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MIMESIS, MAGIC, MANIPULATION:
A STUDY OF THE PHOTOGRAPH
IN CONTEMPORARY BRITISH AND CANADIAN NOVELS

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Presented to the School of Graduate Studies
University of Ottawa
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy, English Literature

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Abstract

The photograph is of interest to the writer because it is uniquely a product both of the realm of objective, physical reality and of the realm of artifice. Its ambiguous status as the physical emanation of a past referent endows it with an uneasy authority. It appears to offer assurances of identity and clarity; at the same time, it undermines the attempt to control experience by demonstrating that to freeze time and space is to render them obsolete. Thus the photograph can be seen as a metaphor for the life-giving and death-dealing enterprise of writing fictions. Moreover, because the photograph is a reflection of the past, private or public, a comparison of the use made of photographic images in the fictions of two different cultures, one older, one newer, may reveal differences in aesthetic between those two cultures.

A theoretical dialectic for exploring the use made of the photograph in contemporary British and Canadian fiction can be constructed by comparing the thesis of Susan Sontag's On Photography (1977) with that of Roland Barthes' Camera Lucida (1980). Sontag is concerned with the camera as an instrument of power which victimizes its subjects; she sees the text as necessary to contextualize the image according to its function in time. Barthes understands the photograph's fragmentariness as potentially revelatory, and text as

parasitic upon image. Where the Sontagian model emphasizes narrative contextualization and the photographer/writer as wielder of power, the Barthean model emphasizes a vertical hermeneutic of epiphanies and the spectator/reader as creator of meaning.

A look at several contemporary British novelists who use photographic imagery (Julian Barnes, Graham Swift, Martin Amis, Fay Weldon, Penelope Lively, Anita Brookner, Timothy Mo, Salman Rushdie) suggests that these writers tend towards an ironical distancing of the photograph, which is seen as parodic of traditional mimesis. Such novelists thus ascribe to and yet undermine Sontag's concern with narrative control. A number of contemporary Canadian writers (for instance, Margaret Atwood, Alice Munro, Margaret Laurence, Timothy Findley, Norman Levine, Diane Schoemperlen, Janette Turner Hospital, Michael Ondaatje) find within the photograph a representational magic that transcends boundaries of spatial and temporal logic. They share Barthes' belief in the intransigent value of appearances. An examination of these different writers' use of the photographic image thus provides a commentary upon their various understandings of the real, the fictive, and the relationship between the two.

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And, of course, my gratitude to John, Ben and Anna, for living with, through and around a dissertation in production, and surviving.

What's the difference between vision and a vision? The former relates to something it's assumed you've seen, the latter to something it's assumed you haven't. Language is not always dependable either.

Margaret Atwood, "Instructions for the Third Eye,"
Murder in the Dark

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Preface

In a little store in the Ottawa valley some time ago, I came across a display of postcard-sized portrait photographs dating from the early years of the century. Propped up along a narrow shelf, these photographs were for sale at a dollar apiece. Their sitters were unidentified, their photographic quality was unremarkable, and their corners were dogeared, but their age gave them an authenticity that was apparently considered marketable.

Since I come from a part of Britain where such photographs would need to be a good deal older and more consciously contextualized to warrant the dollar charge, and where for the native the notion of age-for-its-own-sake does not even have cash value until it can claim contemporaneity at the least with Queen Victoria in her prime, I found myself pondering the relative importance attached to old photographs in the two cultures as emblematic of some deeper difference between them. It had come to my attention that the photographic motif is very much in evidence in recent Canadian fiction, often with some sense of the magic of connection with a real past. I considered investigating more thoroughly, and comparing the use of photography in the contemporary Canadian novel with its use in the British counterpart.

I expected to discover that photography carries less significance in British fiction because the past has less need to assert its reality; and initially it seemed my expectations would be justified. It was with considerable interest, then, that in the mid-1980s I noted the arrival on the literary scene of a number of significant British novels in which photography plays a prominent role. Would this role be nevertheless different from that in Canadian novels? Or would I discover in the British novels that photographs shored up tradition against a new sense of cultural disintegration? In the face of warnings against too bipolar an approach and asseverations of the internationalization of contemporary fiction, I maintained a strong sense of a basic difference in tone between Canadian and British fiction, and decided to use the photographic motif as a means of investigating the nature of that difference.

Initially I looked briefly at the historical development of photography in parallel to developments in literature. This led to a more careful consideration of photographic theory, and I found it particularly useful to set up a dialectic between the somewhat contrasting approaches of Roland Barthes and Susan Sontag. With these theoretical differences in mind, I prepared to look in more detail at various British and Canadian fictions of the last fifteen years or so in which photography plays a significant

part. The three sections of my introduction effectively deal with these three stages in the development of my project. The body of the thesis consists in the detailed reading, formal as well as thematic, of specific fictions from both countries. Are there any conclusions to be drawn? I make some suggestions in the Conclusion, and await with interest the opportunity to search out dogeared postcard portraits in a British country store.

Introduction

What makes photography a strange invention--with unforeseeable consequences--is that its primary raw materials are light and time.

John Berger, Another Way of Telling



From Arthur Goldsmith, *The Camera and its Images* 21.

Because of its long exposure-time, the Daguerrotype recorded intricate detail but lost motion. In this view of Paris by Daguerre, c. 1837, the street looks empty because vehicles and pedestrians moved too fast to leave an imprint. Only the man having his boots shined was stationary long enough for the camera to "see."

The possibility of a relationship between photography and literature is implicit within the word "photography" itself, for literally it means "light-writing." In a piece written for his family magazine of September 1855, Lewis Carroll, one of the nineteenth century's most celebrated amateur photographers, declares, "The recent extraordinary discovery in Photography, as applied to the operations of the mind, has reduced the art of Novel-writing to the merest mechanical labour" (Gernsheim, Carroll 110). Photography, the making of permanent marks by the action of light, had been established in France in 1839 with the publication of the Daguerreotype process, which produced an image on a silvered copper plate.¹ Twelve years later, Frederick Scott Archer in Britain introduced the wet collodion process by which direct positives could be made on paper rather than on metal, and thus ushered in the great mid-Victorian era of popular photography. Carroll, using Archer's discovery as his point-of-departure, goes on in his essay to suggest that now "the ideas of the feeblest intellect, when once received on properly prepared paper, could be 'developed' up to any required degree of intensity," so that the thoughts from a weak young man's mind might move from the Milk-and-Water school of novels through the Matter-of-Fact school to the "spasmodic or German" school simply by dousing the paper in different chemicals. There have been successful attempts,

declares Carroll, at working up Wordsworth, though Byron produced scorched paper; meanwhile a young-man chosen as guinea-pig, on being shown the results of this mechanical development of his thoughts, fainted quite away at their ferocity. Could this method be used fruitfully, Carroll wonders, to develop parliamentary speeches (Gernsheim, Carroll, 113)?

Despite the farfetched nature of the game Carroll is playing here, he is responding to a fact about photography that creative artists have continued to find either disturbing or liberating. For photographs are produced not by direct human agency but by the action of light as it is focused through a machine; and they are developed by chemical processes. This essential interference of the irrefutably mechanical in the realm of art, traditionally imagined to be the sphere of unalloyed human creativity, not unreasonably caused initial anxiety, and particularly to the painter.² It was only gradually that photography came to be seen as an art-form in its own right, as emphasis moved from the notion of a mechanical eye to that of the personal control of the camera by the photographer. And the situation is still far from straightforward: there is a strong body of contemporary opinion that claims the movement to establish photography as art has, by denying or bypassing its social referentiality, devalued it to the status of the "mystical trivia" of modernist aestheticism (see Sekula 102).

Photography's involvement with the mechanical, however, points to that fundamental ambiguity in its nature which can be understood as its strength. From its beginnings the photograph has challenged accepted notions of art, imagery and representation, by virtue of the fact that it is in a unique sense a product of the realms both of physical reality and of artifice. As the physical emanation of a past referent it is endowed with an uneasy authority: it is the trace of a reality that no longer exists, witness at one and the same time to the subject's "thereness" and to its pastness. But as an image the photograph expresses intentionality. The British art-historian John Berger writes:

Every image embodies a way of seeing. Even a photograph. For photographs are not, as is often assumed, a mechanical record. Every time we look at a photograph, we are aware, however slightly, of the photographer selecting that sight from an infinity of other possible sights (Ways of Seeing, 9).

The image is one of an infinite number of possible images, "a crafted, not a natural, thing . . . [and] how it will be represented is neither natural nor necessary" (Snyder and Allen 151). As an image, moreover, the photograph can only be 'read' within its historical context of discursive possibilities and signifying practices (concerning, for

instance, 'frame' and 'point-of-view') by which the communication of meaning is conventionally determined.

The historical development of photography is chronologically parallel to the movement from romanticism to modernism and beyond in literature. Gerald Graff has argued persuasively in "The Myth of the Postmodernist Breakthrough" (1973) that the common theme of an "organicist" theory of art extends from the early nineteenth-century romantics right through to the present-day postmoderns. Such a theory sees the work of art not as mimetic of an objective reality in the external world, but as an autonomous, self-contained entity--a "thing in the world" rather than an interpretive commentary on it. What alters over one hundred and eighty years is not the way art is defined so much as the implications that are drawn from the definition. Graff sees a logical progression from the romantic notion of the artwork as self-contained to the modernist notion of art as self-referential in meaning, and thence to a postmodernist declaration of meaninglessness apart from the ecstasy of personal experience. The concept of an autonomous creative imagination, argues Graff, implicitly concedes that artistic meaning is pure fiction; thus, radically nihilistic and skeptical premises have been latent in literary thinking since the romantic period. The gradual erosion during the nineteenth century of universal belief in a significant external reality, or in the possibility of objectively

verifiable meaning, led to the modernist notion of a priesthood of art which would create order out of perceived chaos; the artist's priestly vocation was to hold time and history still. This power the photograph clearly demonstrated from its inception. But more than this: in an environment of distrust of the material world and yet a desire for communicable meaning, the photograph proposes a unique relationship between the external world and the art object. It seems to hold out the promise of union between external and artistic truth.

Through the nineteenth century photographic discourse veered between the two poles of referentiality and subjectivity. The informative power of the photograph led to its reception as document, owing its meaning to the empiricism of science and its status to its supposed ability to 'stand for' what it represented. On this basis, photography served a steadily expanding bureaucracy and was understood as public property. But the affective power of the photograph, evidenced even at its inception by the fear people felt of looking for any length of time at the mysteriously real faces it presented, led to its being revered as relic, owing its meaning to the transcendentalism of magic and its status to its supposed ability to penetrate appearances. On this basis, photography was understood as a private matter, serving the uniqueness of individual subjectivity (Sekula 94ff). Both poles of meaning were

effectively dependent on the photograph's being read within the dominant realist convention, as having direct access to the real; the signifier was treated as if it were identical with a pre-existent signified and the reader/viewer's role was purely that of consumer (Tagg 99).

It has been suggested that "[t]he speed with which the possible uses of photography were seized upon is surely an indication of photography's profound, central applicability to industrial capitalism" (About Looking 48). Certainly photography was of particular value to a burgeoning middle-class and to the administrative activities of the civil government which supported the values of that class. The widespread accessibility of photographs made possible, for instance, the ordinary man's family portrait-gallery. By the mid-1850s portrait photography had almost completely supplanted miniature painting, and most miniature painters had become professional photographers. The introduction in 1873 of the gelatine dry plate which made possible truly instantaneous photographs, and subsequently in 1888 of the Kodak hand-camera which incorporated roll-film to be returned to the factory for developing and printing, led directly to the spread of the amateur movement in photography. The portrait-miniature had belonged to the era when only the wealthy could bequeath their images to their children. Now for the first time the man-in-the-street could have the reassurance of collecting together an album of

portrait photographs into his own personal visual history, thereby both preserving descriptions of his family and gaining the status associated with the inscription of social identity (see Tagg 37).

The camera was, however, seen as an instrument of more than familial authority. It was not long before the privilege of being photographed had developed into "the burden of a new class of the surveilled" (Tagg 59). Photographic records became a new means of knowledge in the benign service of the state, and were a foundational element in the spreading network of bureaucratic power through hospitals, prisons, schools, reformatories and mental institutions. As well, the photograph of subject-matter other than portraits appealed to the public desire for authentication of those observable facts which it was believed would one day enable people to control and order both nature and society (Berger and Mohr 99). "The camera is the eye of history," said Matthew Brady in the United States as he documented the beginning of the Civil War (Gernsheim 271). And even with the gradual decline of faith in the positivist dream, a decline which was considerably accelerated by the cataclysmic events of the First World War, the photograph still maintained its unique evidential value because of its referential nature. It was in the Great War, in fact, that photographers were for the first time officially attached to the armed forces as war reporters. The arrest of time gains poignant authority in

face of perceived universal disorder.

But already in the nineteenth century some photographers had been aware of the potential in photography's other face: its supposed ability to reveal hidden truth. Julia Margaret Cameron, for instance, described her desire to "record faithfully the greatness of the inner, as well as the features of the outer man" (Gernsheim 306). By the 1920s the popularization of psychoanalytical theory had encouraged an interest in the unconscious: this interest too could be served by photography. "Photography," wrote Walter Benjamin in 1931, "makes aware for the first time the optical unconscious, just as psychoanalysis discloses the instinctual unconscious": photography alone can reveal that fraction of a second at which a person starts to walk, or the subliminal expression of a face moving from self-containment to a recognition that registers the inner and hidden response. The photograph's technical proficiency thus reveals information hitherto unavailable to the human eye. Eadweard Muybridge's 1879 photographs of "The Horse in Motion" were initially disbelieved because they chronicled details beyond the former limits of human perception.³

Gradually, reality came to be understood as a matter of correspondences and of the juxtaposition of multiple insights, rather than of a single fixed perspective. Arthur

Stieglitz in his 1921 photographic portrait of Georgia O'Keefe used not one image but twenty-six, and yet introduced them as a single picture, "A Woman (one portrait)," in his New York show that year (Hunter 127-8). Here is that appreciation for the complexity of the image, rather than merely for its development through time, which was explored by the psychological novelists of the early twentieth century. D.H. Lawrence, for instance, in Women in Love, which was published in that same year of 1921, makes a similar use of multiple exposure in his building up in the reader a sense of the characters of Ursula and Gudrun. Moving away, as he put it, from "the old stable ego of character," Lawrence shows the sisters from different perspectives and over a period of years, as he traces their family history from The Rainbow (1915) through to Women in Love. He exploits a kind of visual notation in words as a way of conveying different states of mind, much as Stieglitz exploits photographic images.

From the perspective of the new psychology, then, the evidential value of the photograph was subordinate to its potential as a sustainer of ambiguity. However, along with the consciousness that appearances were more than singular in meaning grew an awareness that the photographer was more than a neutral eye. The photograph's freezing and decontextualizing of ambiguous visual information within a frame of the photographer's choosing appealed to the desire

to make meaning, to endow existence with significance. The superimposition of the will and personality of the photographer upon the subject-matter of the photograph led through Pictorialism and Stieglitz's Photo-Secession to that split between the photograph and its social character which is considered a hallmark of modernism.⁴ The division in the 1930s between documentary and art photography developed into a polarity between, for instance, Walker Evans' 'plain fact' pictures of workers in the Depression, and the surrealism of Man Ray, giving "a gleeful stamp of reality to the patently unreal" in clear parody of a realist foundation (Lacayo, "Drawn by Nature's Pencil" 64). An interest in "pure form" divorced from referentiality created a mode of photography in which surface is split from sign, and the image is self-contained, not claiming to be an image 'of' anything other than the subjectivity of the photographer. In the late nineteen-fifties Aaron Siskind could write, "[A]s the language or vocabulary of photography has been extended, the emphasis of meaning has shifted--shifted from what the world looks like to what we feel about the world and what we want the world to mean"; and again, "When I make a photograph, I want it to be an altogether new object, complete and self-contained, whose basic condition is order" (Lyons 95,98).⁵

This formalist aesthetic continues to inform photographic criticism and practice to the present day, as

does the contrasting aesthetic which privileges 'objective' documentary photography. What Allan Sekula has called "the binary folklore of the photograph" still opposes a symbolist to a realist discourse. Victor Burgin, writing in 1980, asserts that as yet there is no photographic theory worth the name, and that the dominant discourse of photographic criticism is "an uneasy and contradictory amalgam of Romantic, Realist and Modernist aesthetic theories" (3). There has been some movement towards a recognition that "realism" as it evolves historically can be admitted to involve the aesthetic factor of expressionism as well as reportage even when it is firmly committed to a documentary purpose. However, the tendency of the individual photograph at any given moment of reading, Sekula argues, will always be to one or other of these two poles of meaning (108). One might add that a postmodernist reading will undermine the integrity of both approaches and propose a third, playfully constructed and parodic meaning. It is this susceptibility to variant readings that is of particular interest in a consideration of the use made of the photograph by writers of fiction.

II

The concern of the novel form, from its inception, has commonly been the exploration of personality as defined through an interpretation of the past (see Watt). The photograph has an obvious attraction here, because it situates its subject before what John Berger calls "the task of memory, . . . of continually resuming a life being lived in the world" (Another Way of Telling 287). The fact that the photograph is uniquely able to narrate a particular relationship to memory lies at the heart of its authority. Berger argues that memory and photography are closely associated, in that both depend on and oppose the passing of time; both preserve the individual moment; and both "propose their own form of simultaneity, in which all their images can coexist" (280). He would disagree with those theorists who assert that memory is a syncretising process, whereas photography insists on rupture. For Berger:

Memory itself is not made up of flashbacks, each one forever moving inexorably forward. Memory is a field where different times coexist. The field is continuous in terms of the subjectivity which creates and extends it, but temporarily [sic] it is discontinuous.

The postmodern era has been characterised as one that lacks

memory, both public and private. Widespread dissemination of information about the disasters of the twentieth century has fostered the conviction that history is incomprehensible, too big and too random for the ordinary person to understand (Hunter, 65ff). The power of the photograph in such a climate is that it offers the security of arrested time, a timelessness which "insist[s] on the permanent" (Another Way of Telling 108).

In his attempt at recapturing his Russian family history, Michael Ignatieff points out that photographs have the religious function of icons, connecting present and past, the living and the dead (Russian Album 2). Even though he believes that "[m]emory heals the scars of time" whereas photography "documents the wounds" (7), he is drawn to the evidential force of that documentation in what he considers to be its unassailable presentation of the past.⁶ Berger, espousing a liberal Marxist view of the world, hopes for bigger things yet from photography, despite his awareness of the dangers inherent in the arbitrary public use of the photographic image. He writes that photographs, duly contextualized into a continuity with the past, may be "the prophecy of a human memory yet to be socially and politically achieved" (About Looking 57). The photograph, Berger suggests, has "another way of telling," distinct from but related to that of traditional narrative. His theory concerning this 'other way' is of interest because it

directly confronts the modernist dilemma of the loss of shared meanings. Like Roland Barthes, Berger argues that photos offer irrefutable evidence about existence, but that they say nothing about its significance, and are weak in intentionality compared with other art forms: "At one level there are no photographs which can be denied. All photographs have the status of fact. What has to be examined is in what way photography can and cannot give meaning to facts" (Another Way of Telling 86, 90, 98). Photographs, he claims, can uniquely reposition meaning in the external world.

Prior to the Enlightenment, western cultures treated appearances as signs which through resemblance and analogy conveyed a message about the universe: "the Puritan sermons tell us, remember, that the world is a book the Creator opened for us, and all we must do is have the skill and humility to read it" (Bowering, "Modernism" 6). This understanding was radically undermined by a scientism that argued the physical was no longer revelatory unless investigated by practical reason. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, for the first time, visual art was severed from a belief that it is in the nature of appearances to be meaningful. Berger reinstates this belief by appealing to experience: "In every act of looking there is an expectation of meaning" (Another Way 117).⁷ Thus he can go on to argue that the camera has the power to complete

"the half-language of appearances", by "fulfil[ling] the expectation intrinsic in the will to look" (129). The camera is able, by stopping time and allowing for the preservation and sharing of appearances, to provide the coherence and meaning that life can seldom offer.⁸

High modernism introduces the danger of the camera's separating appearance from function. Private photographs, read in a context continuous with that from which the camera removed them, are still surrounded by meaning, so that, according to Berger, the camera contributes to living memory. Public photographs, by contrast, are usually presented in "a seized set of appearances" which have nothing to do with their readers or with the original meaning of the event, and they are therefore vulnerable to any arbitrary use (About Looking 52-3). What is needed, suggests Berger, is an alternate photographic practice which recognizes the fundamental importance of the photograph's dual nature as both reference and artifice, and incorporates photography into social and political memory. Such a practice would have two chief components. Firstly, it would require the photographer to think of him- or herself not so much as a reporter to the world as a recorder of the world, and specifically of those involved in the event to be photographed. Secondly, it would require existing photographs to be put into the context of other photographs or of words, in a radial and associative textuality that

would "mark and leave open diverse approaches," as memory does (About Looking 51-63). Working from the assumption that "subjective experience always connects," Berger situates meaning at the level of the correspondences within a photograph, or across a group of photographs, which can be appropriated by reflection (Another Way 289).

If photographs constitute "another way of telling," they also have much in common with the ambiguous and polyvalent medium of language.⁹ The fundamental character of photography may be said to consist in the duality of its reference, to the presence of an absence, and in the duality of its execution, which depends upon both the photographer's eye and the effects of chemistry and optics. Questions of absence and presence, of authorial intention and readerly competence, which have been central concerns of contemporary literary criticism, may be applied also to photography, while always bearing in mind the added and ineluctable issue of physical reference.¹⁰ Early writings in the study of signs, such as Roland Barthes' Elements of Semiology (1964), sought to uncover the language-like organization of those dominant myths in society which control the meaning of appearances. Barthes' paper of that same year, "The Rhetoric of the Image," describes the 'polysemic' character of the specifically photographic image, in which a "floating chain of significance" underlies the signifier even though the relation between signified and signifier is not arbitrary,

as in language, but a matter of quasi-identity (see Halley 69). Although Barthes spent much of his career lauding and demonstrating the erotically alluring power of the text, his last book is on the subject of photography, and in seeming to suggest a return to referentiality it has been found problematic by many of his admirers. One of the most sensitive assessments of Barthes' final text is found in "Writing Itself: On Roland Barthes," by the American author and critic Susan Sontag, an erstwhile disciple of Barthes. Sontag's own collection of essays On Photography (1977) in fact takes a fundamentally different stance from the one later espoused by Barthes. Where Barthes finally seems to privilege the language of appearances above the language of the text, Sontag sees photographic appearances as a debased and unethical form of language.

Both theoreticians are acutely aware of the postmodern environment in which they write, where philosophical attention has long since shifted from things to words, from ontology to linguistics. Both are in reaction against their own earlier pronouncements concerning the erotic lure of the text, a solipsistic literary criticism which avoids either public or private responsibility. The photograph presents itself as a potentially meaningful version of that objective reality in which the modernist had ceased to trust. Barthes, appearing as a kind of romantic realist, sees in the photograph the possibility of a private escape from mere

fiction in relation to his personal history. Sontag, the postmodern ironist, sees in the photograph the danger of a move into a public fictionalizing of the entire external world, motivated by the desire for power and material profit.

In La Chambre Claire (1980), translated into English in 1981 as Camera Lucida, Barthes ostensibly turns away from the "voluptuous pleasure" of language (87), which cannot authenticate itself, to the photograph, which he calls "the Real, in its indefatigable expression" (4). Language, says Barthes, is by nature fictional, whereas the photograph is "authentication itself" (18)--a curiously old-fashioned view which echoes that espoused by the makers of documentary realist photo-texts in the 1930s (see Hunter 104). It has justly been asserted that in Camera Lucida Barthes "leaves us with a poignant reassertion of the realist position" (Tagg 1).¹¹ Barthes dedicates his book to Sartre, for whom photography offered a materiality that seemed to provide an escape from the indulgence of language (Hunter 34). In effect, the photograph is attractive to Barthes both because of its scope and because of its limitations. He sees it as stronger than language, in that it is not dependent on intelligible and describable reality; he sees it also as less ambiguous than language, in that it refers specifically and directly to the material world. Photography, to Barthes, is "pure contingency" (28).

Of course his writing a text about photography in which he appears to privilege the image over the word provides a further example of Barthes' customary subversion of categories. Sontag has suggested that he "construes writing as an ideally complex form of consciousness: a way of being passive and active, social and asocial, present and absent in one's own life" ("Writing Itself" xviii). But it is clear too that photography's attraction for Barthes in the last years of his life was deeply personal, and functioned on the level of desire because of his life situation. Camera Lucida describes his search not only for the essence of photography, but also for the essence of his mother, who died in 1978. Tagg writes, "The trauma of Barthes' mother's death throws Barthes back on a sense of loss which produces in him a longing for a pre-linguistic certainty and unity--a nostalgic and regressive phantasy, transcending loss, on which he founds his idea of photographic realism" (4). This is only partially just, however, since Barthes had already in 1961 called the photograph a "perfect analogon," and declared that "the special credibility of the photograph is its exceptional power of denotation" ("Photographic Message" 196, 200). It seems that the 'magic' of photography is focused but not discovered for Barthes by his bereavement.¹²

On the one hand, the photograph opposes Barthes' earlier aesthetic of absence in that the loss of the subject

is repealed by contingency: she was there. On the other hand, the photograph makes of absence more than an aesthetic: she was there, but she is no longer. The only concept that ultimately evades deconstruction, as David Lodge has wittily pointed out in his pastiche of the world of literary criticism, is the concept of death (Small World 328). In Camera Lucida Barthes comes face to face with this uncompromising reality and the result is, according to Tom Conley, that "few texts are so morbid as La Chambre Claire" ("Message Without a Code?" 153). Conley sees the text as prefiguring the author's own death. He points out that, though the book is amply illustrated with photographic material, it does not include the one photograph which is its overriding concern, that of Barthes' mother as a child of five, in which Barthes finally finds her "air." "Too much to be seen," writes Conley, "[his mother] comes off as the visible voice of the text, hence the mark of its living death" (154). Hers is an absence that cannot be classified.¹³ However, Parthes' discovery in her childhood photograph of "the impossible science of the unique being" (Camera Lucida 71) is his way of resolving death. Through that image, his mother has become his little girl, the "feminine child" of his own "inner law" (72), which in its absolute subjectivity is unreproducible, except by the power of the photograph in him.

It is because the object of a photograph, its

"spectrum," as Barthes pointedly calls it, is both present and absent that he describes the photograph as a hallucination: not art, but magic (88). This "anthropologically new" object presents the spectator with a flat, impenetrable surface which spells the arrest of interpretation. The photograph can be appropriated only by the viewer's entering into its spectacle. Like Nietzsche who, in a madness of grief and pity, threw his arms around a maltreated horse, Barthes embraces the photograph, "taking into my arms what is dead, what is going to die" (117). In face of the manifest plenitude of the photograph, no interpretation is possible, but only a quasi-religious silence which receives the "punctum" of the photograph's personal meaning for the spectator. Barthes thus conflates Sekula's two poles of photographic meaning, the documentary and the affective, into the single category of the magical. For him the power of photography lies precisely in that its referential nature is inescapably hallucinatory, because the objective is collapsed into the subjective and remains impenetrable by anything but the "punctum."

This "punctum" is unashamedly subjective, for Barthes is concerned to discover what he calls a "science of the subject" (18). From the outset, his declared interest is not in the photographer who produces the photograph, but in the spectator, the 'reader,' who receives it. He may be affected in a general way by the cultural message--the "studium"--of

the photograph. But it is the "punctum" that animates the spectator and creates the photographic adventure. It may be a "punctum" of form, coming from a specific detail in the photograph which has particular meaning for the spectator, or it may be a "punctum" of intensity, resulting from a realization of the subject's absence in time.¹⁴ Barthes stresses that nothing exists beyond the frame of the photograph, except insofar as the spectator may make imaginative projections beyond it. But the photograph's fragmentariness is potentially revelatory, because it is witness to a subjective and relational truth, the magical presence of a reality deferred by time.

And so Barthes suggests that the photograph stands as a final and unassailable statement about both the death and the authenticity of the subject. Narrative commentary can only tame photography into something less than its "unendurable plenitude" (90), by providing it with the comfort of an intelligible context. Whereas history is fabricated memory, the photograph offers a "certain but fugitive testimony" (93). Unlike Berger, Barthes sees the photograph as a kind of counter-narrative, by virtue of its being unable to develop, and its compelling a vertical reading ("Third Meaning" 328). In fact the opacity of the photograph, far from stimulating memory, can actually block it, because the photograph completely disallows penetration. Susan Sontag, however, sees this very opacity as the quality

which makes textual interpretation of photography essential, in order to counter the immorality of what she describes as photography's fundamentally discontinuous way of seeing.

In On Photography (1977) Sontag is concerned primarily with photography as an instrument of power which victimizes its subjects. In both its authoritarian realist mode and its subjective modernist mode, it holds out a spurious kind of knowledge that is dissociated from experience and that fragments reality into possessible portions. Photography creates a whole world of images that can always be manufactured into an artificial unity. Far from giving accessibility to reality, as they appear to do, photographs actually provide access only to images and inflate the value of appearances. By appropriating reality, these images both make it obsolete and falsify it. Reality thus becomes surreal, by virtue of the arbitrary and fragmenting authority of the photographic frame. Marshall McLuhan, in his groundbreaking though, with hindsight, somewhat simplistic book Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man (1964), wrote that the meaning of the photograph lay in its "creating a world of accelerated transience" (176).¹⁵ Sontag, writing with a more jaded sensibility and less humanistic optimism, calls photography the only natively surreal art (51).¹⁶

Like Barthes, and like those earliest 'readers'

of photography, Sontag understands there to be something magical about photographs. She suggests that photography revives the primitive status of images, the notion that a thing and its image were "simply two different, that is, physically distinct, manifestations of the same energy or spirit," so that "an image was taken to participate in the reality of the object depicted" (155). But whereas for Barthes the magic of a photograph is to be treated with reverence, for Sontag in its magic lies its danger. If a photograph is not only like its subject but somehow an extension of that subject, then there is an inherent possibility that the photograph can exercise some form of control over the subject. And, Sontag argues, just such control has made our society one of images: "the powers of photography have in effect dePlatonized our understanding of reality," so that we can no longer ascribe greater reality to the subject than to its image (179).

Sontag privileges narrative over the photographic image as a corrective to this situation.¹⁷ Narrative alone can explain the images' relationship in time. Although she calls photography "a grammar and ethics of seeing" (3), it is a grammar and ethics of which she fundamentally disapproves. A photograph cannot be understood, she argues, from its surface appearance, but only from the way in which it functions: "And functioning takes place in time, and must be explained in time. Only that which narrates can make us

understand" (23).¹⁸ Moreover, argues Sontag, "life is not about significant details, illuminated a flash, fixed forever. Photographs are" (81). Photographs, which exalt or even create the significant moment, feed acquisitiveness rather than understanding, and encourage an aesthetic rather than an ethical relation to the subject by at once certifying and refusing experience.¹⁹ Woolfian gig-lamps find no legitimate place in Sontag's universe, which, despite earlier suggestions that "in place of a hermeneutics we need an erotics of art" ("Against Interpretation" 24), is now profoundly utilitarian and moralistic. Sontag's polemic throughout her book is descended from that of Walter Benjamin, and is directed against the photographer, who can shoot (and 'kill') his subject, and reduce that subject to an object which can be possessed.

This attitude is in marked contrast to that of Barthes, for whom the spectator of a photograph is engaged in an act of love. But Barthes restricts himself deliberately to a consideration of the role of the private spectator, since this is the role that he himself is playing throughout the quest of his book. Sontag is concerned also with the roles of the public photographer and the public subject, and this leads her to define a tension between the two conceptions of photography which arise from its inherently ambiguous nature: that of documentary photography as a recording of reality, and that of affective photography as a vehicle of

self-expression. She recognizes that photography can be both a technique for appropriating the objective world and an "unavoidably solipsistic expression of the singular self."

Thus photography stands as:

the paradigm of an inherently equivocal connection between self and world--its version of realism sometimes dictating an effacement of the self in relation to the world, sometimes authorizing an aggressive relation to the world which celebrates the self (On Photography 123).

Photography's capacity both to subjectivize and to objectify reality is at the root of Sontag's unease about it. If photography's primary task is that of recording and informing, as Sontag implies it should be, then the notion of personal vision becomes an interference that needs to be exposed.

Behind this condemnation of subjectivity there appears to be a kind of positivist yearning for a world of identities, which is evident too in her apparent faith in the transparency of language. Bruce Robbins argues stridently of Sontag that, although she appears to make a direct attack on humanism:

[h]er naive technologism rejects the modern world in the name of a prephotographic world when action was direct, meaning singular, aesthetics innocent, and when experience was immediate because

ideology had not already distorted the image of what was seen (304).

In this sense Sontag, like Barthes, can be called a romantic. Her privileging of the verbal as a way of escaping visual aestheticism contrasts with Barthes' privileging of the visual. But his stance too leaves him open to the charge of naïveté, since he chooses not to be concerned with either the mediation of experience through cultural convention, or the photographer's bias enacted in the composing of the photograph. Nevertheless it is clear that fundamentally each espouses one particular philosophy of perception rather than another. For Sontag, perception can be accurate only when grounded in a cultural context--Barthes' notion of 'studium' in which he shows only minimal interest. Sontag is highly critical of the way in which photography has fostered the notion of seeing for seeing's sake, "that didactic cultivation of perception, independent of notions about what is worth perceiving, which animates all modernist movements in the arts" (On Photography 93). And since photographs, she asserts, only record and never describe, they require language to describe for them (145). Barthes would agree rather with Ansel Adams, who wrote in 1948 that "[a] true photograph need not be explained, nor can be contained in words" (Lyons 32). What Sontag criticizes as photography's dissociative and subjective nature is for Barthes precisely the vehicle for powerful insight, dependent not upon the fictionality of text but upon the referentiality of

appearance.

III

How, then, can these theories inform an exploration of the role of photography within narrative? In the face of physical and metaphysical uncertainties, contemporary writers of explicitly fictional texts, as much as those of biography and traditional history, have appropriated the power of the photograph as both cultural construction and unconstructed material trace (see Another Way 93). The Sontagian writer will be likely to understand text as decreasing the distance between the photographic image and the reader. Such a writer will be acutely aware of the potential for violence within the photographic act, and of the spurious power of the image; the narrative will give the photographic image a temporal and cultural context. The Barthean writer will allow considerable authority to the visual image in itself as hallucinatory magic, and, in order to avoid reducing the image to mere illusion by placing it in an acceptable cultural context, may explore ways in which it refuses to fit predetermined categories. Such a writer will imply that understanding is to be sought on a vertical rather than a horizontal axis of hermeneutic, since the temporal flow of the narrative is of less significance

than the epiphanies offered by particular moments within it. Where the Sontagian model suggests an emphasis on the photographer/writer as the wielder of power, the Barthean model emphasizes rather the spectator/reader as the creator of meaning.

The polarization of these two models is of course to some extent artificial. However, it is possible to identify different emphases within fiction, ranging from a predominant concern with temporal form at one extreme to a primary concern with spatial form at the other. While sequence in narrative is clearly a given, the reader who is nevertheless encouraged to extend imaginative borders spatially rather than chronologically is exploring the synchronic, metaphorical aspect of composition over and above the diachronic, metonymic aspect to which narrative has traditionally been tied. It was the renowned film-maker Sergei Eisenstein who first proposed that a still film-cut derives its energy through contrast, equivalence, conflict and recurrence, both within its own frame and in comparison with other stills (Another Way of Telling 287).²⁰ John Berger, as has been pointed out above, advocates the notion of reading across the discontinuity of a set of photographic appearances, to find a synchronic coherence that, "instead of narrating, instigates ideas" (Another Way 128). And Victor Burgin declares that "[t]he narration of the world that photography achieves is accomplished not in a linear

manner but in a repetition of 'vertical' readings, in stillness, in atemporality" (211). Some contemporary novelists have been concerned with the narrative range that can be achieved by focusing on the spatial rather than the temporal dimensions of literature. "I think it is at least empirically arguable," suggests Fredric Jameson, "that our daily life, our psychic experience, our cultural languages, are today dominated by categories of space rather than by categories of time, as in the preceding period of high modernism" ("Postmodernism" 64).

Certainly, modern criticism of literature has been dominated by spatial, synchronic, architectural models such as formalism and structuralism. This leads W.J.T. Mitchell to point out that, since "[w]e cannot think about literature or anything else without using spatial metaphors," it is possible to argue that "spatial form is the perceptual basis of our notion of time" ("Spatial Form" 298, 274). This suggests a new approach to the notion of sequentiality, which has in the twentieth century increasingly been seen as fundamentally unrealistic. In her uneven but provocative book Space, Time and Structure in the Modern Novel (1971), Sharon Spencer has explored the ways in which fictional forms have been adapted by the more avant-garde novelists to respond to this alternative epistemological position which understands causality as foreign to experience. The distinction between 'and then . . . and then . . . ' and

'look here . . . look there . . .' has obvious implications in terms of novelistic technique. It parallels the dialogue between epic and lyric in poetry, or between plot and reflection in a traditional novel. Where Sontag would valorize the temporal sequence, Barthes would stress the spatial; both see the photographic image as a powerful objective correlative to a way of experiencing and knowing the world.

But the style of photography is more than mere analogue in modern fiction. Photographs have long been used to add credence to biography and to history. Recently they have begun to appear in that kind of borderline biography written by an author of semi-fiction like Michael Ondaatje. And, much more frequently, verbal descriptions of photographs have figured prominently in both the thematic and the structural centre of works of fiction. The photograph may appeal to the postmodern novelist who wants to deconstruct a linear time-frame and to emphasize plurality of vision. The photograph's unique relationship of reference to the past may also appeal to the more traditional novelist whose concerns involve the development of identity through time. The tacit statement that photographs make about a perpetual presentness of the past may be used to emphasize either a sense of stasis or the distance time has travelled. Writers who, like Barthes, privilege the "punctum" of individual experience over the "studium" of cultural connotation find

in the photograph's assurance of reference the appeal of a subjective magic. Writers who, like Sontag, privilege narrative and contextualization in a linear frame as a more reliable agent of understanding than the individual moment of insight make use of the photograph's referentiality within the safeguard of this temporal dimension.

Clearly, however, a photograph described is generically distinct from a photograph reproduced in the text. In fact Barthes, in an early paper, asserted that description of a photograph is literally impossible, because the text introduces a second-order message of connotation over and above the photograph's denotated message ("Photographic Message" 192). In Camera Lucida he writes that "a photograph cannot be transformed (spoken) philosophically, it is wholly ballasted by the contingency of which it is the weightless, transparent envelope" (5). He sees the photograph's referent as different from the referents of other systems of representation, like language, because it is not optionally but necessarily real--no subject, no photograph (76). Narratives that take most seriously the authority of the image will be likely to include physically present photographs within them, if such photographs are available.²¹ If photographs do not exist, the very fact that the narrative valorizes photographic authority will prevent the writer from using photographic material whose original reference lies elsewhere. Within that large body of fictions

which make verbal use of photographs there will be those that ascribe authority to the individual image as it affects the narrator and, by extension, the reader, and those that imply the necessity of linear narrative frame for a just reading of the image.

In either case, by virtue of its ambiguous authority as material trace and cultural construction, the photograph functions in fictions as a site of power. Consequently, the way in which it is presented can be paradigmatic of the degree of aesthetic distance that the writer considers appropriate to a just reading of the fiction. The romantic writer who privileges the magical appropriation of the image writes to surmount the problem of distance and to enable a subjective embrace. The ironic writer who privileges the contextualization of the image within time and functionality writes to realign the parameters of distance and to provide a vantage-point from which to see the image's disjunctions. On the basis that questions of identity and historical security may be less apparent in an older literature than a newer one, one might advance the hypothesis that a long-established culture will formulate aesthetic distance with irony rather than overcome it with desire. This dissertation will suggest that a study of the photograph as represented in British and Canadian fictions of the last fifteen years supports such a hypothesis, especially when the cultural roots of the individual writers are taken into

account.

A brief look at a handful of recent poems from the two countries may provide some initial evidence to support this notion that differences in aesthetic distance are observable through the paradigm of the photographic metaphor. The dramatized situation of the act of looking, a photographic circumstance par excellence, is "an invitation to memory poets have habitually accepted" as they have sought to preserve the moment against permanent loss (Hunter 162). Because poetry is the most starkly imagistic form of literature, and shares with photography its emphasis on subjectivity and discontinuity, it can be understood to be in itself a kind of verbal analogue for the photograph, bearing in mind Barthes' clarification of the differences between words and pictures.²² In fact, both a modernist emphasis on intensive seeing and a postmodernist attraction to the notion of the decentered fragment echo the Barthean account of photography. Within the highly pictorial literary form of poetry, the use of the photographic metaphor is, then, particularly noteworthy.

Three recent and widely-read British poets who use the photographic motif link it specifically with the notion that aesthetic distance is a prerequisite for a considered response to life. Philip Larkin in "Lines on a Young Lady's Photograph Album" (The Fantasy Poets No.21, 1954) is

concerned with the relationship between a static visual image and the shaped emotional response to it that becomes possible because of the distance imposed by time. Initially the images of the young lady strike at the poet's control, because they provide too rich a "confectionery" of evidence "[t]hat this is a real girl in a real place," which feeds his hunger to have known her in the past. But "in the end" he recognizes that, since his painful response does not have to show accountability to the past, it is a kind of freedom: "we cry / Not only at exclusion, but because / It leaves us free to cry." And the girl's past is free too, held securely by the album, "like a heaven" where she lies "[u]nvariably lovely . . . ,/ Smaller and clearer as the years go by." Ted Hughes in "Six Young Men" (The Hawk in the Rain, 1957) is more concerned with the ironic implications of photographic stasis. He emphasizes the disjunction between the confidence and control of the photograph and the utter lack of control the young men met with in death. The photograph of the six young men ambiguously "holds them well" even though they were all dead six months after the picture was taken and the poet is looking at the picture forty years later. The reader, invited "on this one place which keeps [them] alive / . . . [to] see fall war's worst / Thinkable flash and rending," is also reminded that "these six celluloid smiles" are as alive as any of the reader's contemporaries, and as dead as any prehistoric beast. As a result, "To regard this photograph might well dement, / Such contradictory permanent

horrors here / Smile." But the poem's containment of past and present provides the mental distance, however precariously held, by which one can achieve a perspective even on violent death. R.S.Thomas ascribes to distance a further power in "Album" (Frequencies, 1978). Recognizing as an adult how his parents used him as "the young tool in their hands / for hurting one another," he weeps over the unreality of the smiles in the family photograph. They have been faked in obedience to the camera which says "there is no wound / time gives that is not bandaged / by time." But the poem bears witness to the way in which temporal distance can also reveal wounds previously beyond articulation.

Contemporary Canadian poets, by contrast, seem most inclined to use the photographic motif to suggest that aesthetic distance is irrelevant if not actually deceptive, because it divorces the spectator from the reality of subjective experience. Margaret Atwood's "This is a Photograph of Me" (The Circle Game, 1966) encourages the reader/spectator to extend time and space beyond the limits of the poem by prolonged 'reading' of the single image of the photograph, even to the point of peering beneath its surface. Michael Ondaatje's "Light" (There's a Trick with a Knife I'm Learning to Do, 1979) describes how the light of the mind illumines both past time and present space, so that fragments of memory stirred by photographs are perceived as partaking in as great a degree of both reality and otherness

as fragments of the external world. Even in Roo Borson's "The Photograph" (The Whole Night, Coming Home, 1984), where the notion of perspective (supplied by a "small single oak" which the photographer "took care, by accident, to include") is central to the final photograph of "[m]oments that don't exist, / apart from us," that last line situates the perspective squarely within the subjective experience of the spectator, with the implication that the distance is meaningful only to those for whom it has previously not existed.

Turning from poetry to a consideration of contemporary prose fiction in Britain and Canada, one is at first struck by the fact that there is an extraordinary prevalence of photographic imagery. In Canadian fictions, the photographic metaphor is central either thematically or structurally in many texts, and it has recently become strikingly evident in British fiction too. There is, however, a distinctive difference in tone between the fictions of the two countries, which is related to the notion of aesthetic distance and can be observed in microcosm in the treatment of the photograph. It seems that contemporary British fictions typically assume a greater distance between reader and writer than do Canadian, and that this distance is characterized by heavy irony. British fictions seem to take themselves less seriously than Canadian, to be less ontologically weighty, more world-weary. There is a

cleverness about the writing of Julian Barnes and Graham Swift, for instance, that entertains the mind more than the heart because the fiction-making process is seen as an engaging and intellectual game. In Canada even fictions that self-consciously play with their own status as fictions (for instance, Findley's Famous Last Words or Hospital's Borderline) are impelled by a high degree of seriousness of purpose. Their enactment of a quest for ontological safety may perhaps underlie that fascination with the magical which seems to draw such writers to a Barthean understanding of the photograph. British writers, by contrast, seem more often to work out of an ambivalence towards their cultural security which leads them to irony. Their interest in the photograph lies in the more Sontagian forum of public power and of the relationship between image and narrative frame, although they are likely to handle this too with irony.

What follows in Chapter 1 will be an investigation of photography in novels by five contemporary British authors: Julian Barnes, Graham Swift, Martin Amis, Fay Weldon and Penelope Lively. Chapter 2 will examine the use of the photographic metaphor in the fictions of several prominent Canadian writers, particularly Margaret Atwood, Alice Munro, Margaret Laurence and Timothy Findley. Chapter 3 will explore the photographic metaphor in the novels of Anita Brookner, where structurally significant photographs are the vehicles of particularly stringent narrative irony, by

contrast with the novels of Janette Turner Hospital, for whom photography has semi-magical redemptive power. Chapter 4 will consider the use of the photograph in fictions by three excolonial writers who problematize the notion of history--Michael Ondaatje in Canada, Timothy Mo and Salman Rushdie in Britain. Finally, some conclusions will be drawn about the use of photography as a focus for the ambiguous relationship between fiction and the 'real' world. Mimesis, magic, or consciously constructed cultural manipulation? The photograph is inscribed with the power of all three modes of presentation.

* * *

Notes.

1. In the same year in England, William Henry Fox Talbot read a paper to the Royal Society entitled "Some account of the Art of Photogenic Drawing, or the process by which Natural Objects may be made to delineate themselves without the aid of the artist's pencil." Fox Talbot devised a process for printing positives chemically from negatives.

2. Serious photographers from the outset expended much time and effort in the attempt to imitate painting, which led to their approval of the retouching and 'improvement' of photographic prints and negatives by any means whatever, "in order to render them more like works of art." Thus commented Sir William Newton, a painter of miniatures and the Vice-President of the Photographic Society of London, at the Society's inaugural meeting. This attitude died hard; even in the 1890s several of the Naturalistic School of photographers were trying to imitate impressionist painters, and went so far as to suggest the construction of intentionally defective lenses to soften the camera's focus. By the end of the century there was more tolerance of a partnership between photographers and painters, with both sides expecting to profit by the arrangement: the photographers looked for favourable publicity, and the painters for photographic subject-matter. Most well-known painters by then had darkrooms attached to their studios;

they often used snapshots for their models. The first Impressionist exhibition was in fact held in the Paris studio of the photographer Nadar--pseudonym of Gaspard Félix Tournachon, a former writer and caricaturist whose aesthetically selfconscious work provided a strong contrast to the mechanical productions of popular commercial and amateur photography. Nadar eschewed retouching and contrivance, and depended for his effects upon the subtle use of lighting and a sympathetic relationship to his clients, similar to that traditionally obtaining between the painter and his subject. See Helmut and Alison Gernsheim, The History of Photography, from the Camera Obscura to the Beginnings of the Modern Era (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1969), especially 246, 467, 433; and John Tagg, The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories (London, U.K.: Macmillan, 1988), 50-53. Nadar, incidentally, was considered by Roland Barthes--or by one of his playful personae?--to be "the world's greatest photographer" (Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography [New York: Hill & Wang, 1981], 68).

According to Victor Burgin, " [i]n its essential details the representational system of photography is identical with that of classical painting: both depend (the former directly, the latter indirectly) on the 'camera obscura.' Projecting light reflected from a three-dimensional solid on to a plane surface, the 'camera

obscura' produces an image conforming to geometric laws of the propagation of light--an image seemingly sanctioned by nature itself" (Thinking Photography [London & Basingstoke, U.K.: Macmillan, 1982], 187). He goes on to argue that the apparatus actually constructs a subjectivity, because the camera always implies a unique point-of-view which it grants to the spectator. In similar vein Donald Brook, addressing the ascription to photography by Barthes et al. of a transparent relation to the referent, declares that photographs and oil paintings are equally opaque, and for the same reason: "A convention about simulating conditions stands firmly behind the representations, blocking our direct view of whatever may be represented" ("On the Alleged Transparency of Photographs," British Journal of Aesthetics 25 [1986], 282). Joel Snyder goes even further, in asserting that realistic paintings provided the standard for the kind of image the camera was designed to produce ("Picturing Vision," Critical Inquiry 6.3 [Spring 1980], 511).

3. Such details are of course still alien to the human eye, a point which Snyder and Allen make in support of their argument that the analogy of the eye is fundamentally unsuitable and misleading in discussions of photographic convention ("Photography, Vision and Representation," Critical Inquiry 2.1 [Autumn 1975], 156).

4. Alfred Stieglitz, the founder of Photo-Secession in New

York at the turn of the century, was the first well-known professional photographer both to believe in and to demonstrate the theory of photographs as uniquely visualized concepts: "Ever and always use light to express your thought" (Gernsheim, The History of Photography 468). Stieglitz's journal Camera Work (1903-17) effectively established the tradition of the photograph as a precious object, just at the time that cheap photographic reproductions became very common in the mass media.

5. Nathan Lyons' book Photographers on Photography (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1966), in which these comments of Siskind are reprinted, is itself a testimony to the ahistoricism of a modernist aesthetic. The contributions are arranged alphabetically under the name of the photographer, despite the fact that these photographers span some seventy or eighty years in terms of their photographic output.

6. In practice, Ignatieff does not appear to privilege photography over memory as an evidential force. See below, the discussion of A Russian Album in Chapter 4.

7. For a critique of Berger's appeal to experience, see Bruce Robbins' article "Feeling Global: Experience and John Berger" (Boundary 2, 11.1-2 [Fall/Winter 1982-3]: 291-308). Robbins suggests Berger is naïve in arguing from a base

which assumes that experience is inherently valuable without offering any theoretical clarity as to whose or what experience he means.

8. This could be called a democratized version of what Peter Wollen, discussing the photography of Edward Weston, describes as "naturalistic Platonism," in which "[f]orms and essences are available to perception--concealed within nature but discoverable by wisdom, by the seer" ("Photography and Aesthetics," Screen 19.4 [Winter 1978-9], 18).

9. Berger, arguing for the "half-language of appearances," asserts that the centres in the right half of the brain which "read" and store visual experiences are structurally identical with those in the left half which process our experience of words. Thus "[t]he apparatus with which we deal with appearances is identical to that with which we deal with verbal language," and appearances can be understood to have some of the qualities of a 'code' (Another Way of Telling [New York: Pantheon, 1982], 114).

10. This issue of physical reference is, however, significant enough for the analytical philosopher Mary Bittner Wiseman, in her recent study of Barthes, to describe photography as foreign to language (The Ecstasies of Roland Barthes [London & New York: Routledge, 1989],

189). See also M.A. Abbas: since photography can lie only about the meaning of a thing, Barthes argues, and never about its having existed, the photographic referent cannot be the same as the verbal referent; language can refer to what does not exist ("Photography / Writing / Postmodernism," The Minnesota Review 23 [1984], 105).

11. See, for instance, Ralph Sarkonak: "Barthes whose very fort^é has always been to deconstruct the doxa is now confronted with the ultimate Urdoxa which he can only affirm and reaffirm" ("Roland Barthes and the Spectre of Photography," L'Esprit Créateur 22.1 [Spring 1982]: 62). For a persuasive alternative reading of Barthes' later work, however, see Mary Bittner Wiseman. She argues that the work of Barthes' last five years, rather than being understood as a betrayal of his previous rejection of the unified self, or as a continuation of an increasingly nihilistic relativism, can be seen as instructions for the construction of a theory of the material subject, a rewriting of the concept of self that is "arguably Barthes' most important and least appreciated contribution to contemporary criticism" (Ecstasies 134). She suggests that Camera Lucida testifies to a genetic and specular identity (Ecstasies 152). She goes on to maintain that, in Barthes' earlier structuralism, "the real is the effect of a system of signification, whereas in the post-structural Camera Lucida the real is what patterns light and is opposed to the significant and the semiotic"

(Ecstasies 5)--the real is now akin to the magical, because it is what is not conventionally coded, what is traced in objects, a writing done by no one but by nature or a machine (Ecstasies 161).

For a further, creatively subversive reading of Camera Lucida in relation to Barthes' earlier work, see Michael Halley, "Argo Sum" (Diacritics 12 [Winter 1982]: 69-79).

12. Sarkonak suggests that Barthes' mother's death is precisely what moves him to escape from binarism and to conceive of the photograph as pure reference ("Spectre of Photography" 56, 61).

It is perhaps arguable that 'magic' is a legitimately subjective, experiential description of Tagg's objective, materialist account of how the photograph 'means,' which he situates in opposition to magic. What makes the print meaningful, he argues, is not magic but "the conscious and unconscious processes, the practices and institutions through which the photograph can incite a phantasy, take on meaning, and exercise an effect" (The Burden of Representation 4). One might also consider Jefferson Hunter's point that loss is made not only tolerable by the "shadow" of a photograph, but also more apparent (Image and Word: The Interaction of 20th Century Photographs and Texts [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U.P., 1987], 10).

13. It is in his playful earlier autobiography, Roland

Barthes by Roland Barthes (1975; trans. Richard Howard, New York: Hill & Wang, 1977), that Barthes includes possibly four photographs of his mother--they are not easy to identify since the captions, listed at the back of the book, are typically elusive. (One picture that the reader assumes is of Barthes as a child with his mother is captioned only with a time and place, and the reader deduces from a comment of Barthes' on page 103 of Camera Lucida that it is in fact a photograph of his grandmother and her son, his uncle.) A handwritten epigraph to the autobiography in any case declares that "[i]t must be considered as if spoken by a character in a novel." Barthes implies in Roland Barthes that photographs adversely affect the freedom of the text: "the image-repertoire will . . . be closed at the onset of the productive life" of writing (4). Nevertheless, he opens his text with forty-three of them, perhaps to demonstrate the poetics of desire: "To begin with some images: they are the author's treat to himself, for finishing his book . . . I have kept only the images which enthrall me, without my knowing why . . ." (3).

14. Walter Benjamin's comment in 1931 seems to provide an interesting precursor to Barthes' 'punctum': "However skilful the photographer, however carefully he poses his model, the spectator feels an irresistible compulsion to look for the tiny spark of chance, of the here and now, with which reality has, as it were, seared the character in

the picture; to find that imperceptible point at which, in the immediacy of that long-past moment, the future so persuasively inserts itself that, looking back, we may discover it" ("A Short History of Photography," 1931; rpt. in Screen 13.1 [Spring 1972]: 7). Abbas points out that the 'punctum' is to be understood not as the contrary of the 'studium' but as its supplement: "What attracts Barthes to the photograph is that while the photograph is indubitably a product of culture, it cannot be wholly contained by culture" ("Photography / Writing / Postmodernism," 106). Abbas suggests that "[t]he 'tiny spark of contingency' that Benjamin insists can be found in even the most 'artful' photographs is like the parapraxis that constantly threatens to erupt through the most lucid discourse, revealing what culture represses" (Abbas 95).

15. McLuhan goes on, however, to assert that, "[p]ositively, the effect of speeding up temporal sequence is to abolish time, much as the telegraph and cable abolished space. Of course the photograph does both. It wipes out our national frontiers and cultural barriers, and involves us in The Family of Man, regardless of any particular point of view" (Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man 176-7). For a diametrically opposite opinion see Tagg, The Burden of Representation, where he argues that this inability to take into account the social and historical conditions of both the production and the

reception of the photograph is a falsifying remnant of bourgeois romantic idealism.

16. It is presumably an intentional irony that a book which appears roundly to condemn the immorality of surrealist disjuncture concludes with a collection of fragmentary and undocumented quotations about photography. There is indeed, throughout Sontag's book, a sense of the quasi-erotic allure of the surreal, especially as it is expressed in the photograph.

17. Ian Jeffrey ("Photographic Time and 'The Real World'," in Jonathan Bayer, Reading Photographs: Understanding the Aesthetics of Photography [New York: Pantheon, 1977], 83) argues that it is precisely because "the subject remains interfused in the image" that speculation about the circumstances in which the image was taken is crucial, as it is not with a painted picture.

18. One might expect the contemporary Marxist voice to be equally disapproving. For instance, John Tagg, actually in response to Barthes: "The photograph is not a magical 'emanation' but a material product of a material apparatus set to work in specific contexts, by specific forces, for more or less defined purposes. It requires, therefore, not an alchemy but a history, outside which the existential essence of photography is empty and cannot deliver what

Barthes desires" (The Burden of Representation 4). Contrast, however, Berger's less radical materialism, which assumes a coherent subject and harks back to a pre-enlightenment world in which he imagines there were direct and untroubling correspondences between the represented and the real.

19. Jefferson Hunter argues that if photographs show expressiveness as well as typicality, as, for instance, did the photographs of Bill Brandt in the London of the 1940s, then they ascribe to the photographed subject an individuality equal with that of the viewer. Thus aesthetic considerations can, in his view, be the channel for moral value (Image and Word 159-60).

20. It is worth noting that Barthes said he first worked out his theory of "signifiante" when considering Eisenstein's stills. See "The Third Meaning: Research Notes on Some Eisenstein Stills," A Barthes Reader, ed. Susan Sontag (New York: Hill & Wang, 1982), 317-333.

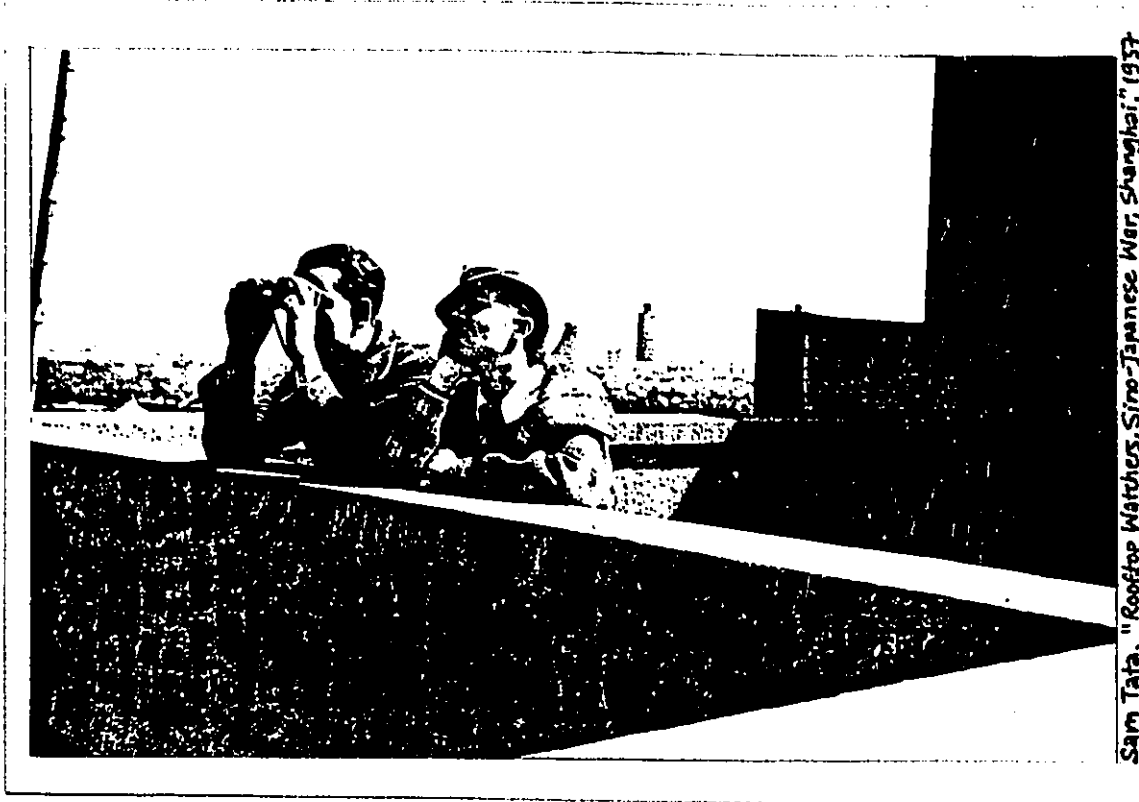
21. This is not, however, a universal rule. For instance, Barthes excludes from Camera Lucida the foundational photograph of his mother as a child, precisely because it is so meaningful to him personally. He declares, "It exists only for me," and would for others have merely the authority of the cultural "studium" (Camera Lucida 72; see above, pp.19-20).

22. Hunter makes the suggestion that "[p]arts of Roland Barthes' Camera Lucida may fairly be considered a prose poem about or a lyrical exegesis of family portraits" (Image and Word 164).

Chapter One. The Photograph as Parodic Mimesis:
Some Contemporary British Novels.

Actual artists, actual texts, are seldom more than more or less modernist, postmodernist, formalist, symbolist, realist, surrealist, politically committed, aesthetically 'pure,' 'experimental,' regionalist, internationalist, what have you. The particular work ought always to take primacy over contexts and categories.

John Barth, "The Literature of Replenishment"



Sam Tala, "Rooftop Watchers, Sino-Japanese War, Shanghai," 1937

In contemporary criticism, structures of representation, whether realist, modernist or postmodernist, have come to be understood as "intimately implicated in the reproduction of ideology" (Burgin 146). Modernism was grounded on criticism of realism as representative of the nineteenth-century bourgeois social order and its world view. Postmodernism is grounded on criticism of modernism as élitist and ahistorical.¹ But naive readerly response is regularly more conservative than textual practice. The novel in Britain has long been popularly understood as maintaining a tradition of conventional realism in which truth can be discovered by the individual through the senses, and in which language can be accepted as transparently referential. Even the novel of high modernism did not advertise its literary conventionality; and its use of the 'stream of consciousness,' for instance, may anyway be legitimately interpreted as a "technique of verisimilitude" (Alter xiii).² But the postmodern introduces a new problematic because it renders indeterminate the whole concept of a subject/object distinction. If the real is perceived as unclear, uninnocent, and a construct of the individual, who is herself constructed by the performance of the text, then there is no simple distinction to be made between the intention of the text and the interpretation of the text by

the reader. This shift in literary ontology has affected the contemporary British novel in particular ways.

"When we recall the scope and variety of English fiction in the earlier years of this century," writes Gilbert Phelps in 1973, "it is difficult not to feel that there has been a decline" ("The Novel Today" 490). Six years later, Bradbury and Palmer move the emphasis from the novel to its reception. They suggest that "[t]he English novel in the period since the Second World War . . . has not generally received a very enthusiastic press" (7). By 1982, Ziegler and Bigsby are able to maintain that in contemporary criticism there has been a blindness to the actualities of contemporary practice:

The English novel has for too long been regarded as a cosily provincial, deeply conservative, anti-experimental enterprise, resistant to innovation, rooted in mimesis, and dedicated to the preservation of a tradition of realism causally related to that of the nineteenth century (9).

This kind of recognition of the provinciality of the criticism of the English novel is comparatively new.³

Novels of the last two decades by, for instance, William Golding, Doris Lessing, Angus Wilson and Anthony Burgess have made charges of cosiness and conservatism much harder to sustain than might have been the case twenty years ago. The subsequent appearance of more or less experimental

writers such as Salman Rushdie (more) and John Fowles (less), along with a host of new novelists of widely differing aesthetic and political persuasions, has necessitated a critical reappraisal of the novel in Britain:

The truth is that the English novel . . . occupies an interesting middle ground; that it does respond in some degree to a sense of a fundamental shift in our perception of the real but that it reflects above all a sense of disturbance, of cultural dislocation, which leaves it negotiating some kind of rapprochement between humanist commitments and an increasing sense of relativism (Ziegler & Bigsby 10).

English realism is not innocent, argue Ziegler and Bigsby, but shares with contemporary literature of North and South America and continental Europe an awareness of the suspect nature of the manipulative power of art, the fragility of character and the relativity of value and perception. However, there remains in Britain a strong attachment to the moral imperatives of traditional realism and to the logic and power of history. A.S. Byatt suggests that recent English fiction typically displays "a sense that models, literature and 'the tradition' are ambiguous and problematic goods combined with a profound nostalgia for, rather than rejection of, the great works of the past" ("People in Paper Houses" 34). Contemporary British novels characteristically involve a merger between the convention of traditional

realism and "a quizzical post-Modernist awareness of the bounds of the convention" (Burden 154).⁴

✍

In this situation, the photograph provides a vehicle of appropriate ambiguity. It is still popularly understood as a transparent witness to empirical truth, a belief shared in varying degrees of refinement by theorists akin to Barthes. The argument is frequently put forward, however, that there is a conflict between what the camera sees and the 'real world' because, unlike the human eye, the camera ignores nothing, and makes no distinction between the significant and the insignificant: "The camera can subvert reality by its absolute impartiality" (Bayer 78). Moreover it can be argued that the existence of a photograph is no guarantee of a corresponding pre-photographic referent: "Every photograph is the result of specific and, in every sense, significant distortions which render its relation to any prior reality deeply problematic" (Tagg 2). Because the well-composed and centrally-oriented subject has become suspect, a representation that embraces randomness may better suggest the uncontrolled events now felt to be reality (Bayer 68).

Susan Sontag is in the forefront of those who regard photography with suspicion. She accuses it of 'patronizing' reality by creating "a duplicate world, narrower and more dramatic than that perceived by natural vision" and by rendering reality atomic, manageable and opaque (On

Photography 80, 52, 23). She argues that the camera, "once an object of wonder because of its capacity to render reality faithfully as well as despised at first for its base accuracy, . . . has ended by effecting a tremendous promotion of the value of appearances" (87). As a result, she says, photography's 'realism' creates a confusion about the real which is morally analgesic. Photography becomes the reality, of which reality is the shadow, and "the real object is often experienced as a let-down" (147). Reality is defamiliarized to such an extent that it is rendered unreal. Reality becomes that which the camera can disclose, and "realism" becomes a polemical name for photography's revelatory character, just as it was a polemical name for a particular view of the world in the heyday of the 'realistic' novel.

Contemporary British writers have displayed considerable awareness of the potential within the photograph to contain the notions of both a traditional and a postmodern realism. The photograph can be used at once to inscribe and to question established structures of reality, by intensifying them to the point of stylization and mockery, or by deconstructing them to compose new and disconcerting structures of its own (see Bradbury 202). The camera's unique ability at once to objectify and subjectivize the externally real renders the photograph peculiarly able to serve the needs of a culture that

typically displays "an awareness of the difficulty of 'realism' combined with a strong moral attachment to its values" (Byatt 34).

This chapter will be concerned with the use made of the photographic motif in six British novels of the last ten years, all of them by novelists who were children in or around the time of the second World War and who are firmly rooted in a traditional past as well as being part of what Carlos Fuentes has called "a new internationalization of British fiction" (43). The first of these novelists, Julian Barnes, won widespread critical acclaim with his third novel, Flaubert's Parrot (1984), hailed as "an extraordinarily artful mix of literary tomfoolery and high seriousness."⁵ Barnes' Staring at the Sun (1986) deals with the hundred-year life-history of a very ordinary woman and charts her involvement with "ordinary miracles." Both these novels are centrally concerned with the writing of history and with the problem of angles of vision; in both, photography plays a minor but significant role. Graham Swift's most recent novel, Out Of This World (1988), revolves around a former photo-journalist turned aerial photographer: "the central metaphor is that of the camera which . . . can confer reality rather than merely record it" (Adachi).⁶ Martin Amis in Other People (1981) plays with the concept of personal identity and its presence and absence through time. He makes use of photography as an instrument both of

traditional realism and of postmodern deferred reference.⁷ In Praxis (1978), Fay Weldon is concerned with the questionable uses of photography in ordering the external world. Photographs tell the life-story of Praxis Duveen not simply by inviting spectatorship but also by revealing the way she has been abused in the taking of the pictures.⁸ Like Praxis and Staring at the Sun, Penelope Lively's Moon Tiger (1987) tells the life-history of a woman from the vantage-point of her old age. Photographs are significant as instances of the disjunction between particular epiphanies and the narrative that makes sense out of them--the subjective experience of the real and the desire to order it as object.⁹

All six novels are centrally concerned with the telling of stories, and with the relationship of stories to the possibility of knowing the truth, defining the real, or understanding the past. All six novels are typified accurately by Malcolm Bradbury's description of contemporary artistic endeavour:

There is a new provisionality in art, a loss of the sure narrative preterite; imagination in modern art insistently questions fact and its capacity to pretend to be fact, and the text that insists on its nature as text, the fiction that foregrounds its own fictionality, has become a commonplace, even in ostensibly literal realms

like journalism, documentary, or history-writing
("Putting in the Person" 183).

All six novels, in addressing such issues, are characterized by varying degrees of that sophisticated narrative irony which, it has been argued above, is a recognizable mark of writing in contemporary Britain. Three of the novels are structured around the notion of following the life of a woman who lives to a ripe old age. The tradition of the photographic record is rendered particularly relevant by such a structure. Moreover, the fact that the focus is on a woman is likely to foreground the story of the unspoken, unrecorded, nontraditional history, which may lie beneath the traditional, realistic surface of the photographic project.

In a recent article in Books in Canada, Janice Kulyk Keefer describes the contemporary literary environment in Britain as anxiously nationalistic in response to growing cultural amnesia and social disintegration. She quotes Philip Norman in the Guardian, where he describes the 1980s as Britain's "Age of Parody":

First . . . there is self-parody--the officially sanctioned drive to earn money from tourists by presenting ourselves in every possible ridiculous historical cliché and stereotype. Then there is parody as escapism, the device of a people increasingly unsure about their own place in the

world and afraid of the present, let alone their future.

The result, she says, is "the metamorphosis of Britain into Fantasy Island, a world of leisure and lifestyle characterized by 'relentless substitution of the cosmetic for the material'." This cultural surrealism correlates directly with the power of the photograph, which Susan Sontag specifically accuses of exalting the cosmetic at the expense of the material. It is not surprising, then, that the six novels to be discussed all make use of photographs as paradigmatic of the paradoxes about life and art, past and present, identity and community, with which they deal.

One novel which perhaps more than any other can be seen as representative of many of the traits of contemporary British fiction is Julian Barnes' Flaubert's Parrot. Though photography plays only a minor role in this book, its use is particularly pertinent to the argument of the present chapter. In a 1985 review of the novel, Frank Kermode suggests that Barnes is "still . . . better known in Britain as a television critic," and adds, somewhat tetchily, that:

the London Sunday papers have nourished a generation of writers capable of wit on many subjects Of course [they] sometimes feel the awfulness of things too, but it is mitigated by the undoubted coziness of literary London, and a witty sadness is the appropriate response

("Obsessed with Obsession" 15).

Insofar as Barnes' style is characterized by cleverness, it does indeed seem typical of the body of contemporary British fiction, and of its Achilles heel. A review of Before She Met Me, Barnes' 1982 novel about an obsessive jealousy both sparked and fed by the visual stimuli of films and photographs, had found the book "far better planned than realized," and had suggested that:

[p]art of the trouble arises from the cleverness of Barnes's writing. He seems unable to resist any wry elaboration, any passing witticism

What the preposterous plot requires is a certain intensity of feeling, and a prose that is able to convey sensuous and emotional force as well as adroit observations (Abley).

"Adroit observations" are the mark of Sunday newspaper journalism, perhaps; they exhibit that degree of distance from their subject which facilitates the ironic or even cynically dismissive remark. But while it might not be unfair to call Flaubert's Parrot first and foremost a very clever novel, it is certainly more than a work of "adroit observations" and does convey "a certain intensity of feeling." For its combination of urbanity with depth, Flaubert's Parrot has deservedly drawn this praise from a reviewer:

[It is] sober, elegant and wry. It works as literary detection, literary criticism and

literary experiment. It tells good stories and deals with ideas empirically, in the British way, for this is a very Anglo-Saxon book. The modern British novel finds it easy to be clever and comic. Barnes also manages that much harder thing: he succeeds in communicating genuine emotion without affectation or embarrassment (Coward).

Barnes is here engaged with his subject in a way that has outgrown both the quasi-adolescensnt cleverness of his first novel, Metroland, and the architechtonics of authorial intention in Before She Met Me.

Flaubert's Parrot is a book about the efforts of a quietly desperate man, an amateur Flaubert enthusiast and a retired doctor, to trace the causes of his wife's suicide at the same time as he tries to trace the parrots of Flaubert's fiction. The book concerns itself with the relationship between writer and writing:

Why aren't the books enough? Flaubert wanted them to be: few writers believed more in the objectivity of the written text and the insignificance of the writer's personality; yet still we disobediendly pursue. The image, the face, the signature; the 93 per cent copper statue and the Nadar photograph; the scrap of clothing and the lock of hair. What makes us randy for relics? Don't we believe the words enough? Do we

think the leavings of a life contain some ancillary truth?

(Flaubert's Parrot 11)

The novel also concerns the relationship of the present to the past:

How do we seize the past? Can we ever do so? When I was a medical student some pranksters at an end-of-term dance released into the hall a piglet which had been smeared with grease. It squirmed between legs, evaded capture, squealed a lot. People fell over trying to grasp it, and were made to look ridiculous in the process. The past often seems to behave like that piglet (14).

Or, in another ironically reclaimed image, "The past is a distant, receding coastline, and we are all in the same boat" (101). Like the stone statue of Flaubert in Trouville, the past has crumbled; like the seedy stuffed parrots in the museum, it has decayed and become inaccessible to the desire for truth. This novel is an ironical extension of Philip Norman's critique of British culture, and therefore essentially parodic. Kermode points out that the doctor,

[r]emembering his happiness and unhappiness, . . . is never capable of keeping it separate from his Flaubertiana; his account of his marriage is lavishly illustrated by quotations from Flaubert. . . . [T]he work of mourning is done by sifting through these surrogate and fading archives. His

wife's secret life was inaccessible, too

("Obsessed with Obsession" 16)

The writer is no more than a sophisticated parrot, writing his Dictionnaire des idees recues. Dr Braithwaite both parrots and parodies Flaubert, in producing his own Dictionnaire about the famous novelist--a project he has already described as "a booby-trapped pocket guide; something straight-faced yet misleading. The received wisdom in pellet form, with some of the pellets poisoned. This is the attraction, and also the danger, of irony" (Flaubert's Parrot 87).

The doctor attempts to settle the question of which is the "real" parrot of Flaubert's "Un Coeur Simple" by photographing both competing museum specimens and comparing his polaroid photographs with the book's description. But the next day he visits a Flaubert scholar who explains that either, or neither, may be the authentic bird, given the licence of the author's imagination and the likelihood that stuffed birds would in any case disintegrate over the years. The photograph stands as witness not to traditional realism, as Dr Braithwaite had planned, but to the postmodern realism of the inaccessibility of the past and the inevitability of fictions. Instead of simply mirroring a univocal 'real,' the photograph becomes an ironic parody of such mimesis, and provides instead a further instance of plurality in the collection of multivocal and untrustworthy evidence about

what can be known of the past.

Braithwaite has intimated as much about photography and its subjects earlier in the text. Directness, he says, confuses: "The full-face portrait staring back at you hypnotises. Flaubert is usually looking away in his portraits and photographs" (102). Because of this apparent paradox, "you trust the mystifier more if you know he's deliberately choosing not to be lucid. You trust Picasso all the way because he could draw like Ingres." By the same token, he has decided not to include a photograph of himself in the front of his book:

I'm afraid it was rather an old photograph, taken about ten years ago. I haven't got a more recent one. That's something you find: after a certain age, people stop photographing you. Or rather, they photograph you only on formal occasions: birthdays, weddings, Christmas. A flushed and jolly character raises his glass among friends and family--how real, how reliable is that evidence? What would the photos of my twenty-fifth wedding anniversary have revealed? Certainly not the truth; so perhaps it's as well they were never taken (103).

The omission of the old photograph of Braithwaite is more helpful than its inclusion, but most helpful of all, he implies, is not to take any photographs at all in the first

place. Their apparent transparency of reference is confusing. The writer at least has the freedom consciously both to parrot and to parody the past, and to foreground the fictionality of his visual as well as his verbal images.¹⁰ The photograph here, then, is a kind of paradigm of the ironic interaction of traditional with postmodern realism, and of the safeguard of emotional distance essential in any relationship to the elusive past.

Barnes' more recent novel, Staring at the Sun, was in fact begun before Flaubert's Parrot, but put aside when the projected short story about Flaubert "grew into a book that I realized I had to write all at once" (Bruckner 3). David Lodge, calling Staring at the Sun "a broken-backed whole," admits that "[i]t is perhaps unsporting to use this evidence [of interruption] against the work, but one can't help tracing its weaknesses to the circumstances of its composition" (New York Review). Lodge's criticism that the book "starts out as one thing and ends up as another" is well-founded: the witty philosophizing of the third and final chapter is reminiscent of Flaubert's Parrot in tone and style, whereas the earlier chapters, and especially the first, have more traditional narrative interest and an irony that stems from the unfolding of character and situation rather than from clever intellectual badinage.

The apparent overall plan, to follow the life and

developing times of an ordinary woman through the course of nearly nine decades, founders on Barnes' fascination with the intellectual. While Jean's homespun wisdom can handle the unusual in events, she is incapable of sustained philosophical enquiry; Barnes therefore situates such enquiry in the head of her son Gregory. But the reader feels this to be a move of convenience rather than conviction. Gregory too seems unlikely to be able to sustain profound ontological thought, because his personality, like his life, is so banal. The interests of the novelist override those of his characters in this final section. In Flaubert's Parrot, changes of pace and of direction are essential to the substance of the argument. But the changes of tone in Staring at the Sun force into the foreground the whole vexed question of authorial intention, and distract from rather than reinforcing an otherwise cleverly patterned narrative.

Carlos Fuentes understands the book as an exploration of the possibilities of enchantment for ordinary human beings, and on the grounds that "Jean belongs to both the magical and the utilitarian worlds" allows to the text a unity which embraces heaven and earth (3,43). Jean, invited to share first Uncle Leslie's earthbound "circle of enchantment" and then Tommy Prosser's skybound one, finds both escaping her as she sinks into the disenchantment of marriage to an utterly unimaginative man. Realizing she must make her own enchantment, she finally leaves Michael, and

buys an airline ticket to magic in the discovery that her personal myth is that of Icarus--of flying. Julian Barnes has said that he "began to think about a book on courage--in war, in facing life alone and in front of the big questions that bother us all" (Bruckner 3). David Lodge admits that the book is at the least an "honourable" failure, since in the story of Jean Serjeant these weighty issues are handled within the charm and delicacy of a "fragile spell." Lodge argues that the spell is broken by the eruption into the text of Menippean satire, in the form particularly of Gregory's dealings with the computer of the twenty-first century which will tell "The Absolute Truth." Fuentes lightly passes over this part of the book as "a good deal of high humor," but his indulgence seems at least in part due to his appreciation for the book Barnes should have produced, rather than for the one he actually did.

Constant through the book is the theme of the ordinary miracle: "For the most part people live close to the wonders of their life without much realizing it" (183). Jean's physical trips to see the seven wonders of the world are paralleled by Gregory's mental trips to try to understand the nature of belief in God. (His fifteen propositions about God, though thoroughly entertaining, are more plausibly ascribable to Walker Percy than to Gregory.) But Jean concludes that the seven most fundamental wonders are to be found at home: being born, being loved, being

disillusioned, getting married, giving birth, getting wisdom, dying. And Gregory concludes that thinking cannot explain the miraculous; sometimes a question-and-answer method of inquiry is inappropriate, for the question and the answer enclose each other (191). With a little aerial manoeuvring, the sun can perform ordinary miracles: it rises twice at the opening of the book for the fighter-pilot Tommy Prosser, and Jean and Gregory together see it set twice at the end of the book, before Jean's hundredth birthday. There is an old Chinese greeting which says, when one meets a friend unexpectedly, "The sun has risen twice today" (182). Even literally, Prosser and Jean have experienced the possibility of this apparent miracle. There is, then, an element of irony to Jean's comment, "An afterlife? You might as well expect to see the sun rise twice in the same day" (193).

The first main chapter of Staring at the Sun opens on a third-person account of how the nonagenarian Jean views the past:

Other people assumed it must be a strain, looking back over ninety years. Tunnel vision, they guessed; straw vision. It wasn't like that. Sometimes the past was shot with a hand-held camera; sometimes it reared monumentally inside a proscenium arch with moulded plaster swags and floppy curtains; sometimes it eased along, a love

story from the silent era, pleasing, out of focus and wholly implausible. And sometimes there was only a succession of stills to be borrowed from the memory.

The Incident with Uncle Leslie--the very first Incident of her life--came in a series of magic lantern slides (7).

The Incident is recalled "only [in] a succession of stills" because the whole point of this memory is that it demonstrates how an adult can play a practical joke on a child who is unaware of adult connections. It also demonstrates literal 'stillness,' in that each frame recalls the same pot of supposed hyacinth bulbs, in the same dormant state, because they are in fact upturned golf tees.

The photographs which Jean takes or which she observes, later in life when she is travelling all over the world, perpetuate this sense of charade, and of an immature suspension of judgment. For instance: "At a commune outside Chengdu they saw a small workshop where fur coats were made from dog-skins; the honeymoon couple dressed up in Alsatian for each other's cameras" (93). The power and the danger of the photograph is that it transfixes an identity as an object, however inadequate and partial such reification may be.¹¹ When Jean visits the pilot Tommy Prosser's widow, forty years after the war, she discovers that Olive has remarried and, on moving house, has "thrown

out" Tommy: that is to say, she has emptied the attic of all his letters and photos (102-3). The identification of Tommy with the verbal and visual imprints he left behind is absolute for Olive, though the sentimental image she retains of him does not tally at all with Jean's memory of him.

But it is in Uncle Leslie's gift-giving that the surreality of the photographic image continues to be thrown into high relief. His nephew Gregory becomes secretly quite proud of Leslie's characteristically bizarre presents, among them "a set of stereoscopic viewing cards without the viewer," and, when Gregory is twenty-one, "a signed photo of Uncle Leslie, taken many years before, possibly in America" (132). It would have ruined the gifts' uniqueness for Gregory had they been less surreal; he "even went for several years in quiet fear that the stereoscopic viewer might turn up, or that his mother might give him one." On his final visit to the dying Leslie, Gregory is given, instead of a viewer, a pink electric shaver--"the perfect present," in his opinion (135). Leslie's "humorous and undefeated behaviour" on this occasion make Gregory feel Leslie has "a good death": this is a concept Gregory has spent much time considering and has demythologized, so that the relationship between the phrase and the physical actuality is as tortuous and hidden as the relationship between a stereoscopic viewer and the pink electric shaver.

At the end of the book, however, the reader learns through Jean's reminiscences that in fact "Leslie's last hours, while free of pain, had oscillated between pure anger and pure fear." Musing over Leslie's behaviour to Gregory on that final visit, Jean concludes that "perhaps faking courage for those who loved you was the greater, higher courage" (194). The untruth of an image may, then, have its own validity, because what is apparently surreal may represent the willed and valid suppression of connections. Uncle Leslie's odd life, a subtext to Jean's throughout the book, carries with it its own mysterious logic, as a commentary on her attempts to grow into wisdom. Photographic images are particularly associated with Leslie because, like his own, their appearances defy rational explanation. They are, in Roland Barthes' terms, "unpenetratable" (Camera Lucida 106). In this novel the duplicate world created by photography is not, as Susan Sontag would have it, less opaque than the real one, but more so--or, at least, its opacity reflects a truth about the way empirical reality can be perceived and received. As in Flaubert's Parrot, photography in this novel is parodic of the traditional concept of mimesis.

The photographic motif figures with much more overt centrality in Graham Swift's most recent book, Out Of This World (1988). The central character here too has a passion for flying--"the magic of it. That release from the ground"

(38). If he had not, in fact, become a professional photographer, he would have liked to become a pilot. David Lodge has commented on "the special mixture of glamour and pathos that attaches to the fighter pilots of the Battle of Britain" in the collective consciousness of modern memory, and in the work of British writers too young themselves to remember the war ("The Home Front"). Out Of This World shares with Staring at the Sun a fascination with wartime pilots; but where Prosser is identified as a fighter-pilot who flies to the defence by attacking enemy bombers, Harry Beech has flown in air-raids with the aggressors, the bomber-pilots, in order to use the gun of his camera. It is Harry's change of heart about the aggressive nature of the photographic enterprise that situates the moral centre of the book.¹² As in Swift's earlier Waterland, the underlying theme is epistemological: what, and how, can we know? Swift has said that he uses photography in Out Of This World as "a metaphor about the blurring of the distinction between truth and illusion." He would agree with Sontag that truth is knowable only sequentially: "A photograph bears witness and also opens the door to our perception of reality. But any given photo, separated from its context, doesn't reveal the sequence of time" (quoted in Adachi). The novel concerns the estrangement between a father and daughter and their changing attitudes to knowledge and understanding that, over time, make possible a reconciliation. Photographs function paradigmatically to

illustrate the potential both for dislocation and for re-membering in human affairs. Their reference to the real but frozen past marks them both as the agents of disjunction and as the stimulus for new formulations of memory.

Harry Beech is a sixty-four-year-old former photo-journalist famous for his images of violence and despair in the troubled areas of the world. He gave up his career when his father, a prominent arms manufacturer, was blown up by a terrorist bomb and Harry found himself instinctively reaching for his camera to record the incident. This instinctive response, observed by his neglected daughter Sophie, precipitated a more permanent estrangement between parent and child: Sophie left for the United States with her kindly if somewhat inadequate husband Joe, and has not been in contact with Harry for ten years.

The story is told in Harry's words and in Sophie's, in alternating chapters, with the effect that the dualisms of old world/new world and of parent/child are thereby built into the structure of the text. But counterpointed against this structure are questions of the relationship between the real and the illusory, and between the observer and the participator: these issues are the site of their pain for both Harry and Sophie. Both must travel "out of this world" to acquire sufficient distance from events to gain perspective. And literally so. Harry becomes an aerial

photographer for an amateur archaeologist, and Sophie's last appearance of the book is on a plane flying back from the States to be present at his second wedding. She writes, "You know, a long time ago, they'd have thought what we're doing now was magic. Impossible! Out of this world! They'd have thought only gods could fly up into the sky" (202). The impending reconciliation between Sophie and Harry has until now been equally unthinkable.

In the final image of the novel, a ten-year-old Harry is sitting in the cockpit of a specially chartered biplane with the pilot, whose favour has been won by a word from Harry's father, the war veteran Major Beech. They are about to return from France, after attending the celebrations that marked the tenth anniversary of the Armistice of the Great War. But it is only now, at sixty-four, as he relates these long-distant events with the perspective of hope which has come to him because of his newfound happiness with his young research assistant Jennifer, that Harry can recognize the freedom that his father was giving to him:

It was as if he had ushered me forward into this wondrous outlook on the sky, had made me a present of it, then discreetly withdrawn. I might soar away; he would remain. . . . I can see now that throughout that homeward journey his feet must have been, so to speak, still on the ground,

still caught in the mud. And I was being lifted up and away, out of his world, out of the age of mud, out of that brown, obscure age, into the age of air (208).

An explicit parallel is drawn between the "brown, obscure age" of his father's world and the sepia world of old photographs; in the same way, the "age of air" is clearly identified with the coloured, patterned photographs of Harry's aerial archaeological discoveries. In these latter pictures, what can be revealed is not the individual human lives that Harry had so relentlessly and impassively charted in his days as a journalist, but the shared patterns of past human existence that are faintly discernible if the light and the climactic conditions are right. From being caught in the mud of combative interaction between camera and subject, Harry has moved to a vantage-point that is out of this world.

Harry's understanding of the place of photography has undergone radical shifts over the years, as he has acquired perspective on his own life. In childhood he protected himself from the unhappiness of both home and school with the thought that "[a]ll you are is your eyes, all there is is in your eyes, your vision is you. And . . . [i]f you exist in your vision, then nothing can hurt you, you need never be frightened of anything" (121). Harry recognizes in this same illusion the power behind photography. The camera

seems to make the news photographer "invisible, invulnerable, incorporeal" (121), and to offer a sense of immunity in the face of extreme danger. Both terror and wonder can be stilled and distanced; the photograph enables one to "[l]ook again when it's safe" (122). The camera can function, in the words of the anti-humanist American photographer Diane Arbus, as "a kind of license" (Sontag, On Photography 191). Initially, Harry had believed that as a photographer he was fulfilling the necessary function of a witness, the "someone" who "has to be in it and step back too" (49), the "observer" who could remain a "neutral party, floating pair of eyes" (70). The Nazi death-camps had stirred in him the feeling that "[s]eeing is believing and certain things must be seen to have been done. Without the camera the world might start to disbelieve" (107). But now he asks, "Which is worse: to have to look at piles of corpses? Or to photograph people looking at piles of corpses?" (107) "There are many reasons for not taking pictures," comments the French photographer Jean Mohr of his own career; "but if you are a press photographer, your employers will recognise none as valid" (Another Way Of Telling 78). The experience of watching his father blown up has shown Harry the world from the point-of-view of one who is inside, looking out, and he no longer wants to take pictures. He had been making his living photographing the horrors which his father had made possible through the manufacture of arms. The closeness of identification between the camera and the gun, when it

becomes personal, finally shocks him out of professionalism into the recognition that he is more than his vision.

Moreover, another incident in his personal life--his wife's becoming pregnant by another man just a few weeks before her death in a plane crash--has led him to consider whether it might not be "a blessing to be blind." He had witnessed Anna's unfaithfulness, but perhaps it could be "a kindness not to tell what you see," not to be a witness (163). He has come to distrust the validity of mere observation separated from considerations of relationship. And once his day-to-day reality is satisfying, he shies away from taking pictures of it because they would make it seem like the illusion his world-weariness suggests it must be. After all, "Miracles shouldn't happen. Picture-books aren't real. . . . You shouldn't be able to advertise in the local papers for an assistant and fall in love with the very first candidate who comes along" (79). Where once he had seen the camera as an agent of realism, he now sees it as a perpetrator of myth:

I used to believe once that ours was the age in which we would say farewell to myths and legends, when they would fall off us like useless plumage and we would see ourselves clearly only as what we are. I thought the camera was the key to this process. But I think the world cannot bear to be only what it is. The world always wants another

world, a shadow, an echo, a model of itself (187). Harry's hard-won conclusion, rather, is, "[i]f it's beautiful, why photograph it? If you have the reality, who needs the picture?" (56)

It had been the moon-landings, which he had watched with his father, that had finally given Harry the Sontagian sense of "[t]he camera first, then the event. The whole world is waiting just to get turned into film. And not just the world but the goddam moon as well" (13). Over the years since its inception, the camera had moved from being a recorder of reality--there had been an "imperceptible inversion":

As if the camera no longer recorded but conferred reality. As if the world were the lost property of the camera. As if the world wanted to be claimed and possessed by the camera. To translate itself, as if afraid it might otherwise vanish, into the new myth of its own authentic-synthetic photographic memory (189).

Sontag is talking about just this inversion when she says, "Photography is the reality; the real object is often experienced as a let-down" (On Photography 147). And so Harry becomes involved in photography that is "out of this world," the kind of photography that can show up a further reality beneath an appearance because of the conscious distancing involved in both time and space. "[T]he eye can't

see ghosts but the camera can" (Out Of This World 193):
ghosts such as the archaeological traces of the Bronze
Age--or, in the final and pivotal photograph of the novel, a
person long dead.

This last photograph is of Harry's mother, a photograph
he found when he was nine years old and whose discovery put
him in grave danger of a beating from his father. It is a
sepia photograph of a woman in a long dress:

Fact or phantom? Truth or mirage? I used to
believe--to profess, in my professional days--
that a photo is truth positive, fact incarnate
and incontrovertible. And yet: explain to me
that glimpse into unreality.

How can it be? How can it be that an instant
which occurs once and once only, remains perman-
ently visible? How could it be that a woman whom
I had never known or seen before--though I had no
doubt who she was--could be staring up at me from
the brown surface of a piece of paper? (205)

This is the image, Graham Swift has said, that provided the
stimulus for his whole novel:

I got a visual image of Harry as a young boy
discovering a photograph of a mother he never
knew, who died in childbirth. The story grew from
that image, the snapshot of a snapshot . . .
(quoted in Adachi).

The ambiguity inherent in the layered reality of a photograph reflects precisely for Harry the doubleness of appearances in his world, and the need for distance to give perspective and insight.

At Christmas, a month after his childhood discovery of the photograph of his mother, Harry asked for his first camera. It was not for a further four years that his father bought him one, but the seed had been sown: the sense that the camera could be an agent of doubleness, could hoard secrets, give "glimpse[s] into unreality," be a repository for powerful emotions. By the time he is narrating this story, Harry has come to realize that the duplicity of appearances extends even to the fabric of the countryside:

I know this landscape is a lie. Skin deep.
Hedgerowed, church-towered, village-strewn
England. Rub the map and civilization as we know
it disappears. The Bronze Age emerges. . . .

And rub the map again--ever so lightly this
time--and a less benign illusion dissolves itself.
Half of Wiltshire and Dorset, good lumps of
Hampshire and Berkshire are military property.
M.O.D. Keep Out. Not countryside any more
--camouflage (194).

His father's country estate was the epitome of English graciousness, but it was sustained by and home to the production of armaments. His father was, in his own eyes,

both a monster and the "perfect English gentleman." Joe's experience of driving around in the spring sunshine of Greece, discussing tourism promotions in the middle of a military coup, bore similar marks of the coexistence of incompatibles (160/1). The distinction is not so much between "the fact and the phantom" as between different levels of reality, seen with different angles of vision and at different times.

"When you put something on record, when you make a simulacrum of it, you have already partly decided you will lose it" (55). Harry explains in this way why he will not take photographs of Jenny nor of the idyllic country world in which he now lives: he does not want to lose them. The implication is that his previous photographic journalism was in some sense an expiation of horror as well as a witness to it. He "used to say once, on those few occasions when [he] was persuaded to make public statements, that photography should be about what you cannot see," either because it is too far away in space, or too fast-moving in time (55). Finally he allows only one legitimate function to photography: the re-presentation of ghosts of what is already lost. Ghosts of his personal past--the unknown mother, and ghosts of mankind's collective past--the Bronze Age. To be valid, photographs must represent what is out of this world, as much in time as in space. "The magic lamp of the camera" retains its magic, but only in the committed hands of those

who will read with care the myths it perpetuates.

Out Of This World has met with mixed reviews, not least because of its very vocal treatment of the problems of photography. "I can't decide," complains a reviewer in The Listener, "whether Swift is being too clever about photography or not clever enough, but either way he fails to use it to bind his novel together. He airs various ideas about the relation of the image to reality, but he never, as you might say, gets it into focus" (Truss 21). She had looked for Swift to use the notion of photography to explore "the aims of the writer," but she objects that "the people and the ideas don't come together" and that the narrators do little more than get in the way of the omnipresent authorial voice. It is true that event seems subordinate to idea in this novel, and that philosophical ruminations on such subjects as history, representation, warfare, technology and contemporary culture are writ large. It is also true that at times Swift is guilty of purple prose and an unconvincingly dogged romanticism in his attempts to counter irony and world-weariness with an other-worldly innocence. But to criticize the novel for lack of cohesion is to misunderstand the nature of the photographic motif.

The alternating chapters can be seen as "a series of interior monologues which operate either as short takes or still photographs in which public and private events are

linked" (Adachi). Sometimes the voices are as closely interleaved as slides in an epidiastope: "[t]his is an extraordinarily closely laminated little story; layer upon layer about violence and insufficient loving" (Duchene). The structural device has been described as one that "might have been disastrous in less capable hands"; in fact the two narrative voices of Harry and Sophie "quickly merge, like the colours and shapes in a kaleidoscope" (Sexton). The notions of layers and of merging assort well with the central concerns of the book: that "[i]t's telling that reconciles memory and forgetting," and that the private and the public are inextricably interwoven. "The movement from armaments to cameras to neurotic disengagement from the realities that both taint is the story not just of the Beech family but of the twentieth century" (Keith Wilson, "Family Conflicts"). Harry's involvement as an aerial photographer would suggest, further, that cohesiveness is finally achieved only by distance--a tenet applicable not only to Harry's personal past and to the larger past of prehistory, but also to the text of Out Of This World.

Much as telling may be necessary to situate a memory, or a photograph, in temporal and emotional context, what this novel also shows is the power of the photograph to reveal ghosts from the past that are otherwise unknowable.¹³ The montage of narrative "stills" in Out Of This World is parallel to the camera shots it describes, so that

photographs and narrative are held together contrapuntally. The resulting structural and philosophical cohesion is more important here than the traditional cohesion of character with idea, because it demonstrates textually that relationship between image and word by which the mind represents the past. John Berger, while he underwrites Sontag's contention that the isolated appearances of photography must be connected in order for meaning to exist, nevertheless does not uniquely privilege a temporal progression as the means of connection. As has been suggested above, he sees a close association between photography and memory, because both depend on and oppose the passing of time, both preserve moments and "propose their own form of simultaneity, in which all their images can coexist The field is continuous in terms of the subjectivity which creates and extends it, but temporarily [sic] it is discontinuous" (Another Way of Telling 280). The "field" over which Harry flies to take his archaeological photographs is a physical representation of the mental field Berger describes here. Its discontinuities and the coexistence of different times are presented graphically in the photographs themselves. In Out Of This World it is literally true that distance lends enchantment--a re-presentation of the ghostly past otherwise unseen but constantly present.

The search for a distanced perspective has become a challenging and wide-ranging one in the contemporary British novel, and involves both spatial and temporal distance. Central characters distance themselves from the immediate by flying in planes; they look back upon their lives from the distance of a great age; they look out upon the world from otherworldly vantage-points. In the postmodern era, to portray a believable innocence, or even to see the world precisely from behind the mask of irony, seems to demand more than ordinary daily involvement with life. It requires considerable distance, of a spatial or a temporal kind. "It is the function of irony in postmodern discourse," suggests Linda Hutcheon, "to posit . . . critical distance and then undo it" (Politics 16); she understands this subversive tactic as characteristic of postmodernism's complicity with and critique of its modernist inheritance. If, as W.T.J. Mitchell suggests, "spatial form is the perceptual basis of our notion of time" ("Spatial Form in Literature" 274), then it becomes clear why the photograph can function as a paradigm of this ambivalent distance. The photograph's apparent transparency needs to be understood from a perspective that takes into account the constructed nature of representations.¹⁴

The otherworldly vantage-point in Martin Amis' Other People is that of an amnesiac. Mary Lamb regains consciousness as she is reborn into the world at the opening

of the novel, and her subsequent vision is characterised by the sort of nursery innocence her name suggests. She is completely uninitiated, unable even to recognise that clouds are not aerial animals, for example, or to recall a previous existence she may have had under the name Amy Hide (Stevenson 189). Randall Stevenson goes on to suggest that the dichotomy between Mary's naïve perspective and the narrator's familiarity with the "tawdry urban context" of the story "focuses with particular clarity Amis's satirical vision of 'enormous shabbiness and misery around these days'." Amis has declared that he is "after laughs" in his books, but *Other People* would suggest also a less truculent purpose. Described by Stevenson as a writer of "contemporary gothic" and by Padhi as a producer of "hard-core extravaganzas", Amis himself has said:

I can imagine a novel that is as tricky, as alienated and as writerly as those of, say, Robbe-Grillet while also providing the staid satisfactions of pace, plot and humour with which we associate, say, Jane Austen. In a way, I imagine that this is what I myself am trying to do (New Review 18).

The combination in *Other People* of neobaroque detective-story with satirical descriptions of contemporary London exactly meets Amis's own criteria for a novel, and, incidentally, provides a particularly striking example of that coexistence of the postmodern and the traditional

realist which critics like A.S. Byatt have seen as typical of contemporary British fiction.

The book opens with a prologue: the narrator's confession that "I didn't want to have to do it to her." Postmodernism is characterized, suggests Jameson, by a "shift in the dynamics of cultural pathology . . . in which the alienation of the subject is displaced by the fragmentation of the subject" ("Postmodernism" 63). In Other People, this fragmentation is apparent in the narrating subject as well as the narrated subject, and, as a result, fragmentation is experienced also by the reading subject. "I didn't want to have to do it to her." What, exactly, is the narrator referring to? Is it in a past or future tense--something that has been done, or something that is to be done? And to whom--Amy, or Mary? As the text progresses, the narrator seems to be identifiable not only with the detective, Prince, whose suspect machinations confront Mary with her past self, but also, finally, with Mr. Wrong, Amy's murderer. Is his opening sentence then a reference to his murdering her, or to his being about to recreate her in his narrative as Mary? And will he thereby have done her a service or a disservice? Whatever his action towards her, the narrator asserts here at the beginning, "she asked for it." Asked figuratively, by her behaviour as a prostitute, or literally, because Amy once said she loved him so much she wouldn't mind if he killed her? Or, again,

is he referring to her desire for a new life, a second chance? "I do not appreciate an obscure novel," grumbles one disgruntled reader. "What, exactly, is expected of us here, and how does Mr Amis propose to elicit whatever response he is seeking?" (Hunter 9).

The narrator seems to have similar concerns. In the allusive and alluring prologue, he continues:

I just wish there was another way, something more self-contained, economical, and shapely. But there isn't. That's life, as I say, and my most sacred duty is to make it lifelike. Oh, hell. Let's get it over with (9).

The reader comes to realize that such references to hell are more than incidental. In Huis Clos, Jean-Paul Sartre has a character say, "Hell is . . . other people" (191). The title of Amis' novel consciously evokes Sartre's comment, and in Other People the notion of hell is never far away. "Is there life after death?" asks the narrator at one point. "If there is, it will probably be hell . . . very like life There will have to be a hell for each of us, a hell for you and a hell for me" (119). Living in his own particular hell involves the narrator in a "sacred duty . . . to make it lifelike" for Mary/Amy as she becomes conscious, in the first words of the first chapter, of "[t]ime--it's starting again" (13). Here is the novelist as devil rather than as deity: the one whose act of creating is always a lie, but

who is condemned always to have to write. Mary later reflects that Prince ('Prince of this world,' 'Prince of Darkness'?) is the only person she has met who "[is] really in the business of lies" (159). In one sense his text is "another way, . . . self-contained, economical, and shapely," the modernist escape into the aesthetic. But, since this is a text informed by the postmodern, it is also inexorably self-reflexive and self-repeating. Prince tells Mary in the middle of the text, "We've got a confession, a guy in a cell saying what he did and why. But we haven't got a body" (113). In his epilogue, having "killed" Amy a second time and restored her to her adolescence to "try again," the narrator is trapped in his own repetitions. He promises that "[he] won't do anything to her if she doesn't want [him] to"; but as soon as he sees her he is "not in control any more, not this time. Oh hell. Let's get it over with" (207). Amis dramatizes the symbiotic relationship between the writer and his characters as obsessive and deterministic, a novelist's personally tailored version of damnation as the "guy in the cell."

Into this paradoxically "staid" and yet "tricksy" novel whose opaque mysteries are reminiscent of those in Les Gommés, Amis introduces the "black art" of photography.¹⁵ He uses photographs to confound the present with the past and the shadow figure with its mirror-image. Photographs traditionally attest to identity. But the way in which they do so is elusive and illusory. Which is the "real" woman,

the innocent amnesiac Mary Lamb or the violent prostitute Amy Hide? Is either Mary or Amy alive in the book, or are they both to be understood as ghosts, or, even, simply as narrative constructs? By playing the postmodern game of exposing the narrative frame, Amis forces the reader to see each persona as a shadow of the other, ad infinitum. Amis makes use of photography's witness to both the presence and the absence of its subject: the photographs in this text at once declare and subvert their own authority by reflecting one world into another without ever having the power to declare which, if any, has present external reality.

The chapter in which Prince first confronts the naïve Mary with her mirror-image in the photograph of Amy is entitled "Stopped Dead." Amis is fond of this kind of word-play. Here the notions of Mary's shock and of the photographic 'shot' are intertwined with the suggestion that there is a question over the finality of Amy's death--did she indeed stop dead? Mary looks at herself and the photograph together in the mirror: "It was Mary. But it was older than Mary And the eyes--they weren't her eyes. The eyes were dead" (73). Mary recognizes harm and hardness in the photographed face and she throws up convulsively, "just sick to death." This is the beginning of Mary's constantly waiting for news of her former self from Prince. It is also the beginning of her nightly dreams of Amy/Mary "stopp[ing] dead" to let the beast that was pursuing her

finish its job: it "veered up and, with dispatch, with contempt, swiped her body into flames of blood" (76). Mary does not understand the nightly presence of her terrible dream. But the narrator does. The dream recurs "[b]ecause this is one of the ways the past gets back to you, the thwarting, indefatigable past." The narrator continues:

I used to think there was no time like the present. I used to think there was no time but the present. Now I know better--or different, anyway. In the end, the past will always be there. The past is all there is: the present never sticks around for long enough, and the future is anybody's guess. In time, you always have to hand it to the past. It always gets you in the end (76).

The photograph of Amy attests to this ever-present power of the past. Its image is not quiescent. Mary perceives it in the mirror as watching and mobile, and it becomes somehow detached from the paper so that it is hiding behind her glass, a "knowing genius" waiting to pounce (75). She finally goes mad in a self-made hell of heat and half-cooked offal and psychological power-trips, laughing crazily with sounds that "would have frightened her very much if it hadn't been Mary who was making them." She looks in the mirror in the middle of the night:

The instant she threw the switch a face reared out of the glass, in exultation, in relief, in

terror. She had done it. She had torn through the glass and come back from the other side. She had found her again. She was herself at last (185). The past, the narrator would say, has caught up with her. It is of course impossible to decide which "she" is being referred to here, because there is no longer a distinction between the two. The alter-ego of the photograph, however unpleasant, is one with the vulnerable and still strangely childlike Mary of the text.

One of the factors which leads to Mary's disintegration as a separate, moral being is her confused relationship to time. At first, "[n]ot yet stretched by time, her perceptions are without seriality: they are multiform, instantaneous and random, like the present itself" (53). Her education into an understanding of the passage of time in "the world of power, boredom and desire" takes place as she moves up the rungs of society from the initial disorienting company of tramps and drunks through to a daily job in a low-class restaurant and finally to a place in the household of Jamie, an indolent and despairing loafer of inexhaustible independent means. With Jamie she rediscovers the disorienting effects of flouting the normal flow of time--but now she is in control of the disorientation.

She has discovered her female "power to make feel bad"--the first time she has had a sense of any chosen power

of her own--and proceeds to manipulate Jamie into a state of madness in a way that she perceives as "just, even admirable." "Together they endeavoured to abolish the idea of diurnal time, time as a way of keeping life distinct, time as a device to stop night and day happening at the same time" (183). 'Time' is what you get for breaking the law, and 'in time' is where you have to "hand it to the past." But it is also 'in time' that you find out the answer to riddles, and it is in time that you are alive. To abolish time may destroy one kind of determinism--the inexorable move from past to present to future. But it also destroys the movement of life, and renders a high-class drunkard like Jamie as decaying as the gutter alcoholics of Mary's first encounters. At the end of the novel, Amy is confronted again with her killer: "There was time for her to run but she did not run. Perhaps there was no time, either, not really" (205). This experience is outside of time, where she is already dead. In order to reenter the world of time, she has to allow her murderer to enfold her. She "felt a sensation of speed so intense that her nose caught the tang of smouldering air" and she opens her eyes to her own past where "Time--it's starting again" (206).

Because an understanding of time as both redemptive and damning underwrites the whole novel, the re-presentation of time past in photographs has peculiar power. This is most acutely and continually felt through Prince's photograph of

Amy; but on two other specific occasions photography's deceptively clear witness to an ever-present past is used to conflate the timeless and the world of time.

Prince gives Mary the address of Amy's family. Mary goes to visit, to try to uncover her past. Amy's room is "suspicious" of her, and the mirror there "[tells] her plainly that . . . whatever soul the room once held had disappeared or died a long time ago" (96). Mary feels panic. To hide it, she asks about the "[s]played photographs in steel wallets" lined up on the mantelpiece. All the photographs are peaceful and contented; there is a notable absence of any pictures of Amy. But one is a picture of Michael Shane, her erstwhile lover and now a successful television documentary reporter. The photograph portrays him with "patient, serious eyes"; the housekeeper and her husband remember him as "[s]uch a thoughtful boy" (97). Later Mary sees the "photograph" on television: Michael, projecting this same image of patience and seriousness. Her decision to seek him out reveals him not only as shallow and egotistical but also as Amy's wretched dupe with whom he had experienced a living death. His chosen career puts him "in all the places where the world [is] on fire" (194), but not, as he had been with Amy, on the wrong side of the door. As a reporter and photographer, he edits the news into acceptable portions of horror. Photography has become a controlling mechanism for him, as it had been in the photographs in

Amy's house, and the shots are exposed as half-truths, arranged for effect. How much truth-value do those mantelpiece snapshots really hold, after all? This simultaneous inscription and undermining of photographic witness shows how the photograph's impenetrability also renders it unstable. "Strictly speaking, one never understands anything from a photograph," as Susan Sontag has argued, because the camera's rendering of reality will always hide more than it discloses (On Photography 23).

The other instance of the exposing-concealing power of photography in this novel is much more sinister. Amy, back from the "other side," is living in "a remote arcadia, a pleasant, fallen world" with Prince, who has saved her from the consequences of her treatment of Jamie. In a chapter entitled "Last Things," where eschatological implications are only just below the surface, Amy has been left alone for a few days and told to expect "something pleasant" to happen. But the first notable thing to happen is that she discovers an old photograph in a copy of The Anatomy of Melancholy she chooses for Sunday reading. It is the photograph of a public hanging. It shows five pale and "qualmish" city fathers in top hats, one hangman in a black hood, and a murderer. He alone "held the camera's eye":

His thin face was taut and unshaven, and there was something desperate and triumphant in his stare, almost a snigger of complicity in this terrible

act he had goaded the world into. It was as if he were the punisher and they the punished--the nauseous city fathers and the hooded man who did not dare show his face. Amy looked into the murderer's eyes. Poor bored idiot, she thought (197).

As she is about to replace the photo, she notices on the back, in Prince's handwriting, the words "You wait."

This photograph is never explained. The refrain "you wait" recurs constantly through the text, spoken by Prince to Mary/Amy, by other characters to her, and by the narrator to the reader. Is it here addressed to someone in the photograph, or to the photo's spectator? Is it spoken by someone in the photograph, or by someone looking at it? Is the murderer in some sense Prince? The surreality of this image, and its conjunction of frozen time past with threatening time future, make it a kind of emblem for the fable of the novel, in which all are implicated in murder and all are both the wielders and the victims of power. "What's life like?" Mary has asked Prince earlier in the story. And he replied, "Murder . . . Hell" (114). Victoria Glendinning comments, "Martin Amis has written a modern morality. At least I think he has."

Glendinning describes the book as "peculiarly interesting and effective" when understood as "a fable, an

investigation into 'how to live with other people' and the possible values of innocence and of 'good' and 'bad'." But she concludes that writing that is so self-consciously intelligent and aware may produce "a good book but a bad novel, the work of a 'writer' rather than of a novelist." Her implicit assumptions about what makes a 'good' novel are, from all appearances, traditional, privileging as they do a novelistic world mimetic of the real one and in which the reader may suspend disbelief. Amis' conscious foregrounding of the fabrication of the text makes such a critic uncomfortable, and even leads her to use 'good' and 'bad' with confusingly different meanings within the same paragraph. Others have been dismayed by the "smugly omniscient" voice of the narrator, and by Amis' "dismal view of the world" (see Hunter). None of these criticisms addresses the novel on its own terms.

More appropriate comment on Amis' mode of writing is offered by the critic who describes Other People as "a Martian novel" insofar as it presents "the familiar world through the eyes of a fascinated alien." This reader recognizes the novel's chief narrative interest as lying in the dualism of the two narrative voices, one naïve, the other knowing. He concludes, "In an unprogrammatically way the novel . . . creates its own bleak universe in which lost souls wander vainly in search of the perfect match, the 'other people' who might make them whole" (Morrison 247). It

is an essential and unsettling part of such a universe to refuse to answer clearly for its own integrity and intelligibility, despite its obvious reference to the real world, and the photographs within the text are symbolic of this shiftiness. As Roland Barthes has said, "The Photograph is the advent of myself as other: a cunning dissociation of consciousness from identity" (Camera Lucida 12).

Photographs, even self-portraits, always present people other than oneself. Amis uses this dislocation as emblematic of his understanding of the nature of fictional worlds.

Making use of a similar dislocation but for sociological rather than intrinsically literary purposes, the feminist writer Fay Weldon introduces two photographers and a wide range of photographs into her 1978 novel Praxis. Weldon is an unrelentingly witty writer whose distinctive style is characterized by disjunctive syntax, short sharp sentences and paragraphs, multiple exclamation-points and a constant downplaying of traditionally major elements of plot in favour of their causes and consequences for the women in her stories. Her wryly ironic tone maintains that distanced but deeply committed stance essential to satire. Reading Praxis, writes one reviewer,

is rather like being shown a family's photograph album. The narrative style is the verbal equivalent of a series of snapshots, some sharp and cruelly revealing, others taken into the sun

or when the light was fading, and so all the more mysteriously evocative of period, place and personality (Mellors 298).

In her use of photography, Weldon aligns herself with a Sontagian position wherein photographs are perceived as potentially dangerous, superficial and manipulative because of their emphasis on appearances and their arbitrary framing of experience. But Weldon also recognizes the social function of the photograph when it is justly contextualized.

Praxis is conceived as the memoirs of an apparently very elderly woman. Like Other People, it involves two narrative voices, but here both belong to Praxis herself. She tells her own story in the third person like the traditionally omniscient narrator, alternating chapter by chapter with her commentary upon her own story, offered with the wisdom and pain of hindsight. Like Other People, this book involves a woman's struggles with questions of identity. Praxis fights to find her own reality through a welter of circumstantially and culturally induced problems, and in her more superficial personae she is known as Pattie. Like Mary/Amy, Praxis/Pattie experiences life at both the bottom and the top of the social scale. Like that of Mary/Amy, the character of Praxis/Pattie is in some ways an exploration of the causes of and the definition of madness, though where Amis' concerns are playfully ontological, Weldon's, despite the ease of her wit, are earnestly sociological. If Praxis

is mad, it is because a patriarchal society has driven her mad, as it did her mother before her. Her story is one of learning to recognize herself as "[n]ot Pattie the prisoner," literally and figuratively behind bars in a world designed by men to please men, but independent Praxis, who must face the frightening possibility that she "might have a future" on her own (177).¹⁶

The book opens on a photograph which captures surface appearances but excludes the less attractive reality of underlying relationships:

Praxis Duveen, at the age of five, sitting on the beach at Brighton, made a pretty picture for the photographer. Round angel face, yellow curls, puffed sleeves, white socks and little white shoes--one on, one off, while she tried to take a pebble from between her tiny pink toes--delightful! The photographer had hoped to include her elder sister, Hypatia, in the picture, but that sullen, sallow little girl had refused to appear on the same piece of card as her ill-shod sister (9).

Before the first page is turned the reader has discovered that the holiday photographer is unlikely actually to print the picture he has taken, because he is a charlatan. He even continues to take pictures, and charge for them, when he has run out of film in his camera. This first mention of

photography, then, is fraught with ambiguity, tension and misrepresentation. And when the photographer, Henry Whitechapel, decides to follow up on the romantic seaside image by looking in on his pretty clients at home, he discovers the reality of their lives to fall very far short of prettiness: a drunken, abusive father, a distraught mother and two neglected little girls.

Henry, a shell-shocked veteran of the First World War, has for years seen the world as a charnel house and the subjects before his camera as "grinning faces, skin stretched over bone" like the "tattered shreds of flesh he had observed hanging on the barbed wire of the Ypres front" (21). However, after Praxis' father walks out, Henry moves into the house as a lodger, and as a result of his albeit grudging acceptance there, he begins to appreciate human beings as more than members of an insane factory farm. He actually prints his photographs, and saves enough to set up a small photographic studio on the seafront. But his relationship with Praxis' unstable mother Lucy grows destructive and manipulative. With the advent of the Second World War and the subsequent diminishing of the holiday trade, Henry gets a job taking photographs of conscripts at the local recruitment centre, and moves out to marry Lucy's cook. For the promise of a reasonable salary he has compromised himself by putting his photography at the service of the forces that had previously reduced him to a

nervous wreck.

Photography offers a false security that cannot endure the assaults of unpleasant reality. When her mother Lucy finds Praxis' chiefly fictional diary and denounces her as a "filthy, dirty little piece of slime," Lucy finally slips into certifiable madness and is taken away to hospital. It is then that Praxis, going into her mother's bedroom, finds "the early photograph of herself on the beach, torn up, and in wretched pieces on the floor" (47). Remembering the misery of her childhood, the older Praxis says:

I was thirty before I could even think about my past. Yes, I would say, to all enquiries, I had a happy childhood, and if pressed would give an account of prewar Brighton, with its clean pebbly beach, and long summer days in the sun, complete with candy-floss. A photographic account. Or pressed still further, forced to remember the photograph torn and on the floor, turn the whole thing into a bad joke (48).

Here she is specifically equating the photographic with the photogenic, that which is photographically attractive. Photographs, rather than reality, have become the standard by which to define the beautiful, a danger against which Susan Sontag writes eloquently (On Photography 85). Praxis comments on the similar deceptiveness of protective memory: "I can put such memories of joy together! . . . Patch them

together into a protective quilt of happiness to keep the cold winds of reality out" (Praxis 49).

In the first chapter spoken in her own voice, Praxis has spelled out the two reasons for the narrative that follows: "I, Praxis Duveen, being old and scarcely in my right mind, now bequeath you my memories. They may help you: they certainly do nothing to sustain me . . . " (15). And:

Look at me, I said to you. . . . Better for me to look at myself, to search out the truth, and the root of my pain, and yours, and try to determine, even now, whether it comes from inside or from outside, whether we are born with it or have it foisted upon us (17).

Thus, the narrative is both a will and a self-examination. Praxis' memories will be both bequeathed and explored, like photographs whose surface one attempts to penetrate to explore the reality beneath. But photographs are impenetrable. Barthes talks of their flatness, and the way in which their "evidential power" prevents the eye from anything more than being arrested by their testimony to absence-as-presence (106). For Barthes this is the magic of photographs. For Susan Sontag it is the ground of their untrustworthiness. Photographic images are cavalier: though apparently objective, they deny interconnectedness and disregard context. Memories too are untrustworthy, because of their overt subjectivity. In telling the story of her

childhood years, the older Praxis asks, "How much is fiction, and how much is true? There can be no objective truth about our memories, so perhaps it is idle to even attempt the distinction. We are the sum of our pasts, it is true: we are altogether composed of memories: but a memory is a chancy thing . . ." (76). She sits, in pain and helplessness in a basement room, refusing to take the initiative to ask for assistance from passers-by because:

[i]t seems to me that the wall between my own reality and theirs is so high, so formidable, as to preclude any waving or smiling over the top I am alone in the reality I have created for myself. In my mind I invented old age, illness, grief, and now I am stuck with them, and serve me right (77).

In searching for her own truth, Praxis turns against photography of any kind. She describes the movies she saw from the front rows of the cinema with her first lover as "the great distorted black and white shapes of someone else's truth" (113). She takes no family photograph into her cell when she is imprisoned for the manslaughter of a severely handicapped newborn child. It was in the confession of this killing, which could have passed undetected, that she "for once . . . was not unsure as to what was reality and what was not. What she remembered and what had happened were identical. She had passed into the real world, where

feelings were sharp and clear, however painful" (243). Instead of having truth mediated to her by someone else, in words or in images, she has taken responsibility for the truth herself.

It is her last husband Phillip who has consistently seen life through a photographic frame. Even when Praxis first met him in university, Phillip was using the camera as a defence against reality, a way of looking at the world without becoming personally involved. His involvement is, he says, with the bigger issues that people may symbolize:

the more people can be persuaded to turn private grief into public good the better. Film is the way ahead. . . . We must hold up a mirror to the world, so it can see itself, and reform itself.

Everything else has failed (95).

He had wanted to take pictures of Praxis' mother in her mental hospital. Praxis forbade it, listening to him "using the griefs of the world as if they were bucketfuls of oats to be fed to some lively horse he was determined to mount and spur on to personal victory" (95). Praxis had endured the destruction of the innocent childhood photograph of herself and her sister only to find that her mother had preserved a packet of nude photographs of herself, coy and unnatural, taken by "the beach photographer, her lover, [whom she had relegated] to the cupboard under the stairs." And so she responded sharply to Phillip: "No one's going to

take pictures of my mother. . . . It won't do her any good" (96).¹⁷ For Praxis the photographs not only speak of her mother's unbalanced nature and wretched social situation-- they seem like accessories after the fact.

In his move through television commercials to documentaries, Phillip is constantly able to justify his self-gratifying behaviour in terms of its aiding a longterm social revolution. Towards the end of his first marriage, his wife Irma tells Praxis, "Of course Phillip's a voyeur. He sublimates with cameras, that's all" (180), a comment Praxis later has reason to reiterate from her own experience. Irma is about to struggle into hospital to await the birth of a baby, and observes of Phillip's non-appearance to help, "When it's real life, and not images of life, he simply can't concentrate" (181). Phillip and his camera crew intend to film the birth, though even he balks at using his own wife's labour for financial gain in this way. It is not long after Praxis moves in with him that she begins to feel as if she were merely part of his imagination:

What she saw lacked solidity, as if Phillip were making an eternal square with his two hands and framing her through them, able at will to cut to the next square, to edit and delete.

I'm going mad, thought Praxis (189).

This notion of Phillip's "eternal square" is in fact a fitting image for Praxis' relations with all three of the

men she lives with: in each case she allows them to mould her to their design, and in each case she has finally to escape their framing of her. Sanity is therefore defined as the ability to control one's own life and to be responsible for one's own identity; photography is seen as a threat to sanity, because it involves an attempt to control another's life and to assert one's will over another's identity.

Phillip himself becomes a victim of his own voyeurism. When his son falls off a ladder and suffers internal bleeding, Phillip turns up at the hospital with a camera. It gets smashed in the scene that erupts when his ex-wife Irma appears. "I don't know what it is," he says to Praxis. "I can only face real life if there's a camera between it and me. Perhaps I need some kind of treatment" (200). Phillip is a victim of the dichotomy that Sontag locates at the centre of the photographer's experience, by which he is enabled to participate in an event at the same time that his alienation from his subject is confirmed (On Photography 167). He is deeply shocked when a cameraman he is with in Vietnam is struck by a stray bullet and paralyzed: "I don't understand you," says Praxis. "Did you think it was just a game? Didn't you know the bullets were real?" Such an attack on his defences cuts too near the bone, and their relationship begins to falter from this point on.

Phillip is moved into the BBC Drama Department and

begins to make television shows which flout contemporary sexual convention. He wants to use shots of Praxis' breasts, and when she refuses because "they're private," he auditions for other suitable ones. He ends up having an affair with the model he chooses. His conflation of the private with the public continues: using a Polaroid camera, he films his own lovemaking with Serena from the end of the bed. He asks Praxis if he can film her mother's dying moments, to save the feelings of whatever elderly actress he would otherwise need to find for his movie about disaster. Praxis refuses. The movie, when it finally appears, is not a success: "It lacked, critics complained, grandeur of concept and scale" (237). Phillip has reduced himself to a mannikin.

Ironically his *pièce-de-résistance* is achieved in his return to documentary and his apology to Praxis. He makes a movie for the Women's Movement called 'The Right to Choose' in which Praxis, the activist Praxis on whom he had turned his back, figures as heroine. From prison she signs release forms to allow him to use old footage of her: "Motivation no longer seemed of much consequence. Results were what mattered" (245). To Phillip, or to Praxis? The structure of the sentence seems to imply that this is true for both of them. In that case, it is photography that finally brings them to a kind of reconciliation. For both Phillip and Praxis in their different ways, the results of the movie are personally satisfying because of the public acclaim involved.

Moreover, in the final chapter of Praxis' narrative, when she is hospitalized for malnutrition, this photography of Phillip's becomes an agent of social identity. Praxis is revealed to be "not nearly so old as [she] had assumed": like her mother before her, she has subconsciously been using a pretence of extreme old age as a protection against involvement with the present. As a result of Phillip's film, the doctor recognizes her as Praxis Duveen the heroic feminist. Now "[c]ameras click and whirr. I have been elected heroine." With a somewhat perfunctory change of tone at the end of the book, Weldon has Praxis accept this undesired external recognition as a legitimate way of giving meaning and purpose to life, and in her acceptance find relation with society: "And there, you see, I've done it. I have thrown away my life, and gained it. The wall which surrounded me is quite broken down. I can touch, feel, see my fellow human beings again" (251). The part played by photography in this resolution is ambiguous. Phillip's film has created the adulatory environment in which Praxis finds herself, at the centre of yet more photographic activity. It is an adulation that she both dislikes and recognizes as constructive of social meaning. Praxis' public affirmation seems to ratify her private sense of self. But the fact that photography has created a community of sorts and proven a cohesive force must be held in tension with its tendency to reify and ossify whatever comes within its frame of

reference.

Ambiguity is inherent in the photographic enterprise in this novel. When Praxis had visited her first lover Willie and his wife Carla after she moved in with Phillip, Willie's position in the household had reminded her of that of Henry Whitechapel in her childhood home:

Willie was no longer powerful; Carla was no longer a trump card pulled out of Willie's pack. . . . Willie, moving sometimes above-stairs, sometimes below-stairs, unsure of his status, was a version of Henry the photographer, cut down to size (189).

Photography seems to share Willie's and Henry's insecurity of status. Does it represent external reality, "above-stairs," or does it reveal internal realities, "below-stairs"? Is it a master or a servant? At some points it symbolizes a precarious external order. At others it represents the externalization of disturbing inner obsessions and failures to handle reality. Moreover, there is a parallel between the reifications of photography and those of Praxis' professional writing. Both when she is producing advertising copy, and, even more, when she is engaging in vehemently feminist editorials, she "find[s] a certainty in writing which she certainly did not find in real life" (240).

But it was to find certainties, "to search out the truth," that she began to write the complex personal memoirs which form the present narrative. The end of the penultimate chapter reads, "She wrote, she raged, grieved and laughed, she thought she nearly died; then, presently, she began to feel better" (248). In prison Praxis had been sufficiently discouraged to ask even her friend Irma to call her Pattie, the name of her weakness and acquiescence with the status quo. In the hospital the doctor's public ascribing to her of her birth-name is symbolic of her own acceptance of her unique and difficult place in the world. Finally, the most precise certainty that she finds is that of her own identity, which requires both external recognition and internal acceptance.

In her media persona on the one hand and her hermit-like existence on the other, Praxis is a type of the displaced photographer, sometimes above-stairs, sometimes below-stairs. Her narrative implies that such shiftiness and shape-changing is an unavoidable concomitant of the struggle for unconventional identity in a conventional world. Weldon's use of the ambiguities of reference inherent in photography to mirror this struggle provides a further example in contemporary British fiction of the photograph working to parody the traditional concept of mimesis. The photographer, like the writer, frames the world around her for her own ends. But like the writer she may also allow her

work to reflect societal concerns, so that her relationship to the external world is reciprocally defining. "Praxis," writes Weldon, "meaning turning-point, culmination, action; orgasm; some said the Goddess herself" (12). In learning to understand her identity as both public and private, Praxis has reached the culmination of a unique and extraordinary life. In the course of her life she has experienced both photography and writing as dangerous methods of control which perpetuate unrealistic, irresponsible views of reality. She has also, however, come to realize the potential in both photography and writing for active participation in the creation of personal identity.

The strength into which Praxis grows is a strength with which Penelope Lively's heroine, Claudia, is born. Wayward and independent as a child, she becomes an opinionated and self-assured woman who from the outset is not susceptible to male dominance in the way that Praxis has been. Moon Tiger is not obviously a feminist text. Even in its treatment of war it does not display a specifically female "basis of selectivity," as one reviewer points out with palpable relief: "[t]he close observation and compassion that characterize many of the classic war memoirs by participants are common to both sexes" (Walker 515). Claudia, in any case, is the kind of woman who can manipulate herself into the battle zone as a war correspondent, and who has often found being a woman "a valuable extra asset" (14). But what

she does share with Praxis is the vantage-point of old age, a desire to write her own history in her own way, and a few significant photographs.

Penelope Lively is by education a historian, and her primary concern in Moon Tiger is to explore the relationship between public and private histories. Thus Claudia Hampton's reason for writing is not, like Praxis', "to search out the truth," but rather to present a view of the past which shows the relationship of the individual to time. Lively has asserted, "History does not in fact exist. It's a series of conflicting testimonies."¹⁸ Claudia, dying in hospital at the age of seventy-six, sets out to write a history of the world: "The whole triumphant murderous unstoppable chute--from the mud to the stars, universal and particular, your story and mine. . . . A history of the world, yes. And in the process, my own" (1). And she speaks with Lively's convictions: "Argument, of course, is the whole point of history. Disagreement; my word against yours; this evidence against that. If there were such a thing as absolute truth the debate would lose its lustre" (14). Her thesis is, instead, that the received collective past provides the keys to an understanding of one's private past, and is therefore not just public property but also privately relevant: "Time and the universe lie around in our minds. We are sleeping histories of the world" (65). Ancient Egypt, for instance, is to be understood as a continuous phenomenon, where past

and present cease to have meaning, because "Egypt is not then but now, conditioning the way we look at things" (80).

It is not surprising, then, that in her concern for "realistic" history, Claudia rejects a linear approach:

Chronology irritates me. There is no chronology inside my head. I am composed of a myriad Claudias who spin and mix and part like sparks of sunlight on water. The pack of cards I carry around is for ever shuffled and re-shuffled; there is no sequence, everything happens at once (2).

Where rock strata are distinct and separated, Claudia's "strata" are "not even sequential but a whirl of words and images" (14). Because of the memories conjured up by physical place, "nothing is ever lost, . . . everything can be retrieved, . . . a lifetime is not linear but instant" (68). And so to be 'realistic' history must be constructed kaleidoscopically. The experience of love confirms this: the days of Tom's leave in Cairo with Claudia are "broken up into a hundred juggled segments, each brilliant and self-contained so that the hours are no longer linear but assorted like bright sweets in a jar" (108). The experience of frontline warfare confirms it too: Tom tells Claudia that "[i]t's like the whole of life in a single appalling concentration" (101).

Fundamentally, Claudia is making the distinction

articulated by the British critic Frank Kermode in The Sense of an Ending (1967), when he differentiates between time understood as 'chronos,' the hour that inevitably passes, and time understood as 'kairos,' a period of significance in one's life (46ff). Claudia suggests that ultimately "history" and experience are on different planes, the one making sense of the past and the other speaking loudly in a voice not susceptible to constructions and analyses. Reading Tom's wartime diary as she lies close to death, Claudia says:

All I can think, when I hear your voice, is that the past is true, which both appals and uplifts me. I need it; I need you And I can only explain this by extravagance: my history and the world's. Because unless I am a part of everything I am nothing (207).

The writing of her own memoirs, in which she shows the past inhabiting the present, as well as the disjunction between personal experience and a historical narrative that "makes sense," is therefore in itself her history of the world.

In the first chapter of the book Claudia focuses upon a particular photograph which for her provides "a neat image for the relation of man to the physical world" (13). It is a photograph of an English village street, taken in 1868, in which there are no people because the time required for the exposure was too great to catch their passings. Man may tamper with the physical world but, until he does so

definitively, it will always outlast him. The central core of the book, and of Claudia's life, concerns the Egyptian desert campaign of World War II. She observes that even so fierce an engagement fails to affect the desert in any lasting way. The sand has no boundaries and is fundamentally untouched by war; the desert is "an infinite sandy rubbish-tip" for the debris of the campaign (82). Individual human life has only a fragile hold on the land, and photography, especially the early photography of extended exposures, can demonstrate that fragility.

But photography can also witness to the tenacity of emotional realities. In the desert, when Claudia first goes out as a war-correspondent, the young tank-officer Tom Southern takes a picture of her, leaning against a truck, laughing. The discomforts of the ride, the appalling casualties she observes, the whole ghastly game of war, do not cancel out the beginnings of love, nor the reality of her happiness. Many years later, it is because she writes a retrospective article about the desert campaign, which she illustrates with this photograph, that Tom's sister realizes who Claudia is and sends her the diary he was writing in his last weeks at the front.

Above everything else, this diary is an attempt to describe "what it was like" in the desert war. It is therefore a personal, experiential account of noise, blur,

fear, confusion, friendship, written by someone for whom at the time "[t]he story continues; I am still in it" (204). And it is the description of this story from inside that makes Claudia most vividly aware of the difference between such a voice and the voice of historical narrative. Being a part of history is very different from reading history. Experientially, "[h]istory is disorder" (152). Formally:

when you and I talk about history we don't mean what actually happened, do we? The cosmic chaos of everywhere, all time? We mean the tidying up of this into books, the concentration of the benign historical eye upon years and places and persons. History unravels; circumstances, following their natural inclination, prefer to remain ravelled (6).

Tom says of his diary that he is recording emotions and events "raw and untreated" of which later he will want to make sense (204). Claudia, in an inevitably different story forty years later, knows only that she cannot make sense of the material beyond its witness to the truth of the past. She has written historical narrative all her life. Now, at the close of that life, she recognizes the primacy of experience. She dies elated, watching the sun on raindrops outside her window.

Of course in this text too there are photographs which create unreality by their propensity for disjunction: the

"camera fodder" that Egypt supplies for the elderly American tourist (87); the files of cheerful soldiers' faces that "change with the eyes that view them" (104); Claudia's mother's picture of her father, handsome and moustached, betraying nothing of his agonizing death on the Somme (6/7); and supremely the movie-shots of a spectacular technicolour battle which is based loosely on the exploits of Cortez in Mexico--Claudia, to her amazement, has agreed to act as Historical Advisor in this "expensive charade" (157).

But emotional truth is accessible behind these photographic distortions. Her mother remembers her father as he lived, not as he died, and that memory has its own validity, if only in enabling her mother to survive by "retir[ing] from history" (6). Even photography which consists basically in commercial exploitation is emotionally redeemable. Claudia's sometime lover Jasper makes a television series dramatizing the history of World War II. She recognises its dual dimensions of public and private narrative, and of contemporary fictional images and past factual ones: "[f]iction is in full warm colour. . . reality is black and white." But when images appear on the screen with which she herself has emotional connections, a third dimension is introduced, which is "both more indistinct and yet clearer by far":

This dimension has smell and feel and touch . . .
. Its feelings are so sharp that Claudia gets up,

slams the television into silence and sits staring at the blank pane of glass, where the story rolls on (50).

Once the "not quite real" newsreel pictures awaken her own memories, photography has ceased to be an exploitable medium and has become a vehicle of personal truth.

In Roland Barthes' terms, Claudia experiences a 'punctum' in relation to the images, which overrides the 'studium' of their context, whether of history or of contemporary commercialism: "What I can name cannot really prick me. The incapacity to name is a good symptom of disturbance" (Camera Lucida 51). Barthes describes the 'punctum' as "a wound rising from the scene"--a kind of personal punctuation, always and essentially subjective (26). It is Claudia's final acceptance of "the incapacity to name" that brings her beyond the historical, beyond the controlling position she has almost always occupied in her life, and opens her to the epiphany of her dying vision.

She had "put [her] faith in language," declaring, "I control the world as long as I can name it" (51). She had understood truth as being "tied to words, to print, to the testimony of the page" so that "fiction can seem more enduring than reality" (6). She had said that she would have "the historian's privilege" of the last word, even though she would allow all the relevant voices to speak--many of

the incidents in the book are in fact told two or three times, from the point-of-view of different characters involved in them. She had described the power of language in "[p]reserving the ephemeral; giving form to dreams, permanence to sparks of sunlight" (9). She had recognized that language and landscape share a virtual indestructibility at the hands of human time. It is language that "tethers us to the world; without it we spin like atoms" (41). She had seen the abuse of language, akin to the manipulations of photography, in the "lunatic and fantastic" official language of warfare. But she had also known that "[s]peech regenerates itself like the landscape; words die and others are born" (68).

And now, on her deathbed, she recognizes that she too is part of a story whose language she cannot ultimately control. One of the things that old age and sickness have meant for Claudia has been an occasional loss of verbal memory, an aphasia that has terrified her. Tom writes during a night of fear in the desert war that what sets men apart from animals is that they have a story. He cannot escape into obliviousness, but he does have the ability to dream and to hope concerning future developments in his story, and this is what keeps him sane (202). Claudia has reached the point in her story where another story will go on without her. The historian's privilege of the last word goes not to her, but to the author within whose narrative Claudia

herself is contained. And the reader is left with two things: a sense of the void that is the absence of Claudia's life, and the inevitability of the world moving on: "beside the bed the radio gives the time signal and a voice starts to read the six o'clock news" (208). Claudia has become a part of the larger history she has been writing. The world is still there without her, and so are the text and the photograph.

The relationship between Claudia's private life and the story of the twentieth century resolves itself into one of coexisting planes which intersect, and which are bequeathed to the reader in words and images. Earlier in the narrative, Claudia has declared that reality survives in the words and images that portray the horrors of war--"this is what history comes down to in the end" (67). She has been describing the anticlimactic end of Jasper's raffish Russian father Sasha, and has been lamenting the fact that he did not die "respectably amid history" in a way to which one could respond with decorum:

He should have been that bent rag-clad figure with a box on its back that shuffles through the lunar landscape of blitzed Murmansk in 1942, in a photograph I once saw; he should have been that other eternally surviving anonymous grey face, crouched over the shot bodies of wife and daughter in Smolensk or Minsk or Viazma or Gzhatsk or

Rzhev (67).

Claudia is suggesting that to become historically significant may raise an individual above the reality of his unheroic life, and that the images which are preserved by photography partake in a different order of reality by virtue of their reception as symbols. Lively seems to be echoing Sontag's assertion that "[i]t is not reality that photographs make immediately accessible, but images" (On Photography 165). Photography involves a kind of invention or replacement of memory that produces an aestheticizing of reality--the 'tidying up' of cosmic chaos into a coherent and meaningful history, even if that historical narrative is most basically a description of wars and their aftermath.

But by the end of the novel Claudia has allowed that words and images may equally powerfully function in a private dimension. The meanings of the photograph Tom had taken of her in the desert, and the meanings of his diary entries addressed in hope to her, are incompatible with the meanings of the narrative Claudia knows about the desert campaigns, but they are nonetheless important and necessary to her. Her final experience of joy and well-being is visually stimulated and wordlessly experienced: an involuntary epiphany that epitomizes the sense of individual history as a kaleidoscope of moments of 'kairos' beyond which 'chronos' continues its relentless march. "Life," argues Sontag against photography, "is not about significant details,

illuminated a flash, fixed forever" (On Photography 81). It seems that Claudia--and Penelope Lively--would disagree with Sontag here: photographs can be understood to have legitimate power in both the public and the private arena because they preserve "significant details" for personal response.¹⁹ Lively uses the notion of the photograph to show both the abusive possibility of complacently rearranging the past for present convenience, and the inevitability of the past's inhabiting the present.

More than the other British novels explored here, Moon Tiger approaches an espousal of the Barthean model of photography, in which the photograph is a magical presence that can be appropriated through the 'punctum' by which it enters the spectator. Lively's emphasis on the significant moment, and on a kaleidoscopic rather than a linear structure for Claudia's "history of the world," accords well with Barthes' description of the photograph as "a certain but fugitive testimony" of "unendurable plenitude," in contrast to the fabricated narratives of history (Camera Lucida 93, 90). Something of this sense of the magic of photographic testimony is also allowed to the older and wiser Harry of Out Of This World; but there it is hedged around with warnings about the necessity for distance and perspective if the doubleness and ambiguity of the photograph are to be counteracted. This is thoroughly non-Barthean, because Barthes' approach to photographic

meaning is intensely subjective and requires the avoidance of aesthetic distance in order that the hallucinatory effect of the photograph's re-presentation of a past referent may be fully felt.

However, despite Claudia's eventual silent privileging of the visual, Penelope Lively ascribes considerable authority to the verbal ordering of history. For Lively it would seem that language authenticates itself by being personally inhabited, in much the same way that photographs can be inhabited. The most persuasive example of this linguistic magic lies in Tom Southern's diary, by whose testimony Claudia comes to understand the difference between public chronicle and private experience. For all that Tom calls his account "raw and untreated," it has been structured enough to be written down, to be given a shape and a sequence through time. Although Claudia's pronouncements about the power of language to preserve the ephemeral and enable human beings to control the world must be countered by her final recognition of the value of the wordless, nevertheless in dying she is proof of her own dictum that it is language that "tethers us to the world; without it we spin like atoms." And the novel of which she has been the heroine is proof that language outlasts the people who have spoken it.

Despite Claudia Hampton's strident personality and

satirical commentary on much that she observes, Moon Tiger, of all the novels discussed in this chapter, is the least characterized by authorial irony. The other five share a clear narrative distance from their subjects and invite the reader to a similar remove, from which to view the subject of the text, and sometimes also the text as subject, with ironic detachment. Two of the novels, Flaubert's Parrot and Other People, foreground the playing with their fictional status as a central focus of their dealing with the past. This kind of self-consciousness is typically postmodern in its emphasis on the inevitability of fictions and the essentially fabricated nature of the real. These novels also show particular awareness of the potential of photography to contain the tensions between traditional and postmodern realism, because of the photograph's nature as a trace of the real that no longer exists. Staring at the Sun, Out Of This World and Praxis all confirm the opacity of photographs, and the danger in their "capturing" someone on film and thereby freezing or controlling his or her identity. But these novels also show how photographs can have a re-presentative as much as a dislocating function if they are contextualized and viewed from a sufficient physical or emotional distance. Even in Moon Tiger photography parodies traditional mimesis by showing the inaccessibility of the past, despite the empirical presence of its traces.

For these authors, Barthes' understanding of the

photograph as "pure contingency" does not take sufficient account of its context or of its dehumanizing potential in the hands of a photographer who wants to exert control over his subject. They would favour a Sontagian position that argues not only the elusive nature of reference but also the need to counter with narrative the photograph's dangerously discontinuous way of seeing. The image needs to be understood not merely from its appearance but from the way it functions in time. However, there is a moralistic polemic behind Sontag's arguments that is foreign to these contemporary British writers, whose ethical concerns are likely to be hidden behind a screen of irony and apparent detachment. Where Sontag opposes the ethical to the aesthetic in her understanding of the possible responses to the photograph, these British novelists comprehend the aesthetic as the route to the ethical.²⁰ Only with sufficient aesthetic distance can the photograph be properly understood. This conception of the function of aesthetic distance gives complex resonances to the use of what at first seems dismissive irony. It also goes some way towards explaining why the exposing/concealing nature of the photograph, with its attachment both to traditional realism and to postmodern relativism, is so attractive to many contemporary British writers.

* * *

Notes

1. In a paper on "Margaret Drabble: The Resurrection of the English Novel" (Contemporary Literature 23 [Spring 1982]: 145-168), Michael Harper argues that postmodernism is pursuing a contemporary mode of 'realism' whose tenets are that reality is constituted by language and that the world is a text that we have always already interpreted. The technique of foregrounding fabrication is therefore a realistic gesture. To dehistoricize the term 'realism' in this way, however, seems to rob it of any general usefulness, since 'realism' comes to denote a representation of whatever the real may be understood to be by any given writer.

2. In Partial Magic: The Novel as a Self-Conscious Genre (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1975), Robert Alter distinguishes between an elaborately artful novel and one that is self-conscious on the basis of whether the artifice is employed as a technique of verisimilitude or as a testing of the ontological status of the fiction (xiii). He argues that elaborate narrative artifice may be in the service of moral and psychological realism: "Conrad and Ford give us the world through a labyrinthine narrative because that seems to them the most faithful way of representing a labyrinthine world." However, Alter implies that there is an unequivocal turning away from realism when artifice is

deliberately exposed in the presentation of "fictional form as a consciously articulated entity rather than a transparent container of 'real' contents" (x).

3. See also: Michael F. Harper, "Margaret Drabble: The Resurrection of the English Novel," Contemporary Literature 23 (Spring 1982): 145-168; A.S. Byatt, "People in Paper Houses: Attitudes to 'Realism' and 'Experiment' in English Postwar Fiction," The Contemporary English Novel, ed. Malcolm Bradbury and David Palmer (London, U.K.: Edward Arnold, 1979), 19-41; and Randall Stevenson, The British Novel since the Thirties: An Introduction (London: Batsford, 1986).

4. Historically-speaking a testing of the bounds of convention is inherent in the notion of realism, because of its commitment to individual human experience rather than to traditional practice and form (see, for instance, Ian Watt, The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding [Berkeley & Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1957], 13). On this basis one might argue that the growing tendency, from the Renaissance on, for individual experience to replace collective tradition as the ultimate arbiter of reality has its natural continuation in Harper's proposition about realism in contemporary fiction (see #1 above).

5. Julian Barnes was born in 1946 and educated in London

and at Oxford. He worked as a journalist on the New Statesman and the Sunday Times, and from 1982 to 1986 was television critic of the Observer. His first novel, Metroland, appeared in 1980. Barnes has also become a successful crime-story writer under the pseudonym of Dan Cavanagh.

6. Graham Swift was born in 1949 and educated at Cambridge and York. His first volume of short stories appeared in 1976 and his first novel in 1980. He moved to a position of international prominence with his third novel, Waterland (1983), in which the telling of a family saga provides the forum for reflections on human and geographical history and on the nature of storytelling itself.

7. Martin Amis, like Graham Swift, was born in 1949. After schooling in Britain, Spain and the U.S.A., he read English at Oxford. He worked as an editorial assistant on The Times Literary Supplement, and then as Literary Editor for the New Statesman from 1977 to 1979; he now writes for the Observer. His first novel appeared in 1974.

8. Fay Weldon, one of an influential group of contemporary feminist writers in Britain, began her career as an advertising copywriter and a television scriptwriter. Her first novel appeared in 1967.

9. Penelope Lively grew up as the child of expatriate British parents in Egypt, but settled in England after World War II and read history at Oxford. Although she had a successful career as a children's writer in the early seventies, she did not start to write for adults until 1977. Moon Tiger won the 1987 Booker Prize.

10. Robert Alter suggests that radical scepticism about the relation between language and truth can lead in one of two directions. It can issue in despair about fiction, on the basis that all writing is lying, or in new vitality through the medium of parody, which "explodes the absurdities" of previous literary conventions (Partial Magic 158). See Janice Kulyk Keefer's comment on Britain's "Age of Parody," pp. above.

11. One of David Lodge's criticisms of the book is that Barnes sends Jean around the world "collecting wry little verbal snapshots of her impressions."

12. Beech could be said to move from one side to the other of the opposition Ansel Adams set up between the predatory "taking a picture" and the sympathetic "making a picture" (Adams' Introduction to Portfolio One, San Francisco, 1948; reprinted in Nathan Lyons, ed., Photographers on Photography [Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1966], 31-2).

13. Swift's treatment of photography here is similar to that of the Canadian novelist Margaret Atwood in Surfacing (1972; Markham, Ont.: PaperJacks, 1973). See Chapter Two.

14. In arguing thus, I am differing from Fredric Jameson, who suggests that "distance in general (including 'critical distance' in particular) has very precisely been abolished in the new space of postmodernism" so that we are incapable of distantiation from the image ("Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," New Left Review 146 [July/Aug. 1984]: 87). His concern that the past "has become a vast collection of images, a multitudinous photographic simulacrum" (66) is precisely what these British novelists appear to be countering in their search for perspectives in space and time--and in their use of photography. They take the photograph to be a moment of potential critical distance par excellence, from which--if the distance can be made potent--they may rescue meaning for the present. The photograph does inevitably present the 'other,' even when that 'other' is the self-as-other.

15. Photography was known as 'the black art' in the mid-nineteenth century not only because of its apparently magical abilities, but also because the nitrate of silver bath used in developing caused black stains on the hands and clothes of careless operators (Gernsheim, History of Photography 232).

16. In a provocative paper concerning Weldon as a writer of ambivalently realist/postmodern novels, Alan Wilde argues that these novels share poststructuralism's "fascination with crisis and extremity but not its Derridean faith in the endless dissemination of meaning" ("Bold, But Not Too Bold': Fay Weldon and the Limits of Poststructuralist Criticism," Contemporary Literature 29.3 [Fall 1988]: 418). Wilde suggests, moreover, that Praxis is the "most confused and confusing of Weldon's novels" because it leaves the reader "uncertain of whether it is irony or sympathy that is called for" towards Praxis herself (410).

17. Praxis would probably have preferred photographs to be of the early calotype variety, of which Punch wrote in 1847, "One of the advantages or disadvantages, as the case may be, of many photographic portraits is that they fade away by degrees, and thus keep pace with those fleeting impressions or feelings under which it is sometimes usual for one to ask another for his or her miniature" (Punch vol.xii [1847]: 143, cited in Gernsheim, History of Photography 175).

18. Penelope Lively in discussion during Toronto's "Authors at Harbourfront," October 1988. One might, however, juxtapose David Lodge's wry comment: "History may be, in a philosophical sense, a fiction, but it does not feel like that when we miss a train or somebody starts a war" (The

Novelist at the Crossroads, and Other Essays on Fiction and Criticism [Ithaca, New York: Cornell Univ. Press, 1971], 33). From this perspective, as Bernard Bergonzi also argues, the assumption that history is just another kind of fiction is "unhelpful, indeed untenable" (Bergonzi, "Fictions of History," Bradbury & Palmer 45).

19. Compare Henri Cartier-Bresson, in 1952, declaring that "we [photographers] are out to capture the fugitive moment, [and] to preserve life in the act of living" (Introduction to The Decisive Moment [New York: Simon & Schuster, 1952]; reprinted in Lyons 42-51).

20. Jefferson Hunter argues convincingly in Image and Word that the aesthetic can offer an alternative vision of the moral. If the desire to present people as individuals must lead to showing expressiveness as well as typicality, then aesthetic considerations can render a photographed subject an individual equal to the viewer (159-60).

* * *

Chapter Two. Photographic Magic in Contemporary
Canadian Fiction.

The mind has become a dark chamber, or camera
obscura, and its pictures are reflections of what
is at once physical and human nature.

Northrop Frye, "Haunted by Lack of Ghosts"



Frontispiece from Diane Schoemperlen, Double Exposures

While contemporary British fiction needs to be understood against the backdrop of a long-established tradition, Canadian fiction has only in the last twenty years been generally understood, even by many Canadians, to be valuable in its own right, apart from considerations of colonial response, collusive or reactionary, to its European heritage. The literary importance of cultural nationalism and the search for Canadian 'identity' was, around the time of Canada's centennial celebrations, overworked to the point of cliché, and continues to maintain a significant hold over the popular imagination. In her speech on the occasion of presenting the 1989 Governor General's Awards in Montreal, for instance, the then-incumbent Jeanne Sauvé referred to the special merit of Canadian books which "offer us an image of ourselves." Literature, she implied, should embody a coherent, unifying vision.

But the growing confidence of Canadians with regard to the outside world has led to the freedom to assume a less self-consciously nationalistic posture in the arts. The inner world of the imagination may be explored in ways that are distinctively Canadian by virtue of the psychological and geographical environment from which they spring, rather

than because they are vocally nationalistic. Thus the call of the literary avant-garde may be more clearly and comfortably heard, as it champions the notions of difference, fictionality and a variety of 'histories,' rather than of one self-evident, 'true' history of Canadian literature. Indeed this call is not only strident but even, on occasion, somewhat peevish. Northrop Frye, at one time accused of ignoring Canadian literature altogether (see Mathews 119ff), is now attacked as the arch-proponent of the concept of an essential relationship between national value and the value of representation. Frye, it is said, defines as 'classics' those books which interrelate national consciousness, literary history and an idealized form of mimetic orthodoxy (Lecker, "Canonization").

It is important to listen to non-canonical voices, particularly in a country where the canon has itself been so speedily contrived by the will of publishers and educational institutions. A readiness to ascribe value to traditional mimesis does seem to have been more typical of Canadian educational institutions than of the writers such institutions have canonized. Attempts to define a Canadian 'canon' have therefore been accused of privileging linearity and conventional realism, and have been dismissed by some as a self-conscious enshrinement of conservative values. However, the situation is not as monochromatic as such critics would suggest. Consider, for instance, the 1978

Conference on the Canadian Novel.

This Conference, which produced a list of "the hundred most important Canadian novels," is ridiculed by the left-wing as a blatant attempt to define as literary history what embodies the values and position of the academic and political establishment.¹ It is true that Malcolm Ross, who drew up the ballot for the novels, declared among his aims the production of "a guide to those interested in the masterworks of our literary tradition" (Steele 158); Ross hoped to determine for the first time of those novels "which have established themselves as major works, or Canadian classics" (156). However, the Conference contained a wide diversity of opinion, even concerning some aspects of what it was conferring about. As Charles Steele expresses it in his editing of the proceedings, there emerged in discussion "a profound general unease with the entire list-making exercise" (149). Ross himself was at pains during the Conference to point out that this list was to be understood as "tentative and merely experimental," intended to provide guidance for teachers and publishers as to "which one hundred Canadian novels seemed most useful in the classroom" (137). Moreover, the hundred novels listed included some that can hardly be called traditionally mimetic--for instance, Sheila Watson's The Double Hook, Rudy Wiebe's The Temptations of Big Bear, Hubert Aquin's Prochain Episode, and Marie-Claire Blais' Mad Shadows.²

Some critics had already recognized this diversity within the Canadian novel, and had even called into question its earlier designation as predominantly realistic. In a seminal 1977 paper "Possessing the Land: Notes on Canadian Fiction," George Woodcock argued persuasively that "realism as ordinarily defined (in terms of either Godwin's 'things as they are' or Zola's naturalism or the Marxist's 'social realism') [has] not played a very significant role in Canadian fiction" (72). He suggested that realist techniques have more often been used in the service of some alternative primary element, such as moral drama, parable, satire, or a reinterpretation of history, which makes use as much of fantasy as of realism.

Woodcock went so far as to identify the main movement of Canadian fiction as one that bypasses realism:

largely because Canadians, faced with the wilderness on one side and a dangerously powerful neighbor on the other, had little doubt as to the actual nature of their predicament; what they needed was the combination of mythology and ideology that would enable them to emerge from mere escapism and present a countervision more real than actuality ("Possessing the Land" 73).

He argued that a national consciousness was first and most clearly expressed not so much through a naturalist realism

as through the highly-coloured formalism of the paintings of the Group of Seven. Similarly, he understood devices of fictional verisimilitude to be used for purposes that are essentially nonrealistic in intent. He went on to point out a contemporary tendency to merge history into myth and to "break down actuality and recreate it in terms of the kind of nonliteral rationality that belongs to dreams." He described novels which function in this way as embodying "the difference between realism and a reality that is not merely material, between literal credibility and imaginative authenticity" ("Possessing the Land" 95).

As Woodcock implies, contemporary writers in Canada as elsewhere write from within the consciousness that even the most "realistic" writing is fictive. Geoff Hancock expresses it thus: "Reality becomes what is passed on in the telling" ("Magic or Realism: The Marvellous in Canadian Fiction" 33). This awareness of the power of fiction is an essential ingredient in the notion of magic realism, an oxymoronic generic description that has come to be applied as much to a wide range of contemporary Canadian literature--writing by Jack Hodgins, Leon Rooke, Michael Ondaatje, Timothy Findley and even Alice Munro--as to the work of Latin American writers such as García Márquez, Cortázar and Borges. Magic realism, it has been suggested, seems to be closely linked with the perception of "living on the margin."³ It seems to be more characteristic of a

considerable body of contemporary Canadian fiction than does conventional mimetic realism. In some senses it can be understood as a type of the postmodern, insofar as it combines reality with fantasy in the kind of synthesis that John Barth proposes as a programme for a postmodern "literature of replenishment" ("Literature of Replenishment" 69).⁴ Magic realism has also been described specifically as a mode of "post-colonial discourse," because in a post-colonial culture disjunction is structurally present in the historical raw material (Jameson, "Magic Realism in Film" 311), and the characteristic dynamic of magic realist fiction may be located in its suspension between two disjunctive narrative modes, neither of which can come fully into being (Slemon 11).⁵ Woodcock's distinction between "literal credibility and imaginative authenticity" is embodied in magic realism's "extraordinary feats and mysterious characters in an ordinary place" (Hancock, "Magic Realism, or, the Future of Fiction," 5). The miraculous events and symbolic characters of myth and fairytale may be presented in the realistic style of a nineteenth-century European novel. This juxtaposition of realism and fantasy has been claimed to mirror the superimposition of European culture on a North American landscape (Stephen Guppy, cited in Hancock, "Magic or Realism: The Marvellous in Canadian Fiction" 26).

Hancock, the leading apologist for magic realism in

Canada, describes magic realism as "go[ing] beyond copying reality to inventing it" ("Magic or Realism" 27). One might want to argue that all fiction cannot help but do this, and certainly magic realism is dogged by difficulties of definition.⁶ Hancock understands magic realism to have grass-roots origins in storytelling and legend. He sees it as characterized by hyperbolic descriptions and arresting images which declare its links with oral traditions and with the folkloric notion that "[w]hat is most marvellous is also most human" ("Magic or Realism" 32). Although these characteristics will be displayed by some of the writers explored in this chapter, they are foreign to others; and Alice Munro, at least, would argue that what is most human is also most marvellous.⁷ However, a deliberate authorial foregrounding of the magical as well as the realistic within a single tale does create a specific kind of fiction, a kind which seems to answer to the particular circumstances of geographical and psychological inheritance in a vast post-colonialist country like Canada.

This is a far cry from the "academic, sometimes arcane, usually middle-class" writing described by W.H. New as typical of Canadian fiction pre-1960 ("Fiction" 233). But in a piece on "Canadian Monsters" published in 1977, Margaret Atwood argues that "[t]he North, the Wilderness, has traditionally been used in Canadian literature as a symbol for the world of the unexplored, the unconscious, the

romantic, the mysterious, and the magical." She goes on to suggest that in Canadian literature of past decades there are more monsters than has usually been supposed, and that these often originate in native Indian and Eskimo myths (100-01). There is sufficient evidence, Atwood concludes, to vouch for "a mass of dark intimations in the Canadian literary soul" and for a picture of Canadian literary history remote from the vision of Canada as "a dull place, devoid of romantic interest and rhetorical excesses Unmagical" (121, 99).

After all, as Jorge Luis Borges suggested in his 1932 essay "Narrative Art and Magic," the narrative process itself can be understood as magical, because the writer is not bound by cause-and-effect progression but may write anything he can convince his reader to believe.⁸ In an important sense the site of the magic is in the reader. As Hancock puts it, "The 'truth' of fiction is not in the meaning or the verisimilitude of the details; truth is something that completes the reader's apprehension" ("Magic or Realism" 35). For Timothy Findley and Margaret Laurence, this notion of readerly interpretation as a kind of magic is particularly significant; Alice Munro understands magic to inhabit the objective world in a more definite way. In either case, the evocation of the mysterious in the workaday world projects a measure of otherness into the reader's understanding which leaves her alive to the regenerating possibilities of "a

reality that is not merely material." That magic realism is a significant force in contemporary Canadian fiction seems indisputable. The relationship of magic realism to the particular magic of photography, however, has been largely unexplored, although it has recently become a matter of comment that contemporary Canadian writers make remarkably frequent use of the notion of the photograph.⁹

It is instructive to return at this point to Roland Barthes, who has articulated a specific link between realism and photographic magic. Calling himself a "realist," Barthes testifies in Camera Lucida to the photograph's hallucinatory magic, its "certificate of presence" in which "the power of authentication exceeds the power of representation" because the represented object has been there, but is not now. Realists, says Barthes, "do not take the photograph for a 'copy' of reality, but for an emanation of past reality: a magic, not an art" (88). His interest in magic rather than in mimesis has links to the notion of magic realism insofar as both are concerned with the power of realities other than those of the empirical present.

Barthes locates the specific power of the photograph in its witness to time: "The important thing is that the photograph possesses an evidential force, and that its testimony bears not on the object but on time" (88-9). Although Susan Sontag also understands the photograph as

magical, it is precisely in this area of its relationship to time that she most profoundly parts company with Barthes. She allows that, like the painted or sculpted image in primitive societies, the image of the photograph may be taken to participate in the reality of the object depicted (On Photography 155). In fact it will have greater authority than a painted image because it is "a material vestige of its subject," a physical extension of that subject. However, Sontag's preoccupation is with the possibilities and dangers of gaining power over this subject through its material vestiges; she collapses time into the present because she understands the photograph as "testif[ying] to time's relentless melt" (15). For Barthes, on the other hand, the photograph signals the "vertigo of time defeated," both because it sustains the past in the present in a way that invites personal response, and because it shows as alive those who are already dead (Camera Lucida 96-7).

The magic of magic realism is wider than that of the photograph, in that it involves all that is hyperbolic, extraordinary, fantastic, absurd, and mysterious. But 'magic' in itself implies an ability to loosen the bonds of everyday time and space, and here lies its powerful attraction. Where magic realist texts suggest possibilities of otherness, the magic of photography affirms the presence of the past. A reading of several specific Canadian fictions of the last two decades which make use of the photographic

motif demonstrates the power of the various temporalities of magic to provide a "countervision more real than reality." One might look initially at the fictions of an older and a younger contemporary practitioner, both of them presently understood as minor figures, whose writing may, by that very token, be seen as typical of a general preoccupation.

The strictly mimetic seems not to characterize the stories of even an apparent traditionalist like Norman Levine. On his own admission he appreciates understatement and is attracted to the silent story implied in appearances. His pared-down, minimalist style with very simple sentence-structure and frequent one-sentence paragraphs foregrounds the appearances of things rather than their representation in words. He uses the notion of the photograph to present an alternative, past appearance which must be held in balance with that of the present.

The title of Levine's 1979 collection Thin Ice suggests the precarious nature of this temporal balance. In "A Writer's Story" Mrs Burroughs' photograph of herself before her marriage, as a teacher with her class, reduces her to tears because it contrasts the past days of her effectiveness and happiness with her present dependence and loneliness. She can manipulate the rich stories of her past to amuse and satisfy; the photograph, on the other hand, simply presents what was, without the softening of present

interpretation. The narrator of "In Lower Town" expresses relief that, in the neat and ordered world of his mother, her photographs are all in a jumble; his experience of revisiting the areas where he had grown up is of the confused jostling of past and present images, and he wants to feel that his mother is not outside this vital muddle. But she wishes the photographs to be thrown out at her death, so that there may be a final restitution of the appearance of absolute order. Hubert Labelle, the alcoholic photographer of "By a Frozen River," likes to take people's photographs in their own homes in order to fulfil his sexual as well as his financial needs; his pathetic older wife inadvertently acts as the procuress of custom of both kinds. Just as his dapper appearance is belied by his wretched home life, so the serenity of Labelle's photographs belies the conditions of stress under which they are produced. Photographs for Levine, then, represent the coexistence of apparent order with an underworld of confusion and strain, often resulting from past disorder. They are emblematic of his own spare writing style, where a determined lack of elaboration in appearance both conceals and implies complication beneath the surface.

In the fiction of a younger, more clearly nontraditional writer like Diane Schoemperlen, whose first book appeared in 1984, photography can be used overtly to provide a countervision. Double Exposures makes play with

the expectations of the reader/viewer by juxtaposing text and photographic reproduction on every double page with only occasional textually explicit connections, and sometimes with overt contrast between image and text.¹⁰ Some of the photographs are blurred; the frontispiece and the final photograph are in fact doubly, or even triply, exposed. All come from the family collection of Schoemperlen's parents; the reader/viewer who is given this information on the book-jacket is apparently expected to suspend her knowledge of it in reading the story of a fictional family over several generations. Textual information is given non-chronologically in a variety of times and voices, and salient facts (such as, for instance, the suicide of the narrator's half-brother) are withheld until late in the book. The resultant interplay of text and image, each with an ambiguous relationship to both writer and reader, creates the quasi-magical effect of a "double exposure" of significance, time and memory. The final page of the text describes the narrator's intention to visit her parents when her baby is born: the adjacent photograph is a double-exposure of her mother and best friend (long since dead) overlaid with the image of her half-brother (also dead). She predicts that her parents will greet her "like mannequins," but that later, "[w]hen I face them beside the new white fridge in the bright blue kitchen, I am going to understand about camouflage and they too will change back into themselves" (101). Her understanding of camouflage is

the shaping force that guides the choice of pictures and words in the book. Photographs and text, both, may conceal as much as they reveal. Their interplay over time exposes the misrepresentations of each.

This interplay of photograph with text, and an attendant awareness of the magical power of photography, are also evident in the fictions of a number of contemporary writers in Canadian literature who are central both geographically and in terms of recognized status.¹¹ Margaret Atwood, for instance, who has been a key figure in the conscious shaping of a Canadian corpus, makes central thematic use of both magic and photography in her writing. It has been suggested that she is fundamentally concerned with the quest for wisdom and self-knowledge, a quest whose affinity with the fascination of magic is obvious. Moreover, in illustrating Atwood's attraction to the transformational motif of fairytales, one critic has argued that Atwood uses magical figures as "transformative, irreducible fictive equations" in her early novels (VanSpanckeren 11). Atwood herself has said that "Grimms' Fairy Tales was the most influential book I ever read" (Struthers interview 20). Atwood's dominant themes have been defined by another critic as "tenacious survival and constant metamorphosis" (Woodcock, "Metamorphosis and Survival" 141). A third reader, pointing out that "[s]carcely a poem of Atwood's does not in some way allude to magic or sorcery," suggests

that her use of a highly developed art of metamorphosis has substantial as well as formal ends. He asserts that "[m]agic substitutes chance for cause, synchronicity for causality," and argues that Atwood uses such a reversal of traditional realist narrative formations to demystify various "invisible aspects of contemporary culture" (Mandel 63).

Eli Mandel also puts the case that Atwood's "consistent and obsessive use of reduplicating images" as well as her transforming images of journey and spirit are "techniques of demystification" (56). By making visible what has been invisible, such images function in the same way as Atwood's words themselves, to demystify the ghosts of the imagination and to reverse the "process of devastation" by which experience has been derealized into internalized mystery (59). Mandel sees this demystification as the means by which "a series of themes of major cultural concern develops through the language of the ghost story" (60). He makes overt connection between the place of photographs in this process and the place of magic: "At one level, this is a trick, a kind of insane phenomenology, a play with duplication (photographs, say); at another, it is a form of magic (one psychological term for which is synchronicity), or the occult, or shamanism . . ." (60). The primary example Mandel offers is that of Atwood's much-discussed poem "This is a Photograph of Me," from The Circle Game (1966).

A fresh look at the poem may reveal further complexities in Atwood's use of the photographic image. The poem's movement parallels the looking of the viewer. What at first seems smeared becomes, "as you scan / it," something like a branch, leading the eye to a small frame house on a slope, and, in the background, a lake and hills. The second half of the poem, bracketed, focuses on the speaker, drowned "in the lake, in the center / of the picture, just under the surface." The poem ends before she becomes visible to the reader, but the structure as well as the overt statement of the poem imply that visibility is to come, just as it did in the first half: "[i]f you look long enough, / eventually / you will be able to see me." This sense of time and space extending beyond the confines of the poem reverses the traditional expectation of the lyric poem as a distillation of time and space. Atwood appropriates the photograph's magical representation of the past and extends it into the future through the agency of the spectator. But the extension has nothing to do with a Sontagian notion of contextualization by narrative. Rather, Atwood's concern is with the discovery of a Barthean 'punctum' by virtue of a prolonged and careful looking at a single image.

Another poem in The Circle Game makes explicit a tension that has been noted in Atwood's use of photographic images in her novels: the tension between the camera as an agent of fixity and the photograph as a potential source of

revelation. "Camera" disparages the "camera man" whose unlovable semi-existence involves him in collecting souvenirs of time, organized instants that he has arranged in front of his glass eye. Atwood plays with the notion of "time's relentless melt" (Sontag, On Photography 15): even the photograph will dissolve eventually. But she imagines its dissolution being caused more immediately, by its failure to stop time even at the instant of the camera's clicking. And so, in a later viewing of the events of the photograph, "there has been a hurricane," and:

that small black speck
travelling towards the horizon
at almost the speed of light

is me

(46)

Like "This is a Photograph of Me," "Camera" is made up of halves that complement one another, the definition of the first being understood beneath the fracture of the second. In "Camera," the second part of the poem initially undermines the first, telling the reader and the photographer that instants are untrappable; but this second part also suggests a dynamic to the photographic image. If the image partakes in the reality of the subject photographed, then there is latent within that image the possibility of change. If there is change in the subject, then there is held within the image change that a careful

viewer can intuit. As the photographed relationship has disintegrated, so has the photograph. The attic portrait in Wilde's The Picture of Dorian Gray offers an eerie parallel. A photograph may also have more knowledge of the subject than the subject does of herself. "Daguerreotype taken in old age," from The Journals of Susanna Moodie (1970), depends on this kind of imagistic gnosticism.

Although it has been commonplace to see Atwood's use of photographic images as consistently negative, emphasizing "the depersonalizing, fixing nature of the photograph that can still the temporal, living flux"¹², this is to ignore the magic power of the image that has, as it were, a life and reality of its own. "Girl and Horse, 1928," in Procedures for Underground (1970), encapsulates just this tension between the fixed and the changing. Like "This is a Photograph of Me," it relies on the notion that not everything that is present in the photograph is immediately available to the viewer: its other side, its underside, will reveal a fuller reality. It has been suggested that Atwood's photographs "not only dramatize the fragmented self but also initiate the process of a metamorphosis which seems to continue even beyond the 'frame' of the book" (Sharon Wilson 51). This doubleness is particularly evident in Surfacing (1972), Atwood's second novel, and one in which photography plays a major role.

An appropriately enigmatic formulation with which to approach Surfacing, a novel that has engendered quite opposite opinions as to its ultimate mode of utterance, may perhaps be found in Atwood's poem "Projected Slide of an Unknown Soldier," from Procedures for Underground. "The darkness in the open mouth / uttered itself, pushing / aside the light"--Atwood's soldier in this poem cannot tell anything about himself except that, in his photograph, the darkness is uttering itself--whether in control or in total absence of control. And yet it is with the notion of uttering that the poem ends, rather than with the notion of ambiguity. While Surfacing has been commonly understood as a novel 'about' the search for identity, whether personal or national, there has been profound disagreement as to the significance of its ending. Does the narrator, after her descent into a primitive awareness, surface to transformation as a self-conscious human being, or does her surfacing corrupt the romantic archetype by returning her unredeemed to a world of darkness?¹³ The use of the photographic image in Surfacing suggests that the articulation of such an opposition may be beside the point.

It is true, on the one hand, that Surfacing shows the camera as an agent of fixity and depersonalization. David's sadistic desire to film his wife Anna nude so that he can juxtapose the image with that of a tortured heron, strung upside down by its feet, is satisfied only after he exacts

Anna's agreement by pinning her upside down over his shoulder. The camera trained upon her is "like a bazooka or a strange instrument of torture" (136). David's whole project of making a movie called "Random Samples" involves shooting images of domination over and destruction of the natural world--whether in as innocuous a task as felling trees or in the commercialization of stuffed moose dressed as American tourists. He himself is "an imposter, a pastiche" out of touch with his own reality (152). One critic describes his relationship with Anna as representative of "the pornographic inversion of the romantic identity," in which prince and princess are replaced with playboy and pin-up girl (St Andrews 96-7). In the alien world of civilization where the narrator imagines people who are "halfway to machine" (Surfacing 184), David and Anna are a fair way along in the evolutionary process that involves "atrophy of the heart" (St Andrews 96).

David as the hunter shooting with a camera is not the only example of a depersonalizing use of photography in the novel. The narrator remembers the highschool textbook in which "the only pictures of naked bodies it was judged proper for us to see" were those of "cretins and people with thyroid deficiencies, the crippled and deformed, the examples, with black oblongs across their eyes like condemned criminals" (76-7). The scrapbook of her later childhood contains no drawings, only photographs of "ladies"

in advertisements cut out of magazines, and some of women's dresses with no bodies in them (91). And finally it seems probable that the fact that her drowned father had heavy photographic equipment round his neck was responsible at least for his body's not being found sooner, and perhaps even for his death (157).

The narrator describes her mother's photographic "logbook" of her children as "successive incarnations of me preserved and flattened like flowers pressed in dictionaries" (69). Later, when she has destroyed the albums, she tries to imagine what it was like to be her mother, collecting her children's faces in "meticulous records that allowed her to omit the other things, the pain and isolation . . ." (190). Photographs had a controlling and distancing function for her mother. And yet that is not their only function. Surfacing draws a distinction between the fake past and the real past to which photography can bear fruitful witness. The fabricated past is what the narrator has lived by since her abortion: a "faked album" of memories she has pieced together, "scrapbook, collage, pasting over the wrong parts" (144). When she first wants to try to discover at what point she stopped feeling, stopped being an integrated human being with head and body united at the neck, she looks through her mother's photograph album. "I watched myself grow larger I was in most of the pictures, shut in behind the paper; or not me but the

missing part of me" (108)--the only part of her that could really live. So the "successive incarnations" may be flattened, but they are not without authority. Something within them is palpably alive, with a life the narrator is conscious of having lost. And the absence of certain photographs is also, in retrospect, highly significant: there are none to bear witness to a wedding, a husband, a baby, because these things were never there.

Once the discovery of her father's drowned body reawakens her ability to feel, the narrator destroys both David's film, unwinding it into the lake, and the photographs of herself and her parents, burning them to ashes. But to understand both these actions as simply a condemnation of photographic depersonalization is too sweeping. The narrator's state-of-mind, and therefore the rationale for her behaviour, have changed from one occasion to the other. The action of destroying David's tapes is clearly altruistic, an attempt to save Anna from the half-death of her victimization by David. The action of burning her own photographs comes later, at the start of her descent into primitivism, after the others have left her alone on the island and she is waiting to encounter the spirits of her parents. She wants to cancel out all of her past existence, the good and the bad--not only the compromising work she has been doing as an illustrator of fairy tales, but also even the totemic pictograph which she

had felt to be a guiding gift from her mother: everything must be "translated" (177). In burning the photographs, she is specifically burning time:

the sequence of my mother's life, the confining photographs. My own faces curl, blacken, the imitation mother and father change to flat ashes. It is time that separates us, I was a coward, I would not let them into my age, my place. Now I must enter theirs (177).

Their "place" is now timeless, immaterial, for they exist only in spirit. Once the narrator has encountered both of them, she is freed not only of them but also of the extreme responses she has been having to her environment, and she can re-enter her own time.

Wholeness for her means the ability to see brokenness. Of her ex-lover she can now say:

He was neither of the things I believed, he was only a normal man, middle-aged, second-rate, selfish and kind in the average proportions: but I was not prepared for the average, its needless cruelties and lies (189).

Her new sense of integration affects even her attitude to "the pervasive menace, the Americans": "[t]hey exist, they're advancing, they must be dealt with, but possibly they can be watched and predicted and stopped without being copied" (189). It is this presence of hope alongside the

absence of gods ("[t]hey've receded, back to the past, inside the skull, is it the same place") that defines living "in the usual way." She accepts the impossibility of "total salvation" with a kindly humanitarianism, and with the determination "to refuse to be a victim" who believes herself to be powerless and innocuous. There must be a new beginning in her relationship with Joe which involves the acceptance of possible failure, but which is based on trust in the potential for healthy growth: "he is only half-formed, and for that reason I can trust him" (192).

The novel closes on the narrator "tense[d] forward, towards the demands and the questions, though my feet do not move yet," and around her the natural world that no longer makes demands: "The lake is quiet, the trees surround me, asking and giving nothing" (192). As she has become conscious of self-integration, she is now about to step into social integration. Her earlier fear of being no more alive than a photographic negative (111) is overcome through her rediscovery of emotion and her choice to move towards the person she had earlier described as "a centre of darkness, my shadow" (147). Joe is half-formed, their relationship is half-formed, but the halves will meet: the story ends with a half-developed print and a future orientation, "a metamorphosis which seems to continue even beyond the 'frame' of the book" (Sharon Wilson 51).¹⁴

Sherrill Grace argues that Atwood works to break down the stasis of mutually exclusive dichotomies (culture/nature, self/other) by offering a system that embodies "dualities understood as mutually interdependent aspects of a continuum of relationship, functioning dialectically and modelled upon natural life processes" ("Articulating the 'Space Between'" 13). In this system, photography can be seen to embody just such interdependent dualities: time stopped and time preserved, the self fragmented and the self authenticated, life captured and life recognized as powerful behind and beyond the photographic image. The magic of photography affirms the presence of the past and, unlike the pictograph, it can never be dismissed simply as wish-fulfilment because the non-existence of the subject means the impossibility of a photograph.

Photography maps time. It can also map space. Journeying to the island at the beginning of Surfacing involves travelling through "nothing but a tangled maze": "On a map or in an aerial photograph the water pattern radiates like a spider, but in a boat you can see only a small part of it, the part you're in" (31). Everything depends on the point of view. A photograph itself requires physical perspective to be read properly: if you put your eye down close it disintegrates into grey dots (98). The story of the novel is the story of the narrator's revisiting

both time and space, becoming her own camera and discovering, finally, a midpoint of perspective from which to see the patterns she has missed through the distorted lens of fear. The suggestion is that her re-entry into the world after the end of the book will be in appearance a compromise but in essence a perspective on interdependent dualities. As with a photograph, it may be difficult to distinguish between "captivity in any of its forms" and "a new freedom" (192). Perhaps they are different perspectives on the same human situation, different ways of holding together the past and the future.

Grace argues that "[t]o read Atwood correctly is to understand her as breaking imprisoning circles, not as resolving (cancelling or transcending) polarities altogether" (13). The breaking of the imprisoning code of photography is a constant thread in Atwood's novels, achieved in part by her insistence on photography's magical authority as a witness to the past and a vehicle of the power of the photographic subject. In Atwood's latest novel, Cat's Eye (1988), Elaine Risley, the narrator, confesses that she has "never got used to the Queen being grown up." Risley went through grade school under the watchful eye of a photograph of the Princess Elizabeth as a Girl Guide of fourteen; and though "[t]he Queen has had grandchildren since, discarded thousands of hats, grown a bosom and (heresy to think it) the beginning of a double chin," Elaine

insists that "None of this fools me. She's in there somewhere, that other one" (399). The inescapable presence and power of the past in the present, of which photography is emblematic, is, in this novel too, the major source of tension and transformation.

This suggestiveness in the photograph is identified as its saving grace by Susan Sontag, when she writes that "[p]hotographs, which cannot themselves explain anything, are inexhaustible invitations to deduction, speculation and fantasy." She goes on: "The ultimate wisdom of the photographic image is to say: There is the surface. Now think--or rather feel, intuit--what is beyond it, what the reality must be like if it looks this way" (On Photography 23). She privileges narrative as the means to understanding, because narrative explains appearances and explores the temporality of function. For Atwood, on the other hand, an appropriation of the photograph's magical representation of the past and extension of it into the future is not a matter of function so much as of the continuation of identity. This concern is more akin to Roland Barthes' fascination with photographs as surfaces which magically attest to an intransigent reality and resist interpretation into anything other than their own "pure contingency" (Camera Lucida 28). But there is perhaps no Canadian writer whose vision is as closely akin to Barthes', and as much at odds with Sontag's, as Alice Munro.

Munro's concern with the 'thingness' of things is well known. She has spoken of "a kind of magic" about everything; she tells Hancock, "Even totally commonplace things . . . are . . . endlessly interesting in their physical reality . . . they seem to mean something way beyond themselves" ("Interview" 101). Though Munro is reticent to specify in what this meaning might consist, she seems to suggest that objects are by nature symbolic, bathed with significance beyond mere functionality. Woodcock describes her technique as imagist, in that the image does not merely present itself: "[i]t reverberates with the power of its associations, and even with the intensity of its own isolated and illuminated presence" (Northern Spring 134). No surface is mere surface, because the more vividly a surface can be seen the more light shines from it to illuminate, not only itself, but also itself in relation to the world around it. This kind of intensified realism that is not simply mimetic but suggestive of the universal is what has led Woodcock and others to describe Munro as a magic realist--not as Hancock defines the term, to mean the writer who creates a self-sufficient and extraordinary world alongside the everyday one, but rather as a writer who understands the attempt at representation in itself to be a tangling with magic. For Munro the site of magic is not in the writer or the reader, but in the object of perception. Her use of photographic images springs from her belief in

this mysterious authority of appearances. Perhaps she would concur with Edward Weston's belief that the camera eye is to be used to produce "a heightened sense of reality--a kind of super-realism that reveals the vital essence of things" ("What is Photographic Beauty?" Lyons 154).¹⁵

Munro has on several occasions expressed an avid personal interest in photography. When he interviewed her for Canadian Fiction Magazine on the eve of the publication of The Moons of Jupiter (1982), Geoff Hancock suggested to her that "the formal technical processes of using a camera are remarkably similar to the way you use your prose," and he asked whether she tries to "render a scene as a photograph might." Munro replied, "Well, I see the scene. I see it awfully clearly. And I want the reader to see it the way I see it" (Hancock, "Interview" 107). She has described the typical initial impetus for her writing a story as pictorial: a preliminary picture will "generate some other images and attract them like a magnet. Things stick to it. Anecdotes and details" (Hancock, "Interview" 104). This fascination with appearances is not only fundamental to Munro's inspiration; it seems even to inform her choice of narrative form.

Munro is unashamedly a short-story writer and not a novelist. "What on earth," she asks, "is this feeling that somehow things have to connect or they have to be part of a

larger whole?" For her, life is not to be understood in terms of progress. Rather:

"There are just flashes of things we know and find out I like looking at people's lives over a number of years, without continuity. Like catching them in snapshots . . . I don't see that people develop and arrive somewhere. I just see people living in flashes. From time to time"

(Hancock, "Interview" 98).

The stories people relate about themselves will therefore change over time, as people make different "editions" of their lives. And although "none of these stories will seem to connect," all of them will be real to the teller (Hancock, "Interview" 89,94).

For the writer, the implications of wanting to catch people in snapshots concern both structure and perspective. At the end of the final story of Something I've Been Meaning To Tell You (1974), the narrator describes looking back over the stories of the book: "Now I look at what I have done and it is like a series of snapshots, like the brownish snapshots with fancy borders that my parents' old camera used to take" (246). Mostly the pictures have "come out clear enough," but the analogy with photography holds even through what she perceives to be her failures of perspective. She has used what tricks she knows, in her attempt to capture her mother, but she has been

unsuccessful--the picture seems indistinct, like a photograph out-of-focus. When the tricks work, it is "an act of magic," as in the "[l]ovely tricks, honest tricks" of Hugo's story about Dotty in "Material" (43). But the magic depends on the clarity of a certain distance, just as the surface of a photographic subject can be so close to the lens that the camera is unable to process it satisfactorily.

The story "The Turkey Season," in The Moons of Jupiter (1982), focuses Munro's interest in surfaces upon the impenetrability of a certain face. Within her stories the notion of an image, stilled and passive, is often to be held in tension with that of another image with which it seems to be in contradiction. This particular story centres on the tension between the photograph and the photographer, the image and the other side of the lens. At Christmas-time the barn workers gather to have their photograph taken by the foreman, Herb Abbott. At least, the narrator deduces that he must have been the photographer because he is not in the picture, and "he was the one who could be trusted to know or to learn immediately how to manage anything new," like a flash camera. Describing this picture years later the narrator says:

We still wore our working clothes: overalls and shirts I am stout and cheerful and comradely in the picture, transformed into someone I don't even remember being or pretending to be. I

look years older than fourteen. Irene . . . peers out from [her long red hair] with a meek, sluttish, inviting look, which would match her reputation but is not like any look of hers I remember. Yes, it must have been her camera; she is posing for it, with that look, more deliberately than anyone else is. Marjorie and Lily are smiling, true to form, but their smiles are sour and reckless We are all holding mugs or large, thick china cups, which contain not the usual tea but rye whiskey I don't need Herb in the picture to remember what he looked like. That is, if he looked like himself, as he did . . . all the times in my life when I saw him except one (Moons 72-3).

The final pages of Munro's story consist in her narrator's puzzled, adult attempt to define "what was this different look" that she remembers from that far-distant Christmas when Herb's friend Brian got shouted out of the barn. She rehearses the different stages of explanation through which she has passed: what she thought at the time; what she thought later "when [she] knew more, at least about sex"; and then what she thought later still, when she had "got to a stage of backing off from the things [she] couldn't really know" (74). It is tempting to hear this last comment in Munro's own voice, so clearly does the focus on appearances reflect her own concerns. In this final stage, the narrator

says, "It's enough for me now just to think of Herb's face with that peculiar, stricken look." Herb comes to represent the impenetrable mystery of life which can be grasped only in so far as its appearance is clearly perceived.

As much, and as little, as may ever be known about Herb is present in his face. The reason that the narrator can remember Herb's face is not that it is in the photograph, but rather that she "studied it hard at the time." The photograph preserves an essential image of everyone in the workplace except Herb, who takes the picture, and the older narrator, who sees herself in the picture "transformed into someone I don't ever remember being or pretending to be" (72). She is stirred by the photo to a remembrance even of the conversations that took place over the mugs of whiskey; but actually for the two central characters in the story, Herb and herself, it is what is not in the picture, nor even directly suggested by it, that is most important.

The photograph works as a negative to produce the image behind it and the context for it: these are more important here than what is in the picture. Ian Jeffrey argues that "photographs constantly refer to far more than they show," and that "even as arbitrary fragments taken from time and place they evoke the greater whole from which they are abstracted" ("Photographic Time" 86). The significance of

this photograph lies in its exclusion of a specific appearance which it conjures up in the observer. "Herb Abbott must have been the one who took the picture" (72): his absence from the photograph testifies to his superior abilities. By acting as a spur to memory, the photograph has necessitated a stepping behind and out in front of itself, a remembering of its occasion as a moment when what may be known is essentially present in what can be perceived.

For Munro, the stillness and focus of a photograph can reveal the mystery of presence when real-life contact has rendered it invisible. In the story "Something I've Been Meaning To Tell You," in the collection of the same name, Et first understands that her sister Char is beautiful when, having found a photograph of Char, Et then watches her doing the laundry and sees that she "show[s] in her real face the same almost disdainful harmony as in the photograph"(6). This makes Et understand that "the qualities of legend [are] real," because beautiful women are not just "a fictional invention." Although she does not like mystery, photography has forced her to see it.

The last story of Lives of Girls and Women (1971), "Epilogue: The Photographer," deals explicitly with the relationship of mystery to physical presence. This is the story, about the enterprise of shaping fictions, which Munro says she included at the last minute because "I found

eventually that the book didn't mean anything to me without it" (Struthers 25). In the story Del Jordan's aspirations as a young novelist are brought into instructive juxtaposition with the real world. Initially she is an idealist whose novel can only live in her mind: "soon I saw that it was a mistake to try and write anything down; what I wrote down might flaw the beauty and wholeness of the novel in my mind" (Lives 245). She sees her novel as providing a magic antidote to the troubles of the real world by making them appear "unimportant even if true." The story, inspired by gossip surrounding the photograph of a girls' athletics champion which hangs in the school hall, centres around a nameless photographer whose pictures are often "unusual, even frightening" (246). People depicted in them are faced with images of themselves prematurely aged or sick, and so "everybody was afraid of him" (247). The photographer is no mere recorder of life, but a sinister interpreter of it. Lorraine York points out that photography is shown here to have the power "to create grotesqueness from surface innocence": Munro uses the photographic metaphor to underscore her own vision in which the familiar contains the unfamiliar as surely as the strange conceals the commonplace ("The Paradox of Photography" 50-1). Similarly, the renowned photographer Dorothea Lange, discussing the defamiliarizing power of the camera, talked of the way in which the photographer "will find not only the familiar but the strange, not only the ordinary but the rare; not only the

mutual, but the singular" ("Photographing the Familiar," Lyons 71).¹⁶ The heroine of Del's story is fatally attracted to the photographer's unsettling power, and her liaison with him causes her downfall and suicide. Del's own interpretive powers are hardly less unsettling, for her novel is a celebration of decay and desolation. Its magic consists not in any beauty or hope but in its impermeability and completeness within her mind--a vision so powerful that she feels "as if that [imaginary] town was lying close behind the one I walked through every day" (248).

But the central revelation of the story is that reality is stranger than fiction, and more strangely touched with grace. Del's tea with the actual suicide's supposedly deranged brother destroys her novel for her, because she can no longer believe in its truth nor keep it separate from the real world of ordinary strangeness. Her fictional heroine suddenly seems much less interesting than the real Marion Sherriff who lived in this house with brown-and-pink wallpaper and a grey painted porch:

Bobby Sherriff talked about rats and white flour. His sister's photographed face hung in the hall of the high school, close to the persistent hiss of the drinking fountain. Her face was stubborn, unrevealing, lowered so that shadows had settled in her eyes. People's lives, in Jubilee as elsewhere, were dull, simple, amazing, and

unfathomable--deep caves paved with kitchen linoleum (253).

Munro is asserting that the photographer does not have the power to unmask mystery, only to perpetuate it--and in this is art, for the mystery of the real world will merely be diminished by the desire of the over-zealous artist to interpret it.

When Del first describes Marion's photo, there is no description of the face:

In the picture Marion Sherriff was holding a tennis racquet and wearing a white pleated skirt and a white sweater with two dark stripes around the V of the neck. She had her hair parted in the middle, pinned unbecomingly back from the temples; she was stocky and unsmiling (244).

For Del, the discovery of the real world is the discovery of the enigma of faces. In one sense, her photograph says "every last thing" about Marion; in another sense, it is "unfathomable." In the photograph, writes Barthes, nothing can be refused or transformed; it is impenetrable because of its "evidential power" (Camera Lucida 91, 106). The only way in which reality can be "held still and held together--radiant, everlasting," is, in J.R. Struthers' words, in that kind of art in which "as honest an attempt" as possible has been made "to get at what is really there," in all its mystery and dullness, its depth and its simplicity; and this

is the kind of art that Munro most admires ("The Real Material" 6). Del, then, learns something about the distinction between good and bad art. The photograph in the school hall may inspire a gothic fantasy or a suburban soap-opera in the inferior artist, but the artist who is true to "what is really there" must accept that the shadows--the stubbornness--in the eyes form a veil of mystery as persistent as the hiss of the drinking fountain.

Munro shares something akin to but distinct from Roland Barthes' belief in the hallucinatory power of photographs. For Barthes, the urge to subject photographs to a "civilized code" of interpretation renders them no more than comfortable illusion: "What I can name cannot really prick me. The incapacity to name is a good symptom of disturbance" (Camera Lucida 119, 51). These comments reveal a highly subjectivist epistemology that stands aloof from public codes of understanding and challenges the individual to live on the edge of madness. Munro, on the other hand, sees the "intractable reality" of photographs as a key to sanity. In her story "Simon's Luck" (Who Do You Think You Are? 152-73), she suggests that an awareness of the solidity of things, thick and plain as cheap ice-cream dishes, gives to life "a little dry kernel of probity" which works as "a private balance spring" against the extremes of emotion (170). The otherness of things is, in the last analysis, a safety-net which outlasts the rise and fall of individual

interpretation and persists in its own mystery. And it is because, within their catholic boundaries, photographs capture the paradoxical nature of reality--the cave and the linoleum, the extraordinariness and the dullness--that Munro finds them so apt for her own vision. "Paradox," argues Helen Hoy, "helps sustain Munro's thematic insistence on the doubleness of reality, the illusoriness of either the prosaic or the marvellous in isolation" ("Paradox and Double Vision" 101). For Munro, reality is inherently, and physically, contradictory, and this, as she tells Geoff Hancock in a 1983 interview, is what causes her fascination with the "marvellous investigation of things as they really are" (Hancock, "Interview" 96).

The centrality of paradox in Munro's writing is particularly clearly associated with pictures in the story "Changes and Ceremonies" (Lives of Girls and Women 117-142). Very different pictures may be used to describe one person and all be equally true:

Miss Farris in her velvet skating costume, her jaunty fur hat bobbing among the skaters, always marking her out, Miss Farris "con brio," Miss Farris painting faces in the Council Chambers, Miss Farris floating face down, unprotesting, in the Wawanash River, six days before she was found. Though there is no plausible way of hanging those pictures together--if the last one is true

then must it not alter the others?--they are going to have to stay together now.

The Pied Piper; The Gypsy Princess;
The Stolen Crown; The Arabian Knight; The Kerry
Dancers; The Woodcutter's Daughter.

She sent those operettas up like bubbles, shaped with quivering, exhausting effort, then almost casually set free, to fade and fade but hold trapped forever our transformed childish selves, her undefeated, unrequited love (141).

Just as photographs fade but hold an image trapped, so do Miss Farris's operettas. And just as photographs may offer contradictory pictures, so do the images which must remain of Miss Farris. There is no plausible way to hang the images together, but the contradictory nature of reality necessitates living with the paradox of the coexistence of the strange and the familiar. For Munro, life seems best imagined as a series of bubbles, discrete, "shaped with . . . effort, then almost casually set free, to fade"; thus too, perhaps, her stories themselves. She is finally less concerned with hanging the pictures together than with how honestly each one can hold reality "trapped forever."

Munro's interest is in the unresolvable enigmas of each moment. For her, reality is incorrigibly plural, and its plurality can most readily be apprehended through paradoxical physical appearances of the kind so mysteriously

made available to the spectator in photographs. Each picture is to be accepted as a discrete mystery, whose validity is to be experienced through a heightened appreciation of its otherness. Because the photograph "cannot say what it lets us see" (Barthes, Camera Lucida 100), it makes available to the writer a real past, framed and held out for her to respond to, without predetermining that response.

Munro's conviction that life can be best understood as a series of flashes is paralleled by Margaret Laurence's assertion that one way life is perceived is "in short sharp visual images which leap away from us even as we look at them" ("Gadgetry" 88). But unlike Munro, Laurence is concerned with continuity and pattern over time; the images need to be ordered into a meaningful relationship with past and future. This need to create temporal patterns accords better with the format of the novel than with that of the short story. "Life," writes Sontag, "is not about significant details, illuminated a flash, fixed forever. Photographs are" (On Photography 81). Where Munro's understanding of life is centred on just such significant moments, for Laurence the disjunction between life and photography is situated most clearly at this temporal level. And whereas Munro's stories most often originate in pictorial images, Laurence has asserted that her short stories have most often been triggered by events she has

experienced or read about. Her novels she describes as the outgrowth from individual characters: it is the characters who come first, and then "they grow slowly in the imagination until I seem to know them well" (Hehner 45). This is the traditional understanding of novelistic inspiration, whereas Munro's pictorial imagination is more that traditionally associated with the poet.

Laurence's fascination with patterns of behaviour rather than with appearances in themselves naturally leads her to set photographs within a narrative context. Even the possibility of the misinterpretation of a photograph becomes for Laurence a means of forwarding the narrative. In A Jest Of God (1966), the misunderstanding over whose boyhood picture Nick shows to Rachel (his son's? his twin's? his own?) at the same time instigates a major step in the development of the plot and provides insight into the mental realities of each person. Nick is, after all, an emotional child; Rachel is, after all, expecting to be disappointed. But Laurence's patterning of photographs into a temporal sequence is seen at its most developed in The Diviners (1974).¹⁷

The epilogue to the book is the final lines from Purdy's poem "Roblin Mills (2)":

but they had their being once
and left a place to stand on

In the poem, there is a "black millpond" where fragments of past living are held and contained. The pond is a "weed-grown . . . water eye" which "look[s] into itself" and under which discarded moments of past activity are held still as "the substance of shadows." A strange eye, this, for it is "unreflecting": its blackness gives back no image, nor does some inward eye reflect upon what its outer counterpart receives--there is no judgment, no response to the past. But the importance of this "black crystal" is that, like a camera full of undeveloped film, it is the repository of inarticulate history, the "gear and tackle of living" which has, by its passing, "left a place to stand on." The millpond has the value of a photographic negative: it holds what can no longer be seen but what provides the basis for the present. Laurence's reference to this poem clearly attests to her concern through her writing to "come to terms with the past."

In an article published in 1970 Laurence writes, "I see this process as the gradual one of freeing oneself from the stultifying aspect of the past, while at the same time beginning to see its true value" ("A Place" 18). To reassess the substance of shadows, a writer must look into the black eye of the millpond and shed light on the images trapped in it. Morag Gunn, consciously setting out to put her life into some new perspective, is, as Michel Fabré puts it, "an interpreter of the past . . . as well as a diviner of the

pattern of the world" ("Words and the World" 267). The process of shaping and making involves her specifically in dealing with photographs, for she stirs up her memories, the waters of the past, by taking out her pictures.¹⁸

Like the millpond, a photograph holds on to things that have been discarded and forgotten. Like the millpond, a photograph is still and silent, containing the past moment without overt comment or judgment. But unlike the millpond, a photo is not an unreflecting eye. Rather, by virtue of its being a highly specific reflection, a physical emanation of the referent, it cannot be sterile, like the unseen images in the black pool turned inwards only on their dark selves. As soon as an image has an audience to whom it is revealed, it becomes fertile with the imaginations of its viewers.

The interaction between image and imagination is central to Laurence's use of photography in The Diviners. She introduces the first series of photographs in the novel-- pictures of Morag Gunn and her parents during the period up to Morag's sixth year--with the explanation that they "never agreed to get lost" (5). The memories that they evoke, whether accurate or invented, are not yet sufficiently a part of Morag for her to let the photographic images become shadows in the millpond. "Perhaps they're my totems, or contain a portion of my spirit," after the primitive concept to which Sontag refers when she talks of the way in which,

"in primitive societies, the thing and its image were simply two different, that is, physically distinct, manifestations of the same energy or spirit" (On Photography 155). The photos, "jammed any-old-how" into a decrepit envelope Christie had found for Morag at the town dump, could have been thrown out even in her childhood because "her skull would prove an envelope quite sturdy enough to retain them" (5). But Morag has not wanted or dared to discard them, for more than mere images is at stake: "I keep the snapshots," she says, "not for what they show but for what is hidden in them" (6). They have a magic power of their own.

These photographs invite imaginative extension; they "evoke the greater whole" (Jeffrey 86). In the first of Morag's photographs the concealment is a physical presence. She is "concealed in her mother's flesh, invisible" (6), as surely as "the future weather of sky [and] spirit" is hidden in the look of hope on the faces of her parents. As the sequence of snapshots progresses, there is a decreasing amount of time spent on the description of the scene and an increasing emphasis on what "one would not guess from the picture" (7). Words such as "presumably," "perhaps" and "possibly" stress the extent to which a reading of these photos is a matter of interpretation, so that the pictures "tell what is behind [them]" (9) through a continuation of that process of imaginative extension which even a cursory viewing requires.

The third photograph in the series illustrates very clearly how this process works. A few lines describe the child behind the gate, play-acting for the photographer, and then:

What is not recorded in the picture is that after Morag's father has taken this picture, he asks her if she'd like to have him help her climb the gate Morag's father lifts her down from the gate, and they go into their house (7).

There is a physical movement from describing the still image of the photograph to reconstructing the action of the past. Morag climbs the gate and walks away with the reader, rather as Robert turns away with Rowena's chair in Timothy Findley's The Wars. But what Morag walks into is, very specifically, a world of the imagination: "I recall looking at the pictures, these pictures, over and over again, each time imagining I remembered a little more" (8). Her obsession with them is focused precisely upon the issue of imagining, because she feels an imbalance between her vivid memories of imaginary friends and her insubstantial memories of her parents: "I cannot really remember my parents' faces at all. When I look now at that one snapshot of them, they aren't faces I can relate to anyone I ever knew" (9). On the other hand, a picture of her spruce-tree playhouse conjures up immediate and lively remembrances of the imaginary characters she played with there--"I remember those imaginary characters better than I do my parents" (11).

Morag is hurt by this sense that the imagination may be more real than reality, and the story of the book is of her slow growth into a trust that imagined reality has emotional validity. Like Hagar in The Stone Angel (1964), Morag needs to be freed from the "shreds and remnants" that can keep her trapped in impotence, unable to respond positively to her imagination (Stone Angel 36). For both women, the reductive, fragmentary nature of the photographic image, representing their own lack of emotional wholeness, is overcome by imaginative extension from that image, not just into the past but also into the present to which the past has become understood as vitally linked.

However, at the beginning of The Diviners, when Morag puts her snapshots into chronological order, she thinks:

As though there were really any chronological order, or any order at all, if it came to that. She was not certain whether the people in the snapshots were legends she had once dreamed only, or were as real as anyone she now knew (6).

Michel Fabre has pointed out that this passage suggests a deep scepticism about one's power to establish meaning and order, and that the novel may be seen as the process of coming to terms with "the undefined, changing relationship between the real and the fictive" ("Words and the World" 259). At the very end of the novel the proposition that

things both are and are not as the individual perceives them is symbolized in the "apparently impossible contradiction, made apparent and possible" (Diviners 3), of the river flowing both ways; and Morag has come to accept that "[e]verything is improbable. Nothing is more improbable than anything else" (351). The people in the snapshots are neither simply real nor simply legends, but both, in different degrees, at different moments of interpretation. As Timothy Findley says of his parahistorical figures in Famous Last Words, "It's the meaning of history that matters, as Homer knew" (Aitken 79). Morag's photographs attest to both the intransigence of their reality and the necessity of interpretive response.

The necessity of creating reality by interpretation is particularly foregrounded in the treatment of one photograph of faces. When Christie Logan, looking for his longjohns, comes across the Battery Book of the 60th Canadian Field Artillery, the "[v]ery blurred photographs" show row after row of faraway faces which "all look the same, because no face is clear" (Diviners 72). Christie can identify neither Morag's father nor himself. Then he tells Morag the story of how Colin Gunn carried him to safety. But much later Prin says, "That Colin . . . [h]e never done that for my Christie. Saved him, like. Or maybe he done it, I dunno . . . poor lamb. He would cry, and Christie would hold him" (167). The face of reality is not clear--"It's all true and

not true," as Christie remarks about his earlier philosophizing (71). What distinguishes the people in the photograph, so far removed in time from the present, is not their recorded faces, which are now all the same, but the tissue of memories the viewer superimposes on the photograph. And for different people the history will be told in different ways. After reading the "official" version of the Battle of Bourlon Wood, Christie says, "Well, d'you see, it was like the book says, but it wasn't like that, also. That is the strangeness" (73). And either interpretation may be justified from the photograph, whose vagueness invites translation according to the point-of-view of the observer. The mystery of these soldiers' faces is captured in the absence of physical definition which necessitates the creation of reality by interpretation.

It is not so much the mystery of the image as the vulnerability of the subject that concerns Susan Sontag when she refers to the primitive notion of images as partaking in the essence of the thing imaged:

To photograph people is to violate them, by seeing them as they never see themselves, by having knowledge of them they can never have; it turns people into objects that can be symbolically possessed (On Photography 14).

Whereas Munro implies that the reality of the photographed subject is retentive of itself and cannot be possessed by

another, Laurence, like Sontag, suggests that fear of such possession runs very deep. In The Diviners Jules Skinner reacts instinctively against Morag's request to take his photograph with Pique. When Morag asks for his reason:

Jules hands the camera back to her, and hitches his belt up around his hips. He tosses back the mane of hair from his forehead and eyes, and laughs a little, warning her.

"Search me. Maybe I'm superstitious.

Or maybe it's the same as I can't make up songs about myself. Maybe I don't want to see what I look like. I'm going on okay this way. Let's not get fancy about it" (281).

The force in Jules' life is his fierce independence. He protects it against the power of the image, because being photographed involves a vulnerability and an openness to being interpreted that he will not allow. Moreover, a photographed image of oneself creates awareness of self as other and therefore invites self-analysis: Jules does not want to see what he looks like.

Of course it is precisely because Morag does want to see what she looks like, as a being composed of her own past, that she plays her snapshots to herself like tarot-cards: "The child is laughing, acting up, play-acting goofily, playing to an audience of one, the picture-taker" (7); and later, "Her head is bent slightly, and she grins

not in happiness but in embarrassment" (9). By making use of photographs not merely incidentally but also as a structuring device, Laurence stresses the self-conscious deliberation of Morag's self-examination, as though she herself is now the spectator for whom the child in the pictures is acting (see Sullivan 76). Morag begins to understand and to appropriate for herself the power of the photograph to possess its subject. The group of photographs of Pique (among which the one that Jules takes is the last) stands in parallel to the group of photographs of Morag as a child at the beginning of the novel. But Morag describes each photograph of Pique with increasing confidence, as a kind of chapter-heading to lead into a narration of the significant events surrounding each one (258-81). She is no longer questioning the validity of her imagination, but has come to understand that by describing--'naming'--the photographs she is exercising the power of her own perceptions to order past events.

Morag's story in The Diviners is, then, the story of how the hanging together of pictures creates a new picture in which one may see the "true value" of the past (Laurence, "A Place" 18). In this model of fiction-making, the artist's power is stronger than that of the subject of art, because naming creates a fiction of past truth and so, as Barbara Hehner suggests, "transmutes it into new truth" by which to live ("River of Now and Then" 53). By the very

end of The Diviners, after some months of self-examination and of looking at the images and ordering them in her mind, Morag has found a new measure of peace. She stands looking into the river that runs both ways past her house:

How far could anyone see into the river? Not far. Near shore, in the shallows, the water was clear, and there were the clean and broken clamshells of creatures now dead, and the wavering of the underwater weed-forests, and the flicker of small live fishes, and the undulating lines of gold as the sand ripples received the sun. Only slightly further out, the water deepened and kept its life from sight. Morag returned to the house, to write the remaining private and fictional words, and to set down her title (370).

The book suggests that all words are "private and fictional" because all words are an interpretation--this is what Barthes calls the "misfortune, but also perhaps the voluptuous pleasure, of language" (Camera Lucida 85). For Morag, an acceptance of the necessity for fiction makes possible a patterning of life that is legitimate and fruitful. She has looked "ahead into the past, and back into the future" (Diviners 370), like the river, and now the deeper water can be allowed to retain its mysterious darkness without threat. The living and the dead jostle in the shallows, exposed by the sunlight. Morag has reflected upon the jumble of her past and has given present substance

to the shadows. Now the waters have been disturbed enough, and the essential ambivalence of the river that flows both ways symbolizes the essential ambivalence of the truth that must be created by fiction.

The photograph can be understood as the realized image from within the negative "black eye." But, as Sontag has pointed out, "Photographs do not explain; they acknowledge" (On Photography 111). It is because of this ambiguousness latent in the photograph--present pastness both inviting and defying interpretation, in Barthes' terms "unrevealed yet manifest"-- that photography can provide foundational material for writers of as different epistemological persuasions as Laurence and Munro, the one privileging function, the other appearance. And it is the ambiguousness of photography that makes it so appropriate as material for another writer who places the highest value on the twin concepts of memory and the imagination: Timothy Findley.

Like Atwood, Findley sees photographs as implicitly authoritative and needing to be understood with perspective. Like Munro, he sees them as mysterious representations of a marvellous reality. Like Laurence, he understands the art of fiction-making to be the art of creating oneself. A highly visual writer whose work shows constant indications of his involvement in both dance and television, Findley uses the photographic motif in virtually

everything he writes. In particular, photography for him stands as a symbol of and an occasion for that extension into redemptive or into treacherous representation which characterizes the imagination.

When Lorraine York describes photography in the later fiction of Timothy Findley as "the guardian of the human imagination under siege," she is situating Findley's fascination with photographs in a context not unlike that of Atwood and Laurence ("The Other Side of Dailiness" 92). York understands Findley to be developing through his fiction a "growing insistence on the primacy of memory," and argues that the photographic metaphor comes to constitute for him a primary weapon against its loss. However, this weapon is something of a two-edged sword. It has been argued above that Atwood makes use of the ambiguity latent in the photographic image to embody the need for perspective on the interdependence of opposite poles in a duality. Laurence uses the need for photographic interpretation to justify the creation of imaginative reality. But Findley recognizes photography's ability at once to preserve and take away life as emblematic of a dangerous ambiguity in the human imagination.

In conversation with Johan Aitken in 1980, Findley admits:

Photographs are mysterious to me. I know it's

childish, but then you have to be a child, in a way, you have to retain something of a child, in order to see at all. I still sit with a photograph and I think, if I could only get in there with you, I could walk in there, and that person is saying something, that moment in there, and one never, never, never dies. . . . They [photographs] retain their life, their whole life ("Long Live the Dead" 83).

This is part of a discussion concerning the influence of photographs in generating The Wars ("Long Live the Dead" 83). Photographs are mysterious: they "bring back life that's gone, and dissect and keep the dead alive, amongst us." This quasi-magical quality is more than simply attractive. To Findley, memory is "a source of solace and the basis of all reconciliation. Memory provides a ground--however profusely mined it might be--on which we can face reality, accommodate reality and, possibly, even survive it" ("The Countries of Invention" 106). The task of the writer is to bear witness to what others fail to see, to "record what others resist remembering" because it is dangerous or threatening, and to counter the horrors of a dying civilization with "the marvellous" of the imagination--for "[t]he marvellous is what you want" (Meyer & O'Riordan 11). The witness of the photograph to past reality thus has moral as well as magical authority for Findley. At the same time, he argues that memory, like

fiction, is a "country of invention," and suggests that the reminder offered by photographs is open to a "conjuring" which may as easily be treacherous as redemptive.

In Findley's first novel, The Last of the Crazy People (1967), he makes use of photography to represent not just the reality of the past, but also the deceptive safety in its apparent offer of a "merciful death." Nine years later, in his stage play Can You See Me Yet?, Findley situates an entire family in a mental institution in order to explore the notions of sanity and sanctuary. Again, photographs play a central role in offering asylum, but now they become a symbol of continuation and community rather than of escape into the past. In both novel and play, spiritual gain is achieved only at the expense of physical loss of life. This theme is central in Findley's work. In fact the epilogue to perhaps his best-known book, The Wars (1977), consists primarily in the description of two photographs, each of them a variation on this same foundational exchange.

Each photograph is a type of memento mori, not only in the general sense in which, as Sontag points out, all photographs are essentially elegiac, but also in the specific context of their subject-matter positioned at the end point in the narrative.¹⁹ In the first picture, Robert Ross, in uniform at the Albertan army camp before he has seen action in Europe, holds a small animal's skull. The

narrator, coming across this photograph, remembers the words of an essayist during the Second World War: "Nothing so completely verifies our perception of a thing as our killing of it" (226). The 'shot' of Robert verifies the reader's perception of him as an idealistic young man easily moved to anger or pity by the suffering of helpless creatures. It also suggests, in the unfocused shoulder and hand of the soldier lying in the background, and in the sheaf of guns "bound as if for harvest" to Robert's left, that Robert has not yet brought into focus the fact that he will be required to administer an unpalatable harvest of suffering and death. At the same time, the preservation of the photograph ensures the survival of these perceptions beyond the survival of their subject; death is recognized but defeated in the act of 'shooting' the photograph.

The second photograph is chronologically earlier but is given the last word in the novel. It shows Robert holding his handicapped sister Rowena in place on her pony. The narrator/researcher turns the photograph over to discover that "[o]n the back is written: 'Look! you can see our breath!' And you can" (226). This photograph too is a type of memento mori, for of course Robert and Rowena are both long since dead. As Barthes argues, photography is always a "kind of primitive theatre, . . . a figuration of the motionless and made-up face beneath which we see the dead" (Camera Lucida 32). Moreover, the visibility of breath in

this photograph is ambiguously significant: in the trench warfare in which Robert was to fight, the fact that one's breath might be visible in the cold air was a "dreadful phenomenon" because it could betray one's presence to the enemy (Wars 147).²⁰ But the photograph is also a witness to the power of the imagination to restore life to the dead, as every reading of the book does in the telling of Robert's story.

Findley implies that a memento mori can both warn against false images of glory and celebrate what is really valuable. Both these images of Robert represent important ways in which he needs to be remembered if memory is to have its redemptive effect. In both photographs he is a naif, but whereas the military context of his innocence in the first one has become bitterly ironical in light of the events of the book, the second image maintains its positive witness to the vitality of faithful love. The book's epigraph from Euripides affirms the ambiguous power of memory: "Never that which is shall die"--neither the terrible nor the beautiful. The two photographs testify to vulnerability both as it is abused and as it is protected. But the second, redemptive memento is given the final position, of emphasis.

For Findley, the notion of the testimony of the photograph has significance for the photographed subject as well as for the viewer. After Ross's horrifying experience

of gang rape by his fellow soldiers, he burns his picture of Rowena in "an act of charity." The implication here is that he cannot bear to have Rowena witness what has happened to him, and that he wants to spare her the violence and sordidness of life (204). If this burning were an act of anger, then perhaps the photograph could be merely a symbol of Rowena's presence. But since Ross calls it an act of charity, he must in some sense be imagining that Rowena inhabits her photograph--is not merely the deferred referent, but is magically present.

A similar ambiguity surrounds the fading of Robert's photograph after his death (214). In the context, it is hard to determine whether this fading is simply the result of the coming of dusk, whether it is indicative of the blindness of his mother, or whether a literal fading of the physical image is suggested. In any case, there is implicit a symbolizing of the fading of the reality of Robert from his parents' home, as he has disappeared from the world. Death has turned out to be real and terrible after all, and the romantic image of Robert that had contradicted this reality must fade in face of it.

How far Findley will take this "mysteriousness" of photography is dependent on its interaction with the imagination of the viewer/reader. At another point in The Wars the narrator doubts the ability of photography to

represent a graphic scene as vividly as can the inner eye of the imagination--"There is no good picture of this except the one you can make in your mind" (77). Later, the elderly Marian Turner, who had nursed Robert and offered him release from pain into death, sends the narrator/researcher a photograph of herself with a friend, on the basis that "[a]t my age, you don't need pictures any more"(224)--a conclusion that will be disputed by Freyberg in Famous Last Words. But Marian no longer wants to remember, and memory is served by photographs. Findley, then, uses the photographic image in The Wars as a kind of hallucinatory magic even more profound than that implied by Barthes. Where Barthes sees "nothing Proustian in a photograph" (Camera Lucida 82), Findley shows how photography can indeed "call up the past" when the imagination of the viewer is engaged.

Findley also engages the viewer/reader's imagination in the business of structuring his fiction. As several critics have pointed out, he makes use of photographs as a basic structural device.²¹ This emphasizes the arbitrary nature of the frame and the role of the reader in assembling the story, forcing her to relocate her sense of mystery on the level of the external rather than the internal fiction.²² It seems quite possible that what Eva-Marie Kröller calls the photograph's exposure of the restrictions of literary strategy, and its emphasis on the process of image-making rather than on the product, are for Findley a celebration of

the imaginative possibilities shared by both photography and fiction.²³

As if to reinforce such a suggestion, the investigations of the narrator/researcher in The Wars "begin at the archives with photographs" (5): Canadian scenes before and after mobilization, and then one of Robert Ross watching a military band, with his sister in her wheelchair. The narrator describes Robert in the photograph, and as he does so he moves for the first time inside Robert's head. Robert moves:

Robert Ross. Standing on the sidelines with pocketed hands--feet apart and narrowed eyes. . . . He's old enough to go to war. He hasn't gone. He doubts the validity in all this martialling of men but the doubt is inarticulate. It stammers in his brain. He puts his hand out sideways: turns. He reaches for the wicker back of a wheelchair. 'Come on, Rowena. There's still the rest of the park to sit in' (8).

What has happened here is that imagination has worked with the image and made it live. Findley: "I sit still with a photograph and I think, if I could only get in there with you, I could walk in there, and that person is saying something, that moment in there, and one never, never, never dies" (Aitken 83). This is exactly the process followed by the narrator/researcher. Because he pays attention to what

he sees, he experiences the mystery of photographic reference come alive, and so does the reader who is led by him.

The image that precedes the description of this photograph reinforces the notion of the liveliness of the imagination, even before any awareness of a structure within which to ascribe meaning. In an italicized paragraph, the reader is told that "Robert Ross comes riding straight towards the camera," his clothes on fire. "He leaps through memory without a sound. . . . You lay the fiery image back in your mind and let it rest. You know it will obtrude again and again until you find its meaning--here" (8). Some critics have felt that it is unclear from this paragraph whether or not an actual photograph is being referred to.²⁴ But since the narrator/researcher knows from public records that "Ross was consumed by fire" (5), it seems that this notion has burned into his mind. And because his visual imagination is being stimulated by his leafing through old photographs, it produces an image to which he as yet can attach little context. The image inhabits the world of present time in which the archivist brushes a strand of hair from her mouth and the narrator sorts through pictures. In effect, the obtrusiveness of the image stamps it as having that timeless imaginative life the recovery of which photographs can also stimulate.

Which comes first, then, the awakened imagination or the photograph? Findley shows a reciprocal relationship between the two. His description of The Wars "unfold[ing] as a series of pictures" needs to be understood alongside his comment that he "see[s] and hear[s] in tandem" ("Alice Drops Her Cigarette" 16,12) and his later assertion that "photographs can be heard" (Aitken 80). The image of Robert riding at the camera is initially silent because the narrator cannot yet hear the 'words.' The task of imagination is to discover language through searching for the sound of the image, just as imagination must enter the frame of the photograph both to see movement and to hear voices there.²⁵

In Famous Last Words (1981), the writer whose last words these are is described as one "whose greatest gift had been an emphatic belief in the value of imagination" (48). Not surprising, then, that Findley has said of him, "I could think like that man. I could be that person" (Meyer & O'Riordan 10). Findley has effectively foregrounded the power of the imagination not only by identifying himself in this way with the author-character of his own fiction, but, even more pointedly, by having this character already transcend one level of fictionality to be present in the novel. For the writer is Hugh Selwyn Mauberley, Ezra Pound's satirical creation of the artist as the young dilettante, who in Famous Last Words has become Pound's companion and

protégé, able to write satirically about Pound himself. These confusions of the boundary between fictive and factual existence seem to identify Findley with a postmodernist questioning of the possibilities for coherent aesthetic construction (see, for instance, Krölller's "The Exploding Frame"). But Findley is essentially a late romantic rather than a postmodernist, so that his elevating of Mauberley to Pound's level of reality is felt as more significant than what might be seen as his reduction of Pound. For Findley, the purpose of fiction is to "achiev[e] the clarity obscured by facts" ("Alice Drops Her Cigarette" 19).

The story that Mauberley has etched on the walls of four rooms in the Grand Elysium Hotel, when isolated there in the two months before his murder, makes him a hero and a traitor at one and the same time. Findley himself has argued that "a hero is someone who must do what he must do despite the consequences. . . . Mauberley is a hero because in writing what he does on the walls he must condemn himself and everything he stood for" (Meyer & O'Riordan 7-8). Lieutenant Quinn, the surrogate reader of the story, must come to terms with the fact that a writer he has admired has also been a Fascist agent. What makes Mauberley human, asserts Findley, is that he passes through the stage where he appears to give in to Fascism to the point where he has "an utter sense of responsibility to the truth." And he cannot then express that truth until he expresses what he was in the past (Meyer

& O'Riordan 8). Thus Mauberley writes his testimony on the walls, and in condemning himself he redeems his own humanity and justifies the power of imagination. Imagination, like photography, has the potential either to preserve or to destroy.

But photography in this novel is primarily an aggressor. It offers neither freedom nor asylum so much as testimony, though this, depending on its motivation, may be merely superficial or even untrustworthy. Characters throughout this novel are tracked by cameramen and photographed at every opportunity, because they are public figures. It is the fact that Mauberley's face is well-known from the papers that makes his attempt to travel incognito so difficult. Freyberg and Quinn recognize his dead body because they are familiar with him through photographs. And, of course, when they find him murdered, there have to be more photographs: photography is shown as an assault on the dead as much as the living. The pictures of Trotsky's assassination appear on the front pages of every paper. Mauberley writes, "I was both fascinated and horrified. Trotsky may have been the enemy, but still there was something scandalous about a front page photograph of someone--anyone--dying" (255). Photographers were even allowed in the operating theatre to which he was rushed. But Dorothy Pound, Ezra's wife, cuts out a picture of Madam Trotsky, cradling her husband's bleeding head, and puts it

in a book by her bed. This is her way of identifying with the widow's tragedy; she sees in it something of her own struggle. She says, "Faith is for women. Men don't understand" (256).

Susan Sontag's diatribe against the aggressiveness of photography might seem well supported by Findley. Sontag writes, "Taking photographs has set up a chronic voyeuristic relation to the world which levels the meaning of all events" (On Photography 11). However, Findley also shows that the subjects of photography can manipulate it to their own ends and meanings. Socializing in Vienna, King Edward VIII encourages the taking of photographs of himself with Wallis Simpson: "He became completely careless of the Press" (Famous Last Words 97). Everyone in the photographs looks fit and happy and infallible--but this was "a kind of signal only seen and recognized later," writes Mauberley:

It was all a lie, of course. The fact was, we were being used to shore up the King and his reluctant confidence--used as the symbols of the public approbation he needed so desperately before he could broach the subject of Wallis and himself to his family (98).

Thus the subject of a photograph can turn its voyeuristic nature to his own advantage.

Moreover, the viewer of the photograph may also choose

to manipulate it, as Wallis and David do with the portrait of Queen Mary which they force to "witness" their lovemaking aboard the S.S.Excalibur. Their knowing that she above everyone disapproves of their liaison adds piquancy to such occasions. Queen Mary is dressed in mourning in the picture, and, "what is more, she [can] not close her eyes or turn away as her son and his wife [begin] their ritual" (243). This sense of the subject alive and present in the photograph, as if by magic, is reminiscent of the treatment of the photographs of Rowena and Robert in The Wars. It surfaces on a further occasion in Famous Last Words when Diana Allenby, listening to the King's abdication speech on the radio, "t[akes] up a photograph of [her dead husband] Neddy in her hand, framed there in silver and [holds] it, not as if she watched him--but [is] letting him watch her" (120). When the King ends his speech with a sentiment Diana finds intolerably depressing, she lays the photograph back on the table, face down.

Photography may, then, be testimony to the kind of reality that is too overwhelming to face. Findley clearly does not agree with Sontag that photographs refuse experience by converting it into an image, nor that photographing is "essentially an act of non-intervention" (On Photography 9,11).²⁶ This is a novel whose major concern is the power of imagination to preserve memory through language. But photography may stimulate that memory

at the points where language is inclined to blur it. Captain Freyberg's photographs of Dachau, for example, feed his fury and his rage for vengeance. He privileges photographic images over those of the imagination because the images in photographs resist transformation into anything more acceptable. When Freyberg forces Quinn to look at them, Quinn appeals to his own experience to defend himself against their assault:

"I know you were there," said Freyberg. "But do you remember?"

"Yes; I remember. God damn it, sir. And I don't want to see those things again. I can see them in my mind. I don't need any bloody photographs."

"Everyone needs photographs, Quinn" (390).

Freyberg is afraid that the perpetrators of violence are going to escape punishment, either because the horror of their acts will be forgotten, or because, through words like those of Mauberley, they manage to persuade their accusers of their humanness, and are therefore forgiven.

Quinn, on the other hand, understands that the imagination of a generation has been weighed in the balance and found wanting. He tells Freyberg, "I don't think anyone's going to be absolved" (392). Before he read Mauberley's story, Quinn was inclined to consider him misguided. After reading the story, Quinn's judgment has not altered, although his understanding of human weakness has

been horribly extended. He sees in Mauberley's record, in a way that Freyberg does not, a testimony to the reality and power of the dark side of the imagination, rather than an apology for it. Thus Mauberley's epilogue warns against forgetting the dreadful shape below the surface of the sea, an "awesome presence" that waits its next opportunity (395/6). Atwood's vouching for "a mass of dark intimations in the Canadian literary soul" has found an objective correlative here--one that will become yet more solid in the omnipresent iceberg of Findley's next novel The Telling of Lies (1986). By dating Mauberley's epilogue at May, 1945, Quinn acknowledges its warning in the context of the historical objective correlative of the discovery of Dachau.

Photographs, then, offer testimony, but it is not clear testimony interpreted by reason. In Freyberg's case, "Every route to [his] reason--and reasonableness--was mined, and beyond the mines, there was the barricade of Dachau" (47), as pictured in the facts of his scrapbooks. Findley has described facts as "walls" because they obscure meaning. The "unendurable plenitude" of photographs, to use Barthes' phrase, may require imaginative response and not merely unreasoning reaction. Mauberley in his writing has made the factual "walls" of such photographs talk; as Findley advocates, he has done "[some]thing marvellous" with his imagination, for "[t]he marvellous is what you want" (Meyer & O'Riordan 11). But sometimes, photographs can justly be

left to stand as the silent repository of the unthinkable. The humour of what Little Nell feels about the marvellous flesh of Lana Turner can also become a serious comment on the horrific flesh of Dachau:

[I]t well may be there is much in this world so real, so terribly real we dare not unveil and touch it since its reality would only overwhelm us Could any man truly bear the weight of all that . . . flesh in his hands if it were real? Was it not best--in the interest of public sanity--to consign such flesh to magazines and films and to balance it there in the mind . . . (278).

At the end of Famous Last Words, those photographs of Dachau travel away with Freyberg into the ignominy of suspicion over his mental fitness to command. But the words that Mauberley has written remain graven into the walls of fact; they leave the Grand Elysium Hotel with Quinn's generous sobriety, just as they leave the book with the reader.

It seems clear that for Findley a realistic kind of mimesis is not important. If facts obscure clarity but fiction achieves it, then fiction is the more desirable and profitable enterprise. Thus Woodcock calls him "an historical novelist" who writes "fiction as historical pastiche" ("History to the Defeated" 18-19). Photographic

testimony is not so much to objective facts as to the reality of the individual's past experience which can be recreated by memory. In this way Findley's approach is like that of Laurence, who also privileges the truth-telling of fiction. But in his attraction to the magical presence of the photographic subject, he is nearer to Atwood, and particularly to Munro, for whom the magic of the photograph is merely a still-life version of the magic of the everyday. However, Munro's siting of magic in textures and surfaces is a more radical act for a fiction-writer than Findley's siting of magic in the recreation of the past: in this sense, Munro is the more postmodern writer and Findley the more romantic. All four of these writers lay stress on the artificiality of the photographic pose, but see it as something redeemable by imagination. Unlike their contemporary British counterparts, these writers do not work primarily through irony. There is a belief in the mysterious power of fictionality evident beneath the surface of even the most self-conscious of their novels. And, although photographic truth does not, for these writers, seem to depend on the intrinsic significance of the photograph as an unmediated copy of the real world, devoid of all cultural determination (Barthes' understanding of the photograph's denotative level of meaning), their attraction to the notion of the image as a kind of magic suggests that theories about the relationship of realism to super-realism in a vast postcolonial country may have some validity. The extension

of the spatial dimension of the imagination, and even what Sontag would call "time's relentless melt," may become virtues over and above a sense of historical progression, in a context that is perceived as short on conventional history but abundantly endowed with space.

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Notes.

1. For instance, by Robert Lecker, "The Canonization of Canadian Literature: An Inquiry into Value," paper at ACUTE Conference, University of Laval, Quebec City, 30 May 1989.
2. Participants expressed concerns on other levels, too. W.J.Keith, for instance, said, "I think the list is poorly titled: 'Results of Ballot on Significant Canadian Novels and Other Genres'--it isn't that. It's a list of what a possibly random cross section of teachers, critics, commentators, etc., considers to be one hundred significant novels" (Charles R. Steele, ed., Taking Stock: The Calgary Conference on the Canadian Novel [1978; Downsview, Ont.: ECW, 1982], 146).
3. Stephen Slemon, "Magic Realism as Post-Colonial Discourse," Canadian Literature 116 (Spring 1988): 10; Linda Kenyon, "A Conversation with Robert Kroetsch," The New Quarterly 5.1 (Spring 1985): 15. Kroetsch and Kenyon suggest that perhaps magic realism embodies a concept of resistance to imperialistic totalizing systems.
4. Fredric Jameson, however, distinguishes between magic realism and postmodernism on the basis that they have different kinds of narrative logic. Speaking of film, Jameson suggests that magic realism "enjoin[s] a visual

spell, an enthrallment to the image in its present of time" ("On Magic Realism in Film," Critical Inquiry 12 [Winter 1986]: 303), but has a narrative style dependent on "the articulated superimposition of whole layers of the past within the present" (311).

5. J. Michael Dash ("Marvellous Realism--The Way Out Of Négritude," Caribbean Studies 13.4 [1973]: 57-70) sees magic realism as springing from a "counter-culture of the imagination" (66) in response to the violations of conquest. It involves not a rejection of the past but the recognition of a new cultural composite, the possibility of "a literature of renaissance which concerns itself with survival rather than conquest, with 'emergence' rather than 'historylessness'" (70). If Dash's theory is correct, one might expect to find magic realism in the storytelling of, for instance, Canada's native peoples.

6. See Geoff Hancock, "Magic or Realism: The Marvellous in Canadian Fiction," The Canadian Forum March 1986: 23-35, and Slemon, "Magic Realism as Post-Colonial Discourse."

7. Jack Hodgins, for instance, has said that "this thing called 'magic realism' is not magic at all. It's real. I don't write anything unreal or unbelievable or even improbable" (in Geoff Hancock, 'Introduction,' Magic Realism [Toronto: Aya, 1980]: 10). And Keith Maillard describes how

his publisher had likened his writing to magic realism in painting because of "the meticulous detailing so realistic it reverses into dream" ("Middlewatch as Magic Realism," Canadian Literature 92 [Spring 1982]: 10).

8. "El arte narrativo y la magia" is a key essay of Borges' 1932 collection Discusión. The essay suggests that coherent reality exists only by virtue of the text itself. Borges here "concludes that imaginative or fantastic fiction is superior to other kinds because of its broader, 'magical' notion of causality, linking elements by similarity and contiguity as well as by logical cause and effect" (James E. Irby, "Borges and the Idea of Utopia," Jorge Luis Borges, ed. Harold Bloom [New York: Chelsea House, 1986]: 99).

9. See Lorraine M. York, 'The Other Side of Dailiness': Photography in the Works of Alice Munro, Timothy Findley, Michael Ondaatje, and Margaret Laurence (Toronto: ECW Press, 1988); Linda Hutcheon, The Politics of Postmodernism (London/New York: Routledge, 1989).

10. I am indebted to Andrew P. Clarke for introducing me to this book.

An anomaly is presented by the publication of extracts from Double Exposures in Event 14.1 (1985): 65-72. The issue is subtitled "The 'Coming of Age' Issue." The selection from Schoemperlen is indexed under "Graphics" and

appears on full-gloss paper in the center of the journal. The arrangement of image and text is substantially different from that in the book published the year before. Large print is used to foreground words not so emphasized in the book. The photographs are framed in irregular shapes. The central page is a montage of photographs that appear sequentially in the book; on the pictures are superimposed the "acknowledgements" that appear in the book as a postscript. Schoemperlen's name does not appear among those of the contributors to Event on whom there are notes. The presentation of the selection seems to separate Schoemperlen's work from that of the other writers featured, and in foregrounding other visual techniques besides those of photography, it appears to make the narrative into an 'event' of a more privileged or less serious kind than those around it. How much of this undercutting is intentional on Schoemperlen's part?

11. It has been argued that magic realism, because of its breaking down of boundaries, is "eccentric writing" particularly appealing to "hinterland" writers of western and eastern Canada, rather than to "heartland" writers of Ontario (Stanley E. McMullin, "'Adams Mad in Eden': Magic Realism as Hinterland Experience," Magic Realism and Canadian Literature: Essays and Stories, ed. Peter Hinchcliffe and Ed Jewinski [Waterloo: Univ. of Waterloo Press, 1986]: 13-22). Magic realist writing is, in

McMullin's opinion, more concerned with the experimental, the numinous and the psychic than the novel of the "heartland," which is supposedly concerned with meaning, form and structure. I want to show that photography, inhabiting fictions even of the 'heartland' (Atwood, Munro, Findley) itself creates the site for a breaking down of physical and psychological borders.

12. See, for instance, Linda Hutcheon, "From Poetic to Narrative Structures: The Novels of Margaret Atwood," Margaret Atwood: Language, Text and System, ed. Sherrill Grace and Lorraine West (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1983), 17-31.

13. See, for instance, Linda W. Wagner, "The Making of Selected Poems, the Process of Surfacing," The Art of Margaret Atwood: Essays in Criticism, ed. Arnold E. Davidson and Cathy N. Davidson (Toronto: Anansi, 1981), 81-94; and Bonnie St Andrews, "Quest for Unity: Atwood's Surfacing," Forbidden Fruit: On the Relationship Between Women and Knowledge in Doris Lessing, Selma Lagerlof, Kate Chopin and Margaret Atwood (New York: Whitston, 1986), 84-110. Contrast the position taken by Robert Lecker, "Janus through the Looking Glass: Atwood's First Three Novels," The Art of Margaret Atwood: Essays in Criticism, 177-203.

14. For further helpful investigation of the various

functions of the photographic image in Atwood's novels, see this article by Sharon R. Wilson, "Camera Images in Margaret Atwood's Novels," in Margaret Atwood: Reflection and Reality, ed. Beatrice Mendez-Egle and James M. Haule (Edinburgh, Texas: Pan-American Univ., 1987), 29-57. Wilson argues against the widespread belief that the effect of the photographic images in Atwood's narratives is uniformly negative. She asserts that such images "not only dramatize the fragmented self but also initiate the process of a metamorphosis which seems to continue even beyond the 'frame' of the book" (51).

15. Edward Weston, "What is Photographic Beauty?" Camera Craft 49 (1939): 254; reprinted in Nathan Lyons, ed., Photographers on Photography (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1966), 154. Weston argued that by its "innate honesty" the camera could reveal the essence of a subject so that "the recreated image [might be] more real and comprehensible than the actual object" ("Seeing Photographically," The Complete Photographer 9.49 (1943): 3200-3206; reprinted in Lyons 158-163). This is a version of the modernist priesthood of art that Sontag so disparages.

16. Lange's strategy of defamiliarization is to be distinguished from that of the Russian Formalists, which was at root a program for socio-political reform and not simply a neo-romantic aesthetic that, in its most extreme form,

valorizes style as an end in itself. See Simon Watney, "Making Strange: The Shattered Mirror," Thinking Photography, ed. Victor Burgin [London & Basingstoke, U.K.: Macmillan, 1982], 154-176.

17. For a more inclusive examination of Laurence's use of photography, see Lorraine M. York, 'The Other Side of Dailiness': Photography in the Works of Alice Munro, Timothy Findley, Michael Ondaatje and Margaret Laurence, 121-165.

18. Leona Gomm argues that Laurence "tries unsuccessfully to reconcile associative and chronological memory" ("Laurence and the Use of Memory," Canadian Literature 71 [1976]: 51). But she allows that, if Morag's novel is understood as a verbal transcript of her memorybank movies, then a chronological arrangement is finally legitimized in The Diviners by the fact of Morag's self-consciousness as a writer.

19. See York, 85, for further discussion of the notion of 'memento mori.'

20. For further exploration of this notion, see John F. Hulcoop, "'Look! Listen! Mark my words!' Paying Attention to Timothy Findley's Fictions," Canadian Literature 91 (Winter 1981): 36.

21. See York, 'The Other Side of Dailiness' 77-8: "The photograph becomes not only a major image . . . but the main structuring principle of the novel and the source of Findley's terse and strikingly visual style."

22. See Hulcoop 38.

23. Eva-Marie Kröller's negative interpretation of photography in The Wars ("The Exploding Frame: Uses of Photography in Timothy Findley's The Wars," Journal of Canadian Studies 16.3-4 [Fall/Winter 1981]: 68-74) does not take into account Findley's own recorded comments on the subject, nor does it allow for his romantic view of the imagination.

24. See Hulcoop 33. York, begging the question, suggests that this "moving image seems to provide a living link between the researcher and the distant and mysterious world of the public photographs" ('The Other Side of Dailiness' 82). One might argue that photographs are essentially public, however they are privately understood.

25. For Findley the sound of a voice can record the passage of time as poignantly as can a photograph, and can partake in an equally powerful magic; but the significance of voice and photograph is different. The narrator, listening to Lady Juliet d'Orsey in her seventies reading

the diaries she wrote when she was twelve, says:

The voice, at times, sails off in what can only be described as song . . . then quavers--cracks and is reduced to a helpless whisper. The effect of this singing in the passages where Lady Juliet reads from the diaries . . . is both magical and devastating--for you know that what you hear is the voice of someone near to death--and the wisdom remains a child's. Lady Juliet herself is not aware of this apparent contradiction. You know that by the intensity with which she reads. To her--the voice is just the voice of her mind and consistent with the sounds of thought (139).

This is not, then, the magical quality of time defeated, "reality in a past state," in which Barthes identifies the hallucinatory power of the photograph (Camera Lucida 87), but rather the magic of incongruity in time's passing objectively, outside of the individual, more thoroughly than it does subjectively.

26. John Berger argues that moments of agony are already discontinuous with ordinary time, so that "[t]he camera which isolates a moment of agony isolates no more violently than the experience of that moment isolates itself." He suggests a correspondence between camera and gun is therefore not purely mechanical: both camera and gun make the same contrast between the moment of violence and all

others (About Looking [London, U.K.: Writers and Readers, 1980], 39). However, Berger is here wanting to make a particular political point about the counter-productivity of war photographs in arousing viable political responses to war (40).

Chapter Three. Composing the Photograph: Anita Brookner vs. Janette Turner Hospital.

"It is only shallow people who do not judge by appearances. The mystery of the world is the visible, not the invisible."

Lord Henry in Oscar Wilde's The Picture of Dorian Gray.



Man Ray. *Glass Tears*, circa 1930

In her recent book The Politics of Postmodernism (1989), Linda Hutcheon suggests that the two art-forms which most self-consciously foreground the question of the supposed transparency of representation are fiction and photography. A postmodernist approach to representation involves an exploration of "the way in which narratives and images structure how we see ourselves and how we construct our notions of self" (7). However, because a photographic appearance is both a natural trace and a human construction, the physical emanation of a past referent which has been framed by the decision of the photographer, the photograph has an ambiguous authority which offers what Berger calls "another way of telling" dependent on the spectator's completion of a visual coherence (Another Way 92). Two writers who make particularly striking use of this ambiguity in ways that are complementary to their very different understandings of narrative authority are Anita Brookner in Britain and Janette Turner Hospital in Canada. For Brookner, the photograph's apparently transparent reference to the real world becomes an ironic commentary upon the illusion of narrative control. Hospital, on the other hand, treats the photograph as having irreducible authority despite its ambiguity because it re-presents the past for present response.

Several of Anita Brookner's carefully-wrought novels make use of photographs as structural devices that carry stringent narrative irony. Brookner's consistent concern is with the psychological necessity of preserving appearances, and the photographs described in the texts are microcosms of that same problematic. Her fiction, all of which postdates 1980, has generally been understood as the work of a traditional realist; her needle-sharp novels of manners have been likened in style to those of Jane Austen, Evelyn Waugh or even Ivy Compton-Burnett. Her writing does not seem to manifest many of the characteristics associated even with the 'modern' novel--multiple points of view, a problematization of chronological time, a concern with symbolic rather than narrative unity and with the subconscious rather than the conscious workings of the mind. However, an investigation of Brookner's use of fictional photographs suggests that narrative control, far from being a traditionally-conceived ground for her fiction, is itself a central subject of that fiction. This foregrounding of narrative artifice, together with the suggestion that the control achieved by the text is illusory, subverts the modernist belief in art's ability to bring order out of chaos and exposes the fabrication of meaning as a constructed device that disallows penetration. Brookner can thus be understood as an ironically postmodern writer.

Janette Turner Hospital too has made frequent use of

photographs in her novels, but, in contrast to Brookner, she is a romantic, in the sense that she adheres fundamentally to the notions of coherent meaning and the autonomy of the subject. Though overtly postmodern in the apparent concerns and structures of her two most recent books--for instance in the fragmentation of both the narrating and the narrated subject, the self-conscious revelation of narrative artifice, and the suggestion of the indeterminacy of textual meaning--, Hospital is only superficially committed to what Hutcheon defines as the "complicitous critique" of postmodernism (Politics iv). Despite the violence they contain, her books are not concerned with violence as an exhilaration in surfaces, however bleak--an aspect of that "new kind of superficiality" which Jameson sees as "perhaps the supreme formal feature" of postmodernism ("Postmodernism" 60). Instead, Hospital's novels tell stories that have hopeful or even happy endings which do not suggest themselves as tricks played on the reader. Hospital's fundamental concern is not with the problematizing of representation but with how to read meaning in appearances; for her, photographs function paradigmatically to show the potential for redemption in a re-presentation of the past.¹

"Critical opinion," writes one reviewer of Anita Brookner, "is divided between those who find her microscopic approach to narrative limited and those who find it a revelation of subtleties" (Dunn). "The trouble with so much contemporary ladies' fiction," grumbles Anthony Burgess, "is that it prefers to be stuck in the Edwardian era, as though Joyce, or for that matter Dorothy Richardson, had never happened. If you accept the fictional limitations of 80 years ago, you are bound to admire [Brookner's latest novel]" ("Water, water everywhere"). Granted that Burgess' criteria for literary excellence seem to stem from the questionable notion that fictional modes improve from one period to another, it is true that Brookner's fiction does not obviously demonstrate many of the traits characteristic of the 'modern' novel. However, only too hasty an identification of the writer with the narrator will mislead the reader into assuming that Brookner writes "Edwardian" fiction. Instead, her concern with the necessity for constructing deceptive narrative surfaces can be seen as bearing the depthless image of the postmodern.

The two novels of Brookner's that are of particular interest in the present context are her third, Look At Me

(1981), and her fifth, Family and Friends (1985). Both draw particular attention to the narrator, and both make central use of photographic images. The narrator of Look At Me, Frances Hinton, a lost innocent turned skilful satirist, works with archival photographs of melancholy, madness and death. Her job is to mount, caption and classify these images of despair: the trimming and labelling of the photographs is quickly established as a metaphor for both the narrative design and the manipulative power plays that are the subject of the book. Frances' way of handling a bleak life is to block its effects on her and to write amusing satire about it. When Nick and Alix, the amoral hedonists whose lives she finds so irresistibly attractive, treat her as a specimen to be cut out, labelled and classified, she finally decides to take revenge by treating them in the same way: she will write mercilessly about them. The narrator of Family and Friends, while not obviously a character in the narrative, is apparently, like the traditional writer, to be understood as a confidante of those whom she writes about. But her inside 'knowledge' of events and details is suspect: her precise interpretations of each of the sequence of wedding photographs around which the text is structured are undermined by her self-confessed oversights, and by the power of images and appearances to unsettle the characters in the story she is telling. The descriptions of photographs reinforce the book's central concern with the simultaneous usefulness and destructiveness

of boundaries in daily living. The photographs require narrative contextualization, but narrative structures are a deception practised by the narrator upon herself, and upon the unwary reader, to give the illusion of control.

Look At Me opens on this credo by Frances Hinton:

Once a thing is known it can never be unknown. It can only be forgotten. And, in a way that bends time, so long as it is remembered, it will indicate the future. It is wiser, in every circumstance, to forget, to cultivate the art of forgetting. To remember is to face the enemy. The truth lies in remembering (5).

Frances struggles to forget her past--in particular, the sickly gentility of her parents, and the destructive humiliation of her earlier love-affair--by iron self-discipline and by writing sharp-tongued witticisms about those whom she meets in her daily life. Her job, in her life as in the library, is to observe and classify, she asserts--not to solve problems. Nevertheless, she says she could almost write a treatise on melancholy simply from looking through the library's files of images; in effect, such a treatise is what she unwittingly proceeds to write by telling her own story in this novel. The reader carries with her the question, is this a cultivation of the art of forgetting, or is it the re-membering of the truth?

Melancholy, portrayed in old prints as a woman, "is very frightening, but the person she frightens most is herself. She is her own disease" (6). As the story unfolds it becomes clear that this description of Melancholy identifies her precisely with Frances, whose straitened life and obsessively private personality prevent her from escaping from herself. The women in the prints, she says, "look as if they are in the grip of an affliction too serious to be put into words." Her narrative, however, is Frances' unconscious affirmation that words can function as more than labels or satirical quips, and can after all convey the truth of serious affliction. Moreover, the words that she sees as providing a mask, an escape, and a protection against being known within her isolation, also function ultimately as the means by which she faces the enemy of herself.

On the last page of the book, Frances' earlier comment recurs, but with a difference:

For once a thing is known, it can never be unknown. It can only be forgotten. And, in a way that bends time, once it is remembered, it indicates the future. I realize now that although I sit in this room, growing older, alone, and very sadly, I must live by that knowledge (191).

For Frances this means understanding that her relationship with Nick and Alix, whatever they may choose to offer her in the future, is a matter that "is already prejudged, marked

off. It has already been lived through. It has existed"--and there is no hope of redemption. Now, "[w]ith the letting down of this final barrier between myself and the truth I seemed to welcome back those images which used to throng my mind" (191): images of lonely, ineffectual, powerless people, and among them the image of herself. Shut in by the night, with the remembered voice of her mother urging her on, she begins to write. This is no longer the writing of escape, but the writing of attack. Frances will take her revenge upon those who have used her by using them--as material for satire. Words are the means by which she faces the enemy outside herself as well as inside.

It is midway through the book, at the magical beginning of Frances' relationship with James when her "high hopes of a future that would cancel out the past" (36) seem most plausible, that she makes specific the link between writing and images. "Look at me" is a verbal appeal for visual attention. Once Frances has begun to receive attention, and on her own merits, she turns away from writing, with all that it represents to her of isolation, exclusion and surrogate living:

It was then that I saw the business of writing for what it truly was and is to me. It is your penance for not being lucky. It is an attempt to reach others and to make them love you. It is your instinctive protest, when you find you have no

voice at the world's tribunals, and that no one will speak for you. I would give my entire output of words, past, present, and to come, in exchange for easier access to the world, for permission to state 'I hurt' or 'I hate' or 'I want'. Or, indeed, 'Look at me'. And I do not go back on this. For once a thing is known it can never be unknown. It can only be forgotten. And writing is the enemy of forgetfulness, of thoughtlessness. For the writer there is no oblivion. Only endless memory (84).

Earlier she has explained, "[W]riting is my way of piping up. Of reminding people that I am here" (19). By making her writing entertaining, she is setting out to "beguile all the dons and critics" from discerning the real message beneath the subterfuge of her satire--the real message that says, simply, "Look at me" (20). Like a child, she wants attention, but as an adult with a very fragile self-concept she shies away from what such attention will reveal. Her return to words at the end of the book, however, is a power-play as well as a tactic for personal survival. Words assert the personality of the writer even in the act of directing attention elsewhere. This effect of doubleness meets Frances' need to act upon the world that has hurt her. By being assertively vengeful in trivializing the powerful images of others, she transfers power to herself. She becomes mistress of the images of her own past through

her ability to create cutting images of her own choice for the people in her present.

In her introductory comments, when describing her involvement with photographs in her work, Frances says:

I find the power of images very strong, even when I do not understand them. Sometimes an image stands for something that will only be understood in due course. It is a mnemonic, a cryptogram, very occasionally a token of precognition. I pay very great attention to images, both at the Library and away from it. I spend a lot of time on my own, and the contents of my mind, which is nothing out of the ordinary, amaze me with their random significance. That is why I like the Library, not only for the task of classification which is its main purpose, but for the potency of its images (17).

The specific photographed images that she describes all function as cryptograms of her own situation as it unfolds in the book. The Fool on the tarot card, Melancholia with a torn book, Goya in "an extremity of suffering" comforted by a small, resolute physician: together they suggest the obsessed, isolated artist-figure who is pitted against and must make peace with a destiny in which imagination and reason are forever at war.

It is the images in Frances' mind, whether the product of her own past or more strictly of her imagination, that provide her with raw material for her writing; she is at once fascinated and oppressed by their unpredictability and uncontrollability. The fact that she finally makes peace with these mental images and welcomes them as valuable is directly responsible for her eventual freedom in writing. When most in love with James, she found herself happily wordless, untroubled by images, not needing to write; but she found too that she had lost her ability to defend herself when the need arose, or to observe her situation with a critical eye, or even to speak of her subsequent unhappiness. Writing is from the outset seen as an uninnocent activity in this book. More than that, there is the suggestion that innocence is not only powerless but even in some sense culpable in an adult who should be making adult decisions. The choice to write is a choice against naïveté and for the narrator's taking control of her own life.²

As such it is, of course, suspect as truth-telling. At various points in the narrative the reader is alerted to the fact that Frances is implicated in her own writing. Initially she presents herself as "invulnerable." Of her work at the library, cataloguing images of despair and death, she says, "If I were to be afflicted in any way, I doubt if I could look at this stuff all day" (8). Within a

few pages, however, it begins to become evident that such protestations of invulnerability are a hollow mask to disguise her despair even from herself. She has to struggle, she says, to keep a note of despondency out of what gets put down in her writing: "[i]n fact sometimes I have to struggle quite hard, because I do hate low-spirited people. I would even say I hate unfortunate people I have put all that sort of thing behind me" (16). She next lets slip a comment on her "restlessness" and "tendency to brood"--but "I am famous for my control, which has seen me through many crises. By a supreme irony, my control is so great that these crises remain unknown to the rest of the world, and so I am thought to be unfeeling" (19). In fact, "I feel quite deeply, I think. If I am not very careful, I shall grow into the most awful old battleaxe. That is why I write, and why I have to" The non-sequiturs of these three sentences give away more about Frances, who is "[f]ortunately . . . not a hysterical person" (18), than she intends.

Frances, attracted to the invulnerability of amorality as personified by Nick and, especially, by Alix, is capable of practising her own version of deceitfulness upon herself and upon her readers. Once she has admitted to the reader that her life is and has always been "unendurable" ("There is absolutely no need for me ever again to pretend that everything is all right"), she overtly turns away from "the weight of all that virtue," the "blamelessness" that has

left her "deficient in vices with which to withstand the world," and espouses cunning, tries to build up "resources of selfishness" (43). "If necessary I shall write myself into a new way of life, and it will be a very amusing one" (31). "I write to be hard. I do not intend to spare any feelings, except, of course, my own" (44). Moreover, the time-frame of the novel is intentionally unclear--at what point or points in the sequence of events is Frances writing? Her use of phrases such as "It seemed to me then, and it seems to me now" (67) suggests a telling with the benefit of hindsight, but some events in the narrative seem to happen contemporaneously with the telling. For instance, on page 28 Frances is thinking in the present about renting Alix's spare room, though on page 99 she gives a past-tense report of its having been let to James. A further example of narrative deception lies in Frances' exaggeration of the regularity of her life since the death of her mother. She describes Christmas customs as though her mother's maid Nancy and she have been regularly alone together at Christmas, when she says elsewhere there has been only one Christmas since her mother died. The creation of such stable images, however unattractive, is necessary to her, for she is writing to control an unendurable life.

The photographs which she handles at work are, of course, photographs of prints, paintings and lithographs from the past. That is to say, they are photographs of

interpretations of madness, despair and death, and cannot be said to partake of that immediacy of reference which leads theorists like Barthes to privilege the photograph as a mode of truth-telling. Frances' cataloguing of these library photographs represents a kind of ultimate attempt to control the unendurable. The events they depict have been rendered trebly distant and immobile: by painting, by the photography of painting, and by the classification of the photography of painting. These images are nevertheless disturbing and potent--just like those of the mind, however much attempts may be made to control them with words, with the writing down of words, and with the organization of those written words into a book.

There are two photographs, however, that carry particular weight in this novel. They are both centrally placed in the structure of the narrative. The most important is a photograph of Frances, taken by Nick one day when he, Alix, James and Frances have gone on an outing to the country. Frances' relationship with James is already in serious trouble, due to the machinations of Alix and the reticence of Frances herself. But on this outing the golden past seems retrievable, and in the photograph Frances appears "very young, very trusting, very carefree. Very happy. I have it still. It is the only photograph of myself that I possess" (115). The only photograph, then, that Frances has of herself presents an image of her that is

everything she knows she has lost, everything that her writing stands in opposition to. As John Berger has suggested, "[t]he camera can bestow authenticity upon any set of appearances, however false"; it can quote a lie, even though it cannot, in his terms, lie in itself (Another Way 97). The second half of the book is full of images of Frances, seen in mirrors, in store windows, in doorways. They are alternately images of helpless childishness, or of a poise that disguises both terror and murderousness, when what she wants to see reflected back to her is that carefree self of Nick's photograph. But the photograph was essentially deceptive, because it did not reveal the already well-advanced deterioration in Frances' relationships. Photography, then, holds out a promise of stability and control that is shown to be essentially invalid but psychologically necessary.

The other significant photograph, a foil to the one of Frances, shows the beautiful daughter of the library's elderly European researcher, Dr Simek. Frances notices the photograph on a visit to Dr Simek when he is ill. She comments on it, and Simek replies, "Yes. She was beautiful." The reader is left to guess whether the daughter is dead, or disfigured, or captive, or has somehow betrayed her father. But the effect, particularly together with Frances' disturbing image of Dr Simek fighting valiantly to hold himself on his feet as she leaves, is to emphasize an

image's power to transfix the moment and thereby to misrepresent the realities of time (114). It is on the next page that Frances reports having her own photograph taken.

Nevertheless, there is a painfulness to these images of reality from which Frances must finally turn away. In the choice between painting and photography she chooses painting, because of its greater degree of interpretative distance, of pure fabrication. It is not, ultimately, the lost half-truth of the photograph of herself that she takes as her talisman. When she rises from the deathlike sleep induced by the end of her relationship with James, she catches sight in her mirror of a tinted engraving she has loved since childhood: a picture of skaters with doll-like faces "totally devoid of expression or emotion," and beneath it the caption she never understood as a child--"Glissez, mortels; n'appuyez pas" (185). The ice is thin, so skate over the surface, don't look for support. Frances takes this as her motto as she heads back into a world from which she can expect nothing. She will treat life at three removes: through the shields of words, masks and reflected images. The family photographs with which her mother had attempted to domesticate the heavy, inherited dressing-table, by sliding them under its glass top, have been supplanted in the daughter's life by less directly or personally referential images, seen through a further layer of glass. The photographs, like the pain of her life, must be blocked

from affecting Frances. So much less ambiguous and more distant, the engraving will show the way ahead.

In this novel, however, the power of the photograph is reflected in the innocents below-stairs, the three servants of the old apartment building, who do have a real concern for Frances. At the end of the narrative, as she leaves them to their Christmas festivities and turns to her solitary writing, she sees them as if "posing for a last photograph" (189). Their simple celebration is parodic of that of Nick, Alix and James--its comforts less flamboyant, more solid, infinitely kinder, but inaccessible to Frances because of the barrier of class inequality. For her, to look at the truth means to recognize the need for deception, of a kind that the painful referentiality of photographs, however limited and therefore misleading it may be, is unable to sustain.

In Brookner's latest novel, A Friend From England (1987), a central theme is again the simultaneous value and deceptiveness of appearances, with which its characters are little short of obsessed. In this book too the heroine finally confronts a painting which is the occasion for insight and provides her with a mode of response. By contrast, the photographs of this book are seen as naïvely limited by their referentiality, which relates typically to people in their youth or childhood, in sunshine, and in

extreme vulnerability. Finally the heroine is brought to a painful and unforeseen awareness of her own dependency and parasitism, while in the process of attempting to reveal someone else's. It is as though Frances has been confronted by revelations of her own character, not through the machinating Alix but through someone much more akin to Frances' gentle crippled friend Olivia. Heather, though irresponsible and romantic, shares none of Alix' hysteria or cunning, while Rachel, who can only manage life on the surface, is another version of Frances. Rachel's final realization that she "lacked the patience or the confidence to invent a life for [her]self, and would always be dependent on the lives of others" (204) is made the more bitter by her recognition that Heather has learned from her a hardening of the surface. Heather's facial expression is that of the woman in the painting Rachel has recognized as full of meaning though devoid of explanation. She has a look that is "blank but oddly significant," and it is a look that serves her well in the world. It seems that, as in Look At Me, appearances must mask reality and not refer to it directly, if they are to empower access to life.

But A Friend From England is a highly schematic novel, like A Misalliance before it (1986), and this to its detriment. Both books make heavy use of the device of binary oppositions, and the structural motifs are obtrusively, almost obsessively present. Neither book attains to the

subversive subtlety in the use of narrative voice that is distinctive in the earlier Family and Friends, where manipulation of the photographic motif and an excessive foregrounding of the narrator enable Brookner both to inscribe and to undermine the traditional narrative design.

Family and Friends, like Look At Me, is undergirded--or undermined--by the "suspicion" that "the good live unhappily ever after" and that good character is a burden rather than an asset (183,50). On the other hand, Family and Friends also sees through to a bathetic conclusion the "ludic impulse" so dear to Nick and Alix. Here the suggestion is made that in middle age such "early singularity" may leave its practitioners stranded, becalmed, "and noticeably devoid of impetus" (185). Like Look At Me and A Friend From England, this novel concerns itself with the relationship between childhood and adulthood, and with variant understandings of what is entailed in maturity. Unlike the other novels, it adopts the notion of the family chronicle and covers a number of years.

In order to tell the story of several decades in brief compass, the book makes structural use of the artifice of a series of wedding photographs. In all but the very last of these, Sofka, the presiding matriarch of the book, plays a central role. The wedding photographs represent not merely weddings. They symbolize the whole world of family business

over which Sofka presides. Weddings are understood as "important affairs, with the roster of the family's achievements on show," events at which the women appear "iconic and magnificent" (15,16) and by which the children will in the future date and identify their past experiences (47). Moreover, the weddings are for Sofka instances of a degree of reality that everyday life lacks: "There is nothing imaginary about the weddings, only about the whole question of [her daughters'] married lives" (13). The visible certainties of a wedding appeal to her desire for control and order. That these wedding pictures should form the infrastructure of the narrative, and that there should be a degree of identification between Sofka and the narrator, are strong indicators that Brookner is again foregrounding the issue of narrative control in a ludic manner. Here in Family and Friends, narrative control and control of life-circumstances are parodically paralleled. Photographs offer in each case an apparent but deceptive security.

Why, asks one reviewer, would Brookner use such a "stilted device" as the presence of these photographic images to structure her narrative; "and why doesn't the narrative voice describing these few snapshots develop any persona at all?" (James 15). The reviewer has missed the point. To the extent that the device is "stilted," it perfectly conveys the simultaneous inscription and inadequacy of a controlling formula. The epigraph to Family

and Friends alerts the reader immediately to Brookner's concern with the paradoxical powers of structure:

There is much to be said for the advantage of rules and regulations, much the same thing as can be said in praise of middle-class society--he who sticks to them will never produce anything that is bad or in poor taste On the other hand . . . rules and regulations ruin our true appreciation of nature and our powers to express it.

(Goethe, The Sorrows of Young Werther, 1774)

The photographic frame in this novel preserves the appearance of control and good taste, while signally failing to tame the unruly life behind the stilled image. And when James laments the lack of "any persona at all" in the narrator, she is misreading Brookner's signals to such an extent that she is duped by that very narrative irony which sets out to undercut the traditional novelist's pretensions. The narrative voice is insistently omniscient in this book, constantly informing the reader of a future of which the characters are unaware, spelling out her superior knowledge of their temperament and past actions--"This I know to be the case" (8), "I have no doubt that . . ." (9), "He does not yet know that . . ." (50), "I have this on record" (136)--, and making wearily frequent use of the gnostic technique of the rhetorical question. The narrator most often speaks in the first person in sections of the

narrative that involve the photographs, to which she seems to have personal access. She most often substantiates in her own voice the views of Sofka--"Sofka knows, and she is right, that nothing is worth waiting for . . ." (125). Such interjections give a sardonic, world-weary tone to the narrative which confirms the epigraph's criticism of good order, whether in society or in books. The persona of the narrative voice, then, is precisely that of the traditional shaper of narrative, but satirically foregrounded to the point that her authority and reliability are intentionally undercut.

The opening sentence of the book introduces both the theme and its problematization within the narrative: "Here is Sofka, in a wedding photograph; at least, I assume it is a wedding, although the bride and groom are absent" (7). This is a vivid dramatization of John Berger's assertion that photographs quote from appearances where narrative, like painting, translates from them (Another Way 96). Berger talks of narrative description as a matter of judgment mediated through the bias of individual consciousness. The narrator describes the people in the picture, and fills in some details of their background. Then:

None of these people seems to have as much right to be in the picture as Sofka does. It is as if she has given birth to the entire brood, but having done so, thinks little of them. This I know

to be the case (8).

Musing on Sofka's deceased husband, "out of it in every sense," leads into the narrator's observation of other insignificant people: "And now I see that it is in fact a wedding photograph. The bride and groom were there all the time, in the centre, as they should be. A good-looking couple. But lifeless, figures from stock" (8). The reader never does find out whose wedding this was. It was the occasion that was important to the narrator, and Sofka at the centre of it, not the people around whom it was publicly focused. One recalls Berger's assertion that the way we see is affected by what we believe--"To look is an act of choice" (Ways of Seeing 8-9). Here Brookner is showing this to be true not only of the photographer but also of the spectator of a photograph.

After the taking of the photograph there will have been, asserts the narrator, feasting and dancing, a notion to which she returns as metaphor in the final paragraph of the book. Here too is a wedding photograph, this time of two European refugee protégés and quasi-servants of the Dorn household whose union represents the recovery of order and life after the disastrous dismemberings of war. The family configurations have altered. Neither of the initially most audacious and favoured children is there, and Sofka herself is dead--the atmosphere of the family gathering in her drawing-room prior to her imminent death had been "not

unlike one of those weddings at which the whole clan foregathered" (169). But the spiritual descendants of strong will and "singularity" are very much in evidence: the disreputable Dolly, the handsome and seemingly impervious brother Alfred, the lively children in the front row, and upright Mimi, who "looks very like her mother" (Sofka). And, most particularly, Nettie's child Victoria--Sofka's great-niece: "See that look on Vicky's face, that imperious stare, so unlike a child, so like Sofka. . . . See the resemblance. Wait for the dancing to begin" (187). These are the final words of the novel. Sofka's desires for her children have been singularly unfulfilled--only one of the four has a marriage-partner of whom she approves, and he was a last resort; only one of the four has children, and they are alien, modern children, whom she has never met. Nevertheless, a "replica of herself" (12) has been produced from within her family circle, and anyone with eyes to see will understand that Vicky will have people dancing to her tune, just as did Sofka.

But Vicky's birth was "the unexpected . . . a child, after all these years. It seemed like a miracle, and perhaps it was" (187). Born after Sofka's death, Vicky represents not the order that Sofka strove to create, but rather the unorderable that constantly escaped her. The paradox of this child's being Sofka's spiritual heir echoes the paradoxical nature of her control throughout the book, and, by

extension, of narrative control in general. While the photograph contains and implies this tension, it does so by preventing movement and therefore falsifying any valid expression of paradox: "rules and regulations ruin our true appreciation of nature and our powers to express it."

The reader may "see" and "see," but must "wait" for movement. Insofar as this is an invitation to the reader to move into and inscribe the future, she takes on the role of narrator at this point--and will function with the same kinds of inside 'knowledge' as did the narrative voice in the story she has just completed. Thus the authority of the narrative voice is revealed as the authority of hearsay, of an oral or written or visual record whose foundations confound the would-be questioner by their absolute relativity. Brookner's apparently traditional style hides a radicalism which questions its own enterprise even in the act of inscribing it. This use of the parodic Linda Hutcheon defines as characteristic of postmodern texts, which "paradoxically point to the opaque nature of their representational strategies and at the same time to their complicity with the notion of the transparency of representation" (Politics of Postmodernism 20). On such a basis, Brookner must be understood as postmodern. Her problematization of representation through the use of irony, her foregrounding of "the paradox of desire for and suspicion of narrative mastery" (Politics 76), her use of

the "perfect postmodern vehicle" of the photograph, which appears transparent while in the very act of inscribing its own system of signification--these factors suggest that degree and type of self-consciousness about narrativity which characterize the postmodern.

Family and Friends is thematically as well as formally concerned with representation. Within the narrative, the power of appearances is constantly unsettling, and appearances are constantly revelatory. In her early, decadent-modernist period, Susan Sontag used Oscar Wilde's dictum about the value of appearances as an epigraph to her collection of essays Against Interpretation (1964): "It is only shallow people," says Lord Henry to Dorian Gray, "who do not judge by appearances. The mystery of the world is the visible, not the invisible" (Dorian Gray 39). Sontag argues in the title essay that the work of criticism is to reveal "the sensuous surface of art" rather than to try to ascribe hidden meaning to its depths; she advocates "an erotics of art." She is speaking out of a metaphysic of presence, which she will later repudiate, when she refers to transparency in art, that "luminousness of the thing itself, of things being what they are," and of the need for criticism to show "how it is what it is, even that it is what it is, rather than to show what it means" (Against Interpretation 22-3). Nevertheless, what she cites of Wilde has particular application to a postmodern involvement with photography, in

which the visible self-consciously both hides and reveals mysteries. Wilde's comment would function well as an alternative epigraph to Family and Friends.

So significant are appearances in this novel that it hardly comes as a surprise to have the narrator spell out a genetic connection understood between appearance and character:

Sofka notices with a pang that there is some slight resemblance [in her niece Dolly] to her younger daughter Betty: that recessive gene that ordains seductive eyes and a sharp expression has emerged in Betty and in the two half-sisters, Dolly and Nettie, but has altogether missed Mimi and the boys. And Sofka sees that it is this recessive gene that leavens the ordinary good behaviour of this family; it is the enabling factor that points the way to will and to satisfaction (115).

Throughout the book people are described in primarily visual terms. Dolly is said to have chosen her husband Hal on the basis that his plainness sets off her colouring. Sofka, having little idea of her elder daughter's "inner landscape" once her brother and sister are settled in marriage, comes to "[focus] her attention on Mimi's appearance which does indeed begin to reflect that dereliction of spirit that has overtaken Mimi in recent years" (126). A likeness which is

apparent in photographs is understood by the narrator to be a comment on similarity of character. For instance, of Frederick and Evie in their wedding photograph, she writes, "together they present a double row of teeth and already they are beginning to show a marked resemblance" (82).

The younger daughter Betty's unvarying concentration on her looks and her performance ultimately condemn her, however, to a life of sterility and boredom, in which her care for an invalided husband is at least half-motivated by the pride which will not take her back to her family as less than a success. She and her equally narcissistic elder brother Frederick are both described, finally, in terms which suggest that they have reduced themselves to the immobility of photographs:

How have these artists in self-referral managed to edit themselves into a version so static, and yet so emblematic, that those at home, who have not seen them for many years, have no difficulty at all in picturing them . . . (185)?

Both have chosen lives of which their mother did not approve, both have left home. Ultimately, however, they fritter time in "sunlit exile" (186), and it is Alfred who appears to be the man of property, and Mimi the matriarch.

These are the two children who could not escape their mother. Alfred in his twenties has lived "a temporary

fiction of immunity from the rules" (175), but on the death of his mother he reverts to his earlier repressed discretion: he does not marry. Mimi has married deeply against her own wishes, because her mother stressed the importance of appearances: "no one will talk about you in that way when they see your house, when they admire your possessions, when they come to your afternoons" (134). Mimi has already learned the necessity of living on the surface: "It is in order to avoid heartbreak that [she] wills herself into accepting everything at face value" (116). After the death of her mother and the miscarriage of her child, Mimi does become "mildly matriarchal." She and her elderly husband:

talk little of those matters which they both still have at heart, managing to convert their memories into a pleasant concern for each other's welfare, and relying on the habits of a lifetime to see them through certain dark moments. In this they are successful (185-6).

It seems, then, that characters may, by an act of the will, turn to a habit of "ordinary good behaviour" in the absence of that recessive gene which results in a narcissistic attractiveness. In either case appearances take precedence over matters of deeper import, but for those who rely on good behaviour, appearances seem ultimately more productive. It is not incidental that Frederick and Betty

are described as being in self-imposed exile, nor that Betty's husband Max, a Hollywood film-producer who deals in nostalgic images of a poorer but more immediately satisfying life than his own, has his heart-attack while fixedly poring over photographs of Mimi's wedding. For Max, the wedding celebrations and their gathering together of family represent a dream of the home he has never had (160). He and Betty, Frederick and Evie are the exiles; they are not included in family photographs. Home and continuity apparently belong to those who put duty before pleasure, whose lives are sensible but dull.

But what, after all, is the cash value of the promise of appearances? Although the final photograph may predict a new round of dancing, the narrative has shown the ultimate sterility of the "wild card" as much as the dullness of the law-abiders. Even the notion of "home" itself is problematic. War made Sofka aware that she would never be able to go home--to Europe. Alfred struggles obsessively with the desire to find "rootedness" through a house and lands. Mimi's final return, after her mother's death, to the home of her childhood is "a sort of completion," but "[i]f Mimi's cup runneth over, it runneth over with decency rather than with anything more vital," and she has determinedly turned her back on her feelings as though to entertain them were some sort of illness (181-2). Rather, as in Look At Me, it seems that there is something invalid but psychologically

necessary about the keeping up of appearances. This paradox is presented emblematically in the frozen façade of the photographs, which provide structure and order for the narrative while witnessing to the inadequacy of structure to control the life beneath the appearances.

Anita Brookner is an international authority on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century painting, and until 1987 taught at the Courtauld Institute of Art in London, England. She turned to novel-writing in 1980, with the desire to be free of "libraries and footnotes and photographs" (see Dunn). Small wonder, then, if novels that make such significant use of photographic motifs ultimately privilege painting as the superior deceiver. In writing about the necessity to create stable images in order to give the appearance of controlling the uncontrollable elements of life, Brookner points to photographs as both archetypically stilled and contained, and as too painfully referential to provide an ultimately satisfying mask against the world. Narrative contextualization can edit photographs into acceptable mental images, but in so doing it distances them so that they are as much interpretations as painted pictures, or as the narrative line itself. And like photography, narrative control is paradoxical: its apparent order encompasses elements of disorder which may well be potentially stronger than it. The powerful Sofka's spiritual heir is not her own child; Frances can write satire well

only because she is so badly scarred. Brookner plays with the boundaries between photographic, painterly and narrative order, and in so doing demonstrates the necessity she sees for interpretation upon interpretation if the individual is to maintain an illusion of control, even over herself.

II

For Janet Turner Hospital, the photograph requires contextualization not that it may be controlled, but rather that its power may be manifest.³ It seems to have irreducible authority despite its limitations. It retains a mystique that is above artifice and which represents a real force to be reckoned with, the past. The photograph as a "certificate of presence," argues Roland Barthes, can never lie as to past existence, though the meaning of that existence will remain undisclosed (Camera Lucida 87).

Barthes' own attraction to photography is notoriously paradoxical. In his parodic autobiography Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes, he plays with the notion of the photographic referent as the most telling instance of constructed representation, for "[i]n the field of the subject there is no referent" (Roland Barthes 56). The book's simultaneous

use and abuse of both realist reference and modernist self-reflexivity is typical of what Hutcheon, for instance, understands as postmodern (Politics 48). But in Camera Lucida Barthes sees in the photograph the possibility of a private escape from mere fiction as a means of responding to the crisis in his autobiography caused by the death of his mother. In other words, its referentiality meets him at the point of his own desire. For Hospital, both photographs and fictions provide the potential for satisfying desire. They have an authority which transcends their artifice because their representation of the past is potentially redemptive.

Her first novel, The Ivory Swing (1982), is a somewhat overwritten book, too conscious of its symbols and in love with its own expression. Hospital has not escaped criticism as "a romantic who places effect over exactitude and expansiveness over restraint" (Patricia Bradbury 42). Nevertheless, The Ivory Swing is a book capable of passages of great delicacy and potent imagery, and in this sense presages Hospital's future work. It is set in India, where Hospital accompanied her husband on a research trip in 1977. The mysteriousness of the country clearly touched a deep chord in Hospital, but in her writing she remains an outsider. Whereas the Western characters are believable, the Indians seem either comic (Mr Matthew Thomas) or so magical and otherworldly as to be insubstantial (Yashoda).

Appropriately, then, the uncertain ending of the novel is its most convincing moment. Juliet and David, deeply affected by their experience of India, openly accept the frailty of their--and perhaps of any--marriage, and face the future like bewildered children.

There is one use of photography in The Ivory Swing that is noteworthy because it foreshadows what Hospital will do with photographs in future books. When Shivaraman Nair is setting off with David on a visit to the Hindu temple, a place normally forbidden to Westerners, Juliet takes their picture. As he poses, the Nair wipes all customarily vital expression from his face; instead, he "immediately compose[s] his face into a blank stare. He believe[s] it to be the only suitable expression for something as permanent and momentous and auspicious as a photograph" (143). Despite the ironic tone here, the linking of the "permanent" with the "auspicious" suggests that constellation of significances which will draw Hospital to photographs again and again. Her conception of reality as constantly impinging on the surreal, and her ongoing fascination with the magical, will find in photography an appropriately ambiguous form.

Hospital's second novel, The Tiger in The Tiger Pit (1983), is more demanding of the reader's intellect than The Ivory Swing because it is structurally less conventional

and thematically less bipolar, and foregrounds the issue of narrative control. It makes central play with the notion of the musical composition, and with photographs as elements of the past that can be harmonized within it. The book concerns a family, the Carpenters, who are divided by both emotion and geography; a fiftieth wedding anniversary celebration will occasion their physical and perhaps their spiritual reunion. Edward, a retired school principal and an angry old man imprisoned by ill-health, pigheadedness and pride, is ostensibly the tiger of the title; his tiger-pit is the gazebo in the garden, the scene of the most significant moments of both damage and healing in the book. Edward's wife Elizabeth, who had given up her career as a concert pianist in order to marry⁴, is a Prospero-figure who sets out to play the discordant strands of the family into a harmony, an "Elizabethan opera." The composition she is working on, the anniversary reception, is the "final movement of a family symphony" (19). Her orchestration is almost, but significantly not quite, identifiable with the writing of the narrative itself.

"Prospero is my middle name," says Elizabeth to her ghostly reflection in a dusty mirror (105). And when the reunion is successfully under way--but before the final dramatic turn of events--she, "concert-master," congratulates herself: "She lured random notes into harmony. Prospero, she thought, was actually a woman, a white witch,

benign" (219). Elizabeth's credo underlies the movement of the whole narrative: "Life was mysterious and awful and senseless, a chaos of pain and celebration, so what could one do but have faith and make music of it all?" (218) The passion for order is insane--witness Napoleon's universal school curricula and timetables (60)--, but the passion for harmony and wholeness is redemptive. Where Brookner's Sofka dictated and manipulated and insisted on surface appearances, Elizabeth takes risks in digging beneath the surface to produce harmony. When the coda of her composition turns out to be the final restoration for which Elizabeth could only hope--that of her violinist daughter Emily to Dave in Australia--Elizabeth recognizes the partial nature of her own power: "Excellent, she thinks. I have composed it well. Though one's control is never total" (237).

Her relationship to narrative mastery is less that of the dictator than that of the magician. The spells she sets in motion reach farther than she herself can, not least because they involve other people who may also choose to draw rabbits out of hats. Edward sends an invitation to the party to Marta, the long-absent woman whom he has loved with such angry self-denial, and with whose husband Elizabeth, unbeknownst to him, had an affair. Marta's arrival precipitates an enlightening and healing interchange between her and Elizabeth. Marta's presence in the gazebo with Edward triggers the bewildered memory of Edward's

oldest daughter, Tory, a mental patient whose illness had first become certifiable when her father assaulted her and her "young man" with a fully-charged garden hose in the gazebo on the occasion of her seventeenth birthday. Tory's reenactment of the incident with the roles reversed, so that she herself is attacker and her father and Marta are victims, is cathartic for both father and daughter, and opens the way to new health for Tory.

The other uncontrollable element is benign. Elizabeth calls it "catalysis": "If she brings them together, Adam and Edward, the chemical reaction will take care of itself. She won't need to do anything else" (61). Adam, Emily's eight-year-old son and the only grandchild of the family, is to meet the tiger for the first time. His birth out-of-wedlock so enraged the old man when he first heard of it that he vowed he would never set eyes on the child. He has lived to regret his outburst, but not to become sufficiently mellow to confess his mistake. That Adam is able to produce in him, within moments of their meeting, both laughter and tears is miraculous, a sign of the new man buried within the old and the justification of Elizabeth's faith:

When the old man awoke on Sunday morning, he felt first that there had been some fundamental change in the quality of the air. . . . He felt pervaded, that was it, by well-being. As though he had

ingested a massive dose of beatitude (195). The cycle of birth and death is central to the optimism of the narrative, both physically and spiritually. Hours after the death in Vietnam of her lover Joe, Elizabeth gives birth to Jason, whose appearance clearly identifies him as Edward's son:

The rush of life took her by surprise, its variousness, its richness, its inexhaustible offerings of irony. She cradled the tiny body between her breasts. Mere hours from a death, minutes from its own before-life, its bawling grip on the day exhilarated her (236).

Even when she recognizes "the intricate ecology of human actions, the consequences of recklessness," Elizabeth "cannot free herself of the expectation of that which is good, she is a glutton for each new morning" (241). She is the eternal optimist, the alchemist of hope. And her faith is proven well-founded: the story has a happy ending, in which forgiveness is shown to be more important than complete knowledge. She and Edward never do share the same version of their past in relation to Marta and Joe, and it has ceased to matter.

Such a beatific vision is hard-won, however. The magic of life resides not only in its redemptive possibilities but also in its cruelties: "The greatest mystery, Elizabeth

thinks, is the wildness of the beast within us." Every character is secretly a tiger in a tiger-pit: "At any moment we may move in some primal way, take a mere step in the direction of private desire, stretch an arm: and our claws have left blood in their wake" (233). Cruelty is mysteriously stored within us, and it is only when we recognize this that redemption is possible:

'People do terrible things just by lifting a finger,' [Elizabeth] said. 'We all do it, everyone of us. If we didn't understand that, and didn't forgive it, we'd be savages' (207).

Elizabeth does not have merely what she calls "an old woman's wistful belief in hocus-pocus and magic" (64). Rather, she has that strong will to think well of people which can counter the "arcane and mysterious workings of damage" with the power of forgiveness and hope. Jason, the psychiatrist, is always searching for the power to reverse spells of the kind that he sees his sister Tory as suffering under (214). He is expected, in his profession, to hand out magic; but he does not possess the alchemist's stone and is capable of great brutality to others because he has too much pain, his own and others', to handle on his own. For him too the family reunion is redemptive:

'I really think, from now on, I'll be able to do something.'

With his life, he means, with his patients.

[Elizabeth] knows it is simply that he has

discovered hope (234).

Central to the narrative, then, as to a musical composition, are recurrent themes and variations upon those--a sense of change within sameness, movement within design, the past within the present. Each chapter of the narrative is told from the perspective of a different family member, and the various voices play together to form the composite whole, a progression that contains linearity within a bigger circular movement. This is a book in which redemption is both thematically and structurally important. Time passes and yet is never lost, memory is a store of old photographs whose interaction with the present may radically change the way they are to be read:

This is the problem: nothing is settled in the past, it is a shifting region of fault lines and instability. Consider what a random conjunction of now and then can do . . . (236).

The problem, as the narrative demonstrates, therefore contains the seed of its own solution.

"Everyone comes back," as Adam says to Tory, whose sickness is in large measure the result of feeling betrayed by and deprived of those she loves. He himself needs this knowledge: his life has been unsettled and marked by the impermanence of significant people. Studying an ancient sundial in the ruins of Roman Verulamium, Adam first comes

to understand that, though time passes, its progress is not linear but circular:

There was just enough sunlight for him to see that the shadow of the marker had moved a little around the circular dial. Day after day, year after year, century after century, it had moved around the same circle and come back to where it had started from.

Time itself moves on, his mother had said, meaning he could never go back to Australia, never see Dave again. Time itself moves on, moves on, moves on.

Not on, he thought with sudden excitement. But around and back!

The realization came to him like an epiphany (58).

This desire to rediscover the past in the present sets Adam apart from the rest of his family. For the others, even for Elizabeth, the past is most consistently a place to be consciously avoided, skimmed over, buried. It is too full of harm, of traps, of damage:

Elizabeth finds that some atom of memory stores everything. It lies around, this smoking chunk of history, in abandoned corridors of the brain, a hand grenade, waiting. A pin is pulled and it is all still there in undiluted vibrancy (234).

When memories press in on her, she turns to her piano for

refuge, to recompose herself and them into something harmonious. "The trouble with memory," thinks Emily: "pick up a pebble and an avalanche comes thundering about your head" (28). Her "preferred relationship to the past" is "skimming over it in the arms of a Boeing 747" (148).

For Edward, memory is a goad; he goes "pacing through a litter of memories like an unquiet ghost" (43). Two specific memories are "etched into sleep and waking" for him as moments of lost opportunity: the first, when he might have turned to Marta, the second, when he might have given Emily a father's blessing on her child. His memories make him a "frantic dreamer of alternate autobiography" (15). Jason's painful memories surface imagistically in his dreams: "Jason's dreams were as disordered as his days were precise. In dreams he was always trapped in small spaces choked with clutter--attics, chicken coops, cellars, closets" (89). He suffers a traumatic experience when he is as unable as his client Stephen to come to terms with the grotesque butcheries Stephen had witnessed in a Latin American coup. Afterwards, Jason dreams again, this time of the women he feels responsibility for hurting:

. . . inexplicably, he and Stephen were sorting through a pile of mutilated bodies, their dead eyes open and staring: Sister Concepcion's, Tory's, Nina's, Ruth's, Jessica's.

You have to close the eyes, Stephen said. That's

required. You have to stop people from seeing their memories (172).

But the most graphic presentation of the destructive power of memory is of course in Tory, for whom memory is not merely a mental but also a physical trap. Seared by the loss of her "young man" she retreats into an underwater world, a tangle of images, snatches of poetry, and childhood pleading. Her body, bloated by sedatives, becomes a "muffling disguise she ingest[s] with her medication" (90).

The one consciously chosen method which any of the family has by which to conjure up memories is in looking at photographs. It is Jason who hoards photographs of childhood and adolescence, in a battered shoebox hidden behind his volumes of The Encyclopaedia of Philosophy. His poring over the photographs is a kind of addiction, furtive and cabalistic. Its effect is both exhilarating and calming: "a manic frisson of pleasure zipped around like mercury over a layer of almost infantile peace" (91). Jason sees his fascination with the photographs as sentimental. But the sequence in which first he and then Tory look at photographs of her is alternately painful and regenerative rather than simply nostalgic. Jason can "read" his father's "constant inner dynamo of rage and dissatisfaction" even in the way his toes dig into the lawn, and in the backs of his hands (94). Even this earliest photograph, of Victoria taking her first steps, reminds Jason that:

From as early as he could remember, [he] had had an image of his father clanking along in invisible armor, with steel guts and an overwound inner spring (94).

It is important, then, that another of the photographs conjures a different kind of memory--of his father being gentle and considerate with a nauseated Tory at the fair: "I loved him at that moment. I remember it distinctly because it was so unusual" (96). It leads him to consider, "What is it that I can't forgive?" and to start down "into the funnel of his past" (96) to discover that his father's irascible behaviour made Jason feel responsible for the pain his father caused.

Hospital shows in this way how memories and photographs are interconnected. A photograph will jog memory, a memory may "emerg[e] from blur like a print being developed" (228). And in both cases the enforced concentration on an undesirable past image may have surprisingly redemptive results. The photograph which Jason passed hastily over, feeling that "a switch had been tripped in his mind" of "something bale," is the one that moves Tory to tears and lucid remembrances. This is a colour print, of a teenaged and very beautiful Tory with a young man. Tory asks not about him, but about herself: "Where did she go? Where's Tory gone?" In response, Jason tells her, "Tory, you were beautiful. Everyone remembers. I remember." He taps his

forehead: "You're still here" (100). Immediately it is as though Tory is present also to herself: "Do you remember the ferry?" she asks. And they are off on excited reminiscences of a trip to New York that Jason had forgotten all about.

The reminiscences themselves are important here. They are of a time when Elizabeth forgot all about Jason and Tory. Going round the Metropolitan Museum of Art, she was transported into the mysterious world of the unicorn tapestries and simply forgot her children were there. When, returning later in a taxi to fetch them, she tried to explain, breathless with guilt and haste, their silent reaction was merely that it was "all magic" to them, and they never expected explanations to be other than "arcane and mysterious" (103). But the incident depicts the dangers of lack of connection, of the kind of presentness in living that is so attractive to Elizabeth and to Emily. Memory reinforces responsibility, and needs to be nurtured.

Tory, then, demonstrates the potentially redemptive power of the memories that photographs can stimulate, because they help her to focus more precisely and activate a truer sense of personal control. She is, however, very frightened of being captured in a photograph: cameras mean traps to her (225). The same "greedy lenses" that reduce Adam's school trip to a "charming sight" for "ritual-hungry visitors from Illinois" (50) can reduce Tory to an object,

deprive her of her last remaining shreds of human dignity. But the voyeurism of the photographer is ultimately a part only of the external world which does not signify in the redemptive process. What is much more significant here is what Barthes calls the subjective "punctum" of understanding and recognition; Hospital shows that the photographic image is able to stimulate such response in an environment of trust between people who are bound by the ties of family and a shared past.

Tory feels at ease with Jason. She is happy to see him. This trust together with the stimulus of photographs leads her to a renewed ability to focus. Outside of a positive present environment, however, photographs can merely reinforce painful and perhaps misinterpreted memories without moving them towards any redemptive re-remembering. It is a photograph that precipitates Emily's flight from Australia and Dave. Someone at a party takes her picture; it reminds her of her own mother in a characteristic pose that Emily had regularly interpreted as "caged." She has to escape from the inference of her own entrapment: "I stared at that photograph and felt swamped with panic. I cabled London the next day and said I was coming permanently" (190). The photograph of Emily in the concert program in New York fails initially to impress Edward as a picture of his daughter--partly because he has not seen her for many years, but partly because she is living in willed isolation from

the family in a way that makes the program notes about her more than usually accurate. They speak only of her musical career, and nothing of her background: "A skeletal life, sprung full-blown from Juilliard like Venus from her birth-shell." Edward is angry and hurt. He interprets both the picture and its caption from within his position of longtime disappointment with Emily: "Of course she would deny a prior existence, anything that would have the rank smell of family to it. Anything to extinguish him" (115). The inaccessible picture together with the impersonal program notes feed Edward's apprehensions and prevent him from expecting anything from this meeting with his daughter. For the photograph to have redemptive meaning it needs a fresh contextualization within the present situation. Without such living input it merely petrifies old memories.

The conscious framing of an image, the taking of a mental photograph, can be a sign of the present supplanting past images. When Emily sees her whole family "entire" at the anniversary party, this is in itself a step forward in her understanding of and commitment to them, even though the image is disconcerting:

She looked up at the house and saw her family entire, in one glance. The French windows reflecting the gazebo and herself; in front of them her son and her father on the porch swing. Her mother's face was pressed against the

windows from the inside (as always remembered), a disembodied head superimposed on Emily's own shadowy image. They were all contained--her parents, her son, and herself--by the mirrored gazebo, raffish under its disheveled strands of honeysuckle, an oddly décoiffé Medusa-like frame for a family portrait. And above its reflected finial, at an upstairs window, like the eye of God in illuminated manuscripts: Tory. Behind her, Jason.

All present, real and surreal, merging and swaying apart. If Magritte were to depict The Family, its symbiotic layers and floating detachments and arbitrary disjunctions . . . ? Or perhaps Escher . . . ? The Family in ceaseless mutation? (216)

Emily is acutely conscious of the symbolism of the framing gazebo, the positions of the family members, their merging and swaying apart, and she imagines the scene to be a surreal family portrait. Photography, as Susan Sontag suggests, may be called the only natively surreal art-form, by virtue of its ability to create a duplicate world, a "reality in the second degree, narrower but more dramatic than the one perceived by natural vision" (On Photography 51-2). According to this reading, photography is surreal in its relationship to time: it both assimilates time and imposes temporal distance (54,58). Hospital's perception of

reality might itself be called natively surreal; in an interview in 1986 she states explicitly that, for her, "[i]t's difficult to separate the surreal from the real" (Cameron 57). Emily's surrealist vision here of her family is a version of the photographic image, with all the potency which Hospital customarily ascribes to such images. Emily herself will be responsible for the family's mutating a little more before the reunion is over, and her capitulation to this acknowledgment of familial bonds is symbolized by her ability to frame the family's image. Although she ascribes the image to a painterly vision, she describes what she sees as if through the eye of a camera.

"[T]he past is not absolute after all" (205)--this revelation comes to Jason and Emily, when it is clear that their father has forgotten an unpleasant incident they considered indelibly engraved on his memory. Moreover, Emily is aware of having gained wisdom in her responses to Tory: "one wasn't condemned to repeat every single mistake ad infinitum" (201). And Tory, who had at first been described as "elephantine with the unchangeable past" (98), makes the same discovery about its relativity when she is able to repay her father in his own coin and thus free herself from his power. Not that events of the past did not occur. Rather, responses to those events may mature over time, so that within an environment of trust redemption is possible. The photographic image symbolizes both the intransigent

nature of past experience and the open-ended possibilities for present interpretation. It can petrify or liberate memory. Within a trusting environment, the photograph has extraordinary, almost magical power to restore the past in the present. A photograph which reminds the viewer of something he or she does not want to face is perceived as dangerous and paralyzing (95). But when a redemptive environment releases memories of a happier past, they "[come] drifting by like confetti fluttering from an old wedding album" (196).

Susan Sontag has argued that the photograph's fragmentary nature is dangerous: "with the passage of time its moorings come unstuck" (On Photography 71). On the contrary, Hospital suggests that it is the ability of the photograph to retain its "moorings" over time that is dangerous: its witness to the past may also transfix the emotions of the past. But when the photograph breaks free from its moorings its contingency can promote a healthy present response. As witness to an ossified history, the photograph encourages emotional intransigence in the present; as witness to the present reality of an ongoing history, the photograph has quasi-magical powers.

This link of photography with the transcendent is especially important in Hospital's most ambitious novel,

Borderline (1985). Here a specific photograph becomes the bearer not only of the past in the present, but also of the viewer's bonding with and responsibility towards the subjects of the photograph. For the mysterious Dolores Marquez, the sole survivor of a group of illegal immigrants who try to cross the Canadian/U.S. border in a truckload of frozen meat, the photograph of her children and her mother is a necessary talisman. The underground agent Angelo says that she needs it more than food, because "[w]e all need a piece of magic to keep going"; he asks Felicity to return the picture across the border to Dolores (206-7). But this "piece of magic" comes to feel to Felicity like a "steel trap": it obligates her to take responsibility for the family it portrays, and thus implicates her further in the network of illegal immigration and underground political dealing she has stumbled into through a chance encounter.

By the same token, when she hands over the photograph to a priest whom she later discovers will feel legally obliged to give it to the authorities, she accuses herself of having handed over both its subjects and its owner: "I gave away the photograph, I told" (262). As Sontag points out, photography revives the primitive status of the image as magically participating in the reality of the subject depicted (On Photography 155). Moreover, according to Roland Barthes the photograph is a temporal hallucination, "false on the level of perception, true on the level of time"

(Camera Lucida 115). For Hospital, such an understanding of the image as hallucinatory magic is not so much primitive as suggestive of the profoundly disturbing and extraordinary nature of contemporary existence, where reality is as often as not experienced as surreal. In Borderline she explores the uneasiness of the boundaries between the real and the illusory, the truth and the lie, person and person, through a juxtaposition of the photograph with the painting and the word.⁵

Hospital's strong sense of the ineffable, the unattainably other, finds in Borderline much more believable form than in her earlier The Ivory Swing. In both books, there are characters (particularly Dolores Marquez and Yashoda) who seem to embody a kind of transcendent otherness. But in Borderline, this character is made plausible in a psychologically convincing way because her mysteriousness comes to be identified with whatever is unattainable in significant others. For instance, Dolores represents the unattainableness of Felicity to the narrator Jean-Marc, son of the painter who is her long-time lover; she also represents the longsuffering of his wife to Gus, the philandering insurance salesman with whom Felicity has rescued Dolores from the meatvan at the border. Jean-Marc, in telling the story, projects into Dolores everything that is unattainable about Felicity to him, and everything that is idealized about his wife to Gus. Dolores herself is silent

and shrinks from being touched. She does not speak until she is on the car-journey that (probably) leads to her death, and even then in unintelligible and frantic Spanish.

Felicity calls her La Magdalena because she sees in her an overwhelming likeness to the Perugino painting she is trying to acquire for an exhibition in her gallery. La Magdalena never does materialize in an unquestionably definite way, but day-to-day life continues regardless. Felicity never does acquire the painting, but her exhibition goes ahead without it.

Hospital has said that the notion of the unattainable other has always had a strong hold on her: what is the visceral meaning of such unattainable people? She cites the story of the behaviour of Christ's disciples at his transfiguration as the archetypal instance of the human desire to hold onto what is ineffable, and of the resultant blurring of the borders of intelligibility.⁶ This image of transfiguration is one of which she makes central use in Borderline. Gus's transcendent vision of La Magdalena occurs outside a Quebec village called L'Ascension, and neither the narrator nor the reader is ever sure whether the vision had material reality:

She was standing under a tree, transfigured by light, her head tilted back, watching the sky through the leaves. . .

There was a ring of light about her head . . .

. . . Equipped with no tools for articulating to himself a sense of the ineffable, he was simply obscurely aware that nothing would ever be quite the same again (161).

She turns to look at him:

. . . [H]er look was dense with meanings that could not be read in such a glare.

He took a step towards her and stretched out his arms--perhaps in reassurance, perhaps in desire--but he might as well have fired a gun. She was off and running downhill through the trees . . . (161).

Gus picks up and eats one of the apples that has fallen from her skirt: "When he bit it, he felt as though he had partaken of grace" (162). Afterwards, he never checks out whether La Magdalena really was staying safely in Felicity's L'Ascension cottage. Why not? "Because," says Jean-Marc, "one doesn't tamper with visions of transcendence" (187).

"Do you think I'm not aware of what is happening?" he asks (163). "Do you think I don't know I'm really writing about Felicity at ten years of age, lost in the dark world, trying to make the woman in the photograph turn around?" This is a reference to the only photograph Felicity has seen of the mother who died when she was born, a photograph she had been shown as a child, by her grandfather:

There was a drawer in an old dresser that was

crammed with photographs. When anyone opened it, the pictures would spill onto the floor like fish out of a burst aquarium. A waterfall of the past. All the pictures were a sort of creamy brown color, not even proper black and white. It took her grandfather a long time to find the one he wanted (145).

The picture is of Felicity's mother before her marriage, as a schoolteacher guiding her students through an air-raid drill. Her back is to the camera:

Felicity looked intently at the back of the mother whom she had never met. But the people in the photograph seemed to be on the other side of a thin white cloud, as though sunlight had been spilled on the picture and had stained it with too much brightness. The harder Felicity looked, the hazier her mother became. If only she could make her turn around (145).

This blending of the real with the inaccessible links the desired image in the photograph to the experience of the transcendent. Does Jean-Marc know what he is doing? "Of course I know," he says. "We impose our own lives on the world: the self as template" (163). He knows then, that quite as suspect as Gus's version of La Magdalena is Jean-Marc's version of Felicity, "[t]hat her photograph is blurred with light" and "[t]hat she has, as it were, her back to you." But he adds to the reader, "Look to the beam in

your own eye! I read Dante, you read Dante, we're all of us looking for Beatrice, all in the dark wood together "(163).

Critics hailed Borderline as Hospital's first major involvement with the postmodern, and a breakthrough in her own development. John Moss, for example, writes, "This is one of the more impressive achievements of postmodernism: to set narrative reality against our own, and show our capacity to sustain it as truth, despite our certain knowledge of its invention" (Reader's Guide 186). Elspeth Cameron in her review declares that "Borderline is a coup for Hospital In the silent Dolores Marquez, who first appears framed by ominous swinging caracasses, art and life merge Janette Turner Hospital reminds us that the world's surrealist nightmares are all too real" ("Borders" 58-9). And, even more effusively, the Quill & Quire reviewer states that "[t]here is a reverberating sense of revelation, something indisputable yet ineffable, flashing through the prose. This is a fugue in words With Borderline, Janette Turner Hospital has crossed an important line herself" (Roberts 23). She herself has said of the book that, after the success of The Tiger in the Tiger Pit, "I suddenly had the feeling that I should go for broke, and do that more adventurous thing I've always wanted to do" (Cameron 57). Writing this novel, she confesses, "almost killed me" (Cameron 59).

Certainly the declared instability of the narrative is a departure for Hospital. The narrator, Jean-Marc, is, as shown above, self-confessedly unreliable--a piano-tuner who finds he wants to conduct the orchestra, he plays with what information he has to create the story that he wants. Sometimes he is so closely identified with Felicity as to be almost her double. At other times his yearnings for her are so strong that he invents her as the ideal woman around whom the light is so bright that he can barely see her. But the basic proposition behind the novel is not different from that behind The Tiger in the Tiger Pit. Jean-Marc refuses to deprive himself, his acolyte Kathleen, or the reader of all hope of a happy ending, and declares, "There's a fine distinction between what cannot be proved or disproved and what is essentially true" (281). Earlier, describing Felicity's attempts to turn her back on the disturbing events surrounding La Magdalena's appearance, he says in parentheses:

For the past, as Felicity knows and I know, is a capricious and discontinuous narrative, and the present an infinite number of fictions. The braiding of the two is the very stuff of a curator's bag of magic. A historian's too, for that matter, and history is what I'm writing (122).

As in her previous novel, Hospital is concerned here with the relationship of the past to the present, with the

necessity of redemptive memory, and with life-patterns that are cyclical rather than linear. The difference is that in Borderline she refuses to give the reader a place of privileged understanding.

Felicity herself is the unstable subject of more than one artist's work. She is an art historian and the curator of a private gallery in Boston. Over a period of some fifteen years she has been model and lover to Jean-Marc's father Seymour, a painter whom Jean-Marc dubs "the Old Volcano" and whom he accuses of thinking that "his paintings are the borders of reality" (285). While Jean-Marc is trying to "save [Felicity] from the old Volcano's misappropriation" by being himself her "official biographer, the final authority" (253), Seymour wants to fix her in paint before she slips away from him again. The paintings that had made him famous were those in which he took a painter's revenge on her for having left him the first time, and "reduced her to the rules of his own imagination, confined her within his own borders" (215).

The last painting of the book is the one on which the Old Volcano has worked obsessively before Felicity's disappearance. It is a huge painting which dazzles even Jean-Marc and looks "as though he has painted the mind of the sun, the concept of light, the idea of God" (285). Seymour is asked to comment on "the shadow of the woman

behind the light" and he replies, "It is the shadow of a woman who left me. . . . The idea of a woman I lost" (286). Jean-Marc's narrative is, of course, homage to the same shadow, the same idea. Did Felicity die in an apartment fire instigated by the agents who were following her? Or has she slipped away to South America, to "trail streamers of children" as she follows the dictates of her sensitive conscience in trying to care for the underprivileged? In either case she has become, like those with whom she inadvertently got involved, one of "los desaparecidos", the disappeared ones. She can be known only through the witness of paint and word, both of them shot through with the subjectivity of the individual before experience that is transcendent, that cannot be grounded and held.

Felicity's own description of the effect of an exotic and motherless childhood is to refer to herself as "a live transparency . . . from a camera that was jammed. A multiple-exposure life" (6). She keeps a file of newspaper cuttings of "dark and bizarre events" as "a kind of proof that I didn't invent my own childhood." To the agents (of the right? of the left?) who come to question her, she describes this file as "my immunization program. I mean, the desire to understand is itself absurd, isn't it?" (128) Language itself, she says, has become absurd, in the face of the surrealities of real life. Jean-Marc also discounts painting, on the basis that it is too static to contain the

vitality of someone like Felicity--at least until he absorbs the light of Seymour's last canvas. Through the media of word and paint, both Jean-Marc and Seymour leave the reader with this "idea" of Felicity, this shadow, which is fuller in expression but not in evidential power than the photographic images of the book. Not that there is a photograph of Felicity, apart from the "live transparency"; rather that photographic images throughout the narrative contain the power of the transfigured and ineffable in a way that supercedes the subjectivity of the writer and the painter. Photography offers "a kind of proof."

It is not what photographs tell, but what they show, that is magic. Thus when Jean-Marc refers to his narrative about Felicity as a photograph blurred with light in which she has her back to the viewer, he is claiming that even such an inadequate photograph captures a reality of reference that is substantial. The photograph of her mother is not less important to Felicity for bearing less information than she desires. Hospital has described photographs as both more tantalizing and more disturbing than paintings.⁷ The reality that photographs witness to is irrecoverably past and artificially arranged. And yet the image in a photograph has not been at every point interpreted as has the image in a painting. It seems to escape the limitations of both painting and narrative through its "deferred reference," its magical association

with the real.

But their inability to tell can render photographs particularly disturbing. Just as the dense meanings of an experience of transcendence are unreadable in its glare, so the meanings of a photograph are a second order of reference:

Felicity looked at the photograph in her wallet. The two little girls and the old woman stared impassively back. They told her nothing. She looked at her other photographs: her father was mending nets, preoccupied; her mother would not turn around. No messages there either. Nothing (240).

As John Berger puts it, "All photographs have the status of fact. What has to be examined is in what way photography can and cannot give meaning to facts," since "photographs do not translate from appearances. They quote from them" (Another Way of Telling 98, 96). Thus the inescapable presence of the photographed image, together with its unassailable silence, leave photographs open to manipulation, as Sontag has argued. When the secret police (of the right or the left) show Felicity a photograph of a woman slashed to death and declare it to be La Magdalena, Felicity is not in a position to deny the validity of their interpretation (123).

However, later the police show Jean-Marc photographs of

a wrecked Chevrolet in which they suggest Gus and La Magdalena were both killed. Although he is no more able than Felicity to offer counter-evidence, he is less prepared to accept the pictures at face value: "I push the facts back across the table. Opaque, I say. They yield nothing to me" (264). The police show him the pictures of Felicity's burnt-out apartment building, but the fire he dismisses as contrived: he accuses the police of being "plodding literalists," whereas he is used to exploring the subtext.

Jean-Marc's job is to tune pianos, and he describes the way in which mechanical accuracy must be tempered with art and intuition before the resultant sound is musically true (15). In the same way, he suggests, "the well-tempered heart of the matter" about which he is composing his narrative will not be pure and simple: "the absolutely accurate is too narrow; it is false and imperfect"--a sentiment with which Michael Ondaatje would readily concur (see Chapter 4). The "bald facts" which, in the year since the disappearance of Felicity and Gus, Jean-Marc and Kathleen have committed to filing-cards do not make sense of themselves, any more than do the photographs Jean-Marc has been shown. He sets out "to examine the dynamics and harmonics, to look for patterns, resonances, meaning" (17). The narrative is, then, an exploration of ways to read meaning in appearances.

Jean-Marc's alternative reading of the photographs of

disaster he is shown is based on his own intuitions about Felicity. "The one who looks is essential to the meaning found and yet can be surpassed by it. And this surpassing is what is hoped for" (Berger, Another Way 118). For what is needed is an understanding of the event photographed as experience rather than simply as fact; the subjective need of the listener will be responsible for the precise meaning conveyed. Jean-Marc imagines Felicity in Latin America, caring for children: "Children follow like flocks of doves, they clutch at her hands and skirt. She is walking away from me, she will not turn around" (266). His interpretation of the photographs results from his intuitions, his desire for a happy ending, and his skills as a story-teller--one who recognizes a tempering of (or tampering with) the evidence when he sees it. "[D]oesn't it strike you as odd, these separate fires? All this destruction of evidence? Isn't there something contrived. . .?" (265).

In fact Jean-Marc describes contrivance of many kinds in his narrative concern with borderlines: the aunts' escapist philosophy that "all things, when looked at from the right angle, lead to contentment" (105); the reparatory fantasies of Gus the "borderline saint"; the double life of dreadlocked Leon/Angelo who disguises himself as a black to escape detection as an Hispanic agent; and, not least, the fictions of Jean-Marc himself. "For the past . . . is a capricious and discontinuous narrative, and the present an

infinite number of fictions" (122). But the photograph is not among the fictional modes by which the various characters define their borders, because, rather than representing a fictional mode itself, it is a borderline example of that evidential material which must be interpreted into meaning through fiction. Near the beginning of the narrative, Felicity has a dream which illustrates the comparative powers of the photograph, the painting and the word in defining borders, and demonstrates just that ambiguity in the nature of the photograph which is its mysterious authority.

In her dream Felicity is trapped in a painting, and there is a square-foot hole in her torso through which the viewer can see a living tropical landscape. Across her thighs is written, in jasmine flowers, "This is not a real woman" (9). She slips out of the painting and heads towards the exit, ready to hand her passport to the border guard. But there is something wrong with the passport: "a visa lacking, or a hole in the middle of her photograph." She is told to stand aside and wait. Then:

Once the inspector arrived, it was all over. You again, he said, back you go. The man with the brush was waiting as usual and they pasted her back on the canvas, flattening the curves, elongating here, twisting there, making free with the placing of her eyes. She had not even settled

herself properly around the empty space--through which the surf hissed and writhed--when the frame was clanged shut around her. Locked. All borders in place. The man with the keys shook the bunch in front of her face.

Felicity woke in a sweat (10).

Clearly the main reference here is to Felicity's anxiety about her relationship to Seymour's paintings of her. He has told her that she is "an idea" of his, the embodiment of his painterly fantasies, and has catalogued a picture of her in these terms, stating explicitly that "[t]he woman is not real" (7). This comment has worried Felicity, because it has seemed to take on a life of its own. To be described constantly as a 'painter's dream' has thus become for Felicity not so much a matter of pleasing compliment as a question of metaphysical anxiety. Long ago she had told Seymour, concerning her "entire history," that "[n]obody even believes it's real," and he had countered with, "Anything's real once I've painted it" (13). Is her life, then, only the stuff of paintings and dreams? Is she merely, as in the picture she dreams about, a framework within which other people can experience the life of the senses? Even Jean-Marc says, "I have to admit, there has always been a quality of absence about her; which is why her disappearance itself seems insubstantial, merely a figure of speech, or a trick of the light, a momentary thing" (8).

Seymour's paintings trap Felicity, they flatten her and twist her and declare themselves as more real than she is. But in her dream, what verifies the image in the painting is its duplication in a passport photograph--the universal badge of identity, the archetypal "certificate of presence." It is not because the painting dubs her as insubstantial that she cannot escape across the border, but rather because the photograph confirms this verdict: there is a hole in the middle of it. Felicity may be able to step out of the picture-frame and observe her own immolation as a casual viewer, but the self who views the painting is certified inadequate, unreal, by the passport photograph. The photograph confirms her fears that she has no passport to a really independent existence.

Jean-Marc's comment, however, holds the seeds of hope. If Felicity's "quality of absence" is understood as a strength rather than a weakness, then her disappearance too may be insubstantial. This is the basis on which Jean-Marc interprets all the evidence of his narrative. It is not only Felicity but also La Magdalena who is described at different times as seeming like a dream, a multiple exposure, a surreal picture, one of Seymour's paintings. Felicity tries to persuade herself that she has merely "stumbled into someone else's nightmare" and that all the intrigue is really just a dream about a painting (204), but she is fighting against her own perception of the world when she

does this. Of the "police" who inquired about her file of macabre and disturbing news-clippings, she had asked, "Does any of this seem real to you?" (131) And Angelo, responding to her incredulity at his description of atrocities in El Salvador, says, "None of it's possible None of it's real. But it happens" (206). If, then, the atrocities are true, and La Magdalena exists, it is quite as likely that Felicity also is real, and that she can have disappeared into another life rather than into death. For Hospital, life is shot through with both the surreal and the magical, and photographs hover as potential evidence on the borderline between worlds.

The attempt to represent the surreal and the magical leads inexorably to photography. "I am often distressed," Felicity confesses to her mirror, "by the gulf between experience and the possibility of representing it in any medium other than memory" (12) (Hospital's heroines are prone to address themselves in mirrors when they have important thoughts). Seymour uses painting as his representational medium; Felicity herself, like Jean-Marc, uses words. When Jean-Marc is trying to make sense of Felicity's response to La Magdalena, he invokes stories of her past that she has told him:

Her stories bombard me, they seem to have become my own memories, they writhe and change and regroup in the way true memories do. They are like

the photographs in her grandfather's dresser, a deluge of the ever-present past (155).

What is interesting here is that photographs are understood as the presence of the past not in fixity, as one might expect of the fixed photographic image, but in flux: the present meaning of the past is constantly reinterpreted and reshaped, as memories are reinterpreted and reshaped.

Susan Sontag, always conscious of the photographer's power and alert to its abuse, argues that the photographer is the inventor rather than the recorder of the past, so that photographs replace rather than aiding memory (On Photography 66, 165). But for Hospital, the images of memory and photography share in that same validity which Roland Barthes attributes to photography alone when he describes photographs as "reality in a past state: at once the past and the real" (Camera Lucida 82). Hospital's understanding of the relationship between photography and memory is perhaps best identified with that of John Berger: he argues that there is a close association between the two because both depend on but oppose the passing of time, both preserve individual moments, and both consist of a field in which different times coexist (Another Way of Telling 280). The central and necessary role of the subjectivity of the viewer in the interpretation of photographs is recognized by both Barthes and Berger. For Hospital, this relationship

between viewer and image issues in constantly rewritten fictions with meanings appropriate to the present.

In her fourth and most recent novel, Charades (1989), Hospital describes the way in which different histories come off a photograph "like fog." The tenth section of Part I of the book is called "Photographs," and it seems initially to be denying to photography any validity. Talking to Koenig, Charade says:

Sometimes . . . I think of the droplets
of stopped time in photographs, oceans and oceans
of it, in all the albums and wallets and drawers
and attics of the world. Lies, all lies.

Because the camera falsifies everything,
doesn't Koenig agree? There's the picking and
choosing, the arbitrary framing, the whole
dishonest bag of photographers' tricks, that's for
starters; and then there's the self-consciousness
of the photographee--even, or maybe especially,
in the candid shot.

Do we look like that? she asks him,--you know,
startled, sheepish, dramatic--when no one is
watching? It's all a sort of untruth; a composed
--or discomposed--artifice.

What's interesting about a photograph, she
says, is what isn't in the picture (68).

"What isn't in the picture" but is present in "[t]he

emptiness around the edges" is its interpretation. For all her apparently dismissive attitude, Charade still understands photographs to be "full of secrets" (70), different ones of which will be available to different readings. "A photograph," says her mother Bea when confronted with one which reminds her of disturbing past events, "is no more use than a snakeskin after the snake has crawled out [because] it doesn't tell you anything at all" (74). But its power, here as in the earlier fictions, consists in what it shows, and in the presence of this showing as a memory. Despite the "lies" of the arranged image and the self-conscious pose, the photograph witnesses to physical presences in the past, and as such it has an unassailable authority. The photograph can seem to lie only about meaning, as Barthes argues--it can never lie about existence (Camera Lucida 87). It is a photograph, in this section of Charades, that prompts both Charade and Bea to give more or less fictional meanings to the relationships that really existed in the past.

Hospital implies that both photographs and fictions are limited--by the viewpoint of their creator, and by their exclusion of what is beyond their borders. But both have the potential to be redemptive. It is in this sense that Hospital is a romantic rather than an ironic postmodernist. Like Berger, she embraces a metaphysic of meaning and coherence. Photographs, which offer magical reference to the

past, are nevertheless witness not to its absoluteness but to its reinterpretability, in fictions which re-member past images in a present context. For Hospital, it is not that photographs are inherently dangerous because of their privileging of dissociation and the instability of their meaning, as Sontag argues. Rather, they must be freed of the sometimes stubborn accretions of old association and old meanings, through an openness to their ability to stimulate new epiphanies that give meaning appropriate to the present.⁸

*

As the above readings of Brookner and Hospital argue, the use these two novelists make of photographs can be understood as symptomatic of the presence or absence in their novels of coherence, referentiality and narrative control. Brookner's novels initially seem to fit a traditional realist model, but her use of photography discloses a postmodernist interest in representation as constructed surface. Hospital's later novels initially seem the more postmodern in their foregrounding of the indeterminate subject in textual play, but her use of photography discloses a romantic attachment to the notions of essential meaning, narrative coherence and the unity of

the subjective consciousness.⁹ Whereas for Brookner photographs emphasize appearances in a state of stasis and the necessary deceptiveness of control, for Hospital photographs present opportunities for the reinterpretation of appearances into new harmony. Brookner's photographs are typically fixed in an enclosing frame or album which distances and contains their painful referentiality. Hospital's photographs are typically free-floating and passed from hand to hand, so that they are motifs within the larger image of a developing composition.

For both writers "the mystery of the world is the visible," but their understandings of the origin of and response to mystery are profoundly at odds. They seem to differ from one another in ways that are generally in line with the differences noted between other British and Canadian writers in the two previous chapters. Brookner sees the impenetrable image as an ironic defence against the vulnerability of depth. Hospital sees the image's representation of the past as a magical site of potential transfiguration. That photographs can sustain such different understandings of control reflects the ambiguity at their heart--a pastness in the present, an artifice of the real--and witnesses to the tension between transparency and opacity that must inhere in any image-system that can cater to romantic as well as postmodern praxis.

Notes.

1. One might argue that Hospital's novels deserve consideration as approaching that "literature of replenishment" for which John Barth wants postmodernism to become known. Barth takes issue with Gerald Graff for suggesting that postmodern literature is merely "more and more about itself and its processes, less and less about objective reality and life in the world" ("The Literature of Replenishment: Postmodern Fiction," Atlantic Monthly 245.1 [1980]: 65-71). His own program for postmodernism involves a synthesis of the antitheses inherited from premodernist and modernist modes of writing, in an accessible style that is appropriate to the democratic origins of novelistic form. Bernard Bergonzi seems to be setting out a strikingly similar programme when he argues for "a reflective realism." Such a realism would be "aware of the conventionality of fiction, whilst open to the world of experience; as a matter of deliberate choice and consideration for the reader it would preserve the traditional formal decorum of the novel whilst using the insights of problematical fiction" ("Fictions of History," The Contemporary English Novel, ed. Malcolm Bradbury and David Palmer [London, U.K.: Edward Arnold, 1979], 57).

2. It is not merely speculative to suggest a connection here with Brookner's own motivations in writing. In an

interview with Shusha Guppy in 1987, Brookner says, "Writing has freed me from the despair of living" ("The Art of Fiction XCVIII: Anita Brookner," The Paris Review 104 [1987]: 151). Furthermore, she does not dissociate herself from Guppy's naïve assumption that Brookner's early heroines and Brookner herself are interchangeable.

3. Hospital's frequent use of the photographic motif seems to be unpremeditated and instinctive on her part. When I asked her, during an interview at University of Ottawa in November 1986, about her interest in photography, she expressed surprise at its omnipresence in her novels. While we were speaking, she reached for the manuscript of her latest novel Charades, not yet at that stage published, and showed me, with the amusement of self-discovery, that it included a whole segment entitled "Photographs."

4. Incidentally, this was precisely the situation of Anita Brookner's mother.

5. One is reminded of Marshall McLuhan's dictum, "A border is not a connection but an interval of resonance." See "Canada: The Borderline Case," The Canadian Imagination: Dimensions of a Literary Culture, ed. David Staines (Cambridge, Mass. & London, U.K.: Harvard U.P., 1977), 226-48.

6. Comments made by Hospital during an interview I had with her at the University of Ottawa, November 1986.

7. Ibid.

8. In effect, Hospital is wanting to destabilize the image historically. This is to take a radically different line from that of John Tagg, for instance, who argues that "Photographs are never 'evidence' of history: they are themselves the historical," and that they must be understood within this historical context (The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories [London, U.K.: Macmillan 1988], 65). On the other hand, Allan Sekula, for instance, argues that a photograph is open to appropriation by a range of texts, each new discourse situation generating its own messages ("On the Invention of Photographic Meaning," Thinking Photography, ed. Victor Burgin [London & Basingstoke, U.K.: Macmillan, 1982], 91). Hospital demonstrates what happens when discourses--for instance, those of Edward in the past and Edward in the present-- overlap across an image.

9. Hospital gives clear expression to this yearning for coherence when she says in an interview with Elspeth Cameron, "I'm always trying to find some connecting thread that makes sense. That's why I write" ("Borders," Saturday Night Apr. 1986: 58).

Chapter Four. Photography as Alternative History:
Timothy Mo, Salman Rushdie, Michael Ondaatje.

Memory heals the scars of time. Photography documents the wounds.

Michael Ignatieff, The Russian Album



From Michael Ondaatje, Running in the Family 103.

In The Russian Album (1987), the Canadian-born historian Michael Ignatieff is writing the story of his Russian grandparents: Count Paul Ignatieff, the last Minister of Education in the cabinet of Tsar Nicholas II, and his wife Countess Natasha, who was raised on a vast estate given to her family by Catherine the Great.¹ Ignatieff's sources are Paul's memoirs, Natasha's personal reminiscences written down in halting English for the grandchildren, conversations with Paul's children (Michael's father and uncles), and the family photograph album. His book opens with a meditation on photography.

Ignatieff suggests that, in a century which "has made . . . rootedness the exception" and where connectedness with one's own past selves, let alone connectedness with one's ancestors, is problematic, photographs are for many families "the only objects that perform the religious function of connecting the living to the dead and of locating the identity of the living in time" (2). Photographs, Ignatieff argues, not only help to constitute one's temporal identity but also bear witness to an imprisoning heredity within whose limits the individual must create the self. And because photographs make the past present to us at the same time as emphasizing its pastness, they are symbolic of the irony inherent in historical narrative, by which the more present the past is made to seem, the more aware we are of its distance from us. As a result, photographs relate for

Ignatieff both to the individual's quest for identity and to the historian's quest for the truth of the past.

Ignatieff differs from John Berger, however, in distinguishing quite specifically between the value of photographs and the value of memory. Despite the "shock" of encounter with photography's intransigent images, photographs can only document the distance between present and past. They cannot "bind the past and present together with meaning" (5). Where memory integrates time into a mythology within whose parameters the self is constantly reimagined, the photograph may subvert this continuity by presenting disjunctive fragments which "remind us how discontinuous our lives actually are" (6). Where memory "heals the scars of time," photography "documents the wounds" (7). It is in "the struggle of writing" that memory can be preserved (7).

Ignatieff suggests that exile may be the making of a writer, because the past becomes a fabled territory to be reclaimed inch-by-inch in writing. But what kind of a writer? "For someone like myself in the second generation of an emigré tradition, the past has become the story we write to give weight and direction to the accident and contingency of our lives" (8). The assertion that Ignatieff is writing a story seems to allow for invention and interpretation. He himself points out that memory is multi-faceted and often

not reducible to a single narrative--"Even today the brothers still argue heatedly about some things and I could not hope to establish who was right" (15). But later in his introductory chapter he writes, "I have done my best to disentangle history from myth, fact from fancy, but in the end I cannot be sure of the truth, either of what happened or what is remembered. I wasn't there" (20). This is a traditional historian speaking, one whose concern is for fact and verification, the Ignatieff who distrusts the "artifice" of fiction and believes fundamentally in a single, metaphysical 'truth.' He disparagingly calls his book a portrait, "a crude sketch, a study in the unbridgeable distance between first and second generations" (15). He must settle for a portrait, because the ideal history, at once objective and resurrectionary, is an impossibility.

Thus, in this story of his own inheritance, Ignatieff finds himself to be a historian at odds with himself. A historian, he says, must believe that knowledge can consummate the desire to master time's losses; but in experience his knowledge of the past can never satisfy his desire for the past (15). It is because photographs can provide a conjunction of the object of historical knowledge with the object of desire that Ignatieff finds them particularly poignant and powerful. The attraction of photographs lies in their "acute physical tactility" (4)

which testifies to the objective reality that has traditionally been history's concern. Photographs stand as a paradigm for the presences and absences which Ignatieff as a historian feels compelled to document. He distrusts fiction, he is disillusioned with history, but he declares his intention to "stay close to the initial shock of [his] encounter with [his grandparents'] photographs: that sense that they were both present to [him] in all their dense physical actuality and as distant as stars" (16).

Given this kind of comment on the intransigent power of photographs together with Ignatieff's assertion that they need his work of words to imbue them with meaning, one would expect his book to display some ambivalence of approach to the photographs he uses. This is far from the case. In practice, he provides definitive interpretations of every photograph he either mentions or reproduces in the text, so that the "shock of encounter" experienced by the reader is as often as not the shock of disjunction between various possible interpretations of the image of which the reader may be aware, and the meaning that Ignatieff has unequivocally decided upon. This authoritative treatment of the photographs he includes is symptomatic of his treatment of his material as a whole. His desire for a united and linear history overrides his awareness of the existence of irreconcilables.

The inherent ironies of Ignatieff's book, then, are in part those that he himself recognizes as implicit in the project of writing history. But ultimately his book seems to be an ironical commentary on his inability to allow for the pluralities of which he is aware. Thus, though his critique of photography is liberal, his espousal of photography in practice is that of the conservative historian. Not so the practice of the three writers to be discussed in greater and lesser degrees of detail in this chapter, although their interest in history, national as well as personal, has led them too to make use of the referentiality of photography. Timothy Mo and Salman Rushdie in Britain and Michael Ondaatje in Canada are all consciously privileging the notion of what Ondaatje calls the "well-told lie." The photograph, because of the conventionality of its construction and the substantial absence of what it makes visually present, may stand as a paradigm for the ambiguous power of artifice. In Mo and Rushdie, the magic of the photograph is subservient to its artifice, as it has been argued above is most typical of contemporary British writers. In Ondaatje, however, the photograph's impenetrability can give it the authority of magic, to such an extent that he seems to be the most attracted of all contemporary Canadian writers to the power of photography. Ondaatje's work will be the main focus of this chapter.

These three writers, like Ignatieff, all write from the consciousness of a personal and national history that has experienced cultural and geographical disjunction: they share an excolonial orientation.² They are writing not so much history as "historiographic metafiction," the somewhat unwieldy title by which Linda Hutcheon has identified that kind of quasi-history which blurs into self-reflexivity and parody. "Historiographic metafiction" is a fiction that combines the documentary impulse of realism with the "problematizing of reference seen earlier in self-reflexive modernism" (Hutcheon, Politics of Postmodernism 35). Such fiction is "obsessed" with the question of how one may come to know the past in the present; its hybrid forms are typically postmodern in the desire to frustrate critical attempts at totalization (Politics 43). Unlike Ignatieff, these quasi-historians are not interested in leaving a "marked and lighted road" for future generations (The Russian Album 185). Their concern is rather to refuse this linear, totalizing impulse in order to problematize issues of historical representation and convention. To this end they all three, in varying degrees, incorporate into their writing the notion of photography as a site of paradoxical indeterminacy. As Fredric Jameson has suggested, in a culture that has "gradually bracketed, and then effaced altogether" the past as 'referent,' what he calls "the remarkable current intensification of an addiction to the photographic image" can be understood as "a tangible symptom

of an omnipresent, omnivorous and well-nigh libidinal historicism" ("Postmodernism" 66). Photographs represent paradigmatically the conviction that, in Linda Hutcheon's words, "past events are given meaning, not existence, by their representation in history" (Politics 104).

I

His gargantuan An Insular Possession (1987) stands as evidence that Timothy Mo, born in Hong Kong of a British mother and a Chinese father, seems able to look with detachment on two distinct worlds. In this his third novel, the photographic image is one of the central motifs that carries forward the debate about the nature of progress and the relationship between tradition and change. Because the novel concerns itself with life on the South China coast at the start of the Opium Wars of 1839-42, and with the battles leading to the founding of Hong Kong as a British colony in 1841, photography can be introduced at the time of its inception, in the era of the Daguerreotype, and much lively debate can be carried on with historical credibility as to the rightful place of photography in relation to painting, and its viability as an instrument of wartime

information-gathering.

The Americans Walter Eastman and Gideon Chase are employed in China by the American trading company of Meridian. When their employer decides to get involved in the opium trade, Eastman and Chase resign. Eastman starts an outspoken weekly newspaper to counter the existing paper's smug support of the drug trade and to give sketches of Chinese life--written mainly by Chase. While Walter expresses his concern for justice through the instrumentality of his newspaper together with his recently-acquired camera, which he dubs "the charmed eye and necromantic plate" (471), Gideon develops his interest in the Chinese by surreptitiously learning the language from a mandarin.

Gideon is the most transcultural character in the book, since he comes neither from Britain nor from China but is sympathetic towards and literate about both. The reader is informed in an appendix to the narrative that Gideon goes on to become a prestigious interpreter in China, and later a professor of Chinese at various universities in Europe, the States and China itself. To Gideon Mo gives the chance to be wise in retrospect. In a second appendix written by Gideon forty-odd years after the novel's chief events, he reflects upon the apparently oppositional notions of fact and fiction, and of continuance and completion. It is difficult

to know to what extent the reader may fairly interpret Gideon's voice as Mo's, at this point. Certainly some of Gideon's ruminations work well as a summation of positions that have been dramatized earlier in the book.

For instance, Gideon's critique of photography provides a gloss on the previous narrative where he has been wary of the camera for which Walter has been so enthusiastic an advocate:

Photography, I believe, . . . was the point of focus at which those irreconcilables, art and science, the high culture and the low, could be brought together, where elsewhere a coexistence was impossible. And both photography and journalism . . . were the most powerful agents of this novel passion for the actual and the real, alliance made yet more potent where the photograph might be reproduced as an article of news in itself. Yet how deluded was this search for truth, literal truth, and how fallacious its instruments, for there is small verity in the newspaper or the photograph, though both purport to be fact in its purest form. . . . Perhaps the essential truths may only be possessed in utter contrivance, where the artifice is openly acknowledged, as in a painting or a work of fiction where no facts may be found at all (589).

Gideon sees himself as a man who has "lived through . . . a span of time wherein men have experienced a passion for the recording of the actual, to accumulate fact" (588), an enterprise that he now understands as largely illusory. He sees too that he has lived in a time when, as a result of the application to history of the scientific method of collecting evidence from which to make deductions, history has been comprehended as a kind of melodrama, "a succession of acts and actors, of denouements and, above all, of climaxes" (587), in a schematic structuring that he now considers simplistic. His years in China have taught him that human affairs cannot be understood in simple blacks and whites. At one time he had conceived of himself as "a Daguerreotypist on the banks of some mighty stream. For what is a dictionary but a photograph of the river of language at a given moment?" (589) But as a philologist he has come to see that neither river nor language remains static. Both have a tendency "to diverge as well as divulge." The witness of the photograph, then, is relative to its historical positioning. The painter Harry O'Rourke had earlier declared, "A painting [because it meditates on a specific time] is immortal, the Daguerreotype [because it is physically dependent on a specific time] is a reminder of death" (545).³

For Gideon, his years in China were his brightest, and their images remain the most vivid in his mind. Remembering

that time as an extraordinary one, he talks of photography as a "point of focus" and "a reflection itself of a changing view of the world" to which he himself was not immune.

He believes that for both individuals and societies;

there are some years where the essence of all that is new is a concentrate, where development is--to coin a phrase--'telescoped', where the perspective of the years is foreshortened And in these watersheds of change, that which is new and that which is old, the revolutionary and the ancient, invention in its infancy and that which is to become extinct, all come together in a medley of the shocking and the incongruous (593).

Thus as Walter Eastman and Harry O'Rourke both survey the scene of battle, the one attempts to photograph it, the other to paint it. However, in the final chapter of the main part of the book, even Eastman abandons his passion for photography along with his involvement in journalism, in favour of simple hedonistic enjoyment of the passing moment, with an appreciation of continuity through change to which Gideon later comes. "There is no blank end, only . . . the succession of moments leading on to something else" (575). In a move similar to that of Frances in Look at Me, Walter finally privileges the "utter contrivance" of painting, where there is recognition of the inevitability of interpretation and the human desire to make meanings. The photographs he has taken have, in any case, very often been

the product of obvious contrivance themselves.

An Insular Possession has been called "a historical novel of so traditional a kind as to seem startlingly original" (Enright), perhaps because of its interest in physical setting, an action-filled plot, and engaging character, as well as its presentation of encyclopaedic background information. However, there are less traditional elements. For instance, another reviewer, conscious not only of what is said but also of the way in which it is said, points out that "Mr Mo's approach is, at first, maddeningly circular," because although it makes copious use of all the historian's customary primary sources, it advances by fits and starts (Winks). The reviewer concludes that Mo is demonstrating in practice how the Chinese novel has more in common with the picaresque than with the Western novel of plot, a subject on which Eastman and Chase's newspaper has at one point published an essay. Perhaps the native novel is, then, also naturally in sympathy with that confusion of the fictive and the real which has become a mark of the Western postmodern novel.

Mo's framing of the comments in the appendix as passages "edited" from Gideon's "unfinished and unpublished autobiography" (586) problematizes the authority of the ending. With similar ambiguity, Gideon's account of the deaths of the two other chief protagonists of the book,

Eastman and the painter O'Rourke, stands alongside his own argument (itself a reworking of Walter's long ago) that history is a continuum and the desire for satisfying closure a mark of human need. One is ready to suspect that he has been reading Frank Kermode's The Sense of an Ending when he wonders whether:

the pain of our end . . . is that which defines the meaning for our entire lives? For, commonly, an end is that which governs the sense of all that has gone before, which confers a significance.

Men do love a conclusion (591-2).

It is indicative of Gideon's mature understanding of the relationship of the part to the whole, and of the paradox of completion within a continuum, that his final words transgress the boundaries of closure by consciously involving the reader as the agent of continuity: "To you, reader, I reach out my hand. I was a man!" (593).

For Gideon, photography has functioned as a sign of the times, to be superseded by the more openly contrived artistry of writing. For Mo, photography is a game-piece which he can use to score points about the relativity of realism in fiction and the hermeneutics of historical veracity. In this sense, then, and despite his colonial background, Mo shares what has been described as the more typically British approach to photography, in which its magic is distinctly subservient to its artifice, and where

it is denaturalized to be interpreted as offering a parodic version of traditional mimesis.

For Salman Rushdie in Midnight's Children (1981), however, the photograph is emblematic of the site of an indeterminacy in which artifice itself has magical power. Rushdie can be called a magic realist, on the basis that his is "not a realism to be transfigured by the 'supplement' of a magical perspective but a reality which is already in and of itself magical or fantastic" (Jameson, "Magic Realism in Film" 311). Rushdie's fictional universe is essentially magical, and his magic has only the most tendentious links with any traditional concept of realism. He subverts the notions of cause and effect, of the existence of any centralizing truth discoverable through the senses, of the historical and psychological as differentiated from the supernatural, of time and place as objective calculable entities, and of the private and the public as distinct categories. Rushdie's understanding of representation is one in which "facts" cannot be separated from the acts of interpretation and narration that constitute them (see Hutcheon, Politics 94). The very notion of history therefore requires an acceptance of radical uncertainty. Saleem Sinai says, "To understand just one life, you have to swallow the world" (Midnight's Children 108). And from its first paragraph the novel foregrounds the interpenetration of the mundane with the fantastic, the personal with the national:

the birth of independent India and that of Saleem coincide, so that "thanks to the occult tyrannies of those blandly saluting clocks [he is] mysteriously handcuffed to history" from the start (11).⁴

Thus the subversiveness of Rushdie's writing has much wider application than simply to his much-publicized "blasphemy" with regard to Islam.⁵ Whereas John Fowles, for instance, plays with novelistic conventions from within the realist tradition, and is dependent on that tradition to create in his readers a sense of disjunction when he subverts expectation, Rushdie seems to depart so radically from realist convention as to sidestep the tradition altogether. His humanistic commitments seem so overwhelmed by his awareness of relativism as almost to disappear. In part this stems from the fact that Rushdie, from a position similar to Mo's in relation to the Chinese novel, is drawing on an Indo-Anglian tradition rather than only a British one.

As Swann points out in a paper on Midnight's Children, "Western concepts of good and evil, of the tragic and the comic, of purpose and history slither and lose hold in this narrative" ("East is East" 355). Swann finds "[c]entripetal and centrifugal tendencies stand[ing] in perfect equipoise" in a "never-disturbed balance" within which evil is of a piece with the rest of human experience, and the historical truth of war is subsumed into the higher historical truth of

continuance (356).⁶ He understands Rushdie to be presenting not a different concept of evil so much as an emotional reaction to it different from what is customary in the West (357). So committed is Rushdie to this Eastern model that it is only, Swann suggests, when dealing with Mrs Gandhi's attempts to turn India into a modern Western state, by supplanting the balance of nature with an ideal of unilinear progress, that he foregoes his customary ironic smile (358). It is also arguable that his moral indictment finds its most constant expression in this ubiquitous irony, conveyed largely through the distancing techniques of writing-as-performance.

Timothy Mo has Gideon finally dismiss the notion of scientific history as a theatrical melodrama, and photography as a playing at truth-telling. Rushdie's Saleem Sinai, however, embraces the category of melodrama as embarrassing but unavoidable in the telling of his fantastic tale, and makes use of photographic performance as one of many mystifications of the real. Where for Mo the photograph is a point of focus, for Rushdie it provides a further denaturalizing of the image. Rushdie's quasi-history comes into being on the far side of imagistic democratization. In face of the eternally grinning Kolynos Kid, the peepshow of Lifafa Das and the ubiquitous Bombay 'talkies,' life imitates bad art (Midnight's Children 213). Refusing to stay lifesized, it becomes melodramatic (49); Saleem suggests of

his own bizarre inheritance of the world, "perhaps, if one wishes to remain an individual in the midst of the teeming multitudes, one must make oneself grotesque" (108). As the Brass Monkey says to him in exasperation when he first announces that he can hear voices, "[A]ll this performance, for one of your stupid cracks" (163)--an unwittingly prophetic comment addressed to one for whom the whole purpose of writing is to produce a textual body against his physical body's literally cracking apart and disintegrating into "anonymous dust" (38).

Saleem's attempt to tell his story for his son is, then, as unlike Ignatieff's as a pickle-factory presided over by a neon goddess is unlike a well-lighted highway. From Methwold's staging of his "transfer of assets" (97) to Saleem's playing the part of surrogate son for his film-producer Uncle Hanif and his histrionic Aunty Pia (237), from Major Latif's becoming agent for his sister Jamila Singer (303) to Picture Singh's final snake-charming performance, "the show of his life" which no-one is watching (438), Saleem's life is involved with and orchestrated by entertainers (101). When the crisis with the Widow takes away his hope, his magic and his options, he likens himself to a puppet with broken strings (411). He too has been an orchestrator, however. After Commander Sabarmati shoots his wife and her lover on receiving an anonymous tip-off from Saleem, a newspaper writes of the affair that "[i]t is a

theatre in which India will discover who she was, what she is, and what she might become." But Saleem says, "Commander Sabarmati was only a puppet; I was the puppet-master, and the nation performed my play" (255). Nor does he absolve himself from responsibility for "that most macabre of theatres, the Theatre of War" (286). His own personal melodrama is inextricably entwined with that of the nation, "a mythical land, a country which would never exist except by the efforts of a phenomenal collective will--except in a dream we all agreed to dream . . . a collective fiction in which anything was possible" (111). In the India of this novel, reality is identical with India's conception of reality.⁷ Saleem's commitment to the "well-told lie" is therefore as explicit as Michael Ondaatje's. He says that "in autobiography, as in all literature, what actually happened is less important than what the author can manage to persuade his audience to believe" (263). For him, truth is synonymous with the making of meaning. He admits on the first page of his history that "above all things, I fear absurdity" (11).

As the nation stages a collective fiction and Saleem performs his own chutnification, the Delhi magicians stage illusions. They believe in performance and disbelieve, "with the absolute certainty of illusionists-by-trade, in the possibility of magic" (374). The magicians are the supreme artists. Their hold on reality, says Saleem, "was absolute;

they gripped it so powerfully that they could bend it every which way in the service of their arts, but they never forgot what it was" (385). When at the end of the novel the distresses of everyday life under the Widow do prevent them from remembering the realities of the past, they become incapable of judgement and begin to lose their magic skills (428). Similarly, the magic of the *Midnight's Children* is taken away from them when they are rendered hopeless and incapable of reproduction by the Widow's sterilization program. Magic is "the power the artist has over nature through his knowledge of and oneness with its laws" (Swann 359). Magic requires too that sense of time past and time future which makes possible a control of the ways in which meanings are made. These kinds of knowledge are also the source of artistic power. As Swann suggests, "memory is the reproductive cycle of art" (361). The magic of Saleem's life is not defeated, then, for he reproduces himself through his pickles and his text.⁸

If even his magicians privilege artifice as magic, it is not surprising that Rushdie's use of photographic magic is hedged about with qualifications. Photography is, after all, a performance-art, "a kind of primitive theatre" (Barthes, Camera Lucida 32). And it may promise more than it can deliver. Lifafa Das, whose cry of "See the whole world, come see everything!" draws the crowds to his peepshow in Delhi, finds that "[t]he hyperbolic formula beg[ins], after

a time, to prey upon his mind" (75), as he tries desperately to get into his box pictures of everything--famous places, famous politicians, famous actresses, startling news-stories, social comment. This is a deflationary image of what Saleem is about in his narrative. Public pictures, however, have their uses. It is from news photographs that Saleem is able to recognize the new breed of Sanjay Gandhi lookalikes who spread across the country during the Widow's sterilization campaign (382). In a particularly nice example of the synecdoche in which this text abounds, Picture Singh educates Saleem into an understanding of the parlous state of the nation by showing him a newspaper photograph of Mrs Gandhi, whose parted hair, snow-white on one side and ebony black on the other ("surprisingly like Cruella de Ville," comments Cronin ["Indian English Novel" 210]), reveals that the the "corrupt, 'black' economy [has] grown as large as the official, 'white' variety" (386). Picture Singh himself has been given his identity through public photography. He got his name as "The Most Charming Man In The World" after a nationwide Kodak advertising campaign gave this caption to a photograph of him "wreathed in smiles and snakes" (368).

But the power of public photography is ambiguous. Even before Saleem is born, Amina Sinai imagines "A-1 top-quality front-page jumbo-sized baby-snaps" of him in the Times because his birth has coincided with the birth of independent India (99). Her wish comes true and under the

headline "Midnight's Child" Saleem's picture duly appears (118). Framed next to the letter from the Prime Minister which suggests that Saleem's life "will be, in a sense, a mirror of [his] own," this photograph presides over Saleem's childhood nursery, symbol of an "inescapable destiny" that he will suffer along with the nation (122). Moreover, when Ahmed Sinai's assets are frozen by the State, Amina, however unjustifiably, immediately blames the publicity attendant on Saleem's birth for his father's vulnerability (134). The photograph, though, is vitally significant to Saleem. On the day when his family leave Bombay for Pakistan, he buries the photograph, together with the Prime Minister's letter, in his squashed tin globe--"all that has survived of my past" (296).

Thus, with both Saleem and Picture Singh, Rushdie is using photography as one of his techniques to problematize, rather than to valorize, the notion of personal identity. It is less a question of the individual's inscribing his identity in a photograph than of the photograph's lending an identity to the subject it has constructed. However ridiculous may be the identity of Reverend Mother Naseem, it is perhaps least in question of that of any character in the book. And of her there are no photographs anywhere in the world, because "[s]he was not one to be trapped in anyone's little black box" (41). "Photos take away pieces of you," the Reverend Mother contends; she was very concerned when

she saw Amina's photograph in the paper with baby Saleem, she tells her daughter-in-law, because "you had become so transparent I could see the writing from the other side coming right through your face." When Amina tries to protest, Reverend Mother merely responds, "I give thanks to God you have recovered from that photography" (138).

There is one photograph in Midnight's Children, however, that Saleem allows to become speaking rather than silent theatre (45-6). Its relationship to the subsequent narrative is instructive, because not only does it suggest the political tensions of an emerging nation-state, but it also foregrounds the artifice of magic and story. In this fading photograph, taken in 1942, Saleem's father Aadam Aziz is shaking hands with Mian Abdullah, nicknamed the Hummingbird, once a magician in the Delhi ghetto, now the leader of the Free Islam Convocation. In the background stands the Hummingbird's patron, the Rani of Cooch Naheen, and next to her his personal secretary, the poet Nadir Khan. All four people are suffering from what Saleem calls the "optimism disease": they believe that the Muslim League can be overthrown and India be maintained as a non-partitioned state. This is a photograph, says Saleem, of the optimists meeting their leader.

Though the scene is immobile, it is not silent. The Rani, who is "going white in blotches, a disease which

leaked into history and erupted on an enormous scale shortly after Independence," whispers "through photographed lips that never move" that she is the victim of her cross-cultural concerns: "My skin is the outward expression of the internationalism of my spirit" (45). Whether this explanation is offered to the others in the photograph or to the reader is unclear. But a conversation ensues, as if between "expert ventriloquists." Nadir Khan has "hair long like a poet's"; he confesses--to the others? to the reader?--"It's true; I have written verses" Mian Abdullah interrupts him to describe the verses: "Not one rhyme in page after page!" In response to the Rani's inquiry Nadir admits that he is a modernist. The atmosphere becomes tense. Nadir's interest actually seems more postmodern than modernist, in that he is concerned to democratize art so that "my poetry and--oh--the game of hit-the-spittoon are equals." The Hummingbird wants art to uplift: "it should remind us of our glorious literary heritage!" The Rani, trying to keep the peace, suggests humorously that she supply an elegant silver spittoon and set aside a room for spittoon-hittery.

At this point the photograph "has run out of words," and Saleem notices that the Hummingbird is impatient to get away--all the time he has been staring over Aadam Aziz's shoulder at the door beyond which "history calls." The immediate response of Padma (the textualized conventional

reader) to this passage about the photograph is, "What nonsense. How can a picture talk?" (46). It is no surprise to the more distanced reader of the text that the writer should choose to put words into the mouths of characters created photographically, since by definition he all the time puts words into the mouths of characters he creates verbally. Such a reader might well ask, though, how is it that these words concern themselves primarily with aesthetics rather than politics, in this photograph of an ostensibly political occasion?

Several answers suggest themselves, all of them related to Saleem's role as the producer of the text. Firstly, it is with Nadir Khan that Saleem is particularly concerned, since Nadir will be Saleem's mother's first husband, and Nadir is a poet. Secondly, Saleem is less concerned with the Hummingbird himself than with his origins in the magicians' ghetto. Even in a still photograph, the ex-conjurer can swallow a hand, and in the theatre of politics as much as of entertainment, the art of illusion is central. But thirdly, one is made aware of the particular effect Rushdie achieves by asking the reader to consider the photograph as a construct, as in itself a kind of visual literature, stilled but speaking, interpreted according to the needs and interests of the writer who is reading it.

Because a photograph is already framed, it retains a distance from its viewers which is lessened but not obliterated when the characters begin to speak.⁹ When the photograph is pulled towards the reader/viewer by the writer's invitation to listen to the conversation within it, the exactly opposite effect is gained from when the reader/viewer is pushed towards a visual image until the image is out-of-focus. Near the end of Saleem's narrative when he is incarcerated in the Widow's Hostel, he betrays the Midnight's Children to sterilization, and blubbers his confession through the walls. But he refuses to attempt an objective assessment of the situation because, as he says, "right now we're too close to the cinema-screen, the picture is breaking up into dots, only subjective judgments are possible" (419). In the photograph of Mian Abdullah, distance is maintained through the emphasis on the stillness of the image, through Padma's bathetic reminder of its artifice and through the initial comment that this photograph is only being described from memory (45). Thus the image invites discussion: what is art for--is it to uplift, or is it to equalize? And what counts as art--does spittoon-hittery meet the requirements? Does chutney-making?

Because of the self-conscious performance of the writing surrounding this photograph, the image functions paradigmatically to inscribe that playing with aesthetic distance and that emphasis on frame and the construction of

the subject which are hallmarks of postmodernism. Like other photographs in British novels, such as those discussed above in Chapter One, this one also parodies a traditional understanding of mimesis; like other photographs in Midnight's Children, it refuses the viewer/reader the security of transparent reference and foregrounds the notions of artifice and hermeneutic. Rushdie himself, like the Delhi magicians, is bending reality every which way in the service of his art--a contortionist approach which requires of the reader not merely the maintenance of an ironic distance, but also the interpretation of that distance. Victor Burgin suggests that, within contemporary photographic practice, the move to the concepts of the unstable subject and of meaning as articulated within differences still sits uneasily with photographic referentiality (Burgin 145). What in photographic practice may be problematic, then, can more readily be a source of ironic subversion in a text which describes photographs. The writer who believes in its magic may allow the photograph to come to life and extend beyond its frame. The writer who equates magic with artifice may allow the viewer/reader to hear voices whose construction is itself consciously articulated.

II

For Michael Ondaatje, the photograph is more than a constructed image. In his writing, photography and text are constantly held up to one another, juxtaposed and interrelated in ways that allow to each its own plurality of voice. Ultimately, in his most recent novel, Ondaatje comes to privilege the greater polysemousness of language over the silent theatre of the photographic image. But more than any other Canadian writer, perhaps, he treats the photograph as a kind of magic, and the development in his use of photography through his writing demonstrates a growing awareness of what that magic may mean.

It has been suggested that all of Ondaatje's narratives play with the possibility of the imagination's recovery of history (Ferris 74). His four works of extended fiction focus on rebels, renegades, misfits and madmen; he is interested in the underside of polite society, the private faces of the public image, and the workaday world of men who are 'unhistorical' because they are officially unnoticed. Ondaatje applies Foucault's principle of reversal to the referentiality of photographs: he takes what are popularly seen as sources of historical authority and undermines their univocality. More consistently and centrally than either Mo

or Rushdie, Ondaatje uses photographs in his construction of a counter-memory, directed against the notion of a single 'truth' within a readily identifiable 'tradition.'¹⁰

Moreover, Ondaatje's writing technique itself has been described as one of "juxtaposition and cinematic intercutting to create continuity of depth out of an apparent discontinuity of surface" (Hulse). Such a technique is analogous to that of the compiler of a photograph album, who is also involved in rendering history primarily as a series of vivid and multivalent moments rather than as a progressive narrative. And such a technique recalls Eisenstein's formulation of the notion of photographic meaning, with his contention that photographs signify through contrast, equivalence, conflict and recurrence. In considering various still shots from Eisenstein's films, Roland Barthes concurs with Eisenstein's advocacy of the need for a "vertical" reading of the photographic image ("The Third Meaning" 328). Barthes understands the camera to give meaning by the very act of stopping time and thus preserving appearances for scrutiny. Ondaatje is clearly attracted to this Barthean model of photographic meaning.

The Collected Works of Billy the Kid (1970), Ondaatje's first sustained piece of fiction, is an amalgam of verse, journalistic extracts, photographs and prose passages which can be understood as snapshots of Billy in various poses

collected together in order to create a composite motion-picture from a number of stills.¹¹ The blank frame of the opening 'photograph' is transformed by the end of the narrative into a miniature snapshot of the child Michael Ondaatje dressed up like Billy: this suggests that the composite portrait of Billy which the book has built up is still reducible in its externals to the role a child can play.¹² Bharati Mukherjee has proposed that Ondaatje works "by suggesting the final unknowability of the world" (30): what one person can know of another is always conditioned by the image he wants to perceive. Other photographs in the book portray the bleakness of frontier life, but they are contrasted with elaborately imaginative line-drawings: "Angela D." the saloon artiste, a surrealist rendering of the after-effects of a drunken orgy, Billy the Kid on the cover of one of the romances about his heroic exploits. Ondaatje seems to imply that the truth-value of the photographs is no greater and no less than that of the fictional drawings. All are compositions that tell a valid story of their own, and all witness to the inevitability of making fictions in a world that is unknowable in any absolute sense.

A similar equation of photographic and pictorial representation had appeared in Ondaatje's early poem "Four Eyes" (Dainty Monsters, 1967), where the same sense of arrest is attributed to a Chagal picture and to a

photograph of the woman "with posing dog," and both seem analogous to poems. Poetry here is understood as a pattern of images in "immobilized time." Although a poem may in one sense capture the moment, yet it misses the dynamic of that moment--"the music continuing / you were still being unfolded / shaped by the scene"--and in any case forces the poet to separate himself from his experience (thus becoming "four eyes") in order to record it: "This moment I broke to record." But in Rat Jelly (1973), in which many of the poems were written contemporaneously with Billy the Kid, Ondaatje makes frequent use of the notion of the photograph as distinct from the painting in the working out of a poetic.

In "King Kong meets Wallace Stevens," for instance, the juxtaposition of two photographs dramatizes what Solecki has called the "almost symbiotic relationship" between Stevens' naked brain and King Kong's mindless energy (102). Although poetry results from the mediation between mind and experience, the result is not complete control. The photographs are already framed, aesthetic constructs, but their referents refuse the freezing of the moment that "Four Eyes" tends towards. Kong is "staggering," and even Stevens, who moves only inside his head, holds there "the bellow of locked blood." The final two lines of the poem suggest movement too: "The hands drain from his jacket." Thus Ondaatje's poem, like these photographs,

recognizes and applauds the existence of recalcitrant life that resists distancing and freezing.

This sense of the authority and vitality of the photographic image is present too in "Burning Hills." The poet, come to a cabin to write, "sat down / thought pieces of history," and remembered past summers as "layers of civilisation in his memory / they were old photographs he didn't look at anymore / for girls in them were chubby not as perfect as in his mind." Here is an echo of Larkin's "o, photography! as no art is, / Faithful and disappointing!" Ondaatje, however, is differentiating not between photography and art but between different layers of memory that can be recalled with more or less honesty. Consequently he describes a specific photograph that "fuses the 5 summers" of his adolescence because it shows him "oblivious to the significance of the moment" of which he now, with the distance of time and space, is fully aware. This seems to be an affirmation of the value of aesthetic distance. However, the affirmation is undercut by the poem's last two lines, which problematize the objectivity of the narrator and the completeness of the poem: "When he finishes he will go back / hunting for the lies that are obvious." Has the writer finished? Has the poem as we read it been scrutinized for untruthfulness? What, in any case, of the lies that are not obvious? There is, nevertheless, something untranslatably authoritative about the photograph of the boy with the

apple, that evades the subjectivity of interpretation.

George Bowering has described Ondaatje's developing poetic as a move from an early formalism and attraction to the modernist notion of imposing aesthetic order on a world of chaos, to a later espousal of a much more open-ended and process-oriented interest in "unrested form," in which the authority and identity of the poet himself are uncertain. Bowering's suggestion receives support from Ondaatje's most overt statement of his poetic aims, which occurs in the poem "The Gate in His Head." Here Ondaatje describes his philosophy of writing in photographic terms. The poem was written for Victor Coleman, whose "extremely difficult poems . . . attempt to give the reader a sense of life as pure process" (Solecki, "Nets" 105). Coleman has sent Ondaatje the "blurred photograph of a gull":

Caught vision. The stunning white bird
an unclear stir.

And that is all this writing should be then.
The beautiful formed things caught at the wrong moment
so they are shapeless, awkward
moving to the clear.

Earlier, Ondaatje had been attracted to the arrested image of the photograph as a paradigm for poetry. Now, when his poetic is consciously concerned with the beauty of things in

motion, what he calls in Coleman's poems "not clarity but the sense of shift," the photograph still provides an apt paradigm because its attempt to depict movement produces "a clear, unmoving image of a blurred movement towards clarity" (Scobie 55).

This notion of writing as a striving for "the sense of shift" relates not only to poetry but also to Ondaatje's longer fictional works. Three years after Rat Jelly he published Coming Through Slaughter (1976). Though it reads somewhat more like a conventional novel than Billy the Kid, the later book employs similar techniques of montage and moves forward in a similarly disjunctive fashion: here too the world is seen as a fragmentary place where order must be achieved because it cannot be assumed. There are only three images connected to the text, and all are prefatory. One is the expected photograph of Buddy Bolden and his band; one is Ondaatje's own photograph of a "high-class saloon"--this is used on the book's dust-jacket and proposes substantial links between the worlds of writer and subject. But it is the third image that invites particular attention. It is a sonograph of dolphin voices which Ondaatje uses as an epigraph to the book, and it can be understood as providing an oblique commentary on the narrative. The sonograph translates contrasting dolphin noises into a visual dimension but does not attempt to explain their simultaneity; Coming Through Slaughter

translates the sounds of Buddy Bolden's cornet into words but leaves unresolved the tension between their private and public significances.

In exploring the boundaries of identity, the book veers between the silent, private pictures of the photographer Bellocq and the voluble, public narrative of the policeman Webb. Bellocq, a gentle but physically and emotionally crippled man, lusts both to create and to destroy the photographs he takes of street-women. His way to leave his trace on their bodies is to slash the photographs with a knife (55).¹³ His world is essentially private and solipsistic. "What I loved," says Buddy of him, ". . . were the possibilities in his silence," and the "black empty spaces" that he offered (91). Like the traditional novelist, Webb talks his way to the detection and retrieval of Buddy, the partner-in-crime of his youth. Webb represents the verbal equivalent of Bellocq's violence with photographs, because Buddy craves anonymity, but Webb insists on the need for Buddy to be responsible to the chronology of his life: "He came here," says Buddy when Webb has tracked him down, "and placed my past and future on this table like a road" (86). Both Bellocq and Webb are a type of alter-ego to Buddy. The book leaves him silenced by the tension between their two worlds in himself. Whether his final silence signals destruction or resolution is a matter of debate among critics (see Solecki v. Rooke); Ondaatje's privileging

of fluidity and process effectively defers to the reader in the matter of interpretation, just as the sonographic transcription describes without explaining.

In Running in the Family (1982) Ondaatje's deferral to the reader for "translation" is particularly apparent in the authority he allows to photographs to carry the content as well as to counterbalance the structure of his narrative.¹⁴ By placing an unlabelled photograph at the entrance to each main chapter of the book, Ondaatje invites the reader to find correspondences between the images and the text that follows them. The photographs are no longer blanks to be filled in by imagination, as in The Collected Works of Billy the Kid, nor hard-won silences at the mercy of the defacer and destroyer, like the photographs described in the text of Coming Through Slaughter. They are alternative histories that hold within themselves the mysteries of private silence and public show.

Gary Draper describes Running in the Family as comparable to a box of snapshots and tapes: "From the frozen, still images, and the fragmentary stories told in familiar voices, emerges a complex and many-sided family portrait."¹⁵ Where the previous two fictions had emphasized a single individual, here the focus is on the family group. It is in turning to photographs which are a part of his personal history that Ondaatje, like Roland

Barthes, falls thoroughly under the spell of their magic--a spell he had already begun to explore in his poetry. Barthes' interest in photography is self-confessedly subjective. Its attraction for him is sentimental: he is searching for the mother who was real but who is absent (Camera Lucida 18-20). The photograph which for Barthes finally captures the essence of his mother is one of her with her brother in childhood. And for Ondaatje too the picture he loves most is one of his mother with her brother as children; he describes it in "Light," a poem dedicated to her, and the last of his 1979 collection There's a Trick with a Knife I'm Learning to Do.

This poem concerns what Tom Marshall calls the "layering" of Ceylon and the poet's personal past upon a stormy summer night in Canada (88). Sitting on the rainy porch at midnight, the poet imagines "[t]he past, friends and family, drift into the rainshower" from the slides he has made of old photographs of them. The images are psychologically as well as physically "complex ambiguous grainy." Each one is the occasion for Ondaatje's articulating a disjunction between the image and the person he has known: the "calm beautiful face" of the grandmother who "organised wild acts in the tropics"; the shy-looking uncle who tethered his wife to an armchair by her hair whenever he went out drinking; the childhood picture of his mother and her brother, which reminds him both of her joyous

account of her brother's peaceful death, and of her own death the following year. The photographic images and the memories they spark are "fragments," all he has; but the stories expand in his mind and connect to the "grey grainy pictures . . . coming through the light." The frame of the poem, its opening and closing lines, speaks of the lightning which gives the impression that the trees are leaving him, "when in truth like me they haven't moved." By implication, the people of his past who seem to have left him have not moved from his brain. Movement in this poem is a trick of the light, like the slides on the wall. Fragments of memory stirred by the photographs are as real and other as fragments of the external world "frozen in the jagged light as if snapped in their run." The snapshot can appear to testify to desertion but in fact enlightens presence.

This ascription of power to the photograph accords well with Barthes' assertion that the photograph is a "certificate of presence," not merely an image but "reality in a past state" (Camera Lucida 87, 82). He declares that "[t]he realists, of whom I am one . . . , do not take the photograph for a 'copy' of reality, but for an emanation of past reality: a magic, not an art" (88). It is the impenetrability of the photograph that leads Barthes to denote it 'camera lucida' rather than 'camera obscura': its image is "unrevealed yet manifest," like those of the early camera lucida apparatus, which were manifest in the

spectator's looking through a prism, but which would always be external, inaccessible to intimacy (106). Because it is impenetrable, the photograph is also "the arrest of interpretation." When he discovers his mother in her "unique being" in the photograph of her as a child, Barthes describes the "horror" of having "nothing to say" about it because it cannot be transformed into words (93). "It is in proportion to its certainty that I can say nothing" (107). What Barthes calls the "photographic ecstasy" involves confronting in the photograph "the wakening of intractable reality," rather than interpreting it as art or generalizing from it to the banality of everyday life (117-19). What the photograph shows cannot be spoken, and every attempt to speak it involves the addition of a second-order message of connotation that effectually tames the image into compliance ("Photographic Message" 198).

It is in Running in the Family that Ondaatje most clearly uses this concept of the photograph's independence and impenetrability. His first two works of extended fiction demonstrated the necessity of individual response to the power of the photographic image, and that this response is multivocal. These fictions also built on the understanding that photographs can show what cannot be simply spoken (as the sonograph shows behaviour it cannot interpret). But in Running in the Family Ondaatje allows photographic images to show the "unclear stir" of their own history, and refuses to

assume the role of interpreter that would, in Barthes' terms, "tame" their realism with "the civilized code of perfect illusions" (Camera Lucida 119).

The extent to which this Barthean model is descriptive of Ondaatje's approach becomes particularly evident in the comparison of Ondaatje's "fictional memoir" with Michael Ignatieff's attempt to capture his family's past through the agency of photographs. Ignatieff is a historian who distrusts fiction; in The Russian Album he seeks to be as 'factual' as possible, and despite his expressed appreciation for the unruly power of photography, he incorporates his photographs in the time-honoured way, into a carefully-controlled linear narrative. Ondaatje, on the other hand, specifically sets out to write fiction, which he privileges as more truth-telling than attempts at fact. For him, fiction and authentication are not in opposition. One recalls Gideon's rumination in An Insular Possession that "[p]erhaps the essential truths may only be possessed in utter contrivance, where the artifice is openly acknowledged" (589). Thus Ondaatje allows the photographs he incorporates to sustain a simultaneity of plural meanings. They stand as paradigms of the silent theatre which symbolizes for him the individual's inevitable making of fictions by which to live in the world.¹⁶

Ondaatje in Running in the Family is overtly involved

in both a personal and a more general quest for the past. In The Collected Works of Billy the Kid and Coming Through Slaughter, the autobiographical references are oblique and surprising, functioning as points of contact between the fragmented, demented lives of the principal characters and the mind of the writer--and, by extension, the minds of his readers. Such references undermine the reader's ability to distance herself from the disjointed world of the text, and call into question the comfort-value of being encouraged to think of these texts as mere unhistorical fictions. But in Running in the Family, Ondaatje makes himself fictional: he casts himself as Edgar searching for Gloucester, the father he has grown to adulthood without knowing.¹⁷ Here Ondaatje privileges the symbolic weight of tragedy over the referential value of history as traditionally conceived. His book is the result of travels back to Ceylon spurred by the "bright bone of a dream" about his father. He sets out to return to Asia and to the family he had grown away from, "those relations from my parents' generation who stood in my memory like frozen opera. I wanted to touch them into words" (22). Unlike the people in Saleem's photograph in Midnight's Children, Ondaatje's characters do not remain frozen. His touch does bring them to life--and this life is the story and purpose of the book. The photographs that open each main section of the text are untitled except insofar as the sections themselves are titled; they are given no captions, and are only sometimes referred to specifically in

the narrative. Ondaatje's photographs give an image in miniature of what he is doing in his fictional memoir: they defy explanation, and, much like the photographs Alice Munro describes, they enclose impossible contingencies in dramatic silence.

The epigraphs to Ondaatje's book introduce the two guiding principles behind it: the notion of the miraculous or larger-than-life in the everyday world, and the power of language. Margaret Atwood has commented that Ondaatje has written "an account of an exotic and outrageous family Brightly coloured, sweet and painful, bloody-minded and otherworldly, it achieves the status of legend."¹⁸ In the final acknowledgements of his book, Ondaatje thanks a wide group of relatives, friends and colleagues for the raw material of his narrative, and then adds:

While all these names may give an air of authenticity, I must confess that the book is not a history but a portrait or "gesture." And if those listed above disapprove of the fictional air I apologize and can only say that in Sri Lanka a well-told lie is worth a thousand facts (206).

Unlike Michael Ignatieff, Ondaatje sees such a portrait as more, and not less, authentic than attempts at historical accuracy, because its incompleteness is supplemented by the love in the telling (201), and because he believes in the higher value of the "well-told lie."¹⁹ He is not,

however, composing legend of the order of Rushdie's: his fiction retains inevitable roots in a clearly realistic universe, and must do so to fulfil the function for which he intends it--that of bringing his relatives to life.

For Ondaatje, photography is another species of fiction: cameras, like pencils, are tools to control confusion by "mapping" it (Nodelman 77). In his earlier fictions Ondaatje had been concerned to explore the correlation between the image that is "shot" by the camera and the image that is captured in words. In Running in the Family he is more interested in exploring how both photographs and writing may render images mobile and alive. The silence and fixity of the photograph is supplemented by the spectator's knowledge of theatrical convention (the actor plays a role that is silent about the actor's self) and of family history (the real person relates to the outside world through the fixity of roles). But the spectator too is an actor, with personal roles to play, personal silences to guard.

Ondaatje's attitude to the photographs he uses, and to the shape-shifting "unknowability of the world" (B. Mukherjee), may best be understood by example. The fourth section of Running in the Family is called "Eclipse Plumage" and opens on a group photograph which, several pages later, the reader concludes must be that of a fancy-

dress party in the 1920s which included Aunt Dolly and Michael Ondaatje's grandmother, the infamous Lalla. This photograph "has moved tangible, palpable, into [Aunt Dolly's] brain, the way memory invades the present in those who are old, . . . the way her tiny body steps into mine as intimate as anything I have witnessed" (112). Dolly can no longer see the photograph but she knows the expression of everyone in it; and they are all acting. Lorraine York has suggested that the photographs in Running in the Family function as both icons and liars, and that the distortion which accretes around them can witness to a more meaningful truth than the cold objectivity of statistical record ('The Other Side' 120). The world Ondaatje is discovering is one of plumage--wild disguises, heady games--long since discarded but never forgotten. Earlier he has been unsettled by the lack of intimate knowledge implicit in the ubiquitous rumours, scandals and far-fetched stories associated with his family. "I want to sit down with someone and talk with utter directness, want to talk to all the lost history like [a] deserving lover" (54). Here, in the mental ownership of this showy photograph by an elderly aunt, he finds the intimacy he sought, and it becomes clear that theatricality may be less a barrier to knowledge than one avenue to it. The description of the power of this photograph comes between one section that deals with a lunch conversation where various present-day speakers are trying unsuccessfully to make different versions of disparate stories tally with

one another, and another section called "The Passions of Lalla," about Ondaatje's headstrong and eccentric grandmother. Because the photograph has authority for Dolly, it acts as a catalyst between the everyday world of logic and accuracy and the eccentric world of magic and fantasy: the photograph represents the reality of those people in their mystery, as if their fancy-dress were only one degree more theatrical than the dress each person clothes herself in, physically and psychologically, each day.

In The Collected Works of Billy the Kid and Coming Through Slaughter, photographs were symbols for mechanized and anaesthetized emotion, a dead control of the world. The photographs referred to in his poetry show Ondaatje working towards a poetic of "blurred movement." In Running In The Family they have developed into symbols for theatre, a living and playful version of control which always recognizes its own duplicity, and which allows for the reality of many possible meanings within a single image. Whereas in Mo the melodramatic is seen as a falsification and simplification of history, and in Rushdie the melodramatic is the only fair representation of history, Ondaatje emphasizes the element of controlled play suggested by the theatrical image, and he therefore ascribes more authority to the subject than either of the British writers.²⁰

At the start of his journey back to his Ceylonese family, Ondaatje visits an aunt who lives in the old governor's home in Jaffna. Here he has "not so much a dream as an image that repeats itself": he is part of a chattering human pyramid which, as it approaches the twenty-foot-high door of the living-room, ignores the opening that would so easily accommodate it if it would turn sideways, and instead "walks slowly through the pale pink rose-coloured walls into the next room" (27). This image serves as the figurative guide-string through the labyrinth of the rest of the book: expected openings are consistently ignored, and instead the miraculous is silently given precedence.

This is a subversive book, one in which authorial control is apparently relinquished to other voices and to strange images. The narrative plays with the conventions of biography. The first chapter, for instance, is titled "A Fine Romance," and its first three sections are "The Courtship," "Wedding Day" and "Honeymoon." But the title is ironical. It is taken from a sardonic Jerome Kern melody which Ondaatje's mother continues to sing long after her divorce. And the section has nothing to say about his parents' romance. In fact, it suggests that very little romance existed: "The Courtship" concerns their lack of courtship; "Wedding Day" concerns the disastrous driving of the bishop on the way to the ceremony; and "Honeymoon" details the other events of worlds large and small as

Mervyn and Doris, not mentioned here, set off on a life journey which is to be as bizarre and as lacking in propriety as this juxtaposition of the momentous and the trivial in the news. "A Fine Romance" continues with stories of wild adventures in the social circle to which the Ondaatje parents belonged. "Where is the intimate and truthful in all this?" asks Michael Ondaatje, in the voice of the lover. The final cameo of the chapter shows him following his sister Gillian around the garden of their father's last home, pointing out where in the house and grounds Mervyn Ondaatje had hidden his whisky bottles. And over the whole chapter preside the two, disparate photographs of the Ondaatje parents, unlabelled, unconnected, quite unlike in style and mood, inexplicably joined by silence. Their conjunction is ironical and deflationary in a way that prefigures the ironical juxtapositions and posings of the chapter throughout.

For Ondaatje, the teller of the "well-told lie," a consciously manipulative approach to his materials is imperative. "During certain hours, at certain years in our lives, we see ourselves as remnants from the earlier generations that were destroyed. So our job becomes to keep peace with enemy camps, eliminate the chaos at the end of Jacobean tragedies, and with 'the mercy of distance' write the histories." This is the opening paragraph of a section in Running in the Family called "Blind Faith," in which Ondaatje

overtly links himself with Edgar, giving his arm to a blind father but revealing his identity to him only offstage, and too late. "I long for the moment in the play where Edgar reveals himself to Gloucester and it never happens" (180). In the melodrama of Mervyn Ondaatje's life there is never a triumphant elimination of chaos, but there is an ongoing sense of the performance, which is another way of controlling the world. It is in this art of performance, the art of the "well-told lie" of his own fiction, that Ondaatje films must have "blind faith."

What, for instance, is he to make of the photograph he has been "waiting for all [his] life," the single photograph he has found of his mother and father together? It introduces the penultimate chapter, "What We Think of Married Life," and it shows Mervyn and Doris on their honeymoon, making hideous faces for the camera. Ondaatje says he takes it as evidence that "they were absolutely perfect for each other," as "superior hams in their own private theatre" (162). Not only does the content of this photograph tell a tale, but so too does the context in which Ondaatje places it. As Gary Draper has pointed out, the story that immediately precedes the discovery of this snapshot of Ondaatje's parents "is partly about the way the camera can be made to lie." And the succeeding section, set on a tea plantation where Ondaatje's half-sister Susan lives a hundred miles from Colombo, concludes, "This is the colour

of landscape, this is the silence, that surrounded my parents' marriage" (167). Though they shared a code of humour, Ondaatje's parents were unlike in that his mother typically used theatricality as a defence against the world, while his father used reserve.

And yet it is directly following the "Blind Faith" section that Ondaatje introduces "The Bone." This is a retelling by outside observers of the story about which he had dreamed, a "bright bone," at the beginning of the book, and the one story about his father that he cannot come to terms with. In it, his father, gigantic and naked, is tormenting five local dogs by holding them off the ground on ropes. This is a picture devoid of all humour and gentleness: perhaps, Ondaatje suggests, his father was mesmerized by the dogs as images of evil (182). Later he did suffer from extreme forms of paranoid delusion, probably stemming from his alcoholism. But such incidents must render Ondaatje's faith 'blind,' since they require a holding-together of well-nigh incompatible elements. It is in the photographs that this equilibrium between the theatrical and the unspoken is most powerfully portrayed.

It is not only in individual lives but also in national life that Ondaatje is the reader of what is inscribed but unspoken. The chapter in Running in the Family

entitled "Don't Talk To Me About Matisse" is basically concerned with an alternative history of colonialism. It opens with a photograph of a flooded main street that the reader assumes to be in the Nuwara Eliya of 1947, since that flooding is referred to later in the text. The picture comes, during the course of the chapter, to symbolize the otherness of life in Sri Lanka, that shape-shifting country beloved of ancient topographers, where apparent normality continues amid a chaotic fluidity, just as it seems to do in the busy flooded street of the photograph.

Here more than anywhere in the book Ceylon seems a magical island, inhabited by sub-aquatic monsters and brooded over by Prosperos of the word (B. Mukherjee 30). Here is the myth that if a child is given thalagoya tongue to eat he will become brilliantly articulate (Running in the Family 74); here is the description of the Sinhalese alphabet as insects of ink, washed blunt glass, the bones of a lover's spine (83). Here are stories of insurgents who write poetry on walls that get whitewashed; here is the librarian who "knows history is always present" and must publish abroad to preserve voices and visions otherwise kept anonymous and secret (84-5). Here are poems of Ondaatje's own--exotic poems which tell how "everything that is important occurs in shadow," and suggest that, though words are unable to capture the fleeting and transitory nature of experience, they can chart its passing, as the smell of the

cinnamon-peeler leaves its trace of love on his wife. In this strange country even the insurgents behave unexpectedly, throwing down their cache of weapons and playing cricket on the front lawn of the Ondaatje family home, because Mervyn had donated ground for a playpark which they had known as children (101).

Contrast this shadowy shape-shifting with the bright light characteristic of Ignatieff's photographs. He often refers specifically to the light in his photographs; Ondaatje equally often refers to the importance of shadow. His is an underworld to Ignatieff's marked and lighted road; Ignatieff writes to keep back the darkness, whereas many of Ondaatje's seminal ideas belong to the dusk or the night. Darkness becomes increasingly an environment for creativity, in Ondaatje's fictions. In The Collected Works of Billy the Kid, Billy seems to associate light with madness, and avoids exposure by retreating into darkened rooms like cameras (Nodelman 72). In Coming Through Slaughter, the particular value of Bellocq the photographer to Bolden is that he offers him "black empty spaces" of silence. By contrast, his "friend" in mental hospital is the patch of sunshine that caresses his hand. Throughout Running in the Family night is the time of self-knowledge and imaginative recreation. And in Ondaatje's latest novel, In the Skin of a Lion (1987), almost every significant event takes place in darkness--in fact it seems to be the negative rather than the positive of

the photograph that carries the greatest significance.

Ondaatje waits in the darkness in order to reach new insight. The final chapter of Running in the Family opens with the most sustainedly elegiac piece in the whole book, an intimately imagined description of one of Mervyn's drunken nights after Doris has left him. He goes to the bathroom to see his face in the mirror, but is deflected from the pain of that task by the sight of an army of ants carrying away a page of the novel he is reading. It is page 189--the same number as the page on which Ondaatje is relating the story. Mervyn "had not got that far in the book yet but he surrendered it to them." On the next page Ondaatje is writing, at night, continuing the novel, watching his hand move, waiting for it "to stumble casually on perception, the shape of an unknown thing" (190). A white downpour, reflected off the indoor light, falls "like an object" past the window; it is objects, Mervyn has thought, that have stayed and people who have disappeared, in his life. The photograph at the head of this final chapter has stayed: not a picture of Mervyn, but of four children--Michael Ondaatje and his brother and sisters, presumably--playing in the pool in front of the white sheet of a waterfall. And the white water, element of flux and continuance, will still be there when the children have grown. They are the next generation, the book beyond page 189.

The last memories recorded here of Mervyn are loving, funny, sad. Finally Ondaatje says of him, "There is so much to know and we can only guess. Guess around him He is still one of those books we long to read whose pages remain uncut" (200). It is at moments like this that one is most acutely aware of the difference in tone between this personal "historiographic metafiction" of Ondaatje's and the much more distanced metafiction of Rushdie and Mo. In Running in the Family Ondaatje's voice is not primarily witty, though he is witty, nor primarily ironic, though he is ironic. The primary voice is of vulnerability and love. In this sense it compares most closely with that of The Russian Album, however far removed from one another Ondaatje and Ignatieff may be in their philosophy of fiction. In Running in the Family, the final aloneness of the father is an experience common also to the son, and on the last page of the book Ondaatje awaits the dawn in the company only of ants who bite his skin, of Beethoven on a cassette, and of the monsoon rain. The perception on which he has stumbled is one of emotional communion with his father and with his own childhood. The rediscovery of his father gives the lie to Mervyn's conclusion that objects have stayed in his life while people have disappeared. People have not, after all, abandoned him. A new book of his life has been opened. Ondaatje's "perverse and solitary desire" to "touch" his family into words has been fulfilled, and his words have preserved them enigmatically, in the essentially

unfathomable nature of their performances which may only be "guessed around" by a fiction that is parallel to and commented upon by the silent melodrama of the book's uncaptioned photographs.

Ondaatje's most recent novel, however, manifests an interesting development in his understanding of the plurality of the photographic image. In the Skin of a Lion is the first novel in which the narrator takes a stand as an overt social commentator. And as a direct result there is significant change in the use of photography. Ondaatje's first two books each focused on one subversive individual, and made use of photographs to provide a further arena for subversive authorial activity. Running in the Family, motivated by Ondaatje's personal desire for his past, gave full credit to the magical power of photographs to re-present reality. But In the Skin of a Lion moves out into the arena of social history, and photographs are seen as the political tools of the establishment, used to create the history that the establishment cares to know. Ondaatje's distrust of the photograph here stems from the narrator's more socially conscious stance; in this book the magic of the photograph has been relegated, like alternative history, to its dark underside--to its negative, potent and undeveloped.

As a result, for the first time in Ondaatje's extended

fictions, there are no photographs physically present in the text. Even the dust-jacket reproduces a section of a painting: there simply are no public photographs of the working men Ondaatje is concerned with. Private family photographs can be elaborated and penetrated by personal knowledge, as in Running in the Family; archival photographs of specific historical figures can be developed by imaginative re-entry into their lives through the testimony of their friends, as in The Collected Works of Billy the Kid and Coming Through Slaughter. But public photographs of official civic history treat the working man as 'unhistorical,' so that the alternative history which explores his life may be found only in the photographic record of absence. No longer is everything which needs to be held together in tension present in the photograph. It is in the photographic negative, now understood more symbolically than literally, that the unofficial story is most fully told.

Like Ondaatje's previous books, then, In the Skin of a Lion is an alternative history--the story on the underside of official documentation. As in the previous books, Ondaatje makes a point of stressing its fictional nature: in the acknowledgements he says, "This is a work of fiction and certain liberties have at times been taken with some dates and locales." In an interview in May 1987, he claims this latest book as his first formal novel, on the basis that Billy the Kid and Coming Through Slaughter are "a version of

monologue" because they are centered on a single character, and Running in the Family is a "fictional memoir" (Turner 21-2). His distinctions say much about Ondaatje's definition of the novel: that it should contain several contrasting viewpoints, social commentary and an omniscient narrator. Such a relatively traditional definition does not, however, result in a traditional novel. As one critic has put it, Ondaatje "likes to write in curves, in time lapses, in underwater gestures" (Balliett 109) and the results are complex and demanding of the reader.

In the Skin of a Lion is set against a backdrop of two great architectural projects undertaken in Toronto in the 1920s and 1930s: the Bloor Street Viaduct and the city waterworks. The epigraphs to the book, one from the Gilgamesh Epic and one from the art historian and novelist John Berger, alert the reader to the fact that this will be a composite novel where the story will be constructed from a number of different vantage-points. The epigraph from Berger declares, "Never again will a single story be told as though it were the only one." The nearest approach to a central character is Patrick Lewis, an obscure country boy whose life becomes entangled with those of the famous and the infamous in the big city. The Gilgamesh epigraph relates most clearly, though not uniquely, to Patrick, who wanders through the emotional and physical wilderness of the city "in the skin of a lion" as he takes upon himself the mantles

first of an inscrutable millionaire and then of a notorious revolutionary by falling for their women and responding to their causes:

Patrick . . . has always been alien, the third person in the picture . . . a searcher gazing into the darkness of his own country, a blind man dressing the heroine (156,157).

But even such a man can wear the skin of the lion, just as, in a play his lover Alice described to him, the matriarch:

removed her large coat from which animal pelts dangled and . . . passed it, along with her strength, to one of the minor characters

. . . . Each person had their moment when they assumed the skins of wild animals, when they took responsibility for the story (157).

Patrick learns to take responsibility in this book. He moves from being a watcher to being a doer, by playing the roles handed to him until they become his own. The image of theatre is even more central here than in Running in the Family. Both Alice and Clara, Patrick's two loves, are actresses, and every main character is described at some point in theatrical terms. It is not surprising, then, given the tacit link Ondaatje has made between photography and theatre in Running in the Family, that in this novel too the camera should play a significant part.

In the middle of the narrative there is a section which

seems set apart, spoken in the voice of an omniscient narrator, and deploring the fact that there was no contemporary photographer equivalent to the United States' Lewis Hine to tell the stories of this book.²¹ Hine had taken photos:

'[t]o locate the evils and find the hidden purity'. Official histories and news stories were always soft as rhetoric . . . Hine's photographs betray official history and put together another family His photographs are rooms one can step into (145).

These characteristics make them "events of art" that can "realign chaos to suggest both the chaos and order it will become" (a quotation from a letter of Joseph Conrad, Alice's mentor). In the next paragraph Ondaatje explicitly relates this concept of art to the writing of novels:

The chaos and tumble of events. The first sentence of every novel should be: "Trust me, this will take time but there is order here, very faint, very human" (146).

Ondaatje's novel, then, is his attempt to realign chaos, to write unofficial history, to provide "rooms one can step into," after the manner of Lewis Hine's photographs. That this is a realist documentary impulse perhaps goes some way towards explaining why, despite his subversion of traditional novelistic categories, Ondaatje's novel feels ultimately less postmodern than modernist in its aesthetic.

Ondaatje is concerned not with "the grand story" but with deconstructing it into "all these fragments of memory," "underground pools" which allow the luxury of sitting still in the presence of life relived. This, he says, "in literature is the real gift" (148). He is therefore privileging not only the alternative, unofficial history, but also the fragmented literary style which he himself espouses. This book, like Ondaatje's earlier fictions, reads like a series of prose poems, connected by thematic rather than by narrative links, despite the fact that its subterranean story-line is more complex and more integrated than that of any of the previous books.

In exploring an alternative, multi-faceted history, Ondaatje looks to find what lies in the dark rather than what comes to the light. And so almost every major event of the book takes place in the dark. Temelcoff's saving of the nun falling from the bridge; Patrick's working in the underground tunnel; the silent and illegal puppet-theatre of the revolutionaries, and Patrick's backstage meeting with Alice; Caravaggio's bizarre encounter in the mushroom factory with his future wife; the attempted sabotage of the waterworks--all take place at night or in pitch dark. The book opens on Patrick as a child with night fantasies, and closes on the start of the night-time journey which provides the framework of the book: the whole tale is a story told

travelling at night by Patrick to the child of Alice and her revolutionary lover. In his constant emphasis on the dark, Ondaatje is, as it were, privileging the photographic negative.

This reversal is particularly evident in Ondaatje's treatment of the photographs taken in the tunnel under Lake Ontario. The city photographer sets up his picture to suggest light behind the workers; but when he "climbs out into the sunlight," they return to "brown slippery darkness" (105). Work and noise had stopped while the film received its image, and the image therefore betrays the reality. Harris, whose dream-child the waterworks is, has never himself entered the tunnels, though he sends down the the workers every day--and, this once, the photographer. In the photographs that he produces:

moisture in the tunnel appears white. There is a foreman's white shirt, there is white lye daubed onto rock to be dynamited. And all else is labour and darkness. The men . . . are . . . in the small world of Rowland Harris' dream as he lies in bed on Neville Park Boulevard (111).

What is white here relates to officialdom and order; what is black, to the underworld of struggle and lack of recognition inhabited by the workers. As in Running in the Family, "everything that is important occurs in shadow" (Running 88). An alternative to received public history will involve

unrecognized private stories, whose existence underlies and sustains the public history as negatives underlie and sustain their positive prints in photography. The tanners in the steam of the bath-house are reduced and separated by the steam's whiteness, "tattoos and hard muscles fading into unborn photographs" (136), half-printed, half-negative still.

There are over four thousand photographs of the Bloor Street Viaduct under construction, but they are not pictures with a human dimension. Their subject is the structure, not the people who are building it. Photographs of the daredevil construction-worker Nicholas Temelcoff are hard to find, although this is at least in part because he is "the speck of burned paper across the valley . . . an exclamation mark, somewhere in the distance between bridge and river" (34). In effect his invisibility tells a profound truth about Temelcoff, who is a silent and solitary man given to wild flights across the space hung between bridge and ground. The official photograph witnesses to the reality both of his fleeting public presence, and of its personally expendable nature to his superiors. It is the text of the story that will reveal, through language, something of his more personal life.

The book is deeply concerned with the unruly power of language. The silent nun of the opening accident becomes

Alice the revolutionary, who performs silently in puppet-plays directed against capitalist oppression, but who, offstage in her private life, articulates her radical thoughts with all the eloquence of the Conrad whom she loves to quote. She has mockingly taken the name of the parrot which had squawked at her when, as a nun, she was in a state of silent shock, "Talk, you must talk" (148). Patrick spends two years in silence after his loss of Clara, and his rediscovery of words is his rediscovery of external reality. In prison he protects himself from external reality through silence (212). Temelcoff, who came to Canada with no English, learns the language through mimicking stage-actors, like many another city immigrant. It is theatre that gives him a voice.

But photography gives him a memory. When that memory is jolted years later by Patrick's showing him a photograph of himself on the bridge, his response is to cease for a moment to be a man who does not look back, and to enjoy the pleasure of recall:

Patrick's gift, that arrow into the past, shows him the wealth in himself, how he has been sewn into history. Now he will begin to tell stories (149).

A photograph which, in the public archives, would mean only an official record of work done and the men who did it, in private life provides a quite different sense of history

and of the place of stories. It is Patrick, the story-teller of the novel's frame, who understands this most explicitly as he carries the photograph of Nicholas in his pocket:

In books he had read, . . . Patrick never believed that characters lived only on the page. They altered when the author's eye was somewhere else. Outside the plot there was a great darkness, but there would of course be daylight elsewhere on earth (143).

With Patrick's discovery in the library archives of Nicholas' previous identity comes his sense of his own life as "no longer a single story but part of a mural, which was a falling together of accomplices. Patrick saw a wondrous night web--all of these fragments of a human order . . . " (145).

To the extent that photographs give access to "not recorded or evanescent" history (York 117), Michael Ondaatje embraces their plurality. But when they block that access, through official impersonality, he rejects them and turns instead to their dark underside. The creative darkness is paralleled in In the Skin of a Lion by a ubiquitous lack of sight. The Garden of the Blind where Patrick hides after he has set fire to the hotel, and the blind iguana that Clara leaves with him when she returns to Ambrose Small, suggest the power of blindness to permit emotional withdrawal from personal pain and from public consequences. One is reminded

of the Midnite-Confidential Club where Picture Singh performs his last triumphant snake-charming act at the end of Midnight's Children; the club is the "underworld of the blind waitresses" (440) with luminous eyes painted on their closed lids, because "nobody who comes here wants to be seen" (437). In In the Skin of a Lion, blindness also provides opportunity for more political subversion. The skill of Caravaggio as an "invisible" thief; his escape from prison by becoming blue as the sky, and Patrick's disappearing invisibly into the darkness coated in black grease for his sabotaging mission: each of these instances reinforces the notion of blindness as a failure to make connections, as an absence of power to control events, as the creation of free space for the protagonists of alternative histories.

But finally the novel asserts the potency of light and language over the power of darkness and silence. It is Patrick who commits the two motifs of silence and darkness to language and light when he "picks up and brings together various corners of the story, attempting to carry it all in his arms," and this in the prologue, although the reader does not gather its significance until the end of the book. The last word spoken in the novel is Patrick's cry of "Lights," as he and Hana drive north into the darkness. More than merely car headlights, these are the stage lights as he raises the curtain for Hana on the theatre of all the

stories of the book. In suggesting that the storyteller is the one who can develop the photographic negative into its positive counterpart for the telling of alternative histories, Ondaatje is affirming the novelist's authority and, even, his social value.

Public photographs and conventional theatre are instruments of that official history which ignores the little men by whose labour it has been built. In the Skin of a Lion finds Ondaatje dealing in subversive theatre, playful theatre, the melodrama of private lives; "for Ondaatje, history must be grasped as individual lives" (Hulse). He makes verbal pictures equivalent to the alternative history seen in Lewis Hine's photographs. For Ondaatje, the power of the photograph lies in its quality of silent theatre: the show that tells more, the more intimately acquainted one is with the actors and the script. He explores the underside of the photograph--its negative, its development--and the context in which it is placed, as a means of involving himself with the conditions of production in theatre, and the conditions for the writing of alternative histories.

The magic of photographs for Ondaatje has thus returned him to the potency of language, so that he may capture in his words the images they omit, and thereby redress the balance in those areas where photography has been the powerful tool of the establishment. If photographs are silent theatre for

him, yet he does not underestimate the significance of theatre criticism, nor does he forget that the social context of a piece of theatre can radically change its message. Photography is an aggressively private affair in The Collected Works of Billy the Kid and Coming Through Slaughter, and it is an aggressively public affair in In the Skin of a Lion. Only in Running in the Family does the photograph really have autonomous authority, and that is because Ondaatje himself is there one of the company of actors, providing the personal attachment that creates a fitting context for the magic of silent theatre. Like Barthes, he recognizes the essentially subjective nature of response to the photographic image.

But Barthes says of the photograph he discovers of his mother, "[i]t exists only for me": he cannot reproduce it because for the spectator it would be "nothing but an indifferent picture, one of the thousand manifestations of the 'ordinary'" (Camera Lucida 73). Unlike Barthes, Ondaatje is prepared to submit personally meaningful images to the reader's gaze, because he understands their subjectivity less as that of a private talisman than as that of a piece of theatre, to which the spectator may respond aesthetically. Barthes' dismissal of the aesthetic as a taming of the real flies in the face of the entire mimetic tradition of art and the notions of pathos and catharsis. Ondaatje revalorizes such concepts because he understands

the magical as an integral part of the aesthetic; the photograph's magical evocation of the real can work even between strangers, in the same way that the theatre works magic on its audience. The danger is not so much of taming the image, as of imbuing it with an alien rhetoric.²² For Ondaatje, then, the silent images and the script of theatre belong together in the creation of fictions that are truthfully plural.

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The notion of history as performance is common to Timothy Mo, Salman Rushdie and Michael Ondaatje. However, as this chapter has proposed, their valorizing of performance, and therefore of photography as performance, is different. For Mo the need to shape history into a melodrama which has closure is offset by a consciousness of history as a continuum. Photography has a particularly significant role to play within the drama at a point where "the perspective of the years is foreshortened" (593) and where the photograph can provide a focus for the coexistence of the old and the new, art and science, high and low culture; but its referentiality is ultimately deceptive. For Rushdie, the history which is at once the history of the individual and

the history of the world can only be told melodramatically. With a flagrant disregard for the processes of conventional reason and logic, his text obsessively creates extraordinary connections between private and public events and between past and future, in effect playing with traditional teleology in order to subvert it. Photographic performance is paradigmatic of the art which Saleem understands life to imitate. Rather than offering any objective referentiality, the photograph offers a constructed identity by which the viewer/reader may define the self. But for Ondaatje, photographic referentiality is so powerful as to make photography rank second only to fiction as a mode of truth-telling.

The epigraph to Michael Ignatieff's The Russian Album is provided by lines from "What the Light Was Like," by Amy Clampitt:

. . . in what shape
was it we first perceived it--the unstanched
hereditary thing, working its way
along the hollows of the marrow . . . ?

These lines are rendered ambiguous by their setting: is the concern to be with physical or emotional heredity, with visual or verbal shape? Both Ignatieff and Michael Ondaatje, in Running in the Family, return to their ancestral inheritance from situations of displacement, the "descendant[s] of . . . dispossession" (Ignatieff 184). Both

encounter the "hereditary thing" in a physical as well as an emotional way, as a grounding for their own identity. But their use of photographs in these personal biographies demonstrates a profound difference in their concept of history.

Michael Ignatieff writes to save the memory of his grandparents for the sake of his children. "I want to leave the road marked and lighted, so that they can travel into the darkness ahead, as I do, sure of the road behind" (185). His confidence rests on his having shaped and patterned the past into that single "road behind." Photographs along the way give simple assurance of the reality of their subjects, but they at the same time confirm to Ignatieff the necessity of imbuing them with meaning through language. Thus they serve Ignatieff's need to create a unified, authoritative, and personally satisfying narrative more faithfully than he himself seems aware. Ignatieff binds all his photographs together in the centre of his text, and captions them carefully. He uses them strictly as illustrative material to support a thesis substantially proposed in the memoirs of his grandmother. By contrast, Ondaatje's uncaptioned photographs function as alternative fictions, parallel to and commenting upon the text. Ignatieff's image for life is a road, Ondaatje's a theatre; the traditional historian uses photographs as signposts, but the poet, writer of historiographic

metafiction, sees them as moments of theatrical performance, concealing and revealing a silent melodrama, and validating a plurality of meanings. Ondaatje's emphasis on performance foregrounds the notion of controlled play, so that photographic magic is actualized through a combination of the will of the photographed subject (who is playing) and the writer/audience. There is little sense of photography's either victimizing or constructing its subject; the only victimization that Ondaatje deals with in relation to photography is when it fails to recognize subjects who deserve recognition.

"Perhaps the essential truths may only be possessed in utter contrivance"--photography, instead of providing historical evidence, has become as problematic as the notion of history itself. In fact, if one takes into account the deceptiveness of the photograph's apparent transparency, one might argue that it is yet more problematic than history. The image may gain spurious authority over the real world; as Sontag writes, "the powers of photography have in effect dePlatonized our understanding of reality" (On Photography 179) so that the shadow may seem to take precedence over the substance. Rushdie makes overt use of the constructedness of the photograph as a paradigm for the constructedness of history. Mo too emphasizes the artifice of the photograph, though for him its referentiality renders it insufficiently artificial to convey the largest truths. For Ondaatje, the

problem of interpretation is more thoroughly shared with the reader/viewer, since his inclusion of actual photographs in his texts provides a site of alternative history, unarticulated by him.

The distinction drawn by Minor White in the 1960s between the photograph as a function and the photograph as an object still has some relevance, then, in contemporary novelistic practice. All three writers discussed in this chapter are interested in the photograph as it relates to a concept of history, but once again there is an interesting difference between the British and Canadian approaches. Even when all the writers share an excolonialist background, it is still apparent that the photograph-as-function, dependent on contextualization and interpretation, is the preferred mode for the British, where the Canadian favours the photograph-as-object, capable of making statements on its own account and able to present an alternative way of seeing.

Notes.

1. Michael Ignatieff was born in Toronto and educated in Canada and the United States, but presently lives in London, U.K.

2. I say 'excolonial' rather than 'postcolonial' advisedly, since all three writers represent the postcolonizers rather than the postcolonized. They come from well-to-do families in symbiosis with imperialism, and all speak "transatlantic English," the language of world power, rather than the language of difference. See Simon During, "Postmodernism or post-colonialism today," Textual Practice 1.1 (Spring 1987): 44-6, for further discussion of the relationship of language to postcolonialism.

Having spent his first school years in a convent in Hong Kong, Timothy Mo (b. 1950--mother British, father Chinese) moved to Britain in 1960 and went on to receive a traditional upper-class British education. He attended a private school in Britain, from which he went to St John's College, Oxford, to read history.

Salman Rushdie was born an Indian-Muslim in Bombay in 1947, where his father was a businessman. He attended school in Britain from 1961, returning to his family in India and then Pakistan for school vacations. He went to King's College, Cambridge, where he was heavily involved in amateur dramatics. After graduation he worked as an actor for a year

and then spent ten years as a freelance advertizing copywriter. He now lives as a British citizen in London, U.K. He says of himself, describing the mix of Muslim, Hindu and Western culture he grew up with in Bombay, "I was already a mongrel self, history's bastard, before London aggravated the condition" ("In Good Faith," n.p.: *Granta*, 1990, 13).

Michael Ondaatje was born in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) in 1943, which he left for Britain when he was eleven. He came to Canada in 1962 at the age of nineteen. He presently teaches at York University in Toronto.

3. It is interesting at this point to consider Walter Benjamin's distinction between painter and cameraman as comparable to that between magician and surgeon. "The painter maintains in his work a natural distance from reality, the cameraman penetrates deeply into its web" ("The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," 1936; rpt. in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt [London, U.K.: Jonathan Cape, 1970]: 235). Benjamin suggests that whereas the painter's picture is a totality, the cameraman's photograph "consists of multiple fragments which are all assembled under a new law" (236). Such a distinction labels painting as a modernist project and photography as a postmodernist one; this implication has more recently been espoused by, for instance, George Bowering ("Modernism Could Not Last Forever," *Canadian Fiction Magazine* 32/33 [1979/80]: 4-9). I

do not find the argument persuasive--see above, p. 12 of Introduction.

4. Jean-Pierre Durix argues that it is the movement between the poles of the mundane and the fantastic which classifies Midnight's Children as magic realism ("Magic Realism in Midnight's Children," Commonwealth 8.1 [Autumn 1975]: 57-63). But it is just because the two worlds of the mundane and the fantastic here inhabit each other so completely that I find it hard to see Rushdie's book as magic realism in the same way that, say, Calvino writes magic realism. I would argue that in Rushdie there are not "moments of transition when the text suddenly moves into fantasy" (Durix 57), nor "a desire to make fictional and real events coincide" (60), so much as a universe in which the fantastic is the everyday. For similar reasons, Stephen Slemon's definition of magic realism as a fiction in which two disjunctive narrative modes are held together in suspense seems inappropriate to Midnight's Children, however convenient it would seem to be able to claim the novel as an example of the magic-real as post-colonial discourse (see Slemon, "Magic Realism as Post-Colonial Discourse," Canadian Literature 116 [Spring 1988]: 9-24). Slemon's theory is developed from Fredric Jameson's contention that "the possibility of magic realism as a formal mode is constitutively dependent on a type of historical raw material in which disjunction is structurally present,"

though Jameson sees this disjunction especially in terms of modes of production, "the coexistence of precapitalist with nascent capitalist or technological features" ("On Magic Realism in Film," Critical Inquiry 12 [Winter 1986]: 311).

5. Rushdie himself has said of the point-of-view in his most recent novel, The Satanic Verses, that "it is a migrant's eye view of the world. It is written from the very experience of uprooting, disjuncture and metamorphosis . . . that is the migrant condition, and from which, I believe, can be derived a metaphor for all humanity" ("In Good Faith" 3).

6. For instance, suggests Joseph Swann, Rushdie makes it possible for the Western reader to handle "one of the most unsparing but also one of the most dispassionate descriptions of a battlefield in literature" by juxtaposing it with the grotesque incursions of a scavenging 'vendor of notions' ("'East is East and West is West'? Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Children as an Indian Novel," World Literature Written in English 26.2 [Autumn 1986]: 354). The peasant's presence as a peripheral figure counterbalancing the central action is brought into the foreground, rather than kept in the background "as our common Western usage of metonymy would lead us to expect" (356), and represents a complementary rather than a contradictory force in the flow of the narrative.

7. Or perhaps India is identical with Saleem's conception of reality, or with Rushdie's. In an incisive paper on Kipling's Kim and Rushdie's Midnight's Children as Indian English novels, Richard Cronin suggests that "Midnight's Children has its origins in fantasy. . . . [I]t could not be otherwise, for how else, except fantastically, can . . . an English-educated Muslim like Salman Rushdie seek to accommodate the whole of Indian reality, those millions of babbling voices, so many of them speaking in languages that . . . Rushdie cannot understand?" ("The Indian English Novel: Kim and Midnight's Children," Modern Fiction Studies 33.2 [Summer 1987]: 204-5).

8. Durix argues that "the writer does not avoid the problem of death [in Midnight's Children]. He simply plays at masking it for as long as possible" ("Magic Realism in Midnight's Children" 62). I would argue that to conceive of Rushdie's novel as postmodern and of Saleem as a decentred narrator proposes that the text does overcome his death, since Saleem himself does not have extratextual existence and is constantly re-dismembered in the text's being read. Rushdie comes as near as it is possible to do to deconstructing the notion of death, pace David Lodge (see Introduction 21).

9. There is no suggestion here of the objects within the

photographic frame actually moving to reach beyond it, as they do in, for instance, Julio Cortázar's metafictional story "Blow-Up" (1959; trans. Paul Blackburn, Elements of Fiction, ed. Robert Scholes and Rosemary Sullivan, revised Canadian ed. [Toronto: Oxford U.P., 1988], 540-51). In Rushdie the convention of the photograph as still image is rigorously maintained. Moreover, unlike Cortázar, Rushdie does not replace the narrating subject with the camera, but allows to Saleem artistic control. From Jameson's point-of-view Rushdie's text is therefore the less postmodern (see "On Magic Realism in Film" 305).

10. In reading Ondaatje in this way, I differ radically from Arun P. Mukherjee, who castigates Ondaatje for winning success at the sacrifice of "his regionality, his past and most importantly, his experience of otherness in Canada" ("The Poetry of Michael Ondaatje and Cyril Dabydeen: Two Responses to Otherness," Journal of Commonwealth Literature 20.1 (1985): 50). Mukherjee berates Ondaatje as "a sad example of cultural domination of the Third World intellectuals who cannot see their world without applying imported categories to it" (58). Mukherjee sees Ondaatje as an ahistorical, romantic universalist (55), who writes with "no history or memory; only a paranoid urge to catch hold of the passing moment" (52). Mukherjee's article was published before the appearance of In the Skin of a Lion (1987), whose fundamental *raison d'être* must surely give the lie to every

criticism which Mukherjee makes, except perhaps that of Ondaatje's failure to conform to Mukherjee's own political program for "Third World immigrant" writers.

11. See T.D. MacLulich, "Ondaatje's Mechanical Boy: Portrait of the Artist as Photographer," Mosaic xiv (Spring 1981): 107-119, and Perry M. Nodelman, "The Collected Photographs of Billy the Kid," Canadian Literature 87 (Winter 1980): 68-79.

12. According to Lorraine York, this final picture suggests that the only 'tool' able to capture the fixity-in-flux of Billy's life in the act of being lived is the poet ('The Other Side of Dailiness': Photography in the Works of Alice Munro, Timothy Findley, Michael Ondaatje, and Margaret Laurence [Toronto: ECW Press, 1988], 107).

13. For further comment on the relationship between violence and photography in Coming Through Slaughter, see Lorraine York, "'Violent Stillness': Photography and Postmodernism in Canadian Fiction," Mosaic 21.3 (Spring 1988): 193-201.

14. Ina Ferris suggests that in Running in the Family Ondaatje has moved from a model of imagination as penetration to a model of imagination as construction, and from a correspondence theory to a coherence theory of

truth ("Michael Ondaatje and the Turn to Narrative," Present Tense: The Canadian Novel, Vol. IV, ed. John Moss [Toronto: ECW Press, 1985], 76). I would argue that in photography Ondaatje finds more than imaginative construction, in the correspondences he can no longer locate in language. While agreeing with Ferris that "Running in the Family assumes the inevitability of mediation" (77), I would point nevertheless to the fact that in this novel such mediation gives space to the reader/viewer to receive for herself, rather than through the narrator, the ambiguous referentiality of the photographic image.

15. Ondaatje's "self-aware thematizing of the textuality of the past" shows Running in the Family to be dependent on the reader not only as interpreter, argues Linda Hutcheon, but also as definer of genre ("Running in the Family: The Postmodernist Challenge," Spider Blues: Essays on Michael Ondaatje, ed. Sam Solecki [Montréal: Véhicule Press, 1985], 303).

16. It is perhaps worth mentioning here that Susan Sontag understands all of Roland Barthes' work to be informed by notions of theatre. She argues that, in keeping with Barthes' omnipresent interest in the notion of performance, he treats photography as "a realm of pure haunted spectatorship" ("Writing Itself: On Roland Barthes," A Barthes Reader, ed. Sontag [New York: Hill & Wang, 1982],

xxix).

17. Yasmine Gooneratne points out that "Michael Ondaatje is not the first writer to discover that a voyage round one's father brings one back, invariably, to oneself" (Rev. of Running in the Family, World Literature Written in English 22.2 [Autumn 1983]: 364). In discussing the generic question, she makes the suggestion, particularly apt in the present context, that Running in the Family is "artistic fantasy of a most novel and entertaining kind, belonging to the genre of the tall tale, the theatrical gesture" (361).

18. Margaret Atwood, quoted on the back of the paperback edition of Running in the Family (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1983).

19. Ondaatje might have appreciated the position of Henry P. Robinson, the nineteenth-century American photographer who praised photography on the grounds that "it has a capacity for lying sufficient to enable it to worthily enroll its name among the noble arts" ("Paradoxes of Art, Science and Photography," Wilson's Photographic Magazine vol.29: 242-45, reprinted in Lyons, 82-85). Robinson's approach, however, involved flattering everybody; he had a strong influence on the rise of sentimental pictorial photography in the 1880s and 1890s.

20. Linda Hutcheon argues differently. She suggests that Ondaatje's use of photographs in Running in the Family is a playing with the reader's perceptions, and that once Ondaatje has described a photograph (for instance, of his parents), the reproduction of it is redundant, because "words can be as real as photographic reproductions" ("Postmodernist Challenge" 305). This contention seems to me to run counter to the experience of reading. Words can be as real, but they are not the same, as a photograph. The photograph must be understood as a supplement, at the very least.

21. Hine was a sociologist who took up photography in 1905 to expose the plight of European immigrants to the States, and of the Pittsburg iron and steel workers. In 1908 as staff photographer for the National Child Labour Committee, he photographed the exploitation of children in factories (Helmut and Alison Gernsheim, The History of Photography, from the Camera Obscura to the Beginnings of the Modern Era [New York: McGraw-Hill, 1969], 448). Arthur Siegel, writing in 1951, called Hines "the classic documentary photographer When he stated, 'I wanted to show the things that had to be corrected. I wanted to show the things that had to be appreciated,' he defined very simply the documentary attitude" (Nathan Lyons, ed., Photographers on Photography [Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1966], 90). Allan Sekula, more aware of authorial and material complicity and

attempting to reconcile the realist and the formalist impulses in photography, turns to Hine as "an artist in the tradition of Millet and Tolstoy." He describes Hine as "a realist mystic," whose work displays "manifest politics and only implicit aesthetics," and who belongs to what Sekula calls the tradition of "expressionism in the realm of 'fact'" ("On the Invention of Photographic Meaning," Thinking Photography, ed. Victor Burgin [London & Basingstoke, U.K.: Macmillan, 1982], 103ff).

22. In Joy Kogawa's Obasan (1981), it is exactly because images are so powerful and so disturbing that they must be tamed with the bridle of language. Such power associated with photography recalls but qualifies Michael Ignatieff's comfortable proposition that photographs function, in a time of transition and instability, as icons to preserve memory and bring together the living and the dead. (See Conclusion, note #9, for further comment on Obasan.)

Conclusion.

In the end, the Pencil of Nature has drawn a house of mirrors.

Richard Lacayo



Robert Frank, "Trolley, New Orleans/Tamway, Nouvelle-Orléans, 1953"

A quarter of a century before either Sontag or Barthes was writing about photography, Italo Calvino wrote a story called "The Adventure of a Photographer" (1958), in which he anticipated several of their most basic contentions and also warned against an overuse of the photographic paradigm. Calvino here addressed the issues of the photograph's random conferral of value, its usurpation of the place of the real and its aggressive relation to its subject, as well as the relationship between its cultural and personal significance. The story is a parable about the nature of inquiry into meaning, and in it the power of photography to authenticate experience becomes a parodic impotence to experience life except through the agency of the camera.

In Calvino's story, Antonino Paraggi, who enters the story as a "nonphotographer," is introduced as a philosopher by temperament, one with a passion for "unraveling the thread of general causes from the tangle of details" (Difficult Loves 221). He wants to discover the secret appeal of photography partly to assuage his own curiosity and partly to trick himself out of contemplating his bachelorhood and the way it, more even than their passion for photography, is separating him from his friends. When pressed to take their photographs, Antonino also takes the opportunity to express

his opinion, in terms that Susan Sontag would later echo: "The line between the reality that is photographed because it seems beautiful to us and the reality that seems beautiful because it has been photographed is very narrow" (224). Soon he concludes, with the logic of the antimetaphysicians, that his "antiphotographic polemic could be fought only from within the black box" (226). Setting up a studio, he searches for first the social meaning--equivalent to Barthes' 'studium'--and then the absolute character of his subject--equivalent to Barthes' 'air.'

Antonino becomes a "hunter of the unattainable" in his search for the surface that will reveal meaning, that will contain space and time in a finite form. When he finally snaps his model nude and says, "I've got you now" (232), while remaining completely oblivious to her advances, she bursts into tears. He has aggressively divided real from ideal and continues to do so in daily "photographic rapes" (232) of her at many unexpected moments. He fragments her identity into thousands of images: he tells his friends that he is concerned less with her than with method--"Photography has a meaning only if it exhausts all possible images" (233). Not surprisingly, the model tires of this treatment and leaves. In a parody of contemporary philosophical concerns, Antonino is reduced to photographing, first, her absence, and then, everything that resists photography, everything that is "systematically omitted from the visual

field not only by cameras but also by human beings" (234). Finally, he photographs all his previous photographs, systematically cut up and placed in a bundle on newspapers on the floor so that the images seem at once unreal and concrete. Pondering the photographic relationship between the private and the public, he thinks, "Perhaps true, total photography . . . is a pile of fragments of private images, against the creased background of massacres and coronations" (235). He concludes that the "true course he had obscurely been seeking all this time" (235) was that of photographing photographs. Curiosity has killed the catachumen.

"The essence of postmodernism," as Richard Lacayo suggests, albeit with metaphysical catachresis, "is the belief that in advanced societies reality is a secondhand experience [and] the world is a deck of pictures" ("Drawn by Nature's Pencil" 65). Antonino is no longer a person who engages directly with life at all, and yet he feels that he has discovered its meaning. The isolation that he sensed initially has become defined as an isolation he has obscurely been seeking. The desire to comment on "the significance of even the events most remote from his own experience" (221) and to escape his own social ineptitude has played a trick on him and made him an outsider not only to others but also to his own reality. His life becomes not merely solipsistic, but solipsism imaging itself--
photographs of photographs.

Calvino's presentation of photography, in "The Adventure of a Photographer," as a force that can drive away the present, and can turn life into a commemorative image of itself even before it is on celluloid, long predates Sontag's critique. His awareness of the photographer's interest in social meaning and unique being long predates Barthes' 'studium' and 'air.' But perhaps more profoundly even than Sontag, Calvino warns against the dangers inherent in taking a photographic paradigm as a model for living. It is not just the photographed subject who suffers, but also the photographer, who becomes a victim of his desires for controllable meaning and is overwhelmed by his own images. As it does for Bellocq in Coming Through Slaughter, photography becomes a solipsistic and ultimately self-destructive activity.

When Barthes refers, in Camera Lucida, to Calvino's notion of the "true, total photograph," he redefines it as the photograph that "accomplishes the unheard-of identification of reality ('that-has-been') with truth ('there-she-is!')." Such a photograph is both evidential and exclamative, combines 'studium' and 'punctum,' and therefore "bears the effigy to that crazy point where affect (love, compassion, grief, enthusiasm, desire) is a guarantee of Being. It then approaches, to all intents, madness . . ." (113). This willingness to embrace madness seems a dangerous

corrective to Calvino's parodic "true, total photograph." Barthes seems to be advocating a self-destructive solipsism as the necessary concomitant of honest interaction with photography, or, indeed, with human emotions. It has already been suggested in Chapter Two that Barthes' highly subjectivist epistemology stands aloof from public codes of understanding and challenges the individual to live on the edge of madness. Both Barthes and Calvino recognize a desire to escape the deferral of the subject; but where Barthes sees the subjective embracing of absence-as-presence as a viable and even laudable possibility, Calvino, with Sontag, considers the love of images to be an unhealthy preoccupation with shadows.

This may be true not only of the photographer and his subject. That the spectator's preoccupation too can be unhealthy is, for instance, the central motif of Stephen Leacock's early short story "The Awful Fate of Melpomenus Jones." A paralyzingly shy curate is driven to madness and eventual death by his inability to take leave of friends. He spends his time drinking tea and looking at family photographs, in which he has no interest, and is reduced to swearing at the photo of "papa's uncle's friend in his Bengal uniform" because he cannot talk to the real people. Merely looking at photographs here represents an avoidance of reality which is just as much of a trap as taking photographs turns out to be for Calvino's Antonino.

But if the enterprise of photography is beset with so many dangers for photographer, subject and spectator alike, in what does its attraction consist? Firstly, engagement with photography offers a kind of objective correlative for the solipsistic, whether that is seen as desirable or undesirable. Secondly, photography provides for the conjunction of artist, subject, spectator and product a site that is unique in its relation to objective reality.¹ It is what both Barthes and Benjamin understand as a "socialized [and] heterogeneous object, constructed out of elements that cannot be entirely assimilated or textualized" (Abbas 107). The photograph can be understood not simply as a window but also as "a mirror that reflects back the demands we [viewers] make of it, together with [the] image of the photographer" who took the picture (Bayer 80). The photograph, suggests Berger, is "a meeting-place where the interests of the photographer, the photographed, the viewer and those who are using the photo are often contradictory. These contradictions both hide and increase the natural ambiguity of the photographic image" (Another Way of Telling 7). Its power to attract the interests of all four lies in its strange relationship to the real--a relationship that differentiates photograph from word.

Saussurean linguistics has understood the linguistic sign as involving the presupposition of absence. Such a

sign has only a relative and negative value because language is a constant process of differentiation and deferral. The photographic sign, by contrast, can be understood to be inhabited by what it represents--to be what Barthes calls "the Real, in its indefatigable expression" (Camera Lucida 4), or what Sontag more cautiously describes as an extension of the subject. Sartre in The Imaginary (the book "in homage" to which Barthes wrote Camera Lucida) had distinguished between 'image' and 'sign' on the basis that 'image' represents presence in absence, but 'sign' represents simply absence, an "empty intention" (see Halley 73-4). And therefore, although like the linguistic sign the photograph signifies absence, it also witnesses by physical trace to the authenticity of what has existed. Deferral in the photographic sign is temporal but not wholly essential.

Perhaps, then, the photograph should be understood not just in contradistinction to the linguistic sign, but as what Hutcheon calls "semiotically hybrid" (Politics 106)--a complex of signs: an icon offering resemblance, an index requiring the recognition of a causal physical association, and also a version of Peirce's 'symbol' whose arbitrary meaning requires decoding (see Eagleton 100-1).² John Tagg suggests that "the [photographic] image is . . . to be seen as a composite of signs, more to be compared with a complex sentence than a single word. Its meanings are multiple, concrete, and, most important, constructed" (187). Certainly

Burgen, for instance, understands photography as a language system: "Photographs are texts inscribed in terms of what we may call 'photographic discourse'" (Thinking Photography 144). This view can be contrasted with that of, for instance, W.T.J. Mitchell, who is more interested in an iconic theory of language than in a linguistic theory of icons ("Spatial Form" 297). The flexibility of the photograph as material for the writer of fiction lies in this variousness of its nature as sign, together with its essential relationship to the externally real.³ While one writer may stress the photograph's referential resemblance, another may stress its associative narrative significance, or its arbitrary frame and its need of contextualization. For the writer, whether the image of the photograph is made personal in the quasi-magical appropriation of an icon, or whether it is kept at a distance to be understood within its frame by an associative hermeneutic, will depend on the writer's position with regard to both epistemology and poetics. The camera can be understood as an instrument of modernism, in the imposition of order on chaos, or of postmodernism, in the fragmentation and foregrounding of performance (see Cooley 232-3).⁴ We may live in a society of the image, but the photograph demonstrates that the notion of the image, far from being singular, suggests a site of many possibilities of interpretation.⁵

The writer's epistemology and poetics are themselves

likely to be the fruit of a wide variety of influences. Among those that have been considered in this dissertation are the accidents of birth and cultural heritage. For instance, it is hardly surprising that photographs as traces of the past seem to retain an almost mystical authority in a situation where there is a felt need to reconstruct the past in order to secure the present. Several of those writers in both Britain and Canada who make prominent use of the photographic motif are recent ex-colonials or landed immigrants whose relationship with their country of residence is comparatively insecure. Janette Turner Hospital, for instance, has spoken of her sense of "not quite belong[ing] anywhere."⁶ Anita Brookner, born in London, U.K., to Polish emigré parents (the Bruckners), has said of Britain that "although I was born and raised here I have never been at home, completely" (Paris Review 150).⁷ And Michael Ondaatje's search for origins is so omnipresent in his work that it has led one critic, Smaro Kamboureli, to describe Ondaatje as a writer of "autobiography by default" (80).⁸ Perhaps the referential magic of photography draws these writers by its irreducibility--witness to an essentialism remaining embedded in the field of textuality.⁹ But even Salman Rushdie, for whom photography is a construction of the subject, in articulating the heterogeneity of his Indian heritage has spoken of his "determination to create a literary language and literary forms in which the experience of formerly

colonized, still-disadvantaged peoples might find full expression" ("In Good Faith" 13, 3). Even photography understood as parodic mimesis seems, then, to have power appropriate to the colonized.

However, the appeal of photography clearly lies in more than its satisfying of a desire to investigate origins.¹⁰ The British writers other than Brookner, Mo and Rushdie whose books have been examined above have impeccably traditional British backgrounds (see notes to Chapter 1). And, other than Hospital and Ondaatje, the Canadians--Atwood, Munro, Laurence and Findley--have firmly-established Canadian roots. Writers from both countries find in the photographic image a suggestive complex of signs. And yet the use of photography in novels from the two countries does contrast, in novels that display a fundamental difference in tone which seems to stem, ultimately, from a different hermeneutic.

The British writers generally favour a Sontagian approach to photography, by which the distancing involved in narrative contextualization redeems the opacity of the photograph from dangerous solipsism or misinterpretation, although they also valorize an aesthetic relation to the subject in a way that Sontag would see as inimical to ethical understanding. The characteristically ironic British narrative finds in the photographic paradigm a parody of

traditional mimesis. Photography's apparent transparency of reference is revealed as a deception similar to the deceptiveness of narrative itself: neither can avoid the deferral of the referent. Appearances mask reality in a way that reinforces the felt need for control--a control that, when exercised by a photographer, can pose a threat to the subject's identity. In its play with the presence and absence of the subject, the photograph in the contemporary British novel seems to hover on the border between a traditional inscription of realism and a postmodern subversion of it. The need for perspective in viewing the photograph reinforces the notion of fiction as inevitably a matter of interpretation, within which distance alone can lend enchantment. Where the British writers do allow a magic to the photographic image, they require it to be understood from as great a distance as flying or amnesia or antiquity or extreme old age can provide.

The Canadian writers, by contrast, characteristically favour the romantic aesthetic of a Barthean approach to photography.¹¹ Their interest in photography seems to centre around an apprehension of the world itself as inherently magical. Appearances have authority; they attest to the intransigent and mysterious nature of reality which resists interpretation. The photograph is the site of both the presence and the power of the past, and it represents therefore a disturbing source of potential transformation in

the present. The photograph is perceived as occupying a border territory between the real and the super-real, or between the realms of logic and magic, and as possessing a dynamic relationship to the photographer and spectator because it is inhabited by the photographed subject. Distance from the photograph is necessary not so much to avoid the spectator's being deceived as to ensure her seeing the image clearly, and therefore being able to participate fully in its mysterious revelations. In such an environment fiction too is understood as a species of magic power that can represent, reveal, or even create the real, rather than as a necessary device by which to control the real.

There is ample room for further research in the area of the interrelation in fictions between the photographic and the linguistic sign. Barthes himself, whose last book was about photography, had declared his intention of next turning away from the enterprise of the critic-as-artist to writing a novel (Sontag, "Writing Itself" xxxv). Perhaps it would not be fanciful to suggest that in Camera Lucida, with its motif of quest for the 'eidos' of photography and the 'air' of his mother, Barthes has already come near to achieving this aim.¹² What the present study has argued, however, is that, despite the undoubted validity of Calvino's warning against the destructiveness of an obsessive involvement with images, the photograph does offer a powerful and variously interpretable

representation of the appearance of reality, which the writer may use as a paradigm for his or her treatment of appearances in fiction. Thus an examination of a writer's use of the photographic image may provide a commentary upon his or her understanding of the real, the fictive, and the relationship between the two.

*

Epilogue

Lewis Carroll wrote a parodic poem called "Hiawatha's Photographing," first published in 1857. In it he described Hiawatha's unsuccessful attempts to photograph the unphotogenic and flustered members of a family group.

Finally my Hiawatha
Tumbled all the tribe together,
("Grouped" is not the right expression),
And, as happy chance would have it
Did at last obtain a picture
Where the faces all succeeded;
Each came out a perfect likeness.

Then they joined and all abused it,
Unrestrainedly abused it,
As the worst and ugliest picture
They could possibly have dreamed of.
"Giving one such strange expressions--
Sullen, stupid, pert expressions.
Really anyone would take us
(Anyone that did not know us)
For the most unpleasant people!"
(Hiawatha seemed to think so,
Seemed to think it not unlikely.)

. . . But my Hiawatha's patience,
His politeness and his patience,
Unaccountably had vanished,
And he left that happy party.
Neither did he leave them slowly,
With the calm deliberation,
The intense deliberation
Of a photographic artist:
But he left them in a hurry,
Left them in a mighty hurry,
Stating that he would not stand it,
Stating in emphatic language
What he'd be before he'd stand it.
Hurriedly he packed his boxes . . .
Thus departed Hiawatha.

This is Carroll's ironic reminder that not beauty alone, but also reality, seems to be in the eye of the beholder. And sometimes the conflicts between appearances can be resolved only through the departure of one of the points-of-view. But Carroll the writer can have the final word. In his poem he can distance all appearances within a parodic frame. Ultimately the deferral of reference may be the writer's greatest asset.

* * *

Notes.

1. One would want to avoid both the word 'work' and the word 'text' here, because of their theoretical implications. 'Product,' despite accretions of its own specific critical school, is used here to suggest both the historical continuity of the artistic project and the autonomy of the results.

2. Donald Brook's article on "The Alleged Transparency of Photographs" (British Journal of Aesthetics 26 [1986]: 277-82) employs the notions of the simulating picture, the exemplifying match and the arbitrary symbol in a way that is roughly parallel to Peirce's icon, index, symbol. For Brook the primary category, for both painting and photography, is the first, which corresponds to the iconic (279).

3. Historically-speaking, of course, the arbitrary nature of the photograph as symbolic sign was articulated as the photograph came to be seen as opaque rather than as a transparent reference to a pre-existing signified.

4. Recent theory has been eager to claim photography for postmodernism. For instance, Eva-Marie Kröller writes, "Photography appears to be one of the typical metaphors and devices employed by post-modernist writers to expose the restrictions of any prefabricated aesthetic order in

rendering truth" ("The Exploding Frame: Uses of Photography in Timothy Findley's The Wars," Journal of Canadian Studies 16.3-4 [Fall/Winter 1981]: 68). The argument of this dissertation has been more in tune with the thinking of, for instance, Lorraine York, when she argues that "the nature of the writer's engagement with photography . . . reflects his or her philosophy of representation and fiction" ("'Violent Stillness': Photography and Postmodernism in Canadian Fiction," Mosaic 21.3 [Spring 1988]: 194).

5. Michael Halley points out how Barthes himself early (in "The Photographic Message," 1961) distinguishes between levels of potential photographic interpretation. "For Barthes, . . . what remains unique, uncoded, in photographic representation is the denoted image it portrays. The connoted image is reduced to a phenomenon of language, and it exhibits . . . all the characteristics of a text: it possesses a 'discourse' which can be 'read' and interpreted in a cultural or ideological context" ("Argo Sum," Diacritics 12 [Winter 1982]: 70).

6. Janette Turner Hospital, born in Australia but resident in Canada since 1971, has also lived in the United States, Britain and India. She has said, "I feel at ease in five countries yet do not quite belong anywhere. Perhaps this is why my characters tend to be caught up in untenable situations, trapped in a web of cultural or moral dilemmas

from which there is never easy escape" ("About the Author," Borderline [Toronto: Seal, 1987], 291). Perhaps, too, this is why Hospital is so attracted in her fictions to photographs as agents of redemptive memory.

7. Brookner describes her family as "transplanted and fragile people, an unhappy brood" whom she felt she had to protect (Shusha Guppy, "The Art of Fiction XCVIII: Anita Brookner," The Paris Review 104 [1987]: 149). She says, "I always seemed to have to act as an interpreter between them and the outside world" (Elizabeth Dunn, "The author who prefers to keep her life a closed book," London Daily Telegraph 1 Aug. 1987). Interpretation, it has been suggested above in Chapter 3, can give the illusion that life is under control. Thus, although the referentiality of the photograph attracts Brookner's attention, the painfulness of the reference necessitates a containing by interpretation. "Writing," she says, "has freed me from the despair of living" (Guppy 151). "My own life was disappointing--I was mal partie (started on the wrong footing); so I am trying to edit the whole thing. It was the need for order in my life that made me start" (Guppy 152). For Brookner, photographs and their narrative interpretation provide a paradigmatic instance of the relationship between intransigent images and the editing, controlling mind that struggles to make sense of the past.

8. Despite his expressed desire to move away from photographs, Ondaatje's attraction to photographic images is constant throughout his work. In discussing Running in the Family as a deconstruction of traditional autobiography, Smaro Kamboureli refers to Paul De Man's definition of autobiography as not a genre or a mode so much as "a figure of reading or of understanding that occurs, to some degree, in all texts" ("Autobiography as De-facement," Modern Language Notes 94.5 [Dec. 1979]: 921). She sees Ondaatje as involved in the postmodern project of recognizing "the impossibility of spelling out the self in a monologic way" and revealing the "genealogy of self as being inextricably related to the materiality of language" ("The Alphabet of the Self: Generic and Other Slippages in Michael Ondaatje's Running in the Family," Reflections: Autobiography and Canadian Literature, ed. K.P. Stich [Ottawa: U. of Ottawa Press, 1988]: 86, 90). In this connection J.E. Chamberlin's rather more traditional point is of interest: "Canada offers Ondaatje a geography, but no inheritance; Sri Lanka offers him a family history, but no tradition, no way of passing things on; the English language offers him both an inheritance and a history, but no time and place. Ondaatje's success as a poet has been to subject the conditions of his craft to relentless scrutiny, to ensure that his inheritances are indeed his" ("Let There Be Commerce Between Us: The Poetry of Michael Ondaatje," Spider Blues: Essays on Michael Ondaatje, ed. Sam Solecki [Montréal: Véhicule Press,

1985], 41).

Incidentally, Sontag sees much of Roland Barthes' work as autobiographical, in the De Manian sense that he always projects himself into the subject; his last writing is of course literally autobiographical. Sontag speaks of Barthes as "the latest major participant in the great [French] national literary project, inaugurated by Montaigne: the self as vocation, life as a reading of the self" ("Writing Itself: On Roland Barthes," A Barthes Reader, ed. Sontag [New York: Hill & Wang, 1982], xxxii-xxxiii).

⁹. A novel that shows specifically how the temporal rather than essential deferral of the photographic referent can render the photograph a more powerful sign than the linguistic one is Joy Kogawa's Obasan (1981). Kogawa, writing about the internment of Japanese Canadians during the Second World War, is attracted to the slippery authority of the photograph as translinguistic witness of public record and private memory. Though she is third-generation Canadian, her novel is centrally concerned with the pressing need to establish identity and origins in a culture that questions one's right to belong, and with the difficulty of cross-cultural communication through language. In a paper on "Language and Longing in Joy Kogawa's Obasan" (Canadian Literature 116 [Spring 1988]: 58-66), A. Lynne Magnusson refers to Lacan's contention that "to enter into a world of relationships mediated by language is to enter into a world

of endless yearning, where words and substitute objects always register a lack" (62). Magnusson argues cogently that Naomi's experience in the novel is one of movement from a prelinguistic paradise of unmediated communication to a linguistic compromise in which "language--with all its inadequacy--[is privileged] over a delusory wordless security" (66). But although she points out that it is a photograph of Naomi with her mother which stimulates Naomi to try to recreate her lost origins, Magnusson understands the novel to devalue both words and pictures as signs of lost presence, and does not recognize the authority of the photographic over the linguistic sign that is evidenced in the novel.

10. Clearly there is room for further exploration of the relationship between a writer's sense of place and personal history and the use he or she makes of the photographic image. What, for instance, holds true in the U.S. in the work of immigrant writers compared with indigenous writers? What of commonwealth countries other than Canada? Is there a particular attraction to the photograph as evidential icon amongst minority groups in general, as well as amongst those struggling to assert physical rootedness? What of the value of photography to the writer in a country under political stress? One thinks, for instance, of the uses--political, commercial, erotic--made of photographic evidence in the Czechoslovakia of Kundera's The Unbearable

Lightness of Being (1984).

11. Why it is that Barthes, the European in revolt against his French scholastic heritage, should provide a model attractive to Canadians, and Sontag, the American pundit, should seem closer to the British novelists' approach to photography, is a matter for others, more equipped to make sociological judgments, to investigate. One might speculate that Barthes' emphasis on the role of the spectator and Sontag's on the power of the photographer reflect something of the supposedly traditional postures of the Canadian and the British vis-à-vis their belief in their ability to act in the world--but this is mere fancy. It may be simpler to argue that Sontag's ironist mode appeals to the British. Sontag herself has in any case been called "a good European" because she is eminently "respectful of the cultures and peculiarities of nations" (Elizabeth Hardwick, ed., A Susan Sontag Reader [New York: Vintage, 1983], x). Sontag is drawn to European writers and film-makers (Barthes, Benjamin, Godard) and, so Richard Lacayo argues, her attraction to fragments and epigrams is also European ("Stand Aside, Sisyphus," Time 24 Oct. 1988: 86). Barthes, on the other hand, has been characterized in this dissertation as a romantic, whose attraction to photographic magic perhaps appeals to a postcolonial culture in which identity has achieved the status of a moral value. Barthes himself talks about a kind of moral resurrection when he writes that

"[t]he photographer gives life by capturing the subject's air, [which is perhaps] ultimately something moral, mysteriously contributing to the face the reflection of a life value" (Camera Lucida 110).

12. Incidentally, Susan Sontag too declares herself as a fiction-writer manqué. Although she has produced two novels and a collection of short stories, she has failed in her avowed attempt to devote all her time to fiction. "Essay writing is part of an addiction that I'm trying to kick. My last essay is like my last cigarette" (Lacayo, "Stand Aside" 87). Or, perhaps, like the last note in a dissertation.

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