

Ghostly Histories and Embodied Memories: Photography, Spectrality and Historical Fiction in *Afterimage* and *Sixty Lights*

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Abstract:

Sixty Lights and *Afterimage* use the trope of photography to explore the relationship between history, memory and fiction as modes of recollection. Employing a lexicon of haunting and spectrality, these novels are concerned with recognising the persistence of the past in a present cut off from linear models of inheritance and memory. Extending and elaborating influential theoretical models of contemporary historical fiction, these novels deploy the ghostly figure of photography in order to posit the persistence of the past as uncanny repetition and as embodied memory. The article closes by considering the implications of these historical fictions as “memory texts,” arguing that they are not, primarily, concerned with metafictional or metahistorical reflections but rather write the period into our cultural memory, offering themselves as the uncanny repetition of the “body” of Victorian culture persisting in the here and now.

Keywords: *Afterimage*, ghosts, history, historiographic metafiction, Helen Humphreys, Gail Jones, memory, metahistorical romance, photography, *Sixty Lights*.

[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 1983: 357-358)

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 photographs testify to time’s relentless melt. (Susan Sontag, 1977:15)

Writing about photographs as objects of memory, 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 for their exploration of history, memory, and the Victorian era. Examples of neo-Victorian fictions that explore the emergent technology of photography include: Lynne Truss' *Tennyson's Gift* (1996), Robert Solé's *La Mamelouka* (1996, translated as *The Photographer's Wife*, 1999), Ross Gilfillan's *The Edge of the Crowd* (2001), Katie Roiphe's *Still She Haunts Me* (2001), Fiona Shaw's *The Sweetest Thing* (2003), and Susan Barrett's *Fixing Shadows* (2005). This article examines two further neo-Victorian fictions, which engage with this same complex, exploring early image production, narrative, and history as conjoined modes of recollection contributing to the construction of cultural memory. Gail Jones' *Sixty Lights* (2004) and Helen Humphreys' *Afterimage* (2001) explore 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 cheat time, and allow access to the past, facilitating the resuscitation of the dead. The writers 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.

In these novels, memory, history and fiction come together in the trope of the photograph. Employing a lexicon of haunting and spectrality to represent the 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 returning 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 thus deploy the ghostly figure of photography in order to posit the persistence of the past as uncanny repetition and as visually embodied memory.

Significantly, the novels use the language of spectrality to position themselves as revenants. They resuscitate, or, to use Hilary M. Schor's evocative phrase, "ghostwrite" (Schor 2000) Victorian literary texts and mediate Victorian culture haunting the present. The article closes by considering the implications of these spectral 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 ghostly 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.

1. Photography and Spectrality

When it emerged on the Victorian scene, photography was greeted with excitement and widespread enthusiasm, which stemmed from its promise of objectivity, its capacity for verisimilitude (see Batchen 2001: 22; McQuire 1998: 124). The unerring camera stands in place of the erring human subject, guarantor of authenticity and accuracy. Roland Barthes discusses the advent of photography as an epistemic rupture that transformed the individual's relationship to the past, so that history no longer took "the form of myth" but was granted "evidentiary power" via the camera lens (Barthes 1980: 87). The photograph's intimation of unmediated knowledge and absolute veracity, its perceived incapacity to lie, promises 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. 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. Indeed, Raphael Samuel attributes the late twentieth century fascination with the Victorian period to the discovery of nineteenth century photographs as seemingly transparent historical sources, which revitalised its interest for historians (Samuel 1994: 319-20). Jennifer 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).

It is the photograph's association with perfect representation that, for Linda Hutcheon, makes it attractive to historiographic metafiction. In *The Politics of Postmodernism*, she links fiction and photography since "both forms have traditionally been assumed to be transparent media which paradoxically could master/capture/fix the real" (Hutcheon 1989: 39). 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: 45).

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. 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, because of its “invisible umbilicus joining image and referent” (McQuire 1998: 13), the photograph was, and is, conflated with its object. More than having its eye “fixed on the past” (Barthes 1980: 87), the photograph is thought to inhere the past in a unique way. As 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 1980: 88).

Photography’s magic also promised its power as memorial, or memento. 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 a realist representation, here the photograph contains the “trace” of its subject, constituting a “material vestige” (Sontag 1977: 154). More than correspondence, the photograph embodies its subject. The photograph as a representational medium has been used for classification, historical knowledge, surveillance, and as a witness. The photograph as a memorial medium establishes an affective relationship to its object, functioning 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).¹

Interestingly, historians’ discovery of old photographs seems also to have corresponded with 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 (see Nora 1989; Klein 2000). 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 Helen 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).² 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” (Edwards 1999: 226). 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: 233; 229). The photograph produces an affective relationship to its object, even if that object is a past not personally known or experienced. In this sense, photographs do indeed function, as Edwards suggests, as “surrogate memory” (Edwards 1999: 222). Moreover, when the photographs’ object is another century, for example the Victorian past, history becomes personalised; the past is re-established in a particular, affective, relationship to and within 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 problematic 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,” Scott 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 *Still She Haunts Me*, the photograph promises that “everything that flickered could be made permanent” (Roiphe 2001: 8).³ Photography becomes a vehicle for exploring the attempt to restore the past via word and image.

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 the 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 (Humphreys 2001: 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" (Humphreys 2001: 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" (Humphreys 2001: 135). Yet photography is not primarily a means for Isabelle to immortalise the 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 primarily seeks to immortalise her artistic vision. 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" (Humphreys 2001: 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." (Humphreys 2001: 133) Isabelle opposes art, which is permanent, to nature, which is ephemeral, always threatening loss and destruction.

Sixty Lights, too, is a novel coloured and shaped by death and grief. Its protagonist Lucy Strange is, like Annie, an orphan and migrant. After the death of her parents, when Lucy is eight, she and her brother move from Melbourne to London to live with their uncle. The novel tells the story of Lucy's brief life and, like *Afterimage*, explores the potential of words and images to restore loss. Indeed, Lucy, like Isabelle, becomes a photographer to assuage loss. In *Sixty Lights* photography is also associated with death,

but it simultaneously becomes a celebration of life. Lucy's philosophy is built upon the notion of photographic vision, which is a "celebration of the lit-up gaze" (Jones 2004: 142). It echoes Barthes' assertion that "the Photograph is never anything but an antiphon of 'Look,' 'See,' 'Here it is.'" (Barthes 1980: 5) 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. In London, after she has begun to see photographically, but before she has a camera, she desires to photograph three sapphire-blue hyacinths, a baby's cradled head and a group of young, female bristle workers leaving the factory (Jones 2004: 89). In India she photographs or records in her notebook of "Photographs not Taken" a group of widows at a temple and a man selling mixtures of tobacco, spices and herbs (Jones 2004: 144-145). Photography lends significance to the otherwise unremarkable. It grants permanence to the everyday forgettable. The act of photographing asserts the significance of the ordinary.⁴ Although, like Isabelle, Lucy considers herself an artist, her photographs are of the people and places she encounters in daily life. In language that echoes that used by Edwards above, Lucy comes to think of photography as "a shrine" (Jones 2004: 154) or "another form of love ... devotional. Physical. A kind of honouring attention. I think of photography - no doubt absurdly - as a kind of kiss" (Jones 2004: 200).

In a novel with relatively few 'period' references, 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" (Jones 2005). 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*, Barbara Z. Thaden refers to the

“long litany of dead mothers in nineteenth-century fiction”, from William Makepeace Thackeray’s Becky Sharp in *Vanity Fair* (1847-1848) and Charlotte Brontë’s heroines in *Jane Eyre* (1847) and *Villette* (1853), to Elizabeth Gaskell’s motherless heroines in *Mary Barton* (1848), *Ruth* (1853) and *North and South* (1854-1855) (Thaden 1997: 18; 21-23). 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–ii) The trope is also utilised in other neo-Victorian novels such as Michèle Roberts’ *In the Red Kitchen* (1990), in which Hattie King, like Lucy and Annie, is an orphan who feels lost and displaced; and Graham Swift’s *Waterland* (1983), in which the protagonist and his wife are both motherless.

In *Sixty Lights* and *Afterimage* the loss of the mother symbolises the loss of history. It is an un-grounding, or displacement and disruption of identity. In *Camera Lucida*, 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 asks: “is History not simply the time when we were not born?” (Barthes 1980:62) Answering his own query, he asserts, “that is what the time when my mother was alive before me is – History” (Barthes 1980: 65), foreshortening our sense of what history is and bringing the more recent past into its purview. Moreover, Barthes cites Freud’s observation of the maternal body, namely that there is no other place of which one can say with so much certainty that one has already been there (Barthes 1980: 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” (Barthes 1980: 7).

Sixty Lights makes the mother’s body the centrepiece 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” (Jones 2004: 6-7). Lucy’s pregnant mother, soon to die in childbirth, is already slipping away from her daughter, un-grounding her: “the fan imprints itself on Lucy’s heart, ... this little partition between them, of such oriental blue, will

register for ever the vast distances that love must travel” (Jones 2004: 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” (Jones 2004: 45-46). Her mother is a “hieroglyph” (Jones 2004: 70), a mystery that resists decoding. It is at this moment, we are told, that Lucy becomes a photographer, “one whose mission it is to unconceal”, well before she is introduced to a camera. “And every photographic ambition will turn on the summoning of a face and the retrieval of what is languishing just beyond vision” (Jones 2004: 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. Her nostalgia is more akin to the function of memory in feminist fiction as Gayle Greene describes it: “our means of connecting past and present and constructing a self and versions of experience we can live with” (Greene 1991: 293). Severed from her maternal origins, Lucy embraces photography as a tool for memory, an instrument to combat imminent, intractable loss and the destabilising of identity. For Lucy, as for Barrett Browning, the photograph promises proximity, the erasure of time and distance. The epigraph from Barrett Browning encapsulates 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. Not torn, this photograph is, rather, forever missing. It symbolises not only the promise of restoration but also its cruel negation. Her mother's face "could not be willed into vision" (Jones 2004: 70).⁵ 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 a baby, 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" (Humphreys 2001: 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." (Humphreys 2001: 125)

This dream haunts Annie, so that she wakes up from it crying. Indeed, other aspects of this recurring dream consolidate the image of Annie haunted by her mother's ghost: "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" (Humphreys 2001: 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 a literal 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." (Humphreys 2001: 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 smooth continuum of past, present and future. The novel is obsessed with “distance. Position. How to find your way back when where you are depends on where everything else is.” (Humphreys 2001: 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.” (Humphreys 2001: 85) Disconnected from her past, Annie also has no future.

Severed 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 ghostliness more fully. Lucy is jealously convinced that her brother Thomas, who sleepwalks, “otherworldly and implacably absent ... communes with ghosts” (Jones 2004: 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” (Jones 2004: 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; rather it re-inscribes that loss.

The trope of the ghost is a familiar one in contemporary fictional returns to the Victorian era. Indeed Rosario Arias Doblaz 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. These novels, she argues, “aim at resurrecting and materializing the Victorian dead in manifold forms” (Arias Doblaz 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. 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). More than this, however, the figure of the ghost is 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 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 what Peim calls “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” (140). Embedded in the figure of the spectre is indeterminacy and incompleteness. The materiality of the ghost is illusory and always already under erasure. According to Peim, “the authenticity of the spectre is always questionable – a function of the gap between its partial nature and the full version [of past self/time] it claims to represent” (Peim 2005: 77). This also makes the figure of the ghost an apt metaphor for textual representation and verisimilitude. Colin Davis explores the sense in which Jacques Derrida’s formulation of *hauntologie*, or “hauntology”, has been productively adopted in literary criticism to explore the use of ghostliness in and of 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), visual or textual.

This seems especially true of the photographic trace which, as Barthes suggests, always contains “the return of the dead” (Barthes 1980: 9). Yet Barthes’ phenomenology of photography also suggests the contradictory notion, that “every photograph is a certificate of presence” (Barthes 1980: 87). Like the spectre, the photograph seems to occupy 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 just this way, “always there yet gone forever; both in, and out, of history; always already dead – and yet still alive” (Green-Lewis 2000: 31). It is this very ghostliness that Humphreys invokes in the acknowledgments for

Afterimage, when she credits Julia Margaret Cameron's photographs for their "haunting inspiration" (Humphreys 2001: 249). 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" (Jones 2004: 94). He believes that "it is ectoplasm ghosts are composed of" (Jones 2004: 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 1980: 87). The term "ectoplasm" entwines the ghostly image and the photograph as reflections 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 (Jones 2004: 163), animal blood, a throbbing heart (Jones 2004: 144), and bioluminescent sea algae (Jones 2004: 110). These are incandescent, but ephemeral, emanations. They are "auratic" but not solid (Jones 2004: 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." (Jones 2004: 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. It suggests ethereal presence amidst implacable absence.

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" (Jones 2004: 11). Part of Lucy's journey into adulthood (and *Sixty Lights* 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. “Marked, and shadowed, and flecked with time.” (Jones 2004: 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 2005)

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.” (Jones 2004: 73) It cannot be “willed into vision ... called, or fabricated.” (Jones 2004: 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, “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. Rather than provide access to the past it claims to incarnate, the glossy image is constituted in and by desire and reflects instead the projections of both creator and viewer.

2. Embodied Memory and the Mark of the Storyteller

Against the unyielding image and 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 of 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 question of embodied memory, or corporeal history, is posed obliquely. Annie wonders if her body holds the memory of her voyage across the sea to a new life in England (Humphreys 2001: 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 events lived through or actions performed by Annie herself. 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.” (Humphreys 2001: 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”; yet “this is the one thing she can never know. What her mother looked like, and if Annie looks like her.” (Humphreys 2001: 94) Still, in the absence of a visual image, Annie’s body allows her some knowledge of her mother: “Annie does know what the labour would feel like” (Humphreys 2001: 94), since she too is accustomed to heavy work.

The novel thus effaces the conventional link between seeing and knowing, and the conventional epistemological function of photography, by privileging the body as the means to knowledge. When Eldon shows Annie an image of Ireland, her “motherland,” in the form of a map, she attempts to learn it physically. She “puts her finger down, gently, on Kilkee and traces the fogged outline of the Loop head” (Humphreys 2001: 111). In this way the map itself, its very physical substance or “body”, returns to Annie (imperfectly, incompletely) the home she does not recall ever seeing in tangible form. Later that evening Annie performs her own, rudimentary, cartography, drawing the map of Ireland from memory into the cover of her Bible. The action substitutes for a photograph as an act of devotion. It is also her act of ownership. By drawing the lines she connects herself to her home, the place she cannot consciously remember, 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” (Humphreys 2001: 116). 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 silhouette of her mother, cut from black paper, to her lover William, 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” (Jones 2004: 118). Here Lucy embodies the photograph that she so desires. The alchemic fusion of Honoria and Lucy 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 re-members and substantiates that of her mother.

Manifesting this idea of embodied memory is the unconscious repetition of various bodily actions and gestures across generations in the novel. 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.” (Jones 2004: 119) Lucy is the unwilling, 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” (Jones 2004: 9), when Lucy, in her childhood, intruded upon her father in his grief. In a sense the novel ends as it began, with a small child grieving for her dead mother, and witnessing the debilitating grief of another who loved her. Moreover, Ellen “looked exactly, Thomas thought, as Lucy had as a small child” (Jones 2004: 247). The effect is to suggest that Ellen, like Lucy before her, embodies the memory of her mother and that the past will persist in the present in the form of repetitions, fragmented images and unbidden memories. These are what Patrick Hutton calls “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 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 1968: 611, cited 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. As Julian Wolfreys suggests, the textual trace is always the medium for spectral encounters: “recognizing the signs of haunting it must be concluded that whether one speaks of the

experience of reading or the experience of the materiality of history, one witnesses and responds to ghosts” (Wolfreys 2002: 140). In these novels, as in other neo-Victorian fiction, the text becomes a medium of the past, allowing its voices to speak. 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” (Jones 2004: 114). Through reading, Lucy “learnt how other people entered the adventure of being alive” (Jones 2004: 114). Her experience of reading helps her to understand her desire to search out the connections “that knitted the whole world” (Jones 2004: 114) together. 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” (Jones 2004: 114) between parent and child. They return her mother to Lucy in small slices: “a tone of voice, the feminine scent of gardenia” (Jones 2004: 115). “It was like,” Lucy thinks, “something swaying just in and out of vision” (Jones 2004: 115).

Thus, word-images or stories, both anecdotal and novelistic, embody memory and perform the devotional, memorialising function of photography.⁶ 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, 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” (Jones 2004: 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, like the ghostly trace, is “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 still 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” (Jones 2004: 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, unglimped since early adulthood?” (Jones 2004: 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” (Jones 2004: 249) of reading it with his uncle and sister nearly a decade earlier, that finally unlocks Thomas’ grief. Re-reading *Great Expectations* enables Thomas to re-member the sister and uncle he once read it with. Re-reading it constitutes 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, their collective memory. The act of re-reading is an act of recollection and the novel is the medium or conduit of the past.

This idea of the story as a medium, channelling the past and forming a geometry of connections with the 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. When Annie reads Eldon’s books about John Franklin’s expedition to the Arctic, they stand in for a mutual history, one which is placed alongside Eldon’s actual shared history with Isabelle (Humphreys 2001: 151). Furthermore, Annie’s reading also provides her with an image-repertoire held in common 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*” (Humphreys 2001: 157, original emphasis).

Moreover, the narratives of arctic exploration provide Annie with the images she needs to “remember” her own past, to understand her own family’s experience. They provide her with some, albeit 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. Her family and Franklin’s men “*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” (Humphreys 2001: 149, original emphasis). Although reading about and re-imagining the fate of the members of Franklin’s expedition enables Annie to visualise the fate of her own family, to affectively assimilate that which she has not experienced, it is the 1858 *recovery* voyages of Leopold McClintock that are more important to the novel’s larger theme of memory and retrieval. 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 among her own family. 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” (Humphreys 2001: 143). The goal of the recovery expedition, as imaged in McClintock’s voyages, is not actually the past, but the journey itself: “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.” (Humphreys 2001: 148) In this way, the novel emphasises the importance of the *process* of historical inquiry, the telling of stories, the reading of novels, over the meanings produced, which are always provisional.

3. Reading the Memory Text

By utilising the trope of spectral photography to posit the persistence of the past as embodied memory, neo-Victorian fictions like these extend and elaborate the two more influential theoretical approaches to contemporary historical fictions today. The first, Linda Hutcheon’s account of “historiographic metafiction” as the representative genre of postmodernism, foregrounds the problematisation of historical reference, and reads these texts in terms of their deployment of self-reflexivity, irony and complicitous critique to question the very possibility of historical knowledge (Hutcheon 1984; 1988; 1989). The second theoretical approach, Amy J. Elias’ conception of “metahistorical romance” in *Sublime Desire: History and Post-1960s Fiction*, shares Hutcheon’s contention that the contemporary manifestation of historical fiction reflects and contributes to

contemporary narrative and linguistic challenges to historiography, asserting that history is culturally constructed, and that while the past shapes the present, all we can know of that past is its traces. However Elias adds to Hutcheon's account the notion of the postmodern historical sublime as a space outside of textualised history, with its own "lived materiality" (Elias 2001: 53). Elias is at pains to distinguish this notion from the traditional concept of history as unproblematic presence, a space that can be both known and represented. Yet while her terminology is never clearly delineated, her references to "History itself," "history itself," and "upper-case *H* History" all seem to invoke presence. Moreover, for Elias, the sublime is the residence of "Truth" (Elias 2001: 53). Defined by chaos, it remains, nonetheless, "the realm of potential revelation" (Elias 2001: 55).

I would situate these novels between Hutcheon's assertion that in historiographic metafiction representing history becomes the history of representation and Elias' assertion that the metahistorical romance seeks the postmodern historical sublime as the locus of Truth. While the novels share historiographic metafiction's belief in the past as passed, and in our knowledge of it as only ever provisional and partial, they do, nonetheless, make a stronger claim for the past's representation than Hutcheon's model of ironic subversion suggests. They harness a Victorian vocabulary of memorial to explore the ways in which the past can be re-membered. Yet, the entailed re-presentation of the past is not the assertion of historical Truth that Elias attributes to the historical sublime. It is simply the "weirdness of a ghost" (Rody 1995: 104). The ghost speaks with the voice of flesh and spirit, and adopts its look, but, in its very essence, or "inessence" as Derrida would have it (Derrida 1994: 6), it is departed. Its very disappearance is held always before it. "History itself" does not occupy a space at the borders of language, however chaotic, but is departed, disappeared. Reversing the conventional image of the beckoning ghost returning to make a claim upon the present, in these fictions the ghost does not reach out to us, rather we seek it out, conjure it up. Our very desire to remember produces both Victorian texts and contemporary fictionalisations of the period as mediums through which we remember the past.

These novels are unlike neo-Victorian fictions that have been canonised as historiographic metafiction, such as A.S. Byatt's *Possession* (1990) and Graham Swift's *Ever After* (1992), 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 as a séance of another time and other lives. *Sixty Lights* and *Afterimage* 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.

Thus, rather than invoke "history", "metahistory" or "historiographic metafiction", Jones calls her novel a "memory text" (Jones 2005). This can be understood in the same sense that Edwards calls photographs "memory texts," arguing that "[t]hey reinforce networks and identity[ies] built on the memory to which they relate, positioning individuals *vis à vis* the group, linking past, present and perhaps implying a future" (Edwards 1999: 233). In *Sixty Lights*, Jones attempts to establish these connections between the Victorians and ourselves. 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 the whole world in the purest geometry of connections." (Jones 2004: 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 Dickens' *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 contemporary texts' use of the Victorian novels 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).⁷ 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 with each other as well as the Victorians themselves. Moreover, refraction points to the way in which 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 [a] 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).

Sixty Lights also 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. Lucy also foresees critical commentary upon these visual technologies. She explains her aestheticism to Jacob, “what she call[s] art-in-the-age-of-mechanical-reproduction” (Jones 2004: 239), using Walter Benjamin’s phrase (Benjamin 1968), and Jacob reflects that “she spoke like someone who was watching history unfold” (Jones 2004: 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; it 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” (Jones 2004: 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 2004). 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. These novels proceed as, according to Benjamin memory does, in fragments, connecting events according to “resemblances” or “correspondences” (Benjamin 1968b: 211). They offer themselves as aberrant repetitions of the Victorian period, suggesting that what is important is not that the past be accurately known, fully understood or made sense of, but that it be 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” (Jones 2004: 200).

Like Lucy and Annie, we are positioned as readers, tracing references from text to text, not in order to reconstruct the past but to remember it, as a séance of another time and experience into our own present. Finally, then, it is Annie who ties together acts of reading and historical recollection, as embodied memories that return 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?” (Humphreys 2001: 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.” (Humphreys 2001: 67)

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. 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 within the present, focusing upon the possibility of recovery, the attempt at reparation, even if that which is restored amounts only to the aberrant presence of the ghost. Both texts posit the historical novel as one means through which the Victorian past can be remembered, if not restored, through the power of language.

Notes

1. An affecting example of the Victorian belief in this memorial, function of photography is the practice of post-mortem photography, particularly of children (see R. Brandon Kershner 1999 for an extended discussion). Indeed, Corey K. Creekmur notes the dependence of early commercial photography upon the Victorian penchant for memorial, since the stillness of the corpse produced especially clear exposures (Creekmur 1996: 74).
2. In fact, Flint describes the Victorian experience of memory in terms similar to those used by Groth to discuss photography. Flint observes that in the Victorian period “the very nature of memory” was thought to be constituted by the “elision of past and present” (Flint 2003: 529).
3. Roiphe’s novel explores the relationship between Charles Dodgson, also known as Lewis Carroll, and his most famous photographic subject, Alice Liddell. As the title suggests, this novel too invokes the ghostly aspect of photography. It also explores a seamier side of the emergence of photography and its uses. Fiona Shaw’s *The Sweetest Thing* is also critical of the use of photographs for titillation and consumption, examining the production of various types of images that circulate and reproduce promiscuously, accruing meanings in excess of their original purpose. These negative aspects of photography are touched upon in *Sixty Lights* as an alternative trajectory for the medium, where the images produced by Madame Esperance, and those of the magic lantern shows, are associated with fraudulence and with spectacle

and even “enthrallment” (Jones 2004: 233; 141) when the photograph is taken in the service of certain kinds of narratives.

4. Later in the novel Lucy appears to register a negative effect of this capacity when she muses on the ubiquity of images and the difficulty of discerning between them on behalf of her daughter: “how does one direct the vision of small children or assert which image is important or which inconsequential? Perhaps this can only be known by one’s self.” (Jones 2004: 198) This appears, at times, to be a problem for the novel itself, which draws all things into its aesthetic of the ordinary. As Ken Gelder remarks, “there is not a critical bone in Jones’s novel, which lends its aesthetic consent to pretty much everything it comes across” (Gelder 2005: 36).
5. Similarly, in Sebastian Faulks’ neo-Victorian novel, *Human Traces* (2005), Jacques’ mother dies following childbirth and he has “no memory of his mother, he could not revive her ... there was not so much as a daguerreotype of the first Madam Rebriere” (Faulks 2005: 8). Faulks deploys imagery that is similar to both Humphreys’ and Jones’ to describe the way that Jacques’ mother is an elusive, ephemeral and only partially glimpsed image: “His mother was something much vaguer, beyond even the abstract grasp of memory, yet still present, still an entity in his mind, a glimpse of life withheld.” (Faulks 2005: 9)
6. Indeed, 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)
7. Suzanne Keen argues that Peter Ackroyd’s fictions and biographies (several of which are neo-Victorian) act similarly, so that “the present in which we live becomes in Ackroyd’s handling a palimpsest of imagined pasts, recovered not for the sake of historical accuracy or revisionist narrative (though he sometimes achieves these goals along the way), but to heighten the sense of connection, continuity, tradition and repetition.” (Keen 2001: 130)

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