlds, the crisis of maternal loss enables the synthesis of questions of originality, agency, erotic and scientific desire' (Dever, 1998: xi–xii).[12]

In *Sixty Lights* and *Afterimage* the loss of the mother symbolises the loss of history. It is an ungrounding, or displacement and disruption of identity. In *Camera Lucida* (1980), Barthes makes our notion of history, that traditional manifestation of groundedness, inextricable from the mother's body. In a passage aptly headed 'History as Separation' he 'is History not simply the time when we were not born? ... that is what the time when my mother was alive before me is – History' (Barthes, 1984: 64, 65). This foreshortens our sense of what history is, and brings the more recent past into its purview. It is also makes the maternal body a symbol of history, as it is in Jones' and Humphreys' novels. Moreover, Barthes cites Freud's observation of the maternal body: that there is no other place of which one can say with so much certainty that one has already been there (ibid.: 53). This makes of the maternal body the original origin, the home *par excellence*, and, in Barthes' phenomenology, the quintessential photograph, since the photograph's *noeme* is, for Barthes, 'That-has-been' (ibid.: 7).

When the newly-orphaned Lucy stands aboard the ship bound for England, several years before her introduction to photography, she desires a tool that will return her not, primarily, to her lost, Australian, home but to her dead mother. Separating lovers, who use mirrors to locate each other in the crowd, grant Lucy a glimpse of the technology that will promise such a return. We are told:

> it was the woman who was leaving. She tilted her oval mirror to catch at the sun and a young man, diminishing, answered from the shore. Lucy was transfixed. This was what she wanted, a photosensitive departure. Light trained by glass to locate and discover a face, a beam to travel on, a homing device, a sleek corridor through the infinity of the sky itself. (77)

Of course light, trained by glass to locate a face, is the essence of photography. And the face that Lucy seeks, the photograph she longs for, is that of her mother. The reference to a homing device signals

Lucy's disorientation, that without the grounding force of her mother she is cut loose, and cannot orient herself to a home irrevocably gone.

The novel makes the mother's body the centerpiece of its portrayal of loss and potential restoration by introducing Lucy's mother almost entirely in terms of her physicality: 'her belly was enormous'; 'this rather heavy irascible woman, almost entirely immobile'; 'appearing as if some artist had tinted her face pink'; 'her bare swollen feet'; and, importantly, 'the fan that now rested against her face, obscuring it' (6, 7). Lucy's pregnant mother, soon to die in childbirth, is already slipping away from Lucy, ungrounding her: 'the fan imprints itself on Lucy's heart, for it is from this day that her life enters the mode of melodrama, and this little partition between them, of such oriental blue, will register for ever the vast distances that love must travel' (7). This moment is the first time that Lucy really experiences her mother as separate and unreachable, obscured. The maternal body symbolises not only Lucy's past but also her continuity with it. The death of this body disrupts Lucy's sense of connectedness, her sense of history.

Following her mother's death, Lucy searches for the suggestion of her amongst the belongings she has left behind. These objects, contained in a hatbox, are 'a little amnesiac circle: everything was lost and without association. Nothing summoned her mother's face. Nothing was intelligible' (45–6). Her mother is a 'hieroglyph' (70), a mystery that resists decoding.

> [Lucy] becomes, at this very moment, one whose mission it is to unconceal. This is the moment, aged eight, Lucy becomes a photographer. And every photographic ambition will turn on the summoning of a face and the retrieval of what is languishing just beyond vision. (46)

While Lucy's longing for origins is clearly nostalgic, the novel makes this a productive and creative force, rather than a conservative or regressive one. Severed from her maternal origins, Lucy embraces photography as a tool for memory, an instrument to combat imminent, intractable loss and the ungrounding of identity. For Lucy, as for Barrett Browning, the photograph promises proximity, the erasure of time and distance. Barrett Browning's words, quoted in the epigraph to this chapter, encapsulate the idea of photography as a resurrection of past persons or places, not merely representing them but, in an important sense, *re-presenting* them, or *re-membering* them, restoring them to a time and place in which they no longer exist.

Yet in *Sixty Lights*, the photograph of the mother has never been taken, it exists only in, and as, Lucy's desire for it. Kerwin Klein identifies the photograph as a familiar trope in contemporary memory discourse. He describes the way certain objects, such as archives, statues and museums *become* memory:

> ideally, the memory will be a dramatically imperfect piece of material culture, and such fragments are best if imbued with pathos. Such memorial tropes have emerged as one of the common features of our new cultural history where in monograph after monograph, readers confront the abject object: photographs are torn, mementos faded, toys broken. (Klein, 2000: 136)

The untaken photograph of Lucy's mother becomes the quintessential imperfect memory, imbued with pathos: it is not torn, but rather eternally absent. It symbolises not only the promise of restoration but also its cruel negation. Her mother's face 'could not be willed into vision' (70).[13]

Similarly, there is no photograph of Annie's mother in *Afterimage*. Annie is further displaced from the maternal body, and therefore from history, because, unlike Lucy, she has no conscious memory of it. She was a baby when she was separated from her mother. It is in Annie's dreams that the maternal body asserts its significance. Annie dreams that she is again an infant, being passed back to her mother: 'the relief of this, of finally having her mother back, is such a huge feeling it bursts out of her body, out of her skin, makes Annie cry out loud when, at last, her mother takes her in her arms' (125). And yet, elusive as a ghost, her mother remains just out of vision: 'she was almost there. She had almost seen her mother's face' (125).

The description of Annie's response to this recurring dream produces it as a ghostly presence in her life; it haunts her: 'she is afraid to fall asleep, afraid to fall into her dream of the road. The sound of the shovels and axes chipping at the hard ground is already playing in her head, a rattling, somber tattoo, like the sound of bones knocking together' (58). This road, which features so prominently in Annie's haunting dreams, is a symbol of her dislocation, her disconnectedness from history. The English government had famine victims, including Annie's mother, father and brothers, work on public relief schemes, building roads. When there were enough roads they continued building them. However, these roads were truly excess, they went nowhere and connected nothing: 'it was not for anything, did not tie this place to that. No one could ever walk down it expecting to get to the next village' (51).

After she shares the story with him, this image of this road to and from nowhere haunts her employer, Eldon, too. Indeed, it haunts the novel itself as a symbol of dislocation of time and place, the disruption of a linear sense of time, the continuum of past, present and future. In a novel obsessed with 'distance. Position. How to find your way back when where you are depends on where everything else is' (47), the road to and from nowhere symbolises disorientation and displacement. With no connection to her past, cut off from her origin in the maternal body, Annie is as a traveller on this road that offers no hope of return. Moreover, Annie reflects that as a maid, she is unlikely to ever marry or have children, stunting, afresh, the maternal line: 'the future is more of the same. No, the future is less, and the same' (85). Disconnected from her past, Annie also has no future.

Cut off from the maternal body, but desirous of a reunion with it, indeed haunted by it, *Sixty Lights* and *Afterimage* explore the inherence of the past in the present via a series of images of, and metaphors for, haunting. Whereas in *Afterimage* the use of haunting is restricted to Annie's dreams, *Sixty Lights* explores the notion of ghostly haunting more fully. Lucy is jealously convinced that her brother Thomas, who sleepwalks, 'otherworldly and implacably absent … communes with ghosts' (105), particularly those of her parents. Thomas' feeling about these visions captures the characteristic indeterminacy of the spectral figure: 'it was something that would follow him all his life, like having the wrong person's shadow, like carrying an aberration of presence' (95). The liminal figure of the ghost, which exists in a space between presence and absence, and is perhaps only a trick of the light or of the mind, is an aberration of presence. It is not the restoration of what is lost.

The trope of the ghost is a familiar one in contemporary fictional returns to the Victorian era. Indeed Rosario Arias Doblas argues that the prevalence of the use of ghostliness and hauntings as a metaphor for the presence of the past makes the 'spectral' novel a 'subset' of the neo-Victorian novel (Doblas, 2005: 88). In Liz Jensen's *Ark Baby* (1998) a Victorian ghost literally inhabits the same space as the contemporary characters. Having lived in the house herself, when alive, she now haunts it in death (Jensen, 1998). Christian Gutleben observes that the ghost literally interacts with the modern characters, thus establishing a sort of hyphen between the past and present' (Gutleben, 2001: 190). However, the figure of the ghost is actually a disruption of linear time. The link it establishes between past and present is not so much a hyphen, bridge, or other linear form, but is rather a repetition. Or, more precisely, it is repetition with a difference. As Nick Peim suggests, 'the spectre is

revenant, a past figure that keeps coming back, disrupting the smooth logic of time' (Peim, 2005: 75).

The spectre is an evocative metaphor for the past, as 'the *nothing-and-yet-not-nothing* and the *neither-nowhere-nor-not-nowhere* that nonetheless leaves a trace in passing and which has such a material effect' (ibid.: 140). Indeterminacy and incompletion are embedded in the figure of the spectre. The materiality of the ghost is illusory and always already under erasure. As Peim argues, 'the authenticity of the spectre is always questionable – a function of the gap between its partial nature and the full version it claims to represent' (ibid.: 77). This makes the figure of the ghost an apt metaphor for textual representation. Colin Davis explores the way in which Jacques Derrida's formulation of *hauntologie*, or 'hauntology' has been productively adopted in literary criticism to explore the use of ghosts and hauntings in fiction: 'hauntology supplants its near-homonym ontology, replacing the priority of being and presence with the figure of the ghost as that which is neither present nor absent, neither dead nor alive' (Davis, 2005: 373). As Derrida asserts in an interview given in 2005, 'in a certain way every trace is spectral' (Derrida, 2001: 44).

This seems especially true of the photographic trace, which as Barthes suggests, always contains 'the return of the dead' (Barthes, 1984: 9). Yet Barthes' phenomenology of photography also suggests the contradictory notion, that 'every photograph is a certificate of presence' (ibid.: 87). Like the spectre, the photograph, it seems, occupies a strange space between presence and absence, loss and return. The photographic image is truly revenant. Green-Lewis calls this the 'absolute and paradoxical present of the photograph', observing that, as the subjects of the earliest photographs we have, the Victorians continue to exist for us in this way, 'always there yet gone forever; both in, and out, of history; always already dead – and yet still alive' (Green-Lewis, 2000: 31).

While *Afterimage* and *Sixty Lights* each employ the language of haunting, and *Sixty Lights* in particular raises the possibility of spectral visitations through both Thomas and the spurious spiritualist Madam Esperance, the notion of the past as revenant is largely elaborated via the ghostly medium of photography. Rather than the actual figure of the ghost, it is the ghostliness of photography that becomes a metaphor for the revenant past. In *Sixty Lights* Neville greets the spiritualist's luminous image, supposedly the ghost of his dead sister, with the whispered word 'ectoplasm' (94). He believes 'it is ectoplasm ghosts are composed of' (92), and which Madame Esperance can summon. Barthes deploys the same language to describe photography. He writes that upon their inception,

photographs must have seemed, 'like the ectoplasm of "what-had-been": neither image nor reality, a new being, really: a reality one can no longer touch' (Barthes, 1984: 87). This word, ectoplasm, entwines the ghostly image and the photograph as images of an aberrant, or 'hauntological' presence.

Ectoplasm resonates throughout the novel, connected to other luminous evocations of presence, shiny, viscous substances and fluids such as the blood and vernix smeared on the newborn baby, (163), blood, a throbbing heart (144) and bioluminescent sea algae (110). These are incandescent, but ephemeral, emanations. They are 'auratic', but not solid (142). Invoking presence, they are also inextricably linked to the lustre of loss, intuitively visible to Lucy and Thomas as they leave their childhood home when, 'without turning to look, they knew that behind them everything was already coated with the alluring patina of loss. It shone as it receded, like embers in a dying fire, and held for evermore the smouldering glint of their pasts' (75).

The aberrant presence of a ghost, like the photograph itself, *is* this alluring patina; the film, or gloss that attaches to loss itself, making it paradoxically beguiling, mesmeric, even as it is painful. Indeed, first glimpsed in sharp relief against the dark ocean, 'silvery threads of light in a thin film' (110), 'bioluminescence' becomes, for Lucy, a symbol of unexpected light, of ethereal presence amidst implacable absence. It is inextricably linked to 'still moments in time, moments arcane, seductive, trivial, breathtaking, that waited for the sidelong glance, the split-second of notice, the opening up of an irrefutable and auratic presence' (142).

Suggesting restoration and return, this ghostly patina is, importantly, not always visible, indeed it comes most often by accident, unexpectedly. Lucy's pursuit of light is the adult manifestation of her fantasy as a child, of 'casting out every threatening and mystifying shadow' (11). Part of Lucy's journey into adulthood (and this is, after all, a self-conscious reworking of the Victorian *Bildungsroman*) includes the recognition and acceptance of the shadows, as well as the light. For 'the world is like this, don't you think?', Lucy asks, '[m]arked, and shadowed, and flecked with time' (146). As Jones describes it in an interview, '[Lucy] comes to realize that images can't do everything. There are losses that cannot be recovered' (Jones, 20025).

The most significant resonance of this is that there are recesses of memory, that are always obscured by shadow, like her mother's face, which is 'so vague it might be a wet footprint, shimmering thin as breath, transient as a sundial shadow, poised on the very edge of complete disappearance' (73). It cannot be 'willed into vision … called,

or fabricated' (70). The shiny, ethereal substances that are metaphors for the photograph are also, paradoxically, like the shiny surface of a mirror. As Jennifer Green-Lewis observes:

> no effort, however extraordinary, will ever yield access to a photograph and permit the viewer, Alice-like, to climb through its frame into another world. Quite apart from the irony contingent on our every encounter with the paradox of the photograph, and at odds with photography's promise of interiority and penetration, is the hard surface of mirror images that will not melt into air. (Green-Lewis, 2000: 31)

The photograph is spectral; like the ghost, it 'represents what is not there: a present mark coincides with absent presence' (Peim, 2005: 77). The photograph's 'mark' might be a promising patina but it is also the hard surface of the mirror image. The photograph remains a trace, such as Hutcheon refers to when she suggests 'we only have access to the past today through its traces – its documents, the testimony of witnesses, and other archival materials. In other words, we only have representations of the past from which to construct our narratives or explanations' (Hutcheon, 1989: 55).

III

Against the unyielding image, the incapacity for willed recollection, *Sixty Lights* and *Afterimage* each posit as time's receptacle, not the photograph, whose 'absent presence' must always produce a strange mixture of ethereality coupled with impenetrable surface, but the body itself, which is the fundamental home to memory. The lexicon of spectrality is transferred to the body, which becomes a medium for the repetition of the past, its unbidden persistence in the present.

For *Afterimage,* the notion of embodied memory, or corporeal history, is a question that is posed. Annie wonders if her body holds the memory of her voyage across the sea to a new life in England (115, 116). The novel raises the possibility that her dreams of the road that goes nowhere, and of her mother taking her in her arms, are memories held by her body, that these dreams are, in fact, repetitions of actions Annie has performed. Moreover, Annie's body is itself a memory object: 'Annie is the record of her family. She is the cairn they left, what remained for the world to see after they had gone' (149). Faced with the absence of a photograph of her mother she realises that 'the one thing above all

others that she wants to know about her is what she looked like'. And yet, 'this is the one thing she can never know. What her mother looked like, and if Annie looks like her.' However, in the absence of a visual image, Annie's body allows her some knowledge of her mother:

> all she can really imagine of her mother is the work she did. Annie cannot guess what it is her mother would have been thinking on that road in Ireland, or even what she would have been wearing, but Annie does know what the labour would feel like. The roughness of the stone would rub hands raw and bleeding. The body stooping and lifting would make the back ache and force the body to move stiffly to accommodate the pain. Looking up would hurt. (94)

The novel thus effaces the conventional link between seeing and knowing, and the conventional epistemological function of the photography, by privileging the body as the means to knowledge. Eldon, for example, 'has to touch something to make it real, to really see it' (111). When Eldon shows Annie an image of Ireland, her 'motherland', in the form of a map, she, too, attempts to learn it physically, 'puts her finger down, gently, on Kilkee and traces the fogged outline of the Loop head' (111). In this way the map itself, the very paper on which it is drawn, returns to Annie (imperfectly, incompletely) the home she does not recall ever seeing in a tangible form. Later that evening Annie performs her own, rudimentary, cartography, drawing the map of Ireland, from memory, into the cover of her Bible. It is, in place of a photograph, her act of devotion. It is also her act of ownership. Drawing the lines is an act of connecting herself to her home, the place she cannot consciously remember, of claiming it as her own history. She places the map face down on her chest, hoping that the shape of Ireland 'will melt into her skin' (116).[14] Having no memory of it, she seeks, in this way, to embody her homeland.

The question posed by *Afterimage* is explored more explicitly in *Sixty Lights*. In this novel, in place of a photograph of her mother, which is doubly absent because never taken, it is Lucy's body that returns her mother's face to her. When she shows a black paper silhouette of her mother to her lover William Crowley, he observes that she has her mother's profile so that, to Lucy, 'at that instant, they were alchemically fused: she was the bright-lit original for her mother, the shadow' (118). Here Lucy embodies the photograph that she so desires. The alchemic fusion of Honoria and Lucy at this moment both invokes and reverses the photograph, whose lit-up gloss depends upon the shadowy negative.

Honoria's face is continued in and by Lucy's own. Lucy's own body remembers that of her mother.

The idea of embodied memory is exemplified by Lucy's fascination with the elongated lobes on a statue of the Buddha, 'a reminder', Isaac tells her, 'of his life as a prince, when he wore pendant earrings. Before Enlightenment, that is. Before he became the Buddha.' Lucy thinks of this as 'the way the body carries small signatures of its former selves. Small telltale markings' (125). Thus, when she thinks of William she thinks of 'the vulnerable area at the back of his thighs … a pale screen of skin, petal-looking in its texture' and he becomes not the uniformed, confident, and ultimately unfeeling man she has known 'but a man who carried, as it were, the flag of his own childhood. And though she knew now of his definitive meanness and duplicity, she wanted to preserve him thus, in continuity with this quality of unremarked softness' (127). The body is engraved by time, etched with past experience. In this sense memory is carried with us bodily, not so much remembered as 'membered', or embodied.

Opposed to willed recollection and reconstruction, embodied memory is a repetition, and is therefore linked to Pierre Nora's more authentic 'memory', rather than the artificial 'history' (see Nora, 1989: 15). Manifesting this idea of embodied memory is the unconscious repetition of various bodily actions and gestures across generations in the novel:

> how often, [the novel asks] in what small or gifted or implausible moments, do we replay what our parents knew, or did? How often do we feel – in another generation – what they imagined was sequestered in their own private skin? (119)

The novel suggests that we repeat, bodily, the actions, recollections and images of previous generations, and that this creates links between us. When Lucy stands on board the ship as it enters the harbour in Bombay, it resembles Sydney Harbour as it appeared to her mother as she entered it years before: 'Lucy could not have known that she experienced arrival as her mother did: with just the same arousal of spirit, with the same quickening of the heart, like a small fish leaping' (119). Lucy is the unwilled, and indeed unconscious, medium that repeats her mother's experience. This pattern is repeated in the closing passage of the novel when Lucy's daughter, Ellen, opens the door upon Thomas in his unleashed grief, repeating the moment, the 'wedge of disclosure' (9), when Lucy, in her childhood, similarly came upon her father in his grief. In a sense the novel ends as it began, with a small child grieving

her dead mother, and witnessing, too, the debilitating grief of another who loved her. Moreover, Ellen 'looked exactly, Thomas thought, as Lucy had as a small child' (247). The effect is to suggest that Ellen, like Lucy before her, embodies the presence of her mother and that the past will persist in the present in the form of repetitions, fragmented images and unbidden memories. These are Hutton's 'habits of mind', the 'moment of memory through which we bear forward images of the past that continue to shape our present understanding in unreflective ways' (Hutton, 1993: xx–xxi).

The intergenerational repetition of her mother's experience also suggests the connection between storyteller and listener envisioned by Walter Benjamin in describing his notion of the aura:

> it is not the object of the story to convey a happening *per se*, which is the purpose of information; rather, it embeds it in the life of the story-teller in order to pass it on as experience to those listening. It thus bears the marks of the story-teller as much as the earthen vessel bears the marks of the potter's hand. (Benjamin, 1994: 19 qtd. in Geyer-Ryan, 1994: 19)

In *Sixty Lights* and *Afterimage* the mark of the storyteller proves, like the photograph, to be the mark of the ghost. In these novels, then, as in *Possession*, the novel becomes a medium of the past, allowing its voices to speak. As we saw in Chapter 1, Julien Wolfreys suggests that the textual trace is always the medium for spectral encounters (Wolfreys, 2002: 140).

This has particular resonance in the novel because initially, shifted from her home across the world to London with only her brother as a link with her old life, Lucy experiences a profound sense of disruption to her personal narratives. Without her mother to embody them, the stories her mother told her as a child threaten to become meaningless:

> what shall Lucy do with her inheritance of story? Now she is left with a repertoire of exasperating desire, of hokum, memory, nonsense and tall-tale, that she has siphoned into herself as a stream of chill water. These stories fill her with an amorphous dissolving feeling. (73)

However, when Lucy is eighteen, she discovers the reading of novels as 'a séance of other lives into her own imagination', a 'metaphysical meeting space – peculiar, specific, ardent, unusual' (114). Through

reading, Lucy 'learnt how other people entered the adventure of being alive' (114). Her experience of reading helps her to understand her desire to search out the connections 'that knitted the whole world' (114). The novel, rather than the photograph, becomes the medium of experience.

More importantly, through reading, Lucy rediscovers, or re-members, her mother's early stories, which come flooding back to meet her. These stories form the 'purest geometry of connections' (114) between Lucy and her mother. They return her mother to Lucy in small slices: 'a tone of voice, the feminine scent of gardenia' (115). It was like,' Lucy thinks, 'something swaying just in and out of vision' (115).

Furthermore, Lucy's reunion with Molly Minchin, her mother's friend and midwife, also returns her to her mother. Lucy tells Isaac of the association, in her mind, of Molly with her parents' death, so that upon first seeing her years later, 'it was as if the long-past sprang phantom-like to confront me: I was afraid of a whiff of death, of some wound, or corruption, of something dark which would fly up like a bat and scratch at my face' (201). Yet Molly has known her parents, especially Lucy's mother, and can tell many stories about them: 'I tried for so long to forget my parents, but think now that Molly's company is meant to return me to them. She has a fine collection of stories and a loving presence' (201). Word-images, rather than photographic ones, mediate the past for Lucy. In this way, *Sixty Lights* shares the privileging of storytelling in both *Waterland* and *Possession*. It explicitly makes storytelling, and especially the novel, a medium of the past by making reading a séance of Lucy's mother's life into her own. Where the photograph is impenetrable surface, the story allows communion with, and transmission of, the past, as the spiritualist does at a séance.

Indeed, word-images, or stories, both anecdotal and novelistic, also embody memory and perform the devotional, memorialising function of photography. Jones has made this link elsewhere, attributing the 'emblazoning gesture' to both writing and photography, and claiming that it is 'central to all writing … as light is central to photography. The wish to ennoble what is fragile, pitiable, mortal, vulnerable' (Jones, 2006). Lucy's record of 'Photographs Not Taken' and 'Special Things Seen' are as important to the novel as her photographs. Indeed, they are itemised more fully than the photographs which suggests they might even be privileged. Lucy does not distinguish between the images she records in her diary and those she records with her camera. Each represent 'a whole empire of images to which she felt affinity and loyalty.

Her diary would compel attentiveness. Would claim these images. Would set her formally agape' (178).

Like the shards of a mirror in the opening pages of *Sixty Lights,* which continue, in the face of death, loss and grief, to hold the world, offering it up, not whole and complete, but as slices (3–4), memory and its surrogates, photography and writing, do retrieve images from the melt of time, but only in fragments. 'This was memory as an asterix [*sic*]. The glory of the glimpse. The retrieval of just enough lit knowing to see [the] way forward' (115). While Lucy learns to celebrate these moments if not of retrieval then at least of truncated remembrance, of diffuse light, the use of the word 'asterisk', which is most often used to mark omissions or footnotes in a text, signals here all that cannot be brought into vision. An asterisk is as the ghostly trace, 'the present mark of an absent presence' (Peim, 2005 79). For each memory there is a shadow archive of lost moments and forgotten features.

Having posited both stories and the body as fragmented, imperfect, media of memory, *Sixty Lights* and *Afterimage* link these more explicitly by suggesting that the novel itself can stand in the place of, or embody, memory. Following Lucy's death, Thomas feels 'suspended in a kind of absent-minded grief' (248) and wonders if it is possible 'to summon as an after-image on the surface of the retina some image-memory that has lain, pristine and packed away, unglimpsed since early adulthood?' (58). Yet this summoning of a photograph-like image, stored as memory, is not granted him within the novel. Rather, it is his re-reading of *Great Expectations*, 'saturated by memories' (249) of reading it with his uncle and sister nearly a decade earlier that finally unlocks Thomas' grief (249). Re-reading *Great Expectations* enables Thomas to re-member the sister and uncle he once read it with. Re-reading it is his act of devotion to them, consolidating and celebrating the geometry of connections that still joins them. In the absence of both Neville and Lucy, *Great Expectations* holds, or embodies, this, their collective memory.

This idea of the story as a medium, channelling the past and forming a geometry of connections with present, is also dramatised by *Afterimage*. Eldon lends Annie books, which become a shared image-repertoire between them, a collective memory, or shared experience, siphoned from the accounts they read. Annie reads with a 'feverish passion for words' that recalls Roland's epiphanic reading at the end of *Possession*. She reads 'with the same bursts of clandestine intensity that one would use to pursue an illicit encounter' (17). When Annie reads Eldon's books about John Franklin's expedition to the Arctic, they stand

in for a shared history between them, one which is placed alongside Eldon's actual shared history with Isabelle: 'he looks across at Annie, suddenly so grateful that she knows this about Franklin, that she knows some of what he knows of the expeditions. Isabelle, in all their married life, has never once read the same books he has, has never shown the slightest interest in doing so' (151).

Annie's reading also provides her with an image-repertoire that she shares with Franklin's men, who died almost before she was born. Having read that among the possessions found with the remains of Franklin's men was a copy of the novel *The Vicar of Wakefield*, Annie reads it, and tries to imagine what the story's litany of calamities would have meant to the men, reading it in the context of their own disaster: 'were they able to do as the line in *The Vicar of Wakefield* said, the line that Annie stumbled over and then went back to again. *Read our anguish into patience*' (157, emphasis in original).

Moreover, the narratives of arctic exploration provide Annie with the images she needs to re-member her own past, to understand her own family's experience. They provide her with some, imaginative, knowledge of that which eludes her conscious memory: what it was like to be starving to death, as her family did, during the Irish famine. Annie reflects that in the same year that Franklin and his men were dying on their Arctic expedition, her family were dying in Ireland. Annie is transfixed by the realisation that, at the same point in history, her parents suffered the fate ascribed to the members of Sir John Franklin's expedition to the arctic: '*they fell down and died as they walked along*. On a road, in Ireland. On the shifting, unsteady pans of ice in northern Canada. At almost the same time' (149).

Although reading about and reimagining the fate of the members of Franklin's expedition enables Annie to imagine the fate of her own family, to affectively assimilate that which she has not experienced, it is the *recovery* voyages of Leopold McClintock, in 1858, that are more important to the novel's larger theme of memory and retrieval. Reading the account of McClintock's voyages to discover what had happened to the Franklin expedition prompts Annie to wonder, for the first time, whether the story she has been told is what really happened to her family:

> and why, thinks Annie, holding *The Voyage of the 'Fox' in the Arctic Seas* against her chest, why have I never questioned Mrs. Cullen's account of my family's death? Why could I not believe, as Jane Franklin believed and kept believing, that out there, against all odds,

> there was perhaps one who made it through alive. One person. One soul. (150)

For Annie, who has spent her life in England being asked to forget her Irish history, the very fact of the McClintock voyages raises the possibility, for the first time, of retrieving a different version of her own past, of recovering a survivor from her among her own family (150).

McClintock's voyages become a motif for historical recollection in the novel, so that it casts the project of salvaging the past, of imaginatively re-mapping previous journeys, as fruitful. Eldon who, as a boy, had wanted to be part not of Franklin's original, mapping, expedition, but of McClintock's recovery expedition, observes: 'they have mapped more of Canada's Arctic in looking for Franklin than was ever mapped by Franklin himself' (143). The goal of the recovery expedition, as it is imaged in McClintock's voyages, is not actually the past, but the journey itself:

> Annie is surprised by McClintock's book. She had thought that an expedition that had set off in search of Franklin would spend the time sailing towards the Arctic pondering what might have happened to Franklin and his men, imagining their possible fate. But McClintock doesn't even mention Franklin for the first half of the book. Instead, he talks about what he's seeing and experiencing, as though he's on his own scientific survey of the Arctic. (148)

McClintock's journey makes some discoveries about the fate of the Franklin expedition but questions remain. 'All the dead weren't found' (150). McClintock leaves a record of his own discoveries and explorations under the cairn at Point Victory, added to material the Franklin Expedition had left. 'Because it was his voyage, thinks Annie, closing the book. John Franklin was just as much a place as Cape Farewell or Point Victory, something to head towards, something to take bearings from, but truly the journey was McClintock's' (150).

Thus, like *Waterland*, *Afterimage* emphasises the importance of the *process* of historical inquiry, the telling of stories, over the meanings produced, which are always provisional. It privileges journey over destination. Curiosity is also privileged, as it is in *Waterland*. This is explicated not only through the privileging of storytelling, but also through Eldon's map-making. The theme map that Eldon's employer wants him to make goes against Eldon's belief in the value of the journey: 'to mark down the mineral deposits in South America relegates

the map to a mere guide. Exploration loses its edge of curiosity and becomes only a reason for exploitation' (46). The theme map emerges from the belief that 'there is nothing left to show of the world. Nothing new' (25). For Eldon, the map's central function is to offer a means of return: 'the simple purity of the act of making the map, so that the map-maker would find his way back to where he was, so that others could find their way there' (46). When Eldon shows Annie the map of Ireland it transforms her thinking about it, making it a place of potential return. Previously, all her thoughts of home have been tied to that single, endless road her family died building. Thus, Annie 'looks down at the map and is surprised that Ireland is not long and thin, loping off the top of the page into distance' (110). The map of Ireland joins with McClintock's story in Annie's mind and together they enable her to take command of her own recovery expedition: 'she will go back to Ireland herself, back to County Clare, to try and find out what happened to her family. Eldon would like that' (247).[15]

Annie's decision to leave involves a symbolic rejection of photography. For much of the novel, Annie has been caught between Isabelle and Eldon, and therefore, between photography on the one hand and reading and storytelling and cartography on the other. The novel dramatises a contest over knowledge, between photography and the older art forms of cartography and books. For Isabelle, the contest between these epistemologies is characterised as that between a 'living piece of art' and 'dusty old maps' (44). Photography is associated with 'the future' (44, 198), and yet, for the novel, this makes it imperfect as a memorial to, or of, the past. Whereas photography is a fixed image, map-making, for the novel, represents a journey: Eldon observes, 'a photograph is always a destination. It's not concerned with getting there, but being there … To look at a photograph … is always to have arrived' (112). Annie responds with her own assertion that 'your map … is better than a photograph' (112).

The suggestion that the photograph is not a journey but a destination, a kind of truncated or aborted narrative, is also taken up in *Sixty Lights*. For, despite their celebration of photography, through each novel there also runs a critique of the image, the intimation of an alternative, negative, trajectory for the medium. In *Sixty Lights* this takes the form of a tension between image and narrative as ways of knowing which is never satisfactorily resolved. It relates to the different types of meaning-production these perform. The novel takes as an epigraph to its second section Walter Benjamin's assertion that 'knowledge comes only in flashes', which informs, too, its notion of photographic seeing.

These flashes seem to 'fit' Lucy's knowledge of the world as a series of random events, actions and objects:

> unable to reason her profound sense of discrepancy in the world … and the cloudy abstractions they brought in their wake, she decided she would know the world by its imagistic revelations. Seen this way, London presented a venerable randomness, by which, eventually, Lucy was won over. (86)

Lucy is most attracted to image when it remains evocative but imprecise. She saw a magic-lantern show of

> a Chinaman in a peaked hat, carrying two buckets on a stick. This last image she cherished because it connected in some way with her father, but she did not dwell on the significance of something so imprecise. Instead she rejoiced in the arbitrariness of all she had seen. (88)

Yet not all 'imagistic revelations' provide knowledge in the novel. Whereas 'not diversion, but knowing was the gift that story gave her' (114), the reverse is true of images that are made into narrative. Thus, there are magic lantern shows that produce 'enthralment' (108), the patrons 'surrendered to visions fantastical' (248). Here the magic lantern shows possess 'the weird Medusa power … people lassooed [*sic*] willingly into vitreous fictions … improbable conjunctions and fabulous spectacles' (233). They are linked to Madame Esperance's projections as luminous but spurious lies. Jones suggests:

> I wanted a certain scepticism about how the photograph was used … this technology rapidly became used as a narrative form, as a form of deception and as a form of a different kind of pleasure. So, rather than recollection or recovering the real, it became a form of pleasurable fraudulence. (Jones, 2005)

In fact, Lucy's introduction to photography in the novel, and our own, foregrounds its fraudulent use. She visits the photographer's studio with Isaac, the man to whom she travelled as a potential wife, but whose relationship to her is soured by her pregnancy to another man. The visit is an effort, on Isaac's part, to project the image of them as a legitimate couple 'before – as he so indelicately put it – her shape betrayed her – an image, he said, that would help later on and might even serve

as consolation to the future child' (139). The photographer's studio is a 'little world of props and false objects' (139), drawn together to construct an 'immaculately posed' (140) image.[16] The result, for Lucy, is at odds with her image of herself. It has elided some part of herself, making her less substantial, so that 'it seemed plausible that the rumour was true: that the camera removed some human quotient or iota with each image it took' (140). Gazing at a photograph of herself for the first time, Lucy experiences the characteristic dissonance between herself and her photographic image, and foresees the effect of this image, which will outlive her: 'people will look at this image when I am dead; it will stand in for me, for ever, just as my mother's austere paper cut-out – all stasis and reduction – now cruelly betokens her' (141). Lucy distinguishes between the studio photographer's immobilising 'seeing-eye coffin,' which 'sedated and mortified all he saw' and her camera which, she felt, 'discerned the capability of all things, all ordinary things, to be seen singly and remarkably' (141). That is, to be seen as unique, and not forced to fit a particular narrative.

The tension between knowledge-as-narrative and knowledge-as-image is dissolved at the end of the novel. Here, narrative unravels and becomes image. Or rather, the verbal and visual merge together as a series of memories that repeat for Lucy, unbidden. Lucy is dying at the age of twenty-two, drowning in tubercular fluid, and Violet's voice, reading Wilkie Collins' novel, *The Woman in White,* floats in and out of Lucy's consciousness. '[In] her mind, now, the novel unplaited and reversed. The mysterious encounter with the woman in white, an enigma drifting out of the darkness with no identity and purpose, seemed to her especially poignant and compelling, and the end, not the beginning, of any story' (243). As the narrative moves on, for Lucy the story is reduced to the single, luminous image of the woman in white: 'she was transfixed, perhaps self-indulgently, by this single, strange sign … ' (243). Rather than a lesson in how others greet death, this seems more of the séance into her self of the experience of becoming a ghost, a hieroglyph, an image. The narrative of *Sixty Lights*, which has been, throughout, more a series of images than a linear, continuous narrative, dissolves further into flashes, using the images and metaphors that have been associated with the ethereal photograph throughout. Lucy is described as 'disembod[ied]', 'incandescent', 'ectoplasm' (244–5), until finally:

> the image slides suddenly away, into shiny nothingness … Special things seen, and memories, and photographic prints, all converged to this quiet, private point. She tilted the glass. She was still

> anticipating images. She was still anticipating, more than anything, an abyss of light … (246)

Curiously, since she has so yearned for a photograph of her own dead mother, Lucy refuses her family, including her daughter, an image of herself before she dies. She leaves behind only two photos of herself:

> one was the ghost image, which the family could not quite bring themselves to dispose of, and the other was a studio photograph, taken in Bombay, in which Lucy stood posed beside Isaac Newton. She looked like a stranger, like a Mrs Newton, like someone unknown to them all. She was wearing unfamiliar clothes and had alien eyes. As her real face faded, slowly and imperceptibly, this false portrait would begin in sinister fashion to replace her. (248)

Thus, the photograph taken with Isaac, an example of photography used in the service of narrative, designed to create and propagate the legitimising story that they are a married couple, functions, after Lucy's death, as she envisioned it would, to fix her in an identity that she never embodied in life. The ghost image is of Lucy who, while being photographed with Thomas, Violet, Ellen and Mrs Minchin, moved during the exposure so that she 'appeared in print as blurred and residual' (236). In this picture Lucy almost literally embodies the figure of the ghost. 'Clearly I am meant from now on to be a partickler ghost' (236), she says.[17] Or, we might say, as she dies, that she is meant to be an asterisk, or present mark of an absent presence.

Rather than the photograph, then, which provides no memorial of Lucy, the novel returns to the idea of embodied, or re-membered memory. Thus, for Jacob, it is not a photograph that will reconnect him to Lucy, but the Indian Miniature, given to Lucy by Isaac and in turn gifted to Jacob. Jacob, an artist, finds the painting 'childish, inept', and yet, 'something in the face of Radha subtly evoked Lucy's face. She had an intractable self-possession and a whispering gaze' (248). His fingers repeat Lucy's own touch years before, when Isaac had first given her the miniature and remarked on the beetle wings. Rubbing his own finger on them, Jacob 'felt his own heart respond: some mystery of after-life momentarily possessed and moved him. In the absence of likeness there remained this trace of a touch, this memento of something actual but wholly unpictured' (248).[18]

This idea that objects other than photographs can hold memory through the medium of touch, through contact with the body, is a

possibility that Isabelle ponders in *Afterimage*. She reflects that there is no one else to remember her in relationship to her childhood friend, and first love, Ellen:

> no one is thinking of us. We no longer exist to anything in the world. Maybe, in that forest there's a tree that remembers your touch when you stood there, close against it, waiting for me, over twenty years ago. Maybe that patch of bark you laid your hand on is now farther up the tree than I could reach. (96)

In addition to suggesting that objects might hold a memory of touch, this passage also stresses the importance of collective memory. It suggests that if there is no one to share a memory of what is lost, then the loss is felt afresh. Isabelle lost Ellen during childhood but the realisation that there is no one to remember them together, since her parents have now died, produces a second loss. Similarly, when Eldon dies, Isabelle feels it as a loss not only of Eldon, but of the memory he embodied:

> he was a place she had been that still glows dimly in the memory of her flesh. Now that he has died he has taken their whole shared past with him and she is left … What is she to do with her understanding of him? ... And what about her? Will anyone ever know Isabelle again, as long and as well as Eldon did? He has remembered her, so she doesn't have to … the truth is that Eldon's death means also that Isabelle will never be as she was, will not exist as strongly as before. (238)

This adds a further resonance to the notion, in each novel, of embodied memory. It is not only that the past inheres in individual bodies, but that memory is held collectively by bodies, and the death of the body necessarily involves a loss of memory too. This, in turn, threatens erasure. Isabelle becomes ghostly.[19]

IV

Each novel thus posits the need for communal recollection, a community of witnesses to cultural memory. And, in each novel, this takes the form of a community of readers. For, while they share thematic concerns such as historical recollection as a process, the importance of curiosity and of story-telling, and the text as a medium for historical recollection, *Sixty Lights* and *Afterimage* are configured differently to *Waterland* and

Possession, in which literary critics and historians construct a narrative of the Victorian past, deciphering traces left for the historical record and examining historical texts such as letters and diaries. Rather than represent the writing of the past, they explore the *reading* of it. *Sixty Lights* and *Afterimage* primarily mimic the action of memory, recurring and redoubling as a series of hallucinated images which re-member the Victorian period. With its sixty chapters that read as sixty snapshots, some apparently unrelated to the others, *Sixty Lights* is akin to an album of photographs, or a collection of memories, offering images that are partly obscured by shadow, flecked with time, coloured by loss, in keeping with Lucy's personal philosophy. The implication of the novels' depiction of reading as the siphoning of other experience is that *Sixty Lights* and *Afterimage* offer the Victorian era as the séance of another experience, another time, into ourselves. Indeed, through the notion of embodied and inherited memory, they offer the Victorian era as part of our heritage, and inheritance; the Victorian period is written into our cultural memory.

Thus, more than she invokes 'history', 'metahistory' or 'historiographic metafiction', Jones identifies her novel a 'memory text' (Jones, 2005). This can be understood in the same sense that Edwards calls photographs 'memory texts', suggesting that the circulation of photographs establishes and maintains links between groups and individuals, overcoming distance, for example, and enabling distant family members to participate in special moments and rituals. 'They reinforce networks and identity built on the memory to which they relate, positioning individuals vis-à-vis the group, linking past, present and perhaps implying a future.' By offering her novel as a memory text, Jones attempts to establish these connections between the Victorian era and our own. Or, in the vocabulary of her novel, to prompt the recognition that there are 'sight-lines, image tokens, between people and people, between people and objects and words on a page, that knit[s] the whole world in the purest geometry of connections. One simply ha[s] to notice. One ha[s] to remark' (114).

One way she does this is by allowing her text to mediate, or resuscitate, Victorian novels. In both *Sixty Lights* and *Afterimage*, the incorporation of well-known Victorian fictions as reading material for the protagonists – notably Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre,* which also features in Humphreys' text, but also *Great Expectations* and Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White*, among others – creates an image-repertoire that we share with the characters. Reading becomes an act of communal recollection not only between ourselves and our contemporaries, but

also between ourselves and our Victorian ancestors, mediated by the Victorian novel itself. In this way, the use of Victorian novels in the contemporary texts acts as Groth suggests photography did for Victorians such as Barrett Browning, 'in the interests of thickening the connective tissue of memory' (Groth, 2003: 10).[20] Jones calls these links and connections 'acts of imaginative transfer', an 'aesthetic mobilisation by which we connect with the irreducible otherness of the beloved' (Jones, 2006) or in this case, the Victorian past. Georges Letissier's discussion of the 'refraction' of the English canon in 'post-Victorian' fiction elucidates this notion of Victorian novels as a repertoire of images we share not only with our contemporaries but with the Victorians themselves. Moreover, it points, too, to the way in which the Victorian novels become 'source-texts' for contemporary fiction:

> refraction … is used in physics to designate the phenomenon by which a ray of light, or an electromagnetic wave is deflected from its previous course in passing out of one medium into another of different density. When metaphorically applied to literature, it would imply that the source-text – the composite Victorian corpus – has been passed on, through reading, to a contemporary filtering consciousness, which in its turn produces its own mediated version of the original. Such refracting process is all the more complicated as it implies both reading as personal activity … and simultaneously, reading as a collective experience. (Letissier, 2004: 112)

Both *Sixty Lights* and *Afterimage* position the Victorian era as antecedent to, and persistent in, our own culture. In an interview with Jeffrey Canton, Humphreys suggests that she 'was interested in this particular time because, in a sense, it's the beginning of our time. The birth of photography is the beginning of our modern, image-obsessed world' (Canton, 2000). *Sixty Lights*, too, suggests certain continuities between the birth of photography in the Victorian era and features of our own, visual, culture. It establishes connections between the Victorian past and our own by making Lucy a visionary, able to predict the future uses of photography, including x-rays and ultrasound technology, the cinema and television (233). Lucy also foresees critical commentary upon these visual technologies. She explains to Jacob her aestheticism, 'what she call[s] art-in-the-age-of-mechanical-reproduction' (239), using Walter Benjamin's phrase (Benjamin 1968b), and Jacob reflects that 'she spoke like someone who was watching history unfold' (218). While this appears to invoke an evolutionary relationship between the Victorian

period and our own, the specificity with which Lucy foresees us evokes the logic of the ghost; suggests the disruption of linear time, the aberrant presence of the Victorian in our culture. In a photographic reversal, that is, Lucy is able to *see us*. For Jacob, it is as though 'unbidden, he had glimpsed Lucy in another realm' (218). The distance between past and present is elided.

Indeed, both novels have been criticised in reviews for psychological anachronism. For Susan Elderkin, Lucy is too modern, 'eerily ahead of her time' and the portrait of the period is unconvincing: 'references to Dickens and pink bonnets come as a surprise' (Elderkin, 2004). For Ion Martea, the novel 'fails to bring the insight into the period the author had intended to deliver' (Martea, undated review). Humphreys, too, has been criticised for creating an anachronistic heroine. Andrea Barrett observes that Annie 'reshapes Isabelle's thinking about proper representations of women' and, therefore, Annie 'can seem both too good to be true and anachronistic, her character shaped by class and gender issues that belong to our time and not hers' (Barrett, 2001). For Elderkin, Martea and Barrett these anachronisms represent chronological and historiographical confusion and a serious failing in an historical novel. However, I would argue that the use of anachronism contributes to the sense that the Victorian past continues to exist in uncanny forms today; it suggests its absent presence.

The sense of linear disruption is consolidated in *Afterimage* through the immediacy of its present tense. It suggests a kind of afterlife, or, more properly as Humphreys' title suggests, an 'afterimage', a picture that continues to be visible, in altered form, after its original has vanished. It is memory, seeking to hold onto the transient and, in the process, transfiguring it. These novels proceed as memory does for Benjamin, in fragments, connecting events according to 'resemblances' or 'correspondences' (Benjamin, 1968a: 211). They offer themselves as aberrant repetitions of the Victorian period, suggesting that what is important is not that the past is accurately known, or fully understood or made sense of, but that it is remembered in fractured form, as shards of memory. Jones suggests that 'words and images do not have achieved reparation within them, what they have are the gestures towards reparation' (Jones, 2006). Like Lucy's notebook of 'Special Things Seen', the historical novel becomes, here, a kind of shrine, a 'kind of honouring attention' (200).

Thus, a scene in *Sixty Lights* in which Lucy sees a gaslit street in London '*remade* in a quivery film of light' provides a model for thinking about memory and historical recollection in the novel. Moreover, it provides a model for thinking about Jones' project as an historical novelist or,

as she might put it, the author of a memory text. The novelist casts light upon aspects of the Victorian period. This light does not simply illuminate, but, like London's gaslight, *remakes* that which it touches. Just as Lucy is 'bound to this contradiction between the material and its ethereal incarnation in light' (186), so the historical novel does not so much materialise past actuality as recast it in, and as, light. Invested in re-membering the Victorian period, in its imaginative re-creation in and through word-images, *Sixty Lights* and *Afterimage* offer themselves as the (transfigured) repetition of the Victorian in contemporary culture.

Like Lucy and Annie, we are positioned as readers and, like them, we trace references from text to text, not in order to reconstruct the past but to re-member it, as a séance of another time and experience into our own. Finally, then, it is Annie who ties together reading as an act of historical recollection, an embodied memory that returns us to the past. She ponders questions of reference, wondering, 'What is to be believed? Is the true story the story that is made or the story that is forgotten?' (69). The experience that she imagines for herself, gleaned from books she has read, might be as 'true' as the experience itself, she thinks: 'perhaps what can be imagined is somehow a stronger truth because it inhabits you, is you, becomes you. It happens from the inside out' (67). As Lyn Jacobs observes in her article about Jones, this is 'the power of the 'cherished image': the way in which, when *re-embodied* by the reader, intensities of experience are distilled and/or re-invested with "symbolic" meaning' (Jacobs, 2006, 192, emphasis mine).

Thus, in *Sixty Lights* and *Afterimage* the Victorian past is offered to us, via a series of references to popular Victorian novels, photographs, fashion, events and landmarks, as an afterimage, a picture that we continue to see, albeit in 'ghosted' form. The novels are themselves repetitions of the Victorian period, mediums for its haunting presence. Their exploration of Victorian photography, cartography, and reading foregrounds memory discourse, with its vocabulary of loss, but also of retrieval. These novels write the Victorian period into our cultural memory, and suggest that the period has left myriad traces embodied in texts, images and other material, if ephemeral, forms. Rather than focus upon the problematisation of historical representation, *Sixty Lights* and *Afterimage* utilise the spectrality of the photograph as a means to explore the uncanny repetition of the Victorian past in the present, and to focus upon the possibility of recovery, the attempt at reparation, even if that which is restored amounts only to the aberrant presence of the ghost. Each posits the historical novel as one means through which the Victorian past can be remembered, if not restored, through the power of language.