

Pictures of Mourning: The Family Photograph in Canadian Elegiac Novels

by

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B.A., University of Victoria, 1994  
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A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

In the Department of English

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University of Victoria

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### Abstract

This dissertation identifies and examines a previously unremarked genre in contemporary Canadian literature. This genre, which I call the elegiac family romance (combining Freud's "family romance" with Kenneth Bruffee's "elegiac romance"), presents protagonists who narrativize their lives after the death of a parent. I focus on a recurrent trope within this genre: the ekphrasis (described by James Heffernan as "the verbal representation of a visual representation") of the family photograph. I argue that in the context of parental death, this trope emphasizes the renegotiation of subjectivity at a moment of generational transition, with particular emphasis on representation. As well, I argue, in simultaneously conforming to and transcending elegiac linearity, the trope demonstrates the hegemonic power of inherited family narratives while offering possibilities for transmuting them.

Besides its recourse to genre theory, this interdisciplinary study moves between theories of subjectivity and representation, visibility and the photograph, mourning and memory. In reading Michael Ignatieff's *Scar Tissue*, for example, I move between psychoanalytic theory, recent thinking about the elegy, and theories about ekphrasis, to argue that within the elegiac narrative the photograph provides a "space between mourning and melancholia" (Kathleen Woodward). While the elegy imposes on narrative the psychoanalytic demand that mourning terminates in consolation (Jahan Ramazani, Peter Sacks), photographic ekphrasis provides a space capable of resisting those generic and psychoanalytic demands while appearing to conform to them.

In reading Thomas King's *Medicine River* and Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*, my movement between ekphrastic and photographic theory not only demonstrates the disciplinary work done by the family photograph, but also shows the "work of contestation" these "meta-photographic texts" perform by "plac[ing] family photographs into narrative contexts" (Marianne Hirsch). Where Heffernan sees in ekphrasis a struggle for representation between the visual and the verbal, I argue that the two media collaborate to contest the dominant narrative. My chapter on Timothy Findley's *The Piano Man's Daughter* builds on these readings to consider the epistemological quest often associated with narrativization in the wake of parental death. Within this epistemological context, the photograph comes to represent both the child's access to, and the parent's denial of, knowledge of the past, emphasizing the "memoro-politics" (Nicola King) of the family. These memoro-politics are further complicated by the geographic moves which are part of family histories and which place these histories within a global context. Thus in Neil Bissoondath's *The Worlds Within Her* and in Daphne Marlatt's *Taken*, the photograph signals the borders which limit representation and which keep family secrets outside the frame; at the same time, particularly in *Taken*, the haunting possibilities of photographic representation are exploited to explore new ways of knowing.

While the presence of the photographic and the elegiac within Canadian literature is well recognized, their intersection has received little attention. By identifying the photographic trope within the elegiac family romance as such an intersection, this dissertation paves the way for further exploration of visuality's role in the transmission of the verbal narratives through which the family is constructed in our national imaginary.

## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	i
Table of Contents .....	iii
Acknowledgments .....	iv
Introduction	
Pictures of Mourning: The Family in Canadian Elegiac Novels .....	1
Chapter One	
Picturing Melancholia in the Work of Mourning: The Photograph in Michael Ignatieff's <i>Scar Tissue</i> .....	27
Chapter Two	
Ekphrasis and Memorialization: Speaking Out (Of/Against) the Disciplinary Photograph in Thomas King's <i>Medicine River</i> and Joy Kogawa's <i>Obasan</i> .....	77
Chapter Three	
"As if Knowing Was an Important Thing for Me to Have": The Family Photograph and Hidden Histories in Timothy Findley's <i>The Piano Man's Daughter</i> .....	120
Chapter Four	
Looking at/for her People: History, Geography, and the Family Photograph in Neil Bissoondath's <i>The Worlds Within Her</i> .....	162
Chapter Five	
Haunting Images, Haunted Places: Memory and the Photograph(ic) in Daphne Marlatt's <i>Taken</i> .....	206
Conclusion	
"Beyond the Reach of Evidence": Picturing our Stories in the Future .....	256
Works Cited .....	268

## Acknowledgments

I gratefully acknowledge the support of my family, particularly my husband, Paul, who always worked to ensure that I had a room of my own, and who talked me through many, many moments of doubt.

I also acknowledge with gratitude the often demanding support of Smaro Kamboureli, who always insisted on my ability to complete the dissertation, and to complete it well.

## Pictures of Mourning: The Family Photograph in Canadian Elegiac Novels

This dissertation explores a previously unremarked intersection of the elegiac and the photographic in a series of Canadian novels and presents these novels as a distinct sub-genre. In a nod to both Sigmund Freud's "family romance" and Kenneth Bruffee's "elegiac romance," I call this sub-genre the elegiac family romance. In it, protagonists narrativize their lives in response to the death of a parent (or parents). Numerous Canadian novels conform to this pattern; a partial list would include André Alexis's *Childhood*, Marian Engel's *Sarah Bastard's Notebook*, Michael Ondaatje's *Running in the Family*, Barbara Sapergia's *Secrets in Water*, and Richard Wright's *The Age of Longing*. Some of these also offer examples of the recurrent trope that interests me, namely, the protagonist's description of a family photograph, a description that goes beyond the actual image to the memories it evokes. From the latter, I have chosen the novels for this study, concerned primarily with providing a balanced representation of race and gender as well as with exploring the range of stylistic and structural flexibility possible within this genre: Neil Bissoondath's *The Worlds Within Her*, Timothy Findley's *The Piano Man's Daughter*, Michael Ignatieff's *Scar Tissue*, Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*, and Daphne Marlatt's *Taken*. These novels have much in common with the "family album novels" which Brent MacLaine identifies, astutely noting that this sub-genre is always necessarily elegiac. However, the novels I propose to focus on do not specifically rely on the metaphor of a family album; in fact, the photographs described in these elegiac family romances are only rarely in albums. As further distinction, a central concern of the elegiac family romance is the death of a parent or parents.

The photographic trope in these novels presents a form of ekphrasis, or what James Heffernan calls the “verbal representation of a visual representation” (3). The movement this ekphrastic trope comprises between the verbal and the visual accommodates the struggle for representation which is central to memorialization. As well, this movement responds to the generic demands of the elegy, the literary work of mourning, by simultaneously conforming to *and* subverting its insistent linearity, allowing, importantly, a space “between mourning and melancholia” (Woodward 112). Within a Canadian context, the photographic trope central to these novels must be considered in terms of how the discourse of the family photograph influences the poetics and politics of memory and memorialization within this supposedly postcolonial and officially multicultural nation.

Both the elegiac and the photographic tropes have been recognized as significant elements in Canadian literature: Margaret Atwood, for example, has claimed elegy as “a natural Canadian form” (29); Russell McDougall has described Canadian writing as “compulsively photographic” (112). While Atwood fails to explain and justify her claim satisfactorily, McDougall lists “qualities of mainstream Canadian literature which tend to support the view or create the concept that Canadian writers have generally adopted a photographic relation to the world” (111). He draws a direct parallel between the importance of the railway as a Canadian symbol of nationalism and the predominance of photographic imagery and structure in our literature, contrasting this with Australian literature. As well, he connects the prevalence of the photographic in Canadian literature with “the ease with which Canada adopted the strategies of post-modernism” (118).

Numerous critical papers have focused on the Canadian elegy, in its many

individual variations. Sara Jamieson, for example, reads elegies by Margaret Atwood and P.K. Page; L.R. Early interprets those of Archibald Lampman; Stephen Scobie examines Bronwen Wallace's; Coral Ann Howells considers Atwood's handling of elegy and wilderness in *Morning in the Burned House*; and Deborah Bowen explores the parodic treatment of elegy by Lorna Crozier and Margaret Avison. While this is only a partial list, it clearly indicates a sustained Canadian critical interest in the Canadian elegy. Less work, though, deals with fiction and the elegy.<sup>1</sup> Karen Smythe, however, has explicated the poetics of elegy in the work of Mavis Gallant and Alice Munro; she traces the possibility of reading fiction as a response to "the constraints of the traditional structure of poetic elegy," and argues for its "replace[ment] by a fictional exploration of the grieving process" (10).

Most significant for my work, though, is that Smythe reads the autobiographical elements in Gallant's and Munro's work as genre turned trope. That is, occurring as they do within fiction, these elements are not part of an autobiography as we know that genre, but rather constitute a recurrent extended figure or trope within which a character appears to be narrativizing her own life. Further, Smythe connects the autobiographical and the elegiac tropes by noting that "forms of life-writing serve a fundamental purpose in elegy: as a trope of consolation, this use of autobiography distances the speaker from the scene of death and reminds the reader that life does indeed go on" (7). All but one of the novels I read present a narrator who similarly combines the autobiographical with the elegiac,<sup>2</sup> making Smythe's view of fictional recourse to the respective genres of autobiography and elegy as a trope clearly relevant to, and potentially productive for, my study. Through this critical lens, the elegiac family romances I propose to focus on rely on the recurrent trope

of an elegiac fictional autobiography written at the loss of a parent. What this genre-straddling trope gestures toward is the relationship between loss, narrativity, and the construction of one's subjectivity within the context of inheritance—a context of generational and, even, cultural transmission of narratives—which allows for both continuity and change.

Smythe contends that the consolation achieved through traditional elegies is found in fiction-elegies through “an understanding of narrative ritual as a potentially useful method of mourning” (154). This somewhat qualified consolation is one I would also claim for the elegiac family romances I explore. In the case of these romances, the consolation delivered through “an understanding of narrative ritual” is powerfully supplemented by an incorporation of photographs in the narrative. If the elegiac autobiography provides a trope for speaking out one's subjectivity at a moment of loss and, inevitably, change, the incorporation of photographs within such a narrative doubles this trope: the narrative interpretation of the family photograph provides an example of ekphrasis, which translates literally from the Greek as simply a speaking out.

Although the presence of the photographic trope within elegiac-autobiographical fiction is clearly significant, hardly any critics have paid attention to this productive intersection in Canadian literature. Smythe's brief attention to such an intersection in Munro's work<sup>3</sup> is the only notable reference to the presence of the photographic within the Canadian elegy. Certainly, however, the treatment of photographs in Canadian literature has been examined extensively.

In her well-known study of postmodern English-Canadian fiction, for example, Linda Hutcheon suggests the wide use of photographs. She asks why so many Canadian

writers have “turned to the notion of taking photographs for their analogue of *literary* production” (46). Hutcheon supports her claim with a substantial list of writers whose work supports her argument, and she answers her question by suggesting that the photograph works to figure the same kind of arresting/fixing process writers feel uncomfortable with in their own work, so that writing and the photograph line up as static and dead, as opposed to the dynamism of orality. Suspicious, with Jacques Derrida, of this binary and its privileging of the voice, the novelists Hutcheon discusses rely upon the reader “to breathe the life into the static fixity of that photograph” so that “not just oral literature must be defined by its actualization in performance [but rather] even the most written of forms, even the novel, needs that ‘you’ [the reader]” (58). Hutcheon’s characterization of the photograph’s role in the postmodern novel is somewhat at odds with the understanding, drawn from theory on ekphrasis, I will lay out below. Theorists of ekphrasis are more likely to align writing with the voice and thus see it as dynamic in opposition to the picture’s still or static quality. Nevertheless, both arguments find written descriptions of photographs to be a site where the dynamic and the static meet in the relationship between narrator and reader. As Deborah Bowen sums up the conundrum, “the photograph can be seen as a metaphor for the live-giving and death-dealing enterprise of writing fictions” (Bowen, “In Camera” 22).

Many Canadian writers, then, as Hutcheon points out, use photographs in their fiction; as well, numerous critics have studied this use.<sup>4</sup> Most relevant for my purposes is Lorraine York’s book-length study of the photograph in the work of four Canadian writers, in which she observes that “the narrative qualities of the single photograph are *not* linear,” and that a photograph’s narrative is always only implied (17). She builds on

this observation to argue that contemporary writers facing “traditional conceptions of plot and narrative” and “experimenting with fictional forms which emphasize non-linearity, find in photography a ready analogue” (17). Thus she provides an opening for my argument about the photograph’s presence within the elegiac. While we are both interested in the photograph’s relationship to linearity, however, an important difference in our arguments is that I point to narrators whose recourse to the photograph disrupts a linearity—the insistent linearity of the traditional elegy—to which they nonetheless *apparently* conform.

Besides usefully linking the photograph with a formal concern with linearity, York also summarizes other relevant functions of the photograph in Canadian literature. Writing on Alice Munro’s work, for example, she notes the implication that, “like the iconic photograph, the past—and all its levels of meaning—defeats us” (41). Certainly, this is a theme visited by all the writers of my study. Another aspect of York’s work clearly relevant to the fictional narratives I explore is her contention that both Timothy Findley and Michael Ondaatje use photography to examine concerns over fixity while they also, paradoxically, celebrate the positive possibilities of preservation. The most solid building block York offers, however, is her summary, through a reading of *The Diviners*, of “the functions of photography in contemporary Canadian literature” (165).

Declaring that novel to be “a compendium” of these functions, York proceeds to catalogue them: “the photograph as an analogue to memory and the fictional process, as a reminder of the past, as a haunting image of death or loss of identity, sometimes as an image of cultural continuity in the fragile but enduring human chain” (165). All these functions typify the use of photographs in the elegiac family romances I am studying; I

would add, though, two central functions. The first of these would be the photograph's function as an analogue for that which is always frustratingly beyond language, and the second is its emphasis on the politics of representation.

Indeed, although York does not list this latter function, she draws attention to it in her analysis, albeit implicitly. For example, the contrast she establishes between Ondaatje, who she reads as fearing the hegemony of the word, and Laurence, who she says privileges the word, suggests a struggle for representation between the verbal and the visual. Further, when the photograph functions "as an analogue to memory and the fictional process," does it not also operate as an analogue to how memory can be represented? In a separate article, York argues that "the nature of the writer's engagement with photography . . . reflects his or her philosophy of representation and fiction" ("Violent Stillness" 194). This statement more directly ties the fictional photograph to the poetics and politics of representation and compellingly articulates the need to understand this central trope in Canadian writing.

While York's is the most extended study of the function of photography in Canadian fiction, other critics share her interest, particularly with regard to Alice Munro and Margaret Laurence. Some of these critics offer insights which are useful to an exploration of the photographic within the elegiac, although their failure to consider that specific intersection limits their usefulness to my work. I appreciate, for example, Mary Condé's comment on Alice Munro that she "uses photographs in her stories, as a reading within a reading" because this suggestion of a *mise en abyme* structure anticipates my own theorizing of the photographic trope as a polyvalent site of interpretation incorporated within a larger work.<sup>5</sup> But that structure signifies quite differently within the

insistent linearity of the elegy or the elegiac novel, in which, I will argue, it allows an apparent closure while simultaneously accommodating the interminable.

Similarly, Deborah Bowen, in comparing Munro's use of the photographic with Margaret Laurence's, draws useful conclusions, but these need to be modified in the context of the elegiac family romances. Bowen stresses the ambiguity of the photograph, and contends that Munro uses the photograph to point to "an intransigent reality and resist interpretation into anything other than [the photograph's] own 'pure contingency'" (21). Laurence, on the other hand, argues Bowen, privileges narrative as a means of getting beyond the photograph's surface. Bowen aligns Munro's use of the photograph with Roland Barthes and Laurence's with Susan Sontag, who she says "privileges narrative as the means of understanding, because narrative escapes appearances and explains the temporality of function" (21). Thus Bowen's reading, like York's, points to the contest for representation between the visual and the verbal; certainly, this would be a credible reading for the trope of the photograph in the novels I am reading, in which a narrative is interrupted by a description and interpretation of a family snapshot. Again, however, I believe that the incorporation of the photographic within the elegiac modifies the function of the trope. Bowen opposes narrative linearity in Laurence (who works, she says, "to decipher a pattern over time") to Munro's "unresolvable enigmas of each moment" (33). In the elegiac family romances, though, the narrators' recourse to the photograph allows them to have their cake and eat it too: the trope folds the unresolvable into the linear and terminable narrative.

In fact, this incorporation of the unresolvable into a linear and terminable narrative is central to my understanding of the photograph trope's function in the elegiac

family romances: it allows a life to be narrated, a history to be written, while a loss is being mourned and, apparently, consolation achieved; simultaneously, it allows enigmas from a family's or an individual's past to remain unresolved, gestured towards by the visual, if never given voice or transcribed. Smythe points to a trope which figures the genre of autobiography; in their structure as fictional autobiographical elegies, the novels I study also point toward genre operating figuratively. Further figuring also recurs within these novels through the trope of the photograph, which carries the numerous meanings critics have attached to the photographic within Canadian literature.

By figuring autobiographical elegies, these novels point insistently to their adult protagonists' renegotiation of subjectivity in the space opened by parental death, as well as to the way this renegotiation is effected through the process of narrativization. In these elegiac family romances, that narrativization is inflected by the recurrent recourse to the family photograph. The trope of the family photograph is of central importance in theorizing what characterizes these novels: it repeatedly stages the "exhibition moment" that sociologist Richard Chalfen observes is central to our cultural use of the photograph, a moment in which individual pasts become part of the social present. That this photographic trope is insistently repeated in an elegiac narrative places the protagonists' renegotiation of subjectivity in a context which balances the stability of tradition against the inevitability of change.

If this trope offers a repeated representation, in writing, of the oral performance constituted by the "exhibition moment," then Martha Langford's reading of the photographic album productively draws attention to the "oral-photographic alliance" (Langford 123), and offers some suggestions about what this alliance might be working

towards in the novels. Particularly within the context of parental death, inevitably accompanied by generational transmissions and inheritances, that the elegiac family romance figures, this trope points to the role of the family photograph in “preserving the structures of oral tradition” (21). Langford contends that “[t]o *speak* the photographic album is to hear and *see* its roots in orality”; to *write* the fictional photograph, I believe, similarly points to these roots in its imitation of the oral exhibition moment.

This rootedness in orality offers, paradoxically, a stabilizing fluidity. The act of describing a family photograph inevitably requires transmission of certain family narrative traditions, even if only in the identification of the subjects pictured. But if, as folklorist Pauline Greenhill argues, “[f]amily photographs . . . contribute to some extent to the stability of family narrative traditions,” they do so by “allow[ing] constant reinterpretation to fit changing circumstances, which may contribute to their survival as a tradition and an institution” (124). The photographs in the elegiac family romances are obviously fictional while Greenhill and Langford are theorizing material photographs in historical albums. An even more important difference is that the descriptions and interpretations are not obviously oral. However, the conversational first-person perspective, with its implied direct address to the reader, reproduces the flavour of the oral-photographic alliance. As well, shared social familiarity with the conventions of “Kodak culture” (Chalfen) encourages readers to assume an imaginary role of *listening* participants in such an alliance. Thus as it mimics the “exhibition moments” of this culture, the trope the narrators employ to describe and interpret family snapshots manifests this important process of “constant reinterpretation,” particularly in the

“changing circumstances” of parental death and the challenges that such death presents to the family’s survival.

Several steps are necessary in exploring how the “stabilizing fluidity” offered by the photographic trope affects the narrator’s renegotiation of subjectivity within the elegiac family romances. With so little theory available on the specific intersection of the photographic and the elegiac, not only in Canadian literature but also in literature beyond national boundaries, I have adopted an interdisciplinary methodology. To bridge the gap between the useful studies of elegy and the large body of work centred around the photograph (an interdisciplinary body of work which comprises contributions from art history, sociology, and cultural studies), I have woven together a connecting span from strands of psychoanalytic theory—theories of subjectivity, family, and mourning,—theories of memory and memorialization, and theories of visuality. As well, my own theorizing of ekphrasis as it is manifest in these novels—building on several important theories of ekphrasis—constitutes a central strand of this span. Once I have woven these theoretical approaches together into a span connecting the photographic and the elegiac, I will tighten it, tugging until the photographic demonstrably nestles within the elegiac: I believe this configuration is most productive for understanding the relation of the two within the elegiac family romance.

Before bringing the elegiac and the photographic together, however, I want to establish the elegiac as offering a space in which the photographic might be fruitfully received, a space which the contributions of the photographic could significantly complement. Studies by both Peter Sacks and Jahan Ramazani contend that the elegy represents a frustratingly insistent, and terminable, linearity. Sacks’s observation that the

genre encompasses the “elegist’s reluctant submission to language itself” suggests a reason for a persistent recourse to the visual, if only through its verbal representation, in the form of the photographic trope (2). Further, in reading the elegy as a literary work which performs the psychic work of mourning, this body of theory provides an entry point for the photographic theory which sees the photograph as similarly contributing to this psychic process.

While Sacks and Ramazani both study the pastoral elegy and thus restrict their discussion to poetry, Kenneth Bruffee’s work sets an important precedent for reading fiction as elegiac. Bruffee traces similarities to the pastoral elegy in a series of twentieth-century novels, identifying these novels as elegiac romances, his term for a twentieth-century response to the demands of the quest romance. His use of the term “elegiac” reflects his contention that the adventure or quest romance has changed with the twentieth century’s loss of belief in the possibility of heroism. Understandably, then, Bruffee sees the elegiac as modulating the romance, but he is not particularly interested in claiming that the genre he presents changes or responds to the elegy in any way. My interest, however, is in the genre’s response to the specific formal demands of the elegy in the late twentieth-century. Nevertheless, because Bruffee’s term, “elegiac romance,” so usefully signals both change and continuity in genre, I borrow it. Its resonance with Freud’s “family romance” yields my own term, “elegiac family romance,” which reflects the specific concern of the novels I study with the relationship between subjectivity and family, particularly parents, as well as the way these novels respond to the elegiac form.

Sacks’s study of examples of the elegy from Spenser to Yeats elucidates the demands made of elegy, and is thus a good starting point for understanding the genre’s

changing responses to those demands: he reads the elegy as a work of mourning, deliberately echoing Freud's reference to the psychic work performed as an individual moves from loss through mourning to consolation. For Sacks, both mourning and its representation in the elegy "recapitulate elements of the earlier [Oedipal] resolution" (8); both, as he explains them, have at their core a loss whose acceptance "offers a form of compensatory reward" (8). Mourning's gradual relinquishing of all attachments to the lost loved one finds its reward in the mourning subject's ability to re-enter life; the "reluctant submission to language" through which the elegist must give up that which cannot be articulated is rewarded by the completion of the written work; and the Oedipal resolution which both mourning and the elegy, according to Sacks, recapitulate, compensates the loss of unity with the mother by promising identification with the father (for the male child, at least). By establishing these structural similarities between the literary and the psychic work of mourning and the Oedipal resolution, Sacks's reading carries productive resonances for an exploration of a narrator who has lost a parent.

In terms of exploring the function of the photographic trope within the elegiac novel, Sacks's work is most fruitful in his attention to the elegy's movement from grief to consolation and to its use of repetition: this attention points to the tension between mourning and melancholia. As Sacks reads it, the elegy both insists on and claims consolation as the compensatory reward of healthy mourning, yet the repetitions he points out, both within the form and from one elegy to another, seem to me to tell a different story. For Sacks, repetition in the elegy is linked to the work repetition also performs in psychic mourning—namely, forcing confrontation with the reality of loss and preventing the denial which might lead to melancholy. In fact, Sacks is so insistent in reading elegies

as both modeling and mirroring healthy mourning that he minimizes his own significant observation, which I want to underline: that in the repetition signaled by the elegy's classic injunction to begin again, "experiences of loss fold upon themselves in gathers" (17-8).

These gatherings of past losses must surely preserve some unresolved traces of melancholy, yet Sacks prefers to move quickly past them to note the consolations claimed at each elegy's close. But his doubled perception of repetition—both as a way of working through loss and as an indication that loss gathers itself in layers of repeated occurrence—resonates, for me, to consolidate and to trouble the elegy's claim of consolation. Further, it echoes the repetition that I note throughout the elegiac family romances of the moment when a protagonist turns to interpret a family snapshot. Most powerfully, though, it echoes the repetition represented by the genre itself. The traditional elegies that Sacks studies claim, implicitly, to begin again. As Sacks notes, with a nod to Milton's "Lycidas," as [o]ur experiences of loss fold upon themselves in gathers, [they create] the highly stratified 'occasion' that each elegy 'begin[s] again' or enters 'yet once more'" (17-8). In other words, although Sacks reads traditional elegies as claiming to achieve consolation, the very form he draws our attention to acknowledges that loss is recurrent and must be confronted repeatedly.

This contradiction between the elegy's claim of consolation and the ambivalent claims of repetition within in its own form is not manifest in the twentieth-century elegies explored by Ramazani. He argues that these poems resist rather than achieve consolation; thus, he finds Sacks's psychoanalytic model (with its reference to the Oedipal solution) inadequate for his own purposes and proposes as an alternative "the psychology of

melancholia or melancholic mourning” (xi). Sacks’s model is also inadequate for my purposes; the elegiac family romances appear to achieve consolation, but it is a consolation of a limited and conditional quality. These romances, in fact, invite consideration of Ramazani’s suggestion that we might “recast the classical distinction between mourning and melancholia, shading it as a difference between modes of mourning: the normative (i.e. restitutive, idealizing) and the melancholic (violent, recalcitrant)” (xi). Doing so might allow me, as it has Ramazani, a way to “explore the paradoxically *melancholic* emphasis within modern poems [novels, for me] of *mourning*” (xi).

Ramazani’s model, however, is, with Sacks’s, helpful but limited in its usefulness for understanding the construction of mourning in the elegiac family romances. The novels I read feature narrators who do achieve consolation, however conditional; moreover, they present a relationship emerging between melancholy and mourning that differs substantially from that in Ramazani’s reading of twentieth-century elegies. For even as he claims to “recast the classical distinction between mourning and melancholia,” Ramazani preserves this dichotomy. While appearing to allow the two to coexist in the term “melancholic mourning,” he uses this term to denote a form of mourning distinguished from “normative” mourning. His modern elegists “are like the Freudian ‘melancholic’ in their fierce resistance to solace” (4). In contrast, the bereaved protagonists of the novels I study all conclude their narrations by clearly signaling not only reconciliation to their loss, but also an ability and a willingness to move into the future. Nonetheless, they also preserve, in the space provided by the photographic ekphrasis, a certain melancholy which is concomitant with the appearance of successfully

completed mourning in a way that neither Sacks's nor Ramazani's theories allow. Indeed, the failure of elegiac theory to adequately recognize a coexistence of mourning and melancholy provides a potential explanation for the insistent presence of the photographic within these elegiac novels and suggests why bringing together elegiac theory and photographic theory might be productive.

Failure to recognize the possible coexistence of mourning and melancholy is understandable, perhaps, given that these critics study elegies which do not require such recognition. It is also possible, however, that this failure results from the limited possibilities offered by psychoanalytic theory for thinking about the relationship between the two conditions. Kathleen Woodward complains that theorization of melancholy and mourning has been constrained ever since Freud's essay, "Mourning and Melancholia," appeared to cast the "difference between [the two] in clear-cut binary terms" (115). If, as Freud's essay sets out, mourning is normal and, most importantly, terminable while melancholia is pathological, Woodward wonders how we can account for those whose response to grief entails "learning to live with their pain [so] that they are still *in* mourning but no longer *exclusively* devoted to mourning" (116); further, she exhorts a theorization of "something *in between* mourning and melancholia" (112).

A study of *Scar Tissue*, *Obasan*, and other elegiac family romances offers the opportunity to theorize something between mourning and melancholia. While the protagonists, at the conclusions of these novels, model successful mourning in their performance of "moving on," they are still marked with a residual sadness, if not strictly melancholy, which cannot simply be shaken off. This sadness adheres to the narrator as an effect of the recurrent trope of the family photograph. Through this trope, the narrator

both conforms to and subverts the linearity of the elegiac narrative: while the descriptions and interpretations of photographs advance the narrative, the impossibility of completely summarizing the images or of resolving the memories they recall undermines the terminability claimed by such a narrative of mourning. Indeed, the way the photographs are “narratively *incorporated*” (Creekmur 79) in the literary work of mourning allows them to provide an imaginary interior space not unlike that fantasized in the psychoanalytic process of incorporation.

To bridge this gap between elegiac and photographic theory by reading photographs as incorporated in the elegiac requires not only weaving together strands of psychoanalytic theory but also working with theories about ekphrasis. Considering the photographic trope as ekphrasis allows us to conceptualize these interpretative descriptions of family snapshots as a reification of spatial representation within the generally temporal medium of literature. Murray Krieger reads ekphrasis as having a stilling or freezing effect; Heffernan, in contrast, sees it as “dynamic and obstetric” (5). Both, however, note that as ekphrasis stages a struggle between the verbal and the visual, it also reifies space. When Krieger suggests that ekphrasis gives language the task of “represent[ing] the literally unrepresentable” (9), he inadvertently recalls Sacks’s reference to the “elegist’s reluctant submission to language itself” (Sacks 2). Against this awareness of language’s limitations, the reified space of the ekphrastic trope becomes an icon of the compromises of representation.

Krieger contends that ekphrasis carries the hope of transcending the limitations of language to reach some “original pre-fallen language of corporeal presence”; this hope is then frustrated by our recognition that our only means to do so is through “the fallen

language around us” (10). Krieger’s vision of the writer of ekphrasis as poised between hope and frustration echoes Sacks’s attention to the elegist’s reluctant submission to language and the compensations such submission brings in the completed work. The frustration with language also recalls Sacks’s observation that in this reluctant submission and in the rewards of the finished work, the elegy documents the replaying, both in the elegy and in the work of mourning, of the Oedipal entry into language (9). That the ekphrastic trope should accentuate this entry repetitively throughout the elegiac novel also emphasizes the layers of loss that precede the bereavement currently being mourned. Thus the trope figures melancholia as an element already embedded in the language an elegy uses as it moves through and, supposedly, past mourning. Considering the trope of the family photograph as an example of ekphrasis also foregrounds the issue of representation as the two media—the visual and the verbal—struggle, as Heffernan has it, for supremacy. I read ekphrasis within these elegiac family romances rather differently than Heffernan does; I see it modelling collaboration as much as it does contestation. Undeniably, though, it emphasizes representation. Such an emphasis makes ekphrasis a particularly useful strand for strengthening any bridge between the photographic and the elegiac, especially in relation to novels whose protagonists mourn their parents; in these narratives, representation is complicated by an inheritance that involves the inter-generational succession of the right to represent, to tell the family’s stories. The poetics of memory within the novels is sharpened by the politics of memorialization as mourners describe and interpret family photographs. Establishing this trope as an example of ekphrasis strengthens the connections between the elegiac and the photographic. As an

example of ekphrasis, the trope has the potential to incorporate melancholia, to figure the potent relationship between the still and the living, and to represent representation.

Useful as it is to consider the photographic trope as an example of ekphrasis, it is also important to consider the photographs interpreted by the various narrators specifically as photographs. Because the ontology of the photograph is significantly different from the ontology of the more traditional subjects of ekphrasis, it deserves careful consideration. Since the earliest days of photography, theorists have consistently associated the photograph with death and the dying and noted its indexical relationship with that which is always already, in the photograph, lost: the slice of time recorded. Thus they suggest a particular relevance of the photograph's ontology to the work of memorialization. André Bazin, for example, describes photography as "embalm[ing] time" and speaks of the "phantomlike" "grey and sepia shadows" that fill family albums (14). In a footnote, Bazin even likens photography to the molding of death masks (14). This emphasis on death and memorialization within photographic theory demonstrates the value of bringing together photographic and elegiac theory.

If establishing the photographic trope as ekphrasis foregrounds representation, the photograph itself both highlights and obscures the process of representation. Numerous theorists have addressed its relationship to representation, particularly in terms of the claims the photograph holds on truth, oscillating as it does on the borders between science and magic. Walter Benjamin presents this aspect of photography most compellingly when he writes that the photograph's "most exact technique can give the presentation a magical value" ("A Short History" 202). Further, as a cultural object that presents itself as somehow "natural" in its indexical relationship to the photographed

subject, the photograph is characterized by an “ontological deception” (Damisch 289).

While photography appears to document objectively and impartially that which simply is, theorists such as Hubert Damisch, André Bazin, John Berger, Walter Benjamin, Victor Burgin, Alan Sekula, and John Tagg, among others, have long warned that this apparent objectivity masks the subjectivity which governs the photograph. This subjectivity selects, poses, and frames the subject, to say nothing of the resulting image’s development, conservation, and display. Theorists have also suggested that by paying attention to the tensions between objectivity and subjectivity revealed in the photograph, we might gain access to our “optical unconscious” (Benjamin, “A Short History” 203), learning to see that which our culturally conditioned vision filters without our awareness. Thus readings from varied perspectives—Marxist, feminist, and psychoanalytic, among others—examine the politics of representation manifest in even the most casual snapshot.

Certainly, however naturalized into near invisibility, the politics of representation is inherent in every aspect of memorialization. In the elegiac family romance, in which narrativization performs memorialization, and in which they are described through a trope whose ekphrasis emphasizes representation, photographs invite us to look even more closely at what subjects are deemed and rendered representable. Moreover, photographs make visible the forces that shape subjects into acceptable poses and frames. As Marianne Hirsch says, “their conventional nature and the monocular lens’s ideological effect” allow family photographs to “reveal the operation of the familial gaze” (11). More importantly, in terms of representation as it is figured in the elegiac treatment of the photographic trope, Hirsch argues that family photographs offer their interpreters the ability to break the hold of this “conventional and monolithic familial gaze” and disrupt

“a familiar narrative about family life” (8). Specifically, this “work of contestation appears not so much in actual family photographs as in meta-photographic texts which place family photographs into narrative contexts” (8). In the meta-photographic elegiac family romances, this work of contestation is found in the mourning and memorialization that allow the subject to come to terms with the loss of a parent.

My central contention is that the fictional photograph functions in these elegiac family romances to interrupt the narrative while simultaneously and paradoxically allowing it to proceed. In Chapter One, “Picturing Melancholia in the Work of Mourning: The Photograph in Michael Ignatieff’s *Scar Tissue*,” I outline the way these interminably resistant interruptions are accommodated within a linear, terminal narrative. This accommodation sheds light on the potential for a subject to emerge from mourning yet never relinquish it entirely. The narrator of this novel presents his own response to parental loss as pathological and melancholic in contrast to his brother’s more controlled and conventional mourning. Nevertheless, while apparently resisting consolation throughout, the narrator seems to achieve it, if rather abruptly, at the conclusion. The novel thus invites an exploration of the space “between mourning and melancholia” (Woodward). Theories of ekphrasis support my search for this liminal territory in the recurrent trope of the family photograph, particularly in presentation of the visual as occupying space within the temporal medium of writing.

My second chapter, “Death, Discipline, and the Family Photograph: Ekphrasis and Memorialization in Thomas King’s *Medicine River* and Joy Kogawa’s *Obasan*,” explores some of the causes for the sadness that adheres to the photograph, never entirely discharged through the verbal narrative. It does so by building on Heffernan’s view of

ekphrasis as symbolizing the struggle for representation; it also considers the discourse of the family photograph in a Canadian context. The narrators of both novels examine photographs in which their families apparently conform to the disciplinary poses and frames of this discourse, against memories which suggest the costs exacted by this conformity. *Obasan*'s treatment of silence within Naomi's Japanese-Canadian community and *Medicine River*'s attention to the preference of Will's First Nations community for a circuitous or oblique, rather than linear, approach to sensitive topics foreground the matter of representation; within them, the trope of the photograph highlights this issue even further. While Heffernan's focus on ekphrasis productively accentuates the struggle for representation between the verbal and the visual, these novels provide an example of the two modes collaborating to allow a strategic conformity which allows subjects to function within a system (the nation, the family) while registering that system's inequities.

In my third and fourth chapters, I consider the epistemological quest that is central to these elegiac family romances, looking at the family photograph as both invitation to and barrier against forbidden knowledge. Chapter Three, "As If Knowing Was an Important Thing for Me to Have': The Family Photograph and Hidden Histories in Timothy Findley's *The Piano Man's Daughter*," establishes a common concern of the protagonists of all the novels in this study: the inter-generational politics that further complicates the issue of representation and memorialization. The central irony gestured toward by the family photograph is that the loss of a parent is not without rewards in that it allows the adult child to pursue knowledge which was forbidden or barred while the parent was alive. At the same time, of course, the parent as source of missing knowledge

is irretrievably gone, so that presence and absence signal each other in ways which confuse and frustrate the protagonist's search for understanding of family history and its influence on subjectivity.

Family histories often include moves through space as well as through time, and in all the novels of this study, protagonists register at least some awareness of the effects of geographical displacement on these histories. Such displacement further complicates attempts to discover and construct a family history, particularly when the displacement involves a move through the politics of colonialism and postcolonialism; this is the concern of Chapter Four, "Looking at/for Her People: History, Geography, and the Family Photograph in Neil Bissoondath's *The Worlds Within Her*." In this novel, the protagonist, Yasmin, travels to her Caribbean birthplace to bury her mother. The narrative resonates with references by family members to a collective identity signaled by the phrase "your (my, our, his) people." Yasmin resists being identified as part of any such collective. At the same time, however, she realizes that she will have to accept her relatives' ability to lead her into, as she puts it, the family photographs, so that she might begin to construct from the information they offer her a family history that will enable her to contextualize her own life. The photographs she pores over with her relatives become for her not only a source of history but also a way to understand the masks and screens through which she has viewed the past so far. As Marianne Hirsch explains, a proliferation of masks always converge in the photograph, especially in the family photograph (86). But metaphoric notions of masking become even more potent in the novel's Caribbean context. The colonial history of her birthplace shows up in such masks as the political posturing adopted by Yasmin's father and the British manners affected by

her mother. Recognizing these masks in and through photographs helps Yasmin conceptualize the masking which contributes to her subjectivity as she moves geographically and psychologically between Canada and her birthplace.

Chapter Five, “Haunting Images: Death and the Photograph in Daphne Marlatt’s *Taken*,” also touches on geographical displacement. This chapter examines the narrator’s attempt to reconcile her current situation on a Northwest Pacific island with her mother’s past location in the Blue Mountains of Australia and her family’s earlier life in Malaysia. It connects the recurrent references to haunting with Marlatt’s handling of the photographic trope. Not only does the novel mimic the photochemical process of development in its style and structure, but its narrator emphasizes the process of photographic development as much as she does its black-and-white documentary surface. Further, while this narrator draws attention to all that a photograph fails to represent, she also accentuates the light-writing inherent in photography’s name. Her attention to the way vegetation is transformed by changes in light suggests a photography—a light-writing—of place; photography is thus also topography. Through this alertness to other ways of seeing photographically, as well as through her interest in haunting, the narrator is able to overcome the contemporary condition Paul Virilio laments as “topographical amnesia” (116). Disoriented by the televised presence of the Gulf War in her Pacific Northwest home, the narrator nevertheless finds a way to remember through place, in effect revising the ancient memory technique, the Method of Loci, to remember that which hegemonic systems of representation obscure.

The conclusion of my dissertation describes my experience at a conference that challenged me to rethink my reading of the family photograph’s role in the memorializing

narratives which emerged at my father's death. My presentation drew on my theorizing of the fictional photograph's function to celebrate the fluidity I saw paradoxically preserved by the loss and decay of my family's photographs. This celebration, however, was checked by Eduardo Cadava's keynote reading of a series of photographs of Afghan refugees. The traumatic context of these photographs and the historical realities to which they testified defied my own easy acceptance of the loss of memorial artifacts. Cadava's speech highlighted the resistance photographs offer to any hegemonic or ideological fixity of the family, national, and global narratives in which they are incorporated. Finally, though, rethinking my family's photographs in the larger context of the conference brought me to a greater appreciation of the importance of the "oral-photographic" alliance in transmitting family, national, and global narratives, and an accompanying appreciation of its written, fictional representation in the elegiac family romance. This rethinking fortified my belief that the narrativization of family photographs, particularly within the context of mourning and memorialization, offers an important site for the continual renegotiation of our histories and our subjectivities.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Christian Riegel looks at elegy in a short story by Alistair Macleod [Christian Riegel, "Elegy and Mourning in Alistair MacLeod's 'The Boat,'" *Studies in Short Fiction* 35.3 (Summer 1998): 233-40].

<sup>2</sup> One might argue that this merely extends a practice notable even within the traditional elegy, as exemplified by Milton's "Lycidas," in which the speaker's mourning includes a rehearsal of his own beginnings, when he and his lost friend were "nursed upon the self-same hill."

<sup>3</sup> Smythe argues that "Munro's poetics of the *improper*, the *unfamiliar*, the *unresolvable*" is achieved through her rhetorical use of photographic realism; she supports this claim with reference to both Susan Sontag's observation that photography is elegiac and Roland Barthes's reference to the "luminous shadow" of photographs (108-110).

<sup>4</sup> Eva-Marie Kröller's 1981 article on the photograph in Timothy Findley's *The Wars* has been followed by numerous essays and full-length works on the function of the photograph and the photographic in Canadian writing; this critical interest tends to centre on the fiction of Findley, Michael Ondaatje, Margaret Laurence and Alice Munro.

Lorraine York's book examines the role of the photograph in Findley, Ondaatje, Laurence, and Munro, although she also establishes a convincingly substantial preliminary list of Canadian writers who use photographic metaphors and structures to various ends (9-10).

Canadian literary critics also use the photographic as a central metaphor; exemplary of this is George Bowering's explanation of the difference between postmodernism and modernism (George Bowering, "Modernism Could Not Last Forever," *Canadian Fiction Magazine* 32/33 [1980]: 4-9).

<sup>5</sup> Condé sees the photograph as providing a "marvellously appropriate" metaphor for Munro's stories because of the tension it offers "between the truth of the detail and the falsity of the picture"—here she paraphrases the narrator of Munro's "Winter Wind" (99). While Condé's paper primarily catalogues the use of this metaphor throughout Munro's work, I also like her attentiveness to the epistemology of photographs, the way they accommodate Munro's desire to "make 'funny jumps' between illusion and reality" (106).

## Chapter One

Picturing Melancholia in the Work of Mourning:  
 The Photograph in Michael Ignatieff's *Scar Tissue*

*How, broadly, might a photograph participate in the reorganization of human memory and, more specifically, the psychic activity—or what Freud called ‘the work’—of mourning, the regular form of remembrance or memorialization performed in response to the loss of a loved object?*

Corey Creekmur, “Lost Objects: Photography, Fiction, and Mourning,” 73

Michael Ignatieff's novel *Scar Tissue* invites consideration of a slightly modified version of Creekmur's question: how might the *fictional* photograph participate in the psychic work of mourning as represented in the elegiac family romance? As an example of this sub-genre, the novel conforms in many ways to the generic demands of the elegy. These demands, as Peter Sacks establishes, are both imposed by and reflective of the psychic process of mourning so that the literary representation enacts the psychic work of mourning. Both the literary representation and the psychic process it enacts reflect the social demand that grief be bounded, and the structure of the traditional elegy reflects this, particularly in its claim of overcoming mourning and achieving consolation (Sacks). As an example of an elegiac family romance, *Scar Tissue* conforms to this demand that mourning be completed.<sup>1</sup> The novel's conclusion presents the narrator moving determinedly into the future, having apparently accepted the loss of his parents. However,

while this forward movement implies that the protagonist is reconciled to his loss, having completed his mourning, the recurrent trope through which the narrator pauses to describe a family photograph belies this apparent resolution.

A scene in which the anonymous narrator and his brother clear out their father's studio after his death exemplifies the way this trope complicates any notion of achieved consolation. Clearing out the studio mimics the process of mourning: loading their father's possessions into garbage bags represents the loosening of attachments to the lost loved one that Freud argues is the work mourning accomplishes. While engaged in this removal of possessions, however, the narrator finds two photographs in his father's desk drawer, a find that slows the clearing-out of the studio. Although the narrator insists that he "d[oes]n't care about photographs," preferring to keep "[e]verything [as it] was in his mind" (92), his descriptions of them betray his ambivalence. Typical of the trope recurring in this and the other novels of this study, the memories associated with the photographs are as significant here as the images depicted.

The narrator describes one of the snapshots as a photograph neither he nor his brother can identify. It is an image of a man and woman standing in a garden with "their hands on the shoulders of a boy in short pants and slicked down hair" (93). The narrator speculates that "[t]he boy might have been my father's twin brother, who had died in Constantinople, and it might have been my father," although he assumes that if the latter were true, his father "probably would have shown us the picture and he never had" (93). The doubt carried in that "probably" reinforces the sense that this photograph represents a part of the father's life that is inaccessible to his sons and thus, perhaps, not so easily expunged through the process of clearing out his studio. This sense is further reinforced

when the narrator is prompted by his memory of finding the photograph to remember a conversation he once had with his father about the older man's life in Odessa and about the history of the family's move "to the States at the beginning of the Depression" (93).

As much as it signals the areas of the father's life that have been withheld from his sons, the photograph and the memories it triggers also remind the narrator of his often difficult relationship with his father. In the conversation he remembers having over the family's move, the narrator is clearly rebuffed in his curiosity by his father who impatiently retorts that he talks so little about the past in order that "people wouldn't ask me fool questions" (93). Trying to couch his father's impatience in more palatable terms, the son speculates in the narrative's present that his father "[p]erhaps" talked so little about Odessa not only "so that he would be free of it. But so that his sons would be free too, whether they wanted to be or not" (93). The resonance of the "or not," which concludes his speculation, suggests the son's ambivalence about his father's supposedly protective and liberating reticence; it suggests that while he appreciates the protection his father might have intended, he also resents him for withholding information. These words continue to resonate over the narrator's statement that the "photograph was the last thing to detain us" (93). Although he and his brother then go on to tumble "all the staplers, loose change, paperclips, erasers, stubby pencils," and other contents of his father's desk into plastic bags, the narrator's ambivalence can no more be resolved than the people in the photograph can ever be identified now that the father is dead. Similar to the photograph nestled in the narrator's brother's pocket as he continues to clear out the studio, the trope of the photograph nestles within the narrative of this clearing-out to complicate any easy claim of consolation.

In this example, the fictional photograph participates in the psychic work of mourning—as this work is represented by the narrative of clearing out the studio—by figuring interminability within an account that presents mourning, in one of its forms, as temporally bounded. Using the studio-clearing to represent mourning exaggerates the expectations that mourning work toward a timely conclusion. However, this exaggeration and the fictional photograph's subversion of those expectations point to a central concern of *Scar Tissue*: the tension between healthy and unhealthy mourning, or, in psychoanalytic terms, between mourning and melancholia. While its narrator finally enacts the ability and willingness to go on characteristic of successfully completed mourning, he insistently details throughout a prolonged, destructive, arguably unhealthy melancholia which permeates and compromises this conclusion. This is particularly noticeable in his determination, against the evidence of medical tests, to sense his mother's illness in his own body.

The tension between mourning and melancholia is heightened by the way the narrator contrasts his own and his brother's response to the diagnosis of his mother's Alzheimer disease and to his parents' death. His brother accepts the medical diagnosis and recognizes that his mother's subjectivity is irrevocably altered by the disease, whereas the narrator continues to deny this. While his brother's regulation of his mourning over his father's death and his mother's diagnosis is manifest in his prompt return to work, the narrator's response is to turn inward, neglecting his family, destroying his marriage in the process. After his mother dies, the narrator says, he "held on to my depression with both hands and could not be pried loose. In the midst of depression, I read books about it, I wrote about it, not to subdue and overcome it, but to go deeper, to visit its lower storeys,

its caves and dungeons, the wettest, darkest places” (181). This metaphorical movement deeper is matched in the novel’s last pages by the narrator’s wish to go “deep into the hippocampus, deep into the parietal and occipital, down into the brainstem itself to the place where the protein deposits are building up” (194). The earlier explorations of depression’s caves subtly connect the narrator’s imaginary voyage into his brain with depression or melancholia even as the novel’s elegiac form is pointing to the consolations of completed mourning.

Reading *Scar Tissue* as figuring a tension between mourning and melancholia demands a definition and contextualization of these terms as they are used within psychoanalytic discourse. A useful starting point is Kathleen Woodward’s regret that Freud’s essay, “Mourning and Melancholia,” has had a “puzzlingly constraining” effect on most subsequent theories of mourning. Woodward is particularly concerned that the essay casts the “difference between mourning and melancholia . . . in clear-cut binary terms, and [that] this false opposition has paralyzed discussions of mourning ever since” (115). When she sums up this opposition between mourning as normal, necessary, and, perhaps most importantly, terminable, and melancholia as pathological, as “primarily . . . a *state*, not a *process*” (116), she could be referring to the contrasting responses of the narrator and his brother in *Scar Tissue*.

Woodward complains that “[i]n ‘Mourning and Melancholia’ Freud leaves us no theoretical room for another place, one between a crippling melancholia and the end of mourning” (116). What bothers her is that this contradicts her own observations which have taught her that “some people come to terms with their grief by learning to live with their pain and in such a way that they are still *in* mourning but no longer *exclusively*

devoted to mourning” (116). Thus, she suggests, “we may point to something *in between* mourning and melancholia . . . we may refer to a grief which is interminable but not melancholic in the psychoanalytic sense” (112).

Although Woodward accuses Freud of making a strict distinction between mourning and melancholia, his essay, in fact, begins by establishing a number of similarities between them. The false opposition established in “Mourning and Melancholia” may very well have “paralyzed discussions of mourning ever since,” but the same essay simultaneously opens up the very space Woodward wishes to explore. After all, it was Freud who articulated a contiguity between mourning and melancholia (rather than an opposition) when he attempted “to throw some light on the nature of melancholia by comparing it with the normal affect of mourning” (Freud 243). By sketching out what Woodward regards as a paralyzing and false opposition, Freud is himself, I suggest, pointing to the space between mourning and melancholia as productive and worthy of further exploration.

By comparing the two, Freud observes that both mourning and melancholia are responses to loss, and both feature “a profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, [and an] inhibition of all activity” (244). In mourning, “this inhibition and circumscription of the ego” results from the expense of energy in the work of reality-testing which is intended to demonstrate “that the loved one no longer exists,” as well as in the subsequent withdrawal of all libido from its attachments to the object (244). When this “work of mourning is completed the ego becomes free and uninhibited again” (245). Despite the “grave departures from the normal attitude to life,” then, mourning is considered a normal rather than a pathological

process, perhaps primarily because of the anticipation that it will come to an end (243).

Important to note here is that Freud does not label mourning as normal; instead, he rehearses established social conventions. As he says, while “we . . . suspect (those who respond to loss by melancholia rather than mourning) of a pathological disposition,” it is “well worth notic[ing] that “it never occurs to us to regard [mourning] as a pathological condition” (243). Rather, he comments, we expect time to heal the condition.

Melancholia, by contrast, as Freud points out, *is* considered a pathological condition, perhaps especially because of the one feature it does not share with mourning, the disturbance of self-regard. To this important difference between the two psychic states, Freud adds “that melancholia is in some way related to an object-loss which is withdrawn from consciousness,” in contrast to mourning “in which there is nothing about the loss that is unconscious” (245). More importantly, he speculates that the melancholic’s loss of self-regard results from “an *identification* of the ego with the lost object” combined with a shifting of a conflict of ambivalence toward the object “on to the patient’s own ego” (248). Having first established that mourning and melancholia are sufficiently alike that one might shed light on the other, then, Freud also delineates the distance between them as marked primarily by repression and by a loss of self-regard linked to an unresolved ambivalence toward the lost loved one.

Woodward acknowledges the similarities Freud establishes between mourning and melancholia, but is concerned that he defines mourning as normal and necessary, and melancholia as pathological. What disturbs her most, however, is his characterization of mourning as terminable.<sup>2</sup> Woodward argues that there should be a way to theorize a mourning which never ends, but which need not be understood as failed or pathological.

As she says, “some people come to terms with their grief by learning to live with their pain and in such a way that they are still *in* mourning but no longer *exclusively* devoted to mourning” (116). Whether or not the failure to theorize this phenomenon can be blamed on the effects of Freud’s essay, this “grief which is interminable but not melancholic in the psychoanalytic sense” pertains to the narrator of *Scar Tissue*. Despite the termination of mourning emphasized by its conclusion, this novel, along with *Medicine River*, *Obasan*, and other elegiac family romances, accommodates this interminability through the trope of the family photograph. By incorporating images of loss in the elegiac novel, this trope subverts the elegy’s insistent linearity as well as its paradigmatic compensatory consolation to incorporate melancholia within the novel’s mourning.

This contention that the photographic trope incorporates melancholia within the mourning represented by the elegiac novel is only credible if the latter holds—if the elegiac novel signals mourning. Several theorists of elegy either support this equation or productively complicate it. Peter Sacks’s study provides a solid foundation; he analyzes traditional elegies from Spenser to Yeats, relating “the traditional forms and figures of elegy . . . to the experience of loss and the search for consolation” (1). Significantly, Sacks regards the elegy as a “work” in two senses of that term: the literary work represented by the poem as well as the psychoanalytic work of mourning effected through its writing, the process through which memories are “brought up and hypercathected [until] detachment of the libido is accomplished” (Ramazani 3). In the elegy as aesthetic product, Sacks sees the compensatory substitution which allows the mourner to relinquish the lost loved one and move on—the written work of art is the reward for the successful work of mourning.

However, Sacks confines his study to the traditional elegy, and his model of “‘healthy’ and ‘successful’ mourning,” while useful, is “inadequate for understanding the twentieth-century elegy” (Ramazani xi). Jahan Ramazani builds on Sacks’s foundation, but focusses on “the paradoxically *melancholic* emphasis within modern poems of *mourning*” (xi). Ramazani is not interested in poets who trace the traditional elegy’s movement from grief to solace; rather, he reads modern elegists who resist consolation, open wounds and sustain anger.

Ramazani’s study of the melancholic aspect within a work of mourning illuminates the residual sadness that compromises the compensatory claims of elegiac novels such as *Scar Tissue*. While Ramazani uses Sacks’s analysis of the traditional elegy as a starting point for exploring the modern elegy, he finds little room within that analysis for the particular problems faced by the modern elegist. Thus he comments that, in contrast to the traditional elegist who rather predictably performs the psychoanalytic work of mourning—with memories “brought up and hypercathected [until] detachment of the libido is accomplished—and while the traditional elegist finds the making of the poem to be “in some measure a replacement for the man it mourns” (3), modern elegists find their task more complicated.

Ramazani illustrates his attention to the anger and ambivalence that mourners often hold toward their lost loved ones with citations of rather explicitly-expressed anger from twentieth-century poetry. In contrast, the elegiac family romances of this study offer more instances of ambivalence toward the narrators’ lost loved ones than of anger. Muted resentment, for example, is mixed with an attempt at understanding their parents’ motivation as the narrators of *Scar Tissue*, *Obasan*, and *Medicine River* speak of

information withheld from their childhood selves by the parent (or surrogate parent, in the case of *Obasan*). But while Ramazani provides more examples of unresolved anger than of ambivalence, he argues that neither can be easily resolved by the elegy's traditional compensatory promises.

Besides refusing the facile and suspect compensations offered by the traditional elegy, Ramazani sees the modern elegist also mourning the loss of any possible consolation; the twentieth century, he claims, adds "many extraneous deaths" to the immediate loss facing the mourner (8). While some of these losses are specifically experienced by the elegist, many of them also apply to the mourning narrators of elegiac novels: "the death of mourning ritual, of God, of traditional consolation, of recuperative elegy, of the sanctity of the dead, of 'healthy' mourning" (8).<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, according to Ramazani, the "melancholic mourning" of modern elegies "betray[s] . . . the impossibility of preserving a pristine space apart, of grieving for the dead amid the speed and pressure of modern life" (14). To understand the resistance of modern elegists to consolation, even as they grieve the loss of its very possibility, Ramazani proposes a "recast[ing of] the classical distinction between mourning and melancholia, shading it as a difference between modes of mourning" (xi). He offers a "normative (i.e., restitutive, idealizing)" and a "melancholic (violent, recalcitrant)" mode, arguing primarily that modern elegists "tend to enact the work" of the latter (xi). While he seems here to explore the space between mourning and melancholia, Ramazani also appears to justify Woodward's frustration with the constraining effects on such exploration of a false opposition between the two. Certainly, the division performed by these "recast" modes resembles the classical distinction between mourning and

melancholia. Ramazani insists, however, on an important difference in psychoanalytic terms: these melancholic mourners might be “like the Freudian ‘melancholic’ in their fierce resistance to solace, their intense criticism and self-criticism,” but they are mourning “specific deaths, not the vague or unconscious losses of melancholia” (4). Thus the elegists are distinguished from the Freudian ‘melancholic’ by their awareness of the specific cause of their mourning while, at the same time, they differ from the Freudian mourner by their resistance to consolation. The vehemence of their resistance to consolation seems to render them unable to carry on, however, and they fail to help us understand the possibility of an interminable mourning which is not necessarily pathological or crippling.

Thus while Ramazani’s model helpfully illuminates the elements of twentieth-century mourning which render problematic the elegy’s traditional conventions, it fails to apply to the elegiac family romances. Rather, it draws attention to them as worthy of exploration because of their striking difference from the many elegies which so fiercely resist compensatory consolation. Indeed, instead of “resist[ing] consolation,” “sustain[ing] anger,” and “reopen[ing] the wounds of loss,” these novels manifest an achievement of consolation in narrative endings which emphasize ‘moving on.’ The narrator of Thomas King’s *Medicine River*, for example, walks into an expanse of new-fallen snow; the protagonist of Neil Bissoondath’s *The Worlds Within Her* returns from scattering her mother’s ashes with a newfound determination to make her marriage work; and the narrator of *Taken* envisions both seeds and stories spinning themselves into the future. At the conclusion of *Scar Tissue*, the anonymous narrator declares his ability to move forward with an overdetermined sequence of “I wills.” The generic linearity, then,

by which the elegy and its kin, the elegiac novel, so closely reflect the psychic process of compensatory mourning, is reinforced, rather than resisted, by these endings.

But if kinship between the elegy and the elegiac novel is marked by the generic expectation of linearity and of compensatory consolation, the distance between the two is marked by their different response to these conventions. If generic expectations lead the modern elegist to vehemently resist consolation and refuse the end of mourning, the longer prose narrative structure of the elegiac novel accommodates a preservation of melancholia within a compensatory mourning so that there are pockets of interminable and inexhaustible sadness preserved within a narrative which nonetheless ends with a protagonist apparently able to carry on.<sup>4</sup>

Kenneth Bruffee, whose study named and outlined the defining characteristics of the elegiac romance, notes that as a “genre of the infinitely free form of prose fiction,” it is “unbounded by the rigorous conventions of pastoral poetry” (47). Despite their differences, Bruffee finds enough similarities between the pastoral elegy and the elegiac romance to “suggest that elegiac romance serves today something of the same function served at various moments in the past by pastoral elegy” (47). Bruffee’s concern is primarily to establish the elegiac romance as a clearly recognizable genre which combines and carries on the functions of the quest romance and the pastoral elegy; he therefore does not concern himself with the respective relationships of mourning and melancholia to either genre. What interests me is his claim that the elegiac narrative might serve some of the same functions as those served by the pastoral elegy. Just as Ramazani finds the pastoral elegy inadequate for responding to losses inflicted by the twentieth century, so Bruffee traces events, processes, and ways of thought which render the quest romance

untenable in its traditional form. Bruffee is most interested in the elegiac romance as a replacement of the quest romance; I would like to follow his lead and consider the elegiac family romance as an alternative to the traditional elegy, an alternative which offers different possibilities than the refusal of consolation Ramazani finds in the modern elegy.

Most particularly, I believe the form offers itself as an alternative to both the consolatory traditional elegy and the consolation-refusing modern elegy because the greater space allowed by extended prose fiction better accommodates melancholia. Sacks's reading of Tennyson's *In Memoriam* offers some support for such an argument, noting that through its length and its "accretion of moments . . . Tennyson . . . works against the very dictates of mourning: he collects and elaborates rather than strips or refines; he accumulates rather than lets go" (168). Finally, Sacks argues, the work "does eventually represent a successful work of mourning [which Tennyson achieves] by *revising* rather than rejecting the constraints of his own melancholia" (169). The length of the work, then, is clearly associated here with the presence of melancholia, and especially with an accommodation of that melancholia within a work of mourning. And if length can be seen to provide room for Tennyson to revise rather than reject his melancholia, the "infinitely free form of prose fiction" (Bruffee 47) offers even more of this space.

Further, the narrative, as opposed to the lyric, mode of the elegiac romances links the length of the work with what Peter Brooks, borrowing from Barthes's *Camera Lucida*, calls the "dilatatory space" of the narrative's middle. Brooks's narrative theory offers a way to read the elegiac family romances as accommodating an expression of both melancholia and compensatory mourning. In this reading, these novels exploit a potential which Sacks's view of the traditional elegy suggests the form already holds for encrypting

melancholia in figures of repetition. In the elegiac family romances, this potential is exploited by the trope that characterizes the narrator's description and interpretation of a family photograph. This trope, which translates the visual into the verbal and implies an infinity of possible translations, figures Brooks's dilatory space in a manner which emphasizes spatiality within temporality or, as I will argue, figures melancholia as incorporated within a linear narrative of compensatory mourning.

Even in its lyric (rather than narrative) form, linearity, or forward movement, is an important part of the traditional elegy; Sacks interprets the genre's emphasis on "drama, or 'doing' [as] part of the crucial self-privileging of the survivors," and stresses that active progress "is crucial to any successful mourning" (19). Responses to this generic demand for linearity distinguish the two twentieth-century adaptations of the form studied by Ramazani and Bruffee: while Ramazani's elegists refuse to move forward toward consolation, one of the essential features of Bruffee's elegiac romance is its narrator's progress; the personal dilemma in which the narrator is situated at the beginning of the elegiac romance is resolved by its conclusion, in significant part by the narrator coming to terms with the debilitating influence of his deceased hero.<sup>5</sup> Thus successful mourning seems to be signalled by a terminable linearity; the narrative moves inexorably toward a conclusion in which the narrator achieves a liberating and enabling consolation, a consolation that does not leave any room for melancholia.

Yet this linearity, even in the traditional elegy, is complicated by the element of repetition, not only within each individual work, but the particular repetition of formal elements which make each work an example of the genre. Certainly Sacks, before asserting the importance of motion within the elegy, emphasizes repetition as being

equally inherent to the form.<sup>6</sup> He points to repetition of the elegiac question as evidence of the elegy's roots in the work of mourning: as a psychological response to trauma, repetition has the "effect of controlling the expression of grief while also keeping that expression in motion" (23); it also serves to convince "the griever . . . of the actual fact of loss [recognition of which, if refused may] lead to the condition of melancholy" (24). Within the elegy, then, repetition serves to guard against melancholy, ensuring the completion of successful mourning.

But Sacks does not only consider repetition within the elegy. Because he sees the elegy as a specific form of mourning, and because he claims a "similarity between the process of mourning and the oedipal [sic] resolution" (8), Sacks regards the elegy as repeating the displacement of desire that offers substitution as a consolation for loss. For Sacks, the elegy shares and exemplifies "the renunciatory experience of loss and the acceptance, not just of a substitute, but of the very means and practice of substitution" which is the core of both mourning and the Oedipal resolution (8). "In each case," he says, "such an acceptance is the price of survival, and in each case a successful resolution is not merely deprivatory, but offers a form of compensatory reward" (8). Since the compensatory reward offered by the elegy is an aesthetic product formed out of words, Sacks convincingly argues that the elegy not only performs the work of mourning an immediate loss, but it also recalls or repeats the loss, consolation, and movement into language of the Oedipal resolution.

By repeating the Oedipal resolution, the elegy reminds us that subjectivity in language depends on an initial loss. As an aesthetic consolation for the loss of a loved one, this elegiac substitution "seems to repeat a prior change, just as each loss

recapitulates a prior loss and each turn to consolation repeats an earlier deflection of desire” (17). Echoing Milton’s “Lycidas,” Sacks rather beautifully and poignantly notes that “[o]ur experiences of loss fold upon themselves in gathers, creating the highly stratified ‘occasion’ that each elegy ‘begin[s] again’ or enters ‘yet once more’” (17-18). This enfolding of loss, performed at the beginning of every new elegy, is both accommodated and emphasized in the elegiac narratives through the trope of the family photograph.

Although theories of the elegy are very relevant to a reading of *Scar Tissue*, the novel’s narrator never claims to be an elegist. He does, however, evoke the genre, if not formally or directly, then at least in his narrative’s opening reference to death and in the narrative’s subsequent compensatory mourning. Still, he prefers to say, at first, that what he is writing is a history of his family; he then corrects himself, saying that what he has “written is more like a time capsule” (8). This correction is notable in its move from the temporality of a family history to the spatiality of a time capsule; despite its name and its travel *through* time, a time capsule occupies space in its attempt to resist the ravages of time. Nevertheless, the narrator does both: he writes an undeniably temporal and elegiac narrative, a chronological history of his family; at the same time, the photographic ekphrases incorporated in the text function in the same manner as the narrator’s metaphoric time capsule, resisting or subverting the linearity of the literary work of mourning.

Conceptualizing a temporal history in spatial terms recalls Brooks’s attention to the ‘dilatatory’ space of a narrative’s middle. This narrative space signals resistance to the problems inherent in traditional elegies as Sacks presents them: having mourned the

bereavement which occasioned the elegy and having completed the elegy and achieved consolation, the elegist is ironically delivered to a position of waiting for the next occasion of mourning. After all, as Sacks points out, the conventions of the elegiac genre imply that it is a form that has been used to respond to innumerable past deaths and thus also imply the inevitability of future deaths and the renewal of mourning. Yet despite his awareness of repetition as potentially complicating elegy's promises, Sacks chooses to focus on the compensatory consolation of the elegiac ending. Brooks, on the other hand, working with narrative in general rather than with elegy, focuses on the middle. He views the dilatory middle space of a narrative as preventative to the collapse into shared quiescence of the narrative beginning and ending; this view helps explain the function of the photographic trope, which creates such a space within the elegiac family romance.

Exemplary of the photographic trope as creating a dilatory space in the narrative middle of *Scar Tissue* is the narrator's account of pictures found in his father's study after the older man's sudden and unexpected death. Mourning this death is itself, in a way, a dilation of the narrative middle in a novel whose declared purpose, according to its narrator, is to "redeem" the "banal heartlessness" of his mother's death, to "rescue [the unscarred beginnings] from her dying"(1). Throughout the novel, his attempt to order family history into a redemptive narrative is punctuated by descriptions of family photographs. His discovery of family snapshots among his father's possessions represents not only another incidence of the trope of the photograph, but also the way in which the description and narration of a family picture disrupt, or at least complicate, the linearity of the narrative of mourning.

Certainly, this description of clearing out the study offers itself as a mimesis of the mourning process: this process is the last stage in the brothers' concerted effort to remove all of their father's belongings from the home. The narrator moves determinedly from room to room putting his father's belongings in black garbage bags; when twenty bags are loaded into the car, ready to go to either the Goodwill or the dump, he claims to feel "clear in [his] mind," having "purified" and "cleansed" the house (94-95). The compensatory consolation this clarity signals, however, is complicated by the chapter's last paragraph. Here, the narrator follows the direction of his brother's eyes to "the deep, ragged furrows left behind by my father's knees [amongst the ambulance tire-tracks] when he had dragged his body to the retaining wall" (95). These graphic traces insist that ridding the home of his father's possessions will not suffice to erase the troubling image of the paternal body in agony. The model of a linear progression toward a compensatory consolation is also complicated by the narrator's description of the moment he stops his cleaning to "[a]ll into his [father's] chair to inspect" photographs he finds in the study. The memories triggered by these photographs send the reader both backwards and forwards in the novel, a movement that accentuates the dilatory space of the narrative's middle, thus pointing to unresolved issues resistant to clarity, purification, and cleansing.

The narrator's account of clearing the study includes his description of two photographs he finds in his father's desk drawer: the first, already discussed, is the yellowed shot of a man, woman, and young boy, all unidentifiable to the narrator and his brother; the other is of himself and his brother, standing on either side of his father on the Jersey shore. While the narrator insists that he "didn't care about photographs [since] [e]verything was in [his] mind and [he] wanted to keep it that way," in contrast to his

brother who carried “a brown envelope of his keepers,” his descriptions belie this claim and suggest that he finds the images powerfully resonant (92). His denial of any need for the photographs recalls an earlier moment, that of his opening account of the family genealogy which traces “the inheritance, the family silver” of Alzheimer disease (1). Although “[p]ictures survive of her husband and her children,” there are none of Annie MacDonald, who was born in Scotland and emigrated in the 1870s (2). But “I do not need pictures,” insists the narrator, who says that he “see[s] her plainly enough,” and describes her walking along a country road, watched by farmers, and finally stumbling and falling deep in the forest where she is found by a boy heading home in a cart. The picture the narrator imagines poses a constellation of images we will recognize, in a different configuration, at the close of this novel: a woman with Alzheimer disease, a boy, and empty eyes.

For now, though, I want to focus on why the narrator denies his need for pictures while nonetheless inventing one. His use of the word “pictures” indicates the more specific word, “photographs”; however, not only does he choose the more general word, but he uses it twice, thus highlighting its flexibility, its ability to accommodate his ambivalence. In fact, “pictures,” whether photographic or imaginary, are exactly what the narrator needs, primarily because, as he says, “[w]e had few secrets as a family, but we had silences, and [his great-grandmother’s condition] was one of them” (2).<sup>7</sup> He notes that “Annie MacDonald was my great-grandmother but I never heard a word about her until my brother mentioned, in an offhand way, what she died of, as if I already knew” (2). He did know her daughter, Nettie, his mother’s mother. Although his memory of Nettie’s apartment “is bleached and faded,” he “see[s] himself standing by her bed in

pyjamas and slippers, about eight years old, talking nonsense in a high voice. . . . [while Nettie listens] with a sardonic expression” (3). But a year later, Nettie has lost so much of her memory that the narrator accompanies his mother to the police station to help bring her home. Again, as she raises her eyes to the young boy’s, there is the triangle of boy, woman with Alzheimer disease, and “vacant eyes” (5).

The narrator never sees his grandmother again and thinks of her little until the day of her funeral. Nevertheless, there is a moment at the funeral which he tells us he has “always thought of . . . as the instant my childhood ended. It was as if I discovered, in my innocence, that there was such a thing as fate and that it could take a life and dismember it” (5). Clearly, this is a momentous realization. What is also momentous from the reader’s perspective is that the narrator’s denial of a need for pictures leads him from considering photographs in his dead father’s studio, backwards through his memories to a recollection of a family silence. This deployment of “dilatatory space” finally brings the narrator to describe the loss of his childhood in terms violent enough—dismemberment of life—to suggest trauma. His denial leads him to a knowledge repressed in the family and uncovers a traumatic loss; this complex of trauma and repression, suggestive of melancholia (at least as Freud describes it), is linked, then, from the earliest chapters of the novel with pictures or, rather, with the denial of a need for them. The resonance between this early denial and the narrator’s claim that he has no need for the photographs in his father’s studio prompts the reader to consider these pictures more closely within the context of what we have already been told. It forces us, in effect, to move backwards and forwards within the text to assemble clues about the importance of these supposedly unneeded pictures.

Of the seaside photograph of father and sons, for example, the narrator notes that it was taken by his mother, a painter whose visual interpretation of her son has been stressed throughout the text as integral to his self-knowledge. That his mother, the painter, doubles as the family's photographer subtly recalls the narrator's earlier preference for the general term "picture" over the more specific "photograph," a preference which unites various visual media in their distinction from the verbal. His mother, however, painting the narrator in childhood, insists on distinguishing forms of visual representation: "Photography is what this is not, kid," she retorts to his complaint that, in asking him to hold a position, she "sound[s] like the school photographer" (15). Ironically, of course, this denial nonetheless draws attention to an important similarity between the media, and reminds us that the snapshot the narrator gazes at years later has been posed and framed as much as the more blatantly interpretive painting.

While he denies his need for these photographs, being posed, seen, and framed by his mother's eye, even through the camera's lens, is surely significant to a son who, well into his own adulthood and after his mother's death, is "still trying to remember every single instant of the days my mother painted my portrait" (13). His description of his mother painting is ekphrastic; he proffers her snapshot in words. In fact, while the novel offers photographs of the father and both brothers, there are none of his mother, emphasizing, perhaps, her family role as artist *and* photographer rather than subject: "She is wearing her painting clothes: one of Father's white shirts with the tails tied round her waist, a pair of paint-spattered jeans, and her hair is pulled back off her face in a red band. Her feet are bare and her toenails are painted vermilion. . . . There is paint under her fingernails. My mother is painting my portrait" (11). As the narrator uses words to paint

his own carefully observed rendering of his mother, his memory of the week she painted his fourteen-year old self echoes his desire to spend time with her, and echoes, as well, the family dynamics.

He remembers, for example, his older brother lying nearby in the hammock, “affect[ing] not to care that it is my portrait that she is painting, not his” (12). He rather wistfully adds that “[a]t the time I took the fact that she managed to paint me as a sign that I was her favourite. Now I know that this was not the case. She probably loved my brother best” (15). His retrospective vision convinces him that he was chosen over his brother simply because he was “emotionally manageable” in a way that neither his brother nor his father was (15). Thus, while his brother was “not inclined to submit to a week of [their] mother’s scrutiny” (15), the narrator was willing “to give myself to her without reserve” in return for “hav[ing] her all to myself for a week” (14). His descriptions of sitting for the portrait sessions reflect the strength of his desire to know his mother better, to have her to himself; they do so not only in the Oedipal undercurrents that swirl through them, but also in the narrator’s observation of his mother as artist.

To ascribe Oedipal yearnings to the narrator’s younger self is perhaps to overstate his focus on his father, who seems rather literally peripheral in this scene, “circl[ing] around the lawn in his bathing suit.” But years later the son remembers the way his mother “nudges [his father] out of the way with her hip” when he tries to look at the portrait. Indeed, not only does the narrating son remember, but he admits that “[i]f [he] had this moment on video [he] would play it over and over: the way her hip moves and how he fakes grabbing at her, then stands back, looking happy” (12). While the narrator never explains what it is about this memory that triggers his compulsion to revisit it over

and over, its reflection of a playful, comfortable physical intimacy between his parents is followed by a telling moment.

In the following scene, his father, having been hip-nudged away, returns with a beer each for himself, his wife, and his older son. The narrator's mother has just commented that children are impossible to paint "because their faces are always changing"; despite this implicit identification of her younger son as still a child, she directs her husband to "[g]ive the boy [a beer] too" (12). The narrator reinforces his father's answering query—"So young?"—with an impression of himself at the time: "I am fourteen. I want to have Miles Davis's fine bones. I want to play the slide guitar like Elmore James. I want my face to stop changing, my voice to settle down into something strong and masculine. I want to be a man of few words. I want to drink. My father looks me over, then tosses me my first can and when I open it, it gushes over my hands" (12-13). Wanting to be adult, to be strong and masculine like his father, instead he exposes his youthful clumsiness as the beer gushes sloppily over his hands.<sup>8</sup> Years later, "as old now as [his mother] was then," the narrator "can still smell the hops and feel the chill of the can between my fingers"; as he adds, he is "still addicted to impossible wishes" (13). Since he is now grown, it is unlikely that his impossible wishes include the one he voiced, his adolescent desire for adulthood; it is even less likely that his expressed desire for Miles Davis's bones and Elmore James's talent was meant literally. Rather, he continues to be addicted not only to impossible wishes but also to ones he has never been able to voice, wishes he gestures toward figuratively.

While the narrator is not able to articulate fully the confused complex of feelings he has toward his father and mother but only hints at his awareness of their physical

relationship, he is quite clear about one aspect of his own relationship with his mother: his need for her vision of him. While he recognizes that “of what she had seen, she would reveal only what she chose to depict” (14), he nevertheless is convinced that, “[i]n her picture, I get to see myself through her eyes, and I think that it takes me about as deep into myself as I am ever likely to go” (17). Despite, or perhaps because of, the selection his mother exercises over the representational process in revealing only what she chooses, her depiction of him both sets in motion and displays an intersubjective relationship. In the intricate web of this representation, the son sees his mother seeing him, and through those overlapping looks is directed or led to look back at himself. Thus he contrasts the portrait she paints with the photographs from the same time which show him “always [with] the same foolish rubbery grin of the kid brother, the youngest son, with someone’s large hand round my waist” (16). Of the scenes these photographs record, unlike the carefully-recalled occasion of portrait-painting, the narrator can remember nothing, although he knows that he sometimes visits those scenes of generalized happy family life in his dreams.

But by privileging the truth value of his mother’s portrait over that of the photographs she took, the narrator ignores the reality that such photographs necessarily record “only what she chose to depict.” Through this privileging, the narrator attempts to claim a special visual inter-subjectivity between himself and his mother within the family constellation. Certainly, he makes this relationship explicit when he describes sitting for his portrait, with himself the focus of his mother’s attention, and his brother and father peripheral figures to the scene. The role of his mother’s look in the narrator’s construction of himself is also powerfully implicit in his attempts to dismiss the photograph, attempts

which nonetheless reveal his mother exposing his foolish youthfulness. The rubberiness of his youthful grin brings to mind not only child's play, but also the other emotions lurking, ill-controlled by this still-plastic and vulnerable face; as well, it implies a certain flaccidity which, in turn, bespeaks impotence. The rubbery grin reveals the boy caught in a triangle of intersecting looks as the large-handed "someone," probably his father, stands with him in front of the camera's lens while another someone, most likely his mother, stands behind it. No wonder the narrator prefers to dismiss the photograph quickly as proffering only a generic and meaninglessly happy domesticity.

In place of this foolishly grinning happiness associated with his childhood, his mother paints him as "sad and downcast, staring inwards, oblivious to the bright blue sky she has painted round my head" (16). He remembers looking at the painting for the first time, standing with his father, whose hand he can still feel on his right shoulder, and whose simple, one-word response, "So," apparently registers a surprise equal to the narrator's at "the portrait of a child watching his childhood vanish before his eyes" (16). This memory in turn recalls the narrator's earlier insight at his grandmother's funeral when he claims to recognize the instant his childhood ended. Yet while the portrait and the earlier epiphany seem to reference a specific time, a passing stage in the narrator's life, the narrator comes to believe that the loss of childhood this portrait reveals has a foundational significance for his subjectivity.

Seeing himself through his mother's eyes means going "as deep into myself as I am ever likely to go" (17), and this depth reveals him to himself as "a child watching his childhood vanish before his eyes" (16). Further, looking at the portrait, which hangs in his bedroom as he narrates, he "find[s] it strange that forty years on I have changed so little.

All the cells in my body have been replaced a number of times, and I have had a life. Nevertheless I remain what I was when she painted me” (17). Not only does he insist that his mother’s portrait reveals some “deep” truth about himself, but he is equally insistent that her perception of him continues to be valid, that loss *in* childhood and loss *of* childhood is in some fundamental way essential to his subjectivity. Most notably, in speaking of himself as both seeing subject—looking into himself—and viewed object—watching his childhood vanish—he extends the visual relationship he shared with his mother, ensuring, in his adoption of her position as surveyor and assessor of his own self, her continued importance to his subjectivity.

Given the importance that the narrator attributes to his mother’s ability to accurately portray him, the fact that she must have taken the photograph he finds when clearing out his father’s desk renders suspicious his easy dismissal of any need for such mementos. The reader’s awareness of mother as artist behind the camera’s lens changes our perception of the photograph described by the narrator. Yet while the narrator notes that his mother took the seaside snapshot of his father, brother, and himself, his ekphrasis of this photograph minimizes the significance of her presence there. Although the photograph links the four family members on either side of the camera, the narrator, in dismissing its importance to him, associates it primarily with his own weakness vis-à-vis his brother and father and with the charged relationship between his father and mother—his father roaring his peculiarity back at his mother, arguing that “It is why you married me, woman” (92). He fails to acknowledge his mother’s power, as photographer, to frame him this way within the family dynamics. The tension which accrues in this nexus of intersecting familial alliances, of competing claims of truth value of photograph and

portrait, and of our shifting awareness of mother as artist/photographer and simultaneously as excluded from the family photograph suggests that the rather summarily-dismissed snapshot might offer a route to understanding the narrator's investment in his mother's visual perception of him.

*Scar Tissue*'s narrator dismisses his mother's photographs of him as insignificant yet insists on her ability, as painter, to reveal his self. Marianne Hirsch's focus, in her reading of Sally Mann's work, on the Mother as photographer, theorizes the mother's look at her child in ways that illuminate this contradiction by the narrator. Although the narrator's mother distinguishes her painted portraiture from photography, Hirsch's reading is relevant given that the maternal look, in the novel, is complicated by its coupling with an artist's and/or a photographer's eye.

Hirsch is concerned with the role of "the maternal *look* in the process of the child's subject-formation and within the unconscious optics that structure familial interaction" (155). In trying to understand the ambivalence aroused by the mother's look, she makes a distinction between the maternal look and the maternal gaze. The former, directed by the mother toward her child, both mirrors that child and "supports its subject-formation" (154). The latter, by contrast, exposes the child to surveillance by a hegemonic cultural maternal collective of which his or her mother forms a part. Hirsch speculates that the denunciatory public response to showings of Mann's work results from the discomfort experienced when the maternal look takes on "some of the disturbing characteristics and qualities of an all-seeing dominating gaze" due to "the intervention of the camera and the dominant cultural fantasy of maternal omnipotence" (154-5).

Hirsch speculates about a gallery viewer—and therefore a third-party—response to a mother’s interpretative photography of her children. The narrator’s ambivalence, though, results from an intense identification with his mother within the dynamics of a family heavily invested in a construction of masculinity; this construction, in many ways, excludes the narrator. Thus, along with the discomfort about the artist’s eye which lends his mother’s look some of the “qualities of an all-seeing dominating gaze,” the narrator is interested in the balancing power this gaze might offer within his family constellation. Through his willingness to submit himself to her portraiture, the narrator signals a desire for the intimacy of the maternal look and the accompanying support of “subject-formation.” His insistence, however, on his mother’s ability to see “as deep into [him]self as he is ever likely to go” (17); his absolute belief in her revelation of him as essentially “a [sad] child watching his childhood vanish before his eyes” (16); and his further insistence on the continued relevance and truth of this foundational assessment forty years later—all this reflects a profound desire that the maternal look is inflected with qualities—or more specifically powers—associated with the gaze. Where Hirsch finds the viewing public uncomfortable—as is the case with Mann’s attribution of all-seeing, dominating power to the mother’s look—the narrator appears to insist on attributing such power to his mother’s look.

Yet the narrator’s response to his mother’s visualization of him remains ambivalent: while he credits her, as a painter, with the power of seeing his essence even into adulthood, he rejects a snapshot framed by her eye as insignificant. Interestingly, the dynamics that snapshot reveals suggest the very reasons for his investment in the power of his mother’s eye. As he details it,

there was one picture my mother had taken of the two of us, standing on either side of my father on the Jersey shore. We are all in bathing suits, and both our bodies look so white and slender and weak compared to his. We are both shading our eyes from the sun, and I am leaning against my father's side with my arm round his waist. My brother holds himself an inch or so away from Father and is standing straighter than I am. Father has a knotted handkerchief on his head, which my mother always said made him look peculiar, since he was the only man on the Jersey shore to wear one like that. 'But I *am* peculiar!' my father roars. 'It is why you married me, woman.' It was one of his better moments. (92)

As the narrator describes it, the photograph positions the father as central in the family, if perhaps "peculiar" on the Jersey shore. Further, the father roars his desirability *as* "peculiar" to the mother who is invisible in her position behind the lens.

The snapshot also foregrounds the boys' weakness vis-à-vis their father's strength. At the same time, however, while the brothers are united in their weakness, their respective stances separate them: the older brother's straighter stance and maintenance of distance contrast with the narrator's ostensibly easier and more affectionate, but also perhaps more juvenile, posture to recall other narrative evidence which associates father and firstborn son, mother and younger son. The two older men, for example, have science doctorates while the narrator, who has always longed for "some kind of expressive or examined life, like mother's" (25), has a doctorate in philosophy. In contrast to his older brother's "propositional intelligence," the younger son's intelligence is characterized by his father as being "autobiographical" (25). If this is not, as the narrator insists it is, the father's "way of saying I had a scatty female mind," it is at least intended to reinforce his

father's claim that "You take after your mother, boy" (25). In the context of parental loss, which inevitably recalls the losses and compromises of the Oedipal complex, the description of the brothers' positions in the photograph outlines a family dynamic which has made it difficult for the younger son to give up his mother and identify with his father. Rather, the father repeatedly insists on identifying the narrator with his mother, and rebuffs his attempts to be closer to his father.

While he denies any need for the photograph, the narrator's description of it suggests that in snapping this shot his mother has captured some of the family dynamics which underlie the sadness he sees in his portrait. Indeed, it seems plausible that his dismissal of the photograph marks his uneasiness about the power of his mother's eye to reveal the nature of his subjectivity, particularly in the inter-subjective network of the family, and perhaps also particularly when his mother's subjectivity is obscured by her position behind the camera lens. Again, his response to his mother's visual records of him marks his ambivalence: he wants the power of her gaze to be softened, or at least inflected, by the intense reciprocity he associates with her maternal look. Thus he prefers to focus on her painterly vision which, while proferring the ability to discern and represent his deepest self, is matched by his own vision of her as she paints him, a vision which imbues her with movement and intensity. Obversely, he wants to amplify the power of that maternal look: imbuing it with the power of the more collective and hegemonic maternal gaze allows it to balance his father's potential to overwhelm him, even if the gaze threatens the reciprocity he values in seeing his mother see him. Hence, perhaps, he rejects her photographic representation of family dynamics, because the power of her gaze

is obscured not only by the mechanistic intervention of the camera lens, but also by her positioning behind the camera.

The narrator's relatively brief description of the photograph, then, while congruent with his stated disinterest in it, marks an ambivalence toward his mother's visual assessment of him, and contrasts with his rather protracted description of the portrait sessions. Exploring this ambivalence by comparing the narrator's response to the portrait with his response to the photograph outlines the dilatory space opened up by the photograph, a space which throws the reader back to earlier moments in the text which associate father and older brother, mother and narrator. The picture opens this space even wider by inviting the narrator to remember times other than that which it represents; the handkerchief on his father's head folds together other moments in which his parents had words over the peculiarity of his headgear ("mother *always* said it made him look peculiar"). The photograph further, and more noticeably, subverts temporal linearity, particularly that of both text and mourning, by pointing backward to the brothers' conversation earlier that evening.

In that conversation, the narrator points still further backward, as he recalls himself and his brother trailing behind their father on the same Jersey beach: "First he gives you the stone he has picked up, and then you pass it to me, and then I throw it away. . . . That's how it always was. First he gives you the stone, then you give it to me, then I throw it away. . . . That was the whole story, right there" (88). This earlier "whole story" of sibling rivalry<sup>9</sup> and, perhaps more pertinently, of ambivalence toward his father, interrupts the son's narration of his response to his father's death. While his purging of his father's studio enacts a supposed terminability of mourning, this ambivalence reminds us

that mourning is always complicated by the earlier losses it recalls; this residual grief, in turn, argues that mourning may never be completed.

As I discussed at the outset of this chapter, the other photograph that briefly arrests the narrator as he clears his father's desk also causes him, if unwittingly, to manifest his ambivalence toward his father. The seemingly offhand phrase, for example, with which the narrator speculates that his father withheld information so that his sons would be free of a troubled family past "whether they wanted to be or not" (93) implicitly accuses the father of preemptory and unilateral decision-making. While the narrator concedes his father's desire to protect his sons, he also appears to resent the knowledge denied to both himself and his brother. Thus the phrase subtly proposes, in its revelation of the mixed emotions which compromise the son's mourning, the difficulty of completely releasing the past.

Similar to the shot of father and sons on the beach, this photograph also returns the reader to an earlier point in the text, a point which folds together various layers of time. While this section is obviously narrated at some point after both parents have died, it precedes the recounting of the father's death. In this earlier moment, the narrator laments that only "[n]ow that it is too late" does he see himself and his father clearly, "illuminated in the slanting rays of time [with] . . . thirty-four years between us" (26). He notes that "almost the only thing [his father] ever told [him] about [the father's] childhood" is an early memory of opening a window overlooking the Black Sea in 1917 and catching a sailor's cap thrown up from the boulevard below. Years later, this memory leads the son to reflect that his father's childhood, in contrast to his own, was never safe.

In contrasting the two childhoods, the narrator characterizes his and his father's first memories in terms of film criticism, calling his father's first memory Eisensteinian. Presumably, the association with the Russian filmmaker is triggered by the oblique reference to the 1917 collapse of the tsarist regime in Russia; the characterization also owes something to the dynamic visual charge of the single shot image—the dramatic capture of that ascending cap. He describes his own earliest memory as “from some film noir starring Barbara Stanwyck and Richard Widmark” (26). This is a curious attribution for a recollection from a supposedly safe childhood, given that film noir takes crime as its subject and is recognized for its “fatalism . . . claustrophobic décor and shadows” (Mast 296). The narrator recalls his young self and his parents in their car, pulled into a filling station: “The wipers are scraping across . . . the windscreen . . . the world is on the other side” and, he says, “I am safe” (26). Another memory, however, “[m]ore film noir, this time at speed,” seems better suited to the dark genre and belies the claim of safety.

In this second film noir memory, various versions of which recur throughout the novel, the narrator recounts a car accident which occurred shortly after the filling station scene. He remembers himself “saying something over and over” (36), but only after his mother's death does his older brother tell him that what he was repeating was “It was all my fault.” Both the recurrence of the accident in the narrative and the repetition of the narrator's self-accusation point to the compulsion to repeat which Freud identified as a response to unacknowledged trauma.<sup>10</sup> By thus marking the memory as traumatic, these repeated references belie the narrator's claim that his childhood was safe; instead, they point to repressed losses and grief which precede, and thus compromise, the narrator's immediate mourning over the loss of his father. At the same time, the repetition of the

references contributes to the palimpsestic layers whose peeling away expands the space of the photographic trope.

The portrait of the unidentified family in Constantinople, then, while narrativized in the context of the father's death, directs the reader backwards in the text to a point from which she or he can follow numerous threads to the revelation of earlier losses and griefs. Thus while the narrator's claim that "[t]hat photograph was the last thing to detain us" implies that, having been briefly detained, he moves forward to a resolution of mourning, the photograph wordlessly denies this claim, maintaining a space of resistance against an insistently forward linearity.

Creekmur's exploration of the photograph's role in mourning helps explain how the photograph can apparently allow the narrator to mourn and move forward while it simultaneously offers the space for prolonged mourning. Speculating on "[w]hat happens . . . if the lost object . . . is prolonged, not psychically, as a wish or a hallucination, but . . . preserved in a photograph," he suggests two possible answers. Even though it is possible that "the medium of photography [might] be more effective in the insistence on absence . . . than a painfully besieged libidinal position," there is the possibility that, in preserving "at least an element of the lost object's presence," the photograph might "delay the mourner's recognition that the object is fully gone" (75). Creekmur connects these dual possibilities offered by the photograph to Woodward's frustration with the false opposition she finds in Freud's essay, as well as to John Bowlby's suggestion of "prolonged (even interminable) mourning" (75). Thus he suggests that photographs may "delay, sustain, and even encourage mourning when our psyche seems otherwise ready to 'let go' of the lost loved object" (75-76). Certainly, in the passage from *Scar Tissue* I am

discussing, the narrator performs a readiness to “let go” of his dead father, but his description of the photograph suggests the possibilities traced by Creekmur: the photograph might insist on his father’s absence, but it also preserves a space in which the mourner delays or prolongs recognition of his loss.

The narrator’s cleansing of his father’s studio, then, provides a trope for the work of mourning: against his declared lack of desire to retain the photographs he finds there, his description of them details enough past pain and ambivalence to operate as a trope for prolonged or delayed mourning, perhaps even melancholia. An even greater display of ambivalence in the narrator’s claim to move forward is found in the novel’s last description of a snapshot, an image of the narrator, aged six. More precisely, the narrator’s resistance does not lie in his description of the snapshot’s surface representation, but in the way he attributes meaning to his memory of placing the photograph in his mother’s hand while she is in an advanced stage of Alzheimer disease.

Preparing to pin the picture up on a board beside her nursing home bed, the narrator hands it to her with the pin laid across its top margin. As he recounts, “She held it there for a second and stared carefully at this image of a child who was once her son. Then with sudden, savage deliberation, she removed the pin and jabbed at the picture, puncturing both of my eyes” (198). This shocking and violent blinding, particularly in the context of parental loss, again recalls the losses and compromises of the Oedipal complex. Furthermore, the narrator’s interpretation of this action indicates a repression of his earlier grief, as well as an unacknowledged ambivalence toward his mother.

His unacknowledged ambivalence is most evident in the narrator’s claim that he understands his mother’s motivation. He admits that “There was not a shadow of a doubt

as to what she intended. It had been a blinding.” At the same time, however, he says, “Now, of course, I understand. If you hold the picture up to the light, radiant illumination streams through the eyes. It is the light streaming from the terrain beyond the gates of truth” (198). This explanation is problematic not only because absolute truth here is imaged in religious terms and because it resists the reality that the mother, under the onslaught of Alzheimer disease, is unable to form or act upon intentions, but also because the narrator refuses to acknowledge the negative implications of this vehement blinding.

So jarring, indeed, is the narrator’s attribution of meaning to his mother’s traumatic action that it subverts the very reconciliation he purports to achieve through the litany of determinations that conclude this scene. In accordance with the generic demand of elegy that the speaker achieve consolation and return to quotidian life with renewed purpose, he declares, “I will walk out to the end of the railway line. I will listen to the Chatham freights. I will feel the night breeze on my face. I will hear the road just beyond the orchard. I will see the lights of Alton and hear voices beckon. I will see the car lights, streaming through the night” (199). This resolution, however, mixes this rhetoric of movement and future action with the narrator’s conviction against his doctor’s advice—against the evidence of neurological scans—that his mother’s disease is already active within him. As he notes, in a mix of magical and medical terminology, “[t]he cells are too small to see. But I know. I feel them inside me” (199).

While the narrator’s troubling interpretation of his mother’s actions demonstrates an identification with her, his insistent claim to Alzheimer disease suggests incorporation. Arguably, the two psychoanalytic terms—identification and incorporation—are too closely linked, as part of the internalizing process, for this distinction to be relevant.

However, I am interested in exploring the specific ramifications of the latter, both for its association with melancholia and for the way it is mimetically enacted, in this text, by the incorporation of photographs into the narrative. To read this elegiac novel as melancholically incorporating photographs requires some flexibility in interpreting the psychoanalytic terms “internalization” and “incorporation.” W.W. Meissner’s *Internalization in Psychoanalysis* suggests that such flexibility is part of the terms’ history within psychoanalytic literature. He uses internalization as a general term to refer to the process by which the regulations that have occurred in interaction with the outside world are gradually replaced by inner regulations; thus internalization encompasses the more specific processes of identification, introjection, and incorporation (7). At the same time, however, he indicates that there is considerable overlap and slippage between the terms and acknowledges that the notion of incorporation “has always been troublesome” (16). This troubled history justifies, then, a productive exploitation of the slippage between the terms to support using incorporation as a way of understanding the function of the photographs in the elegiac novel. The term is particularly apt for its modelling of the physical process of ingestion, holding, as it does, a body—*corp*—within itself. Thus, while aware of the overlap between introjection and incorporation, I use the latter term to point to a “primitive” form of internalization in which the object becomes taken into the inner subject world.

Judith Butler also demonstrates an interest in expanding or rendering flexible our understanding of incorporation: she cites Roy Schafer’s claim that incorporation is a fantasy wherein “the interior space into which an object is taken is imagined, and imagined within a language that can conjure and reify such spaces” (67). In this context,

the cells which *Scar Tissue*'s narrator imagines inside his body offer themselves as imaginary, incorporated space. Butler's interest lies in exploring the whereabouts of this incorporated space, the way it sustains identification, and its relationship to gender identity. The question I wish to raise concerns whether this space might be mimetically represented through the photographic trope in the elegiac novel. Could the description of the visual photograph within the verbal narrative offer itself as a literary representation of the interior space in which the lost object is incorporated into the ego? In so doing, might it prove less resistant to exploration than the psychoanalytic model which perhaps engenders it?

In considering the role of the photograph in the work of mourning, Creekmur similarly reads photographs as being "narratively *incorporated* or internalized" by novels (79). Significantly, Creekmur immediately follows a reference to the power of "a photograph of a lost loved one" to make us weep—an image, arguably, of mourning—with a note about "Freud and [Karl] Abraham locat[ing] the roots of melancholia in the late-oral, literally introjective, stage of libidinal development" (75). This movement from mourning to melancholia culminates in Creekmur's "concern with *how* photographs are emotionally consumed, though not necessarily internalized" (75). Although he distinguishes between the emotional consumption and the internalization of photographs in mourning, his depiction of photographs as being "*incorporated* or internalized" in a literary work of mourning is marked by his association of melancholia with introjection.

Creekmur claims that photographs are narratively incorporated or internalized by the novels he discusses, Michael Ondaatje's *Coming through Slaughter* and Richard Powers's *Three Farmers on Their Way to a Dance*, although these images appear in the

pages before the novels, and thus, as he says, “remain prefaces outside the *bodies* of the texts.”<sup>11</sup> Surely photographs might be more easily seen as incorporated if they were presented *within* the text proper, particularly if the photographs were further incorporated, made part of the body of the text, by being rendered verbally through the classical literary and rhetorical device of ekphrasis, or what James Heffernan calls the “verbal representation of a visual representation” (3). Ekphrasis provides language “capable of conjur[ing] and reify[ing]” the imaginary interior space integral to incorporation (Butler 67). This reification of space in the generally temporal medium of literature is integral to both Heffernan’s and William Krieger’s studies of ekphrasis. These scholars offer differing views of the relationship ekphrasis outlines between spatiality and temporality; both, however, agree on the central importance of that correlation to this classical rhetorical figure. And in emphasizing this correlation, both suggest to me that ekphrasis is important in a novel whose narrator claims that the family history he writes—a temporal genre—is really intended to function as a time capsule—a spatial artefact.

For Krieger, the introduction of ekphrasis into a work is intended “to use a plastic object as a symbol of the frozen, stilled world of plastic relationships which must be superimposed upon literature’s turning world to ‘still’ it”; he argues that “[t]he spatial work freezes the temporal work even as the latter seeks to free it from space” (265-6). Heffernan, on the other hand, sees ekphrasis as delivering the temporal narrative out of the frozen space of the visual image; he calls it “dynamic and obstetric,” claiming that “it typically delivers *from* the pregnant moment of visual art its embryonically narrative impulse” (5).<sup>12</sup> Both writers, however, implicitly recognize the reification of space ekphrasis performs in staging the struggle between the verbal and the visual. These two

critics, then, support a perception of ekphrasis as creating and/or reifying an imaginary interior space (into which an object might be incorporated).

This perception of ekphrasis as offering space for incorporation is complemented by W.J.T. Mitchell's work which supports the notion that this space incorporates an Other. While Krieger and Heffernan argue, respectively, that ekphrasis represents a desire for pre-fallen language and a contest for representation between two media, Mitchell's essay about ekphrasis and the Other builds on the confrontation between these two media of representation to argue that ekphrastic poetry is "the genre in which texts encounter their own semiotic 'Others'" (699). Further, Mitchell claims that ekphrasis "transfers into the realm of literary art sublimated versions of our ambivalence about social others" (702). Again, this reference to ambivalence carries special resonance in a discussion of melancholia (in which, as Freud points out, ambivalence toward the object is shifted onto the patient's ego). Mitchell's view of ekphrasis suggests that the photographic trope might function in these literary elegies as an incorporation of the Other—an Other I take to be polyvalent, to refer equally to semiotic, generic, modal, and social others—into the textual body. The trope enfolds or incorporates the visual into the verbal, melancholia into mourning, lyric into narrative, the lost loved one into the mourner, and, particularly, the unresolvable into the terminably and determinedly linear.

As an incorporation of the Other, the trope of the photograph gestures toward an absent presence, not only of the visual image which can never be completely captured in words, nor of the lost loved one, but also of those aspects of grief which defy representation. By so doing, it subverts the suspect formal claim of the elegy that successful mourning has been achieved, and that its speaker is free to move on

unencumbered. As the narrator of *Scar Tissue* says of this claim, “Telling the story of any death is a way to pretend that you have mastered it, that you have accepted and come to terms with it. It is a lie you tell yourself to keep going” (76). In its representation of the visual medium within a temporal and linear verbal narrative, the photographic trope offers an interior space in which to escape the need to lie, to escape the inexorable demands of an elegy which insists that mourning must come to an end.

At the same time, the photographic trope, by its repetitive performance of ekphrasis throughout the novel, emphasizes the elegy’s move between the still and the moving, between space and time. And by representing, as Krieger argues that ekphrasis does, a nostalgic hope for a “pre-fallen language of corporeal presence,” tempered by an acceptance of the language at hand, this ekphrastic trope also points to the disappointed hope, the melancholia always already embedded in the language an elegy must use to proclaim its move out of mourning (10). In fact, the disappointed hopes signalled by ekphrasis echo what Sacks calls the “elegist’s reluctant submission to language itself” (2). Thus while the photographic trope incorporates melancholia within a work of mourning, it also potentially draws attention to the “enforced accommodation between the mourning self on the one hand and the very words of grief and fictions of consolation on the other” (Sacks 2). In that accommodation, it suggests the absent presence of a loss that can neither be articulated nor consoled.

What is perhaps most melancholic about the incorporation of this interior space as represented by the photographic ekphrasis is that it offers an escape inward, but not a way out. This inward move might best be understood by referring again to Brooks’s arabesque figure that represents the dilatory space of the narrative middle. Although this arabesque

does eventually terminate, I argue that the photographic trope in some way resists termination. Brooks insists that the end is always inherently present in the beginning. He argues that “story, or ‘life,’ is stimulated from quiescence into a state of narratability, into a tension, a kind of irritation, which demands narration” and that the “ensuing narrative . . . is maintained in a state of tension, as a prolonged deviance from the quiescence of the ‘normal’—which is to say, the unnarratable—until it reaches the terminal quiescence of the end” (103). Brooks’s understanding of narrative as a delaying of the inevitable return of quiescence (a return which is also, paradoxically, the goal of narrative) is particularly relevant to the elegiac family romance, a narrative occasioned by the ultimate quiescence of death.

For Brooks, “[t]he development of a narrative shows that the tension is maintained as an ever more complicated postponement or *détour* leading back to the goal of quiescence” (103). The task of providing and prolonging the tension which keeps the story, or life, from collapsing back into the quiescent nonnarratable is accomplished, according to Brooks, by the narrative plot, which he calls, with reference to *Tristram Shandy* and to Balzac, “a kind of arabesque or squiggle toward the end” (104). Rather than a straight line, the narrative performs this arabesque or squiggle in order to delay “the collapse of [beginning] into [end], of life into immediate death” (104). The arabesque Brooks represents graphically in his text does progress from the left to the right of the page (as indeed does the eye of the Western reader), and does finally, albeit with many detours, reach an ending. At the same time, however, its meandering movement across the page offers the possibility of gathering and/or folding. Thus it recalls Sacks’s alertness to the multiple layers of loss folded into each elegy, and contributes to an

understanding of the trope of the ekphrastic photograph. The mourner's task potentially amplifies the detouring squiggles of the narrative arabesque, exaggerating its gathers to delay the return to quiescence. The ekphrastic descriptions occupy these folds with their melancholic spatiality; through an inexhaustibility of possible interpretation, they resist the linear temporality which claims a termination of mourning.

Brooks's explication of the relationship between narrative beginnings, middles, and endings implies that the mourning which the elegiac novel performs is, in fact, a narrative of a mourning which has already ended; his declaration that narration could not begin without fore-knowledge of the ending is even more pertinent to the case of mourning and elegy. All narration, after all, is a repetition, and the elegy or elegiac narrative is a repetition of mourning already worked through. In the case of elegy, the repetition necessarily signals the completion of the mourning which occasioned it in its very existence. That is, the consolatory substitution with which the elegy traditionally concludes exists in the very form of the work: beginning and ending are inextricably related.

Simultaneously, though, Brooks's narrative model alerts us to an important paradox in the case of the elegiac narrative. The work of mourning is to move through grief and back into life, a move reflected by the consolatory ending of the elegy. However, if, as Brooks points out, the discharge performed by a narrative ending effects a return to quiescence, this consolatory ending in fact returns its mourner to a state of nonnarratability which more closely resembles death than life.

But between the quiescence which precedes and that which follows the elegiac narrative is the middle, with its arabesque-like repetitions, particularly the repetitions of

the trope of the family photograph. This trope mimics or recalls the stimulation of narrative from a state of quiescence; to repeat Heffernan's description, "it typically delivers *from* the pregnant moment of visual art its embryonically narrative impulse" (5). Yet while it performs a narrative by offering a reading of the photograph in question, ekphrasis, in these novels, does not point to the eventual termination and accompanying discharge generally promised by narration. Rather, these verbal interpretations of visual records suggest the interminability of analysis. In *Scar Tissue*'s case, for example, of the photograph of father and sons on the beach, the verbal description not only recalls earlier conversations in the narrative, conversations which hint at unresolved and problematic dynamics within the family, but is itself recalled and amplified in moments which follow.

At the same time, as I have argued, the incorporation of these photographs in the body of the text resists linear temporality in order to model melancholia. This ekphrastic incorporation foregrounds the paradox of an elegy which celebrates a recovery into life by moving into a quiescence that resembles death. As well, the novel's ekphrastic moments provide the tension which prevents its beginning and ending from collapsing into one other; they do so by directing readers backwards in the text or diverting us to consider other possible interpretations of these photographs. Thus, in another paradox, these ekphrastic descriptions give the narrative life even as they resist the return to life that the narrative imposes.

These reciprocal paradoxes complicate the arabesque that Brooks offers as a way of understanding the narrative middle, twisting and turning the arabesque further, allowing the folding and gathering together of life and death. Rather than stretching the arabesque to breaking point, ekphrasis provides an infinite elasticity to the narrative line,

so that while we may seem to be directed through mourning to take up, once again, the progress through life which must inevitably deliver us into death, there is a respite, a resistance to returning to life, but simultaneously a resistance to life's inexorable progress to death. This paradox and the elasticity it adds to the arabesque figure recall Freud's speculation that it is the "kind of regression" which occurs in melancholia which expedites relinquishing the lost object (*The Ego and the Id* 23-4).

But this comment by Freud is not acknowledged by Woodward when she lays out her frustration with the constraining effect his distinction between mourning and melancholia has had on subsequent theorizing. Yet, in this later work, Freud notes that when "a person has to give up a sexual object, there quite often ensues an alteration of his ego which can only be described as a setting up of the object inside the ego, *as it occurs in melancholia.*" Freud further observes that this introjection, which he calls a "kind of regression to the mechanism of the oral phase," makes it "easier for the object to be given up or renders that process possible" (*The Ego and the Id* 23-4). Butler establishes the relevance of this observation to Freud's theorization of the relationship between melancholia and mourning; as she interprets this passage, Freud is here "suggest[ing] that the internalizing strategy of melancholia does not *oppose* the work of mourning, but may be the only way in which the ego can survive the loss of its essential emotional ties to others" (Butler 58). Thus when Woodward expresses concern about the constraints imposed by Freud's 1917 essay, she does so by ignoring important later work, or at least important interpretations of that work.

But if Woodward herself falls into the trap of being influenced unduly by Freud's work on mourning, she thus illustrates, rather than negates, her own claim that

theorization of mourning and melancholia has been hobbled by a tendency to see the two as distinct and as oppositional. Woodward calls for a theory that discerns a more subtle relationship between the two. In response, I point to the reciprocal paradoxes constituted between the ekphrastic trope's representation of melancholia and the elegiac narrative's representation of mourning. In one paradox, the visual stillness, even death, embodied in ekphrasis's melancholic resistance enlivens the narrative; in a second paradox, the linear return to life performed by the verbal narrative delivers the reader to the quiescence of the nonnarratable. As these twin paradoxes mirror each other and simultaneously reflect the narrative arabesque, they both figure and insist upon an imbrication of mourning and melancholia, life and death, time and space. By doing so, they both answer and challenge Woodward's invitation that we explore the space between melancholia and mourning. The paradoxes answer, while challenging, the idea that melancholia and mourning are terminal points with a clearly-determined *in between*. They insist that melancholia and mourning are dependent on one another, as closely dependent as Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* implies life is on death, as dependent as narrative is on quiescence.

Woodward's refusal or repression of Freud's recognition of the possible inevitability of melancholia is ironic given her desire to find a model for something *in between* mourning and melancholia and foregrounds a powerful ambivalence in our cultural attitudes toward grief. Woodward herself appears to refuse the knowledge that successful mourning, as described in Freud's earlier essay, is only, as our narrator claims, "a lie to keep us going." Or that, as Freud wrote to a friend,

Although we know that after such a loss the acute state of mourning will subside, we also know we shall remain inconsolable and will never find a substitute. No

matter what may fill the gap, even if it be filled completely, it nevertheless remains something else. And actually, this is how it should be, it is the only way of perpetuating that love which we do not want to relinquish. (Freud, *Letters* 386)<sup>13</sup>

This is a powerful and a painful knowledge, and Woodward's apparent refusal of it is understandable. But the trope of the ekphrastic photograph as deployed in elegiac novels such as *Scar Tissue* offers a model for exploring the gap Freud points to, rather than refusing knowledge of it, for seeing this gap as an example of melancholia incorporated within the process of mourning.

While the novel concludes with the compensatory consolation the narrator wishes for in his first pages—"There must be some way to redeem this, some way to believe that the banal heartlessness of [his mother's death] was not for nothing,"—his description, in the novel's penultimate pages, of the childhood photograph his mother blinds resists the claim of completed mourning. Not only does the photograph recall other family photographs whose descriptions were marked by unresolved losses and ambivalence. More particularly, the account of the photograph's blinding returns us to that constellation of images presented earlier—a young boy, empty eyes, a woman with Alzheimer disease. In doing so, it recalls the narrator's claim that his childhood ended when his grandmother's funeral revealed life's fragility. His mother's vehement action echoes the violent terms of that previous epiphany—that fate "could take a life and dismember it" (5)—to direct readers backward in the narrative. Yet while this photograph recalls the narrative's numerous unresolved losses, the narrator's interpretation of his mother's response to it imposes a resolution. In its incongruity, his rationalization of her action

demonstrates the unreasonable demand, modelled in the elegy's insistent linear terminability, that "healthy" mourning reach a timely conclusion.

While the narrator's interpretation supports his willed movement forward and accommodates the novel's compensatory conclusion, the earlier moments it recalls register the incorporated ambivalences of melancholia. Thus this final instance of the trope of the family photograph gestures toward that which "escapes anything you can ever say about [what happens at death] . . . what . . . cannot be redeemed" (Ignatieff 172). Accompanying the conclusion's apparent resolution of mourning, the trope presents melancholia as an inevitable aspect of subjectivity and suggests that the space between mourning and melancholia might be, in fact, a space which combines both.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> In “Biography, Pathography, and the Recovery of Meaning” (*The Cambridge Quarterly* 29.4 [2000]: 409-422), John Wiltshire also reads *Scar Tissue* for the way it exemplifies genre, proposing that it be understood as a fictional version of the sub-genre of biography that he terms “pathography.” He notes its “problematic status—evidently a memoir, but presented as a novel” suggesting that its “fictionalising form seems to function plainly as a defence,” presumably by Ignatieff against “the breakdown of boundaries between self and other [which] is characteristic of the material in illness narratives” (419).

<sup>2</sup> The reader might easily infer from Woodward’s reading of the false opposition Freud apparently establishes between mourning/normal and melancholia/pathological that the opposition also associates terminability with mourning and interminability with melancholia. In fact, Freud puzzles over one of the problems set by melancholia: that while we can explain the time needed for mourning by pointing to the reality-testing which must be carried out, melancholia also “passes off after a certain time has elapsed without leaving traces of any gross changes,” yet we have no “insight into economics” of how this might be achieved (252).

<sup>3</sup> Kenneth Bruffee similarly discusses the losses which make the traditional quest romance untenable in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, citing “an unavoidable fact of modern life—the experience of catastrophic loss and rapid cultural change” (15) and noting the twentieth-century paradox posed by the appeal to heroism as protection against such rapid change in light of the concomitant lack of belief in any authority figures (66).

<sup>4</sup> Besides the obvious difference of length, and of prose rather than poetry, it seems necessary to acknowledge that the narrators and deaths in the novels I read are fictional, while Ramazani’s elegists are responding to specific deaths of real (that is, historically verifiable) individuals.

<sup>5</sup> As Bruffee says, “[t]he underlying problem the narrator faces as the novel begins and the change he undergoes as he attempts to solve it by telling the tale are what distinguish elegiac romance from other works of observer-hero narrative” (28).

<sup>6</sup> In another caution against a simplistic or reductive reading of the traditional elegy, Ramazani worries about the risk of “flattening out the complexities of the literary origin,” noting that “[i]n rejecting the premodern elegy, the modern elegy may really elaborate one set of transhistorical tendencies long embedded in the form.” He points out that if “[t]wentieth-century poets self-consciously depart from generic norms by writing nonconsolatory elegies . . . so too did Johnson by suggesting that he may have killed his son with ‘too much’ love, Shelley by ending *Adonais* with an eroticized vision of annihilation,” and he notes that even such elegies as ‘Lycidas’ “mute their [triumphant] resolutions through deliberately artificial reversals and through vacillations between ‘normal’ and melancholic mourning” (9).

<sup>7</sup> The narrator’s mother typically takes recourse in pictures when words are impossible or unavailable. The narrator remembers that it “was as if her thoughts came too fast to be fixed down in words,” and also notes that his father was merciless about the “trouble [she had] getting her words out” (20). Recognizing her problem, she once asked, “‘Why do you think I paint?’ [and the narrator comments that painting] was her primary language, the one that never failed her” (21).

<sup>8</sup> In the context of an adolescent male yearning as he is for adulthood, it is hard to avoid seeing the gushing beer, particularly with its accompanying yeasty smell of hops, as being at least suggestive of that other adolescent male ritual, the hand job.

<sup>9</sup> In the kitchen together the night after their father died, the older brother recalls checking his father’s heart every time he saw him. The younger recalls, but only to the reader, that “Frankly, I had never cared for those sessions with the stethoscope in Dad’s study, the two of them listening to the deep thudding of his heart” (86). The repressed jealousy is palpable here, as is the suggestive edge to the scene which manages to

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evoke images of the womb—the enclosed space, the deeply-thudding heart inside that space—as much as of an almost sexual union.

<sup>10</sup> Freud uses the terms, “repetition compulsion” or “compulsive repetition” (or more correctly, these terms are translations of the German terms he uses), in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (Trans. & Ed. James Strachey. New York: Norton, 1961), in regards to the problem posed by the dreams of those afflicted with war neuroses which would repeatedly bring the patient back to the situation of the trauma. Freud connects this return to the traumatic situation with the *fort-da* game which his grandson plays, and which allows the child to reconcile himself with his mother's disappearance (and eventual return).

<sup>11</sup> Creekmur claims that photographs are incorporated in the novels he discusses “so that the figures in them can become what they were originally not for most readers: lost loved objects capable of being mourned” (79). Making a point about the ability of the public photograph to provoke a private reading, he notes that the two public images which form the starting points of the novels “are thus made personal or identificatory, stunningly realizing Barthes’s recognition that the ‘reading of public photographs is always, at bottom, a private reading’” (80).

<sup>12</sup> Krieger does note on page 10 that each tendency in the verbal sequence to freeze into shape is matched by a countertendency to free itself. And, of course, the quotation offered above describes exactly that reciprocity. Overall, however, Krieger’s depiction of ekphrasis continually emphasizes its stilling, spatializing effect

<sup>13</sup> I was alerted to this letter from Freud to Ludwig Binswanger, dated April 11, 1929, by Ramazani’s reference to it.

## Chapter Two

Ekphrasis and Memorialization: Speaking Out (Of/Against) the Disciplinary Photograph  
in Thomas King's *Medicine River* and Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*

If Ignatieff's novel demonstrates the photographic trope's function as a dilatory space in which melancholia is incorporated within a work of mourning, Thomas King's *Medicine River* and Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* invite a closer look at this trope as an example of ekphrasis. The movement from visual to verbal representation which occurs as the narrator describes family photographs is crucial to a central concern of both King's and Kogawa's novels: the racialized subjectivity of the narrators and their families within the dominant society. Both novels expose the disciplinary function of the family photograph as the narrators recognize and come to terms with their respective families' attempts to conform to the expectations set out by what we might call the discourse of the family photograph, as well as with the impossibility of their ever meeting its demands. Framed by the camera's lens, these families are seen not only in terms of their visible and racialized differences, but also in their failure to conform to a hegemonic vision which privileges the nuclear family. Theories of ekphrasis are useful in understanding how the protagonists are able to counter the photograph's hegemony—a hegemony aligned with that of the dominant society—while the novels extend or challenge current positions on ekphrasis. In place of the struggle for representation between visual and verbal media that theories of ekphrasis tend to emphasize, these novels demonstrate a collaboration of the media that allows the racialized subject to offer a life story that challenges national narratives and representations of family.

*Medicine River* signals the family photograph's role in constructing and enforcing a hegemonic understanding of family through Will's description of a childhood family portrait.<sup>1</sup> The image testifies to the impossibility of Will's family ever conforming to the dominant society's construction of family. In Will's memory, the photographer draws attention to this impossibility, even before posing begins, by greeting them with an impatient question: "Is the mister going to be coming along soon?" (203). His mother's answer "that there were just the three of us" subtly concedes, in her choice of the adverb "just," that the family falls somewhat short of a desired whole. In fact, not only has Will's father died recently, but the father left when Will and his brother James were too young to have a clear memory of him. Further, by marrying a white man, Will's mother lost her Indian status and had to leave her First Nations community. The result of this loss of Indian status is not just economic. Besides having struggled to support herself and her sons through a series of poorly-rewarded jobs, his mother is caught between the Indian and the white society, not fully included in either.

The family's financial difficulties are not visible in the portrait that shows the boys dressed "up in new blue wool pants and white shirts" (213). Only by reading between the lines of Will's memory of the photographic occasion can we guess at the cost to a poor single mother of trying to create a record of her family that meets the demands made by the discourse of the family photograph. Will remembers his mother making him and his brother take the pants and shirts off as soon as they got home so that she could "put the pants in a box, and [fold] the shirts up real neat, fix[ing] the pins and squeeze[ing] them back in the plastic bags" (213). They never saw these clothes again, but two days later his mother told them "that she had lost her job at the Bay, that there

had been some layoffs or something, but that she was going to start working at Petro-Can, only it was going to be at night” (213). Will never explicitly states that his mother’s job loss is directly related to her having “borrowed” the clothes required for an acceptable family photograph. Still, to an astute reader, this attempt to represent her family—an attempt Will tells his brother is made because “Dad died . . . and Mom wants to get a picture in case something happens to us”—results in her taking a position which will surely make it even more difficult to conform to the demands signaled by such representations.

Family photograph albums consistently construct and represent families as happy. At the same time, as Annette Kuhn remarks, “the family as it is represented in family albums is characteristically produced as innocent of such material consideration [as cost of clothes, upbringing of children], above price: to this extent, the family album constructs the world of the family as a utopia” (48). Thus, as Will remembers of the occasion when his childhood family portrait was taken, “[t]he photographer kept telling us to smile, and James and me did our best.” However, as Will continues, “I don’t guess Mom ever smiled. At least the portrait we got had her staring at the camera, her face set, her eyes flat” (213). This flat stare and lack of a smile are clearly problematic in a culture and a discourse which “constructs the world of the family as a utopia” and expects that utopia to be reflected by smiling faces.

Nevertheless, an adult Will displays a more culturally sensitive reading of the portrait thanks to his friend Harlen’s response to it. Despite Will’s claims that he and James were trying their best to smile, Harlen observes that the brothers “look like someone sprayed you up and down with starch” and that “Nobody [is] smiling”;

however, he goes on to affirm that “Pictures of the family are good things to have” (215). By affirming the worth of a photographic record of the family, Harlen frames the portrait as a valuable gift from Will’s mother to her sons and implies her foresight in arranging such a record for them. Harlen’s appreciation anticipates Will’s eventual re-interpretation of the portrait as he photographs his new community. Creating a community portrait, Will recognizes on an elder’s face “the same flat expression that my mother had, as though she could see something farther on and out of sight” (216). Rather than reading his mother’s expression as deficient, as lacking the important requisite smile, he learns to read it as a sign of enhanced vision, a vision defying the limitations of the camera.<sup>2</sup>

That family photographs function normatively, posing families in ways that reflect social expectations, is demonstrated by Will’s memory of the photographer’s directives: he “had my mother sit on an old piano stool. James and me stood on either side of her with our hands on her shoulders” (203). Further, he exhorted the brothers to “get in tight to your mother [saying] You love your mother, don’t you?” (203), and continued to prod them to “wet [their] lips or to smile or to look at the camera” (204). The normative function of the family portrait is also suggested by the silver frame and conventional, even bourgeois, placement above the piano of a portrait described by Naomi, the protagonist of *Obasan*. While the piano’s presence in her aunt’s home is deceptive (any suggestion of the bourgeoisie belied by the frugality of other furnishings), it is continuous not only with the comfort and culture the family enjoyed in Canada before the war, but also with their position as part of the educated and cultured class in Japan. Thus the silver frame and its position on the piano attribute an intentionality to the portrait to legitimize the family’s position in Canadian society. These two elements—the

frame and the position of the family portrait in *Obasan* are in stark contrast to the display of the portrait that arrives at Will's home by mail and that his mother sticks up with four thumbtacks on the kitchen wall where "[i]t stayed . . . until the paper began to curl up and the colours started to fade" (204). Will and Naomi might share a racialized and thus minoritized subjectivity, but their early childhoods were significantly different in both the apparent cohesiveness of Naomi's family and in her family's relatively comfortable financial situation.

The gap between the two families' situations is quickly minimized, however, as any domestic and financial security suggested by the pose and the exhibition of Naomi's portrait is quickly undermined by the manner of its introduction: in response to her *Obasan*'s grief-heavy repetition of the phrase "Too old," Naomi imagines her Grandma Nakane saying "much the same thing those dark days in 1942, as she rocked in her stall at the Vancouver Hastings Park prison" a victim, though "too old then to understand [of] political expediency, race riots, the yellow peril" (17). It is from this memory that Naomi turns to "[o]ne of the few pictures we have of Grandma Nakane . . . the silver-framed family photograph hanging above the piano" (17). Naomi's associations make the photograph as much a marker of the difference between before and after the internment of Japanese-Canadians as a representation of the family's apparent one-time assimilation into Canadian society.

If the family portraits in the two novels are marked by obvious differences, they are also united in signalling the difficulties and traumas that have shaped the narrators' racialized subjectivities. These difficulties compromise the narrators' own, as well as their families', attempts to conform to the demands of the dominant society and also

impose fractures within their ethnic communities. The absent presence of Will's father in the family portrait, for example, signals the power of the white patriarchy and dominant society to define identity in such a way that Will is at once defined as "Indian" and deprived of his right to live on a reserve because his mother has married a white man.<sup>3</sup> As a result of Canada's Indian Act, Will grows up estranged from his community. Despite having been born in Canada, Naomi is similarly denied an identity as Canadian, and becomes estranged from her once closely knit family as some are trapped in Japan during the war, while the rest are placed in internment camps.

Through their efforts to describe and interpret their respective family portraits, the narrators begin to renegotiate their subjectivity both within their own community and within the dominant society. Considering these descriptions of photographs as examples of ekphrasis foregrounds their emphasis on representation, crucially significant to the negotiation of subjectivity and intersubjectivity. As well as highlighting the importance of representation in these descriptions, reading the trope of the family photograph through theories of ekphrasis revises our understanding of ekphrasis. While Heffernan argues that this rhetorical figure stages a contestation for representation between the visual and the verbal, the ekphrastic trope of the family photograph in *Medicine River* and *Obasan* demonstrates a collaboration of the two media.

Heffernan defines ekphrasis as "the verbal representation of visual representation" (3). Through this doubling, ekphrasis "explicitly represents representation itself" (Heffernan 4). As an example of ekphrasis, then, the repeated trope of the family photograph accentuates representation. Reading the trope this way productively illustrates the narrators' attempts to write their way into a discourse which establishes them as

primarily “different.” Consider, for example, the frustrations of Will as he responds to a non-native’s comments on the irony of his “being a photographer” given “the way Indians feel about photographs” (229). Such comments signal the representation of “Indian” which so often precedes Will, and against which he must attempt to write and photograph himself and his community.<sup>4</sup> Although these comments are not themselves part of an ekphrastic passage, they contextualize the novel’s examples of ekphrasis. In both *Medicine River* and *Obasan*, these examples challenge problematic representations of racialized subjects within national narratives.

The ekphrasis performed in the trope of the family photograph accentuates these novels’ attention to representation. Further, the novels themselves challenge or extend Heffernan’s understanding of ekphrasis, a figure that “evokes the power of the silent image even as it subjects that power to the rival authority of language” (1).<sup>5</sup> Certainly, the power of a silent image is not only evoked in the family photographs, but is also intensified by the association of the photos with the deceased parents. (Death, the ultimate power, and a power often associated with silence, is yoked here to the authority of the parent.) The narrators use the rival power of verbal language to contend with that silent, visual authority of the image. However, the photographic trope in these novels also, and perhaps more insistently, features the narrators moving back and forth between the verbal and the visual, forming a compelling imbrication of the two. It is in thus “plac[ing] family photographs into narrative contexts,” that “meta-photographic texts,” according to Marianne Hirsch, perform a “work of contestation” (8). In Hirsch’s study, this contestation is directed against the familial myths perpetuated by the family photograph. In *Obasan* and *Medicine River*, it is directed not only against the familial

myths such photographs represent, but also against the hegemonic representations of family which tend to marginalize difference.

Heffernan's understanding of ekphrasis as a contest for representation relies heavily on the gendered nature of the struggle it stages: "a duel between male and female gazes, the voice of male speech striving to control a female image that is both alluring and threatening" (1). This is a provocative theory, and compelling when considered against the examples Heffernan offers, but the focus on gender is at the expense of race/ethnicity, an aspect of subjectivity at least as important as gender in these novels.<sup>6</sup> In describing the struggle staged by ekphrasis through a figuration of image and speech as dueling, Heffernan inevitably personifies both. While gaze, image, voice, and speech may certainly exceed the body, they nevertheless strongly connote embodiment. Yet, curiously, this personifying and embodying description elides the physical body of the practitioner of ekphrasis; consequently, it also elides the inevitability of that body being image as much as either gaze or voice.

More precisely, Heffernan's description does not so much elide the practitioner's body as assume its alignment with that of male speech, which is itself aligned with the phallic position. However, neither Naomi in *Obasan* nor Will in *Medicine River* can achieve or maintain an untroubled identification with such a position. Rather, both narrators, particularly in their racialized visible minority positions, are as much image as they are word/speech.<sup>7</sup> This is perhaps best exemplified by a photograph Naomi describes in *Obasan* which shows her childhood self clinging to her mother's leg, mortified by the attention of a small boy's stare. Her Japanese-raised relatives have taught her that "in the language of eyes a stare is an invasion and a reproach" (47). Clearly, although Naomi,

gives voice to language, albeit in written rather than spoken form, as she narrates the memory evoked by this photograph, she is also inescapably image.

Besides introducing the complication of the narrators' racialized subjectivity, the ekphrastic family photograph in these novels problematizes any easy identification of the narrator with male speech in another way: the image it offers is not that of a work of art toward which the writer or speaker might take an objective stance; rather, the image, either of the narrator or of a close family member, is one with which she or he must identify to some degree. Both word and image, then, have claims on the narrator. Thus, while Heffernan's reading of ekphrasis illuminates the function of the novels' photographic trope in emphasizing representation, my reading here, following Hirsch, focuses on "the collaboration and the interdependence of the visual and the verbal" (Hirsch 271). Moving between these two theories, I see the ekphrasis in these novels as demonstrating a complex imbrication of the visual and verbal which works to contest a "hegemonic familial Ideology" (Hirsch 8), particularly as the familial ideology affects constructions of national (Canadian) identity.

The ekphrastic trope in these novels demonstrates the "collaboration and . . . interdependence of the visual and the verbal" that narrativizes in challenging ways the familial myths perpetuated by family photographs while, at the same time, the photographs themselves "disrupt a familiar narrative about family life and its representations" (Hirsch 8). They do so, as Hirsch suggests, because they "locate themselves precisely in the space of contradiction between the myth of the ideal family and the lived reality of family life" (8). But what is particularly significant is Hirsch's argument that they can *only* do so "in the context of this meta-photographic textuality and

in this self-conscious contextuality” (8). Hirsch is insisting, in other words, that photographic images have the power to “break[] the hold of a conventional and monolithic familial gaze” only as they are described in words which place them in context (8); words and images, then, must work together rather than against each other.

In the meta-photographic passage from *Obasan* that refers to Grandma Nakane and her internment, for example, the photograph both represents the myth of the ideal family and operates as a site for contestation by other narratives. The passage foregrounds issues of representation, although it does not do so, as is the case with Heffernan’s classical examples of ekphrasis, by questioning the relative claims to representation of verbal or visual artistry. Rather, this example of ekphrasis exposes the hegemonic construction and representation of family that demand racialized subjects conform to its standards, while, at the same time, exposing their difference. This ekphrastic passage reminds Naomi and the readers that, even though the portrait shows the family to be assimilated into Canadian society, they were subsequently denied the rights that should protect Canadian citizens.

This photograph, sitting on the piano in its silver frame, offers a pose recognizable from many family albums, that of an extended family at the christening of a first grandchild, a pose asserting the family’s place within a Western Christian family discourse. Yet membership in this discourse has come at substantial cost, as Naomi’s description of the grandparents’ affiliation with the Judeo-Christian tradition shows that they became Other to her. Describing a neighbour’s visit, Naomi finds herself “donning [the neighbour’s] restless eyes like a pair of trick glasses” so that she cannot help but see her aunt’s living room through eyes that defamiliarize it, exposing its difference from the

norm of small-town prairie decorating (222). Although Naomi's childhood memories of Grandma Nakane's "plump hands" and "soft lap" testify to other gentler ways of knowing, the prevailing visual epistemology defamiliarizes the family once again, forcing Naomi to view her loved ones through a lens that renders them alien (18). By focusing on her maternal grandfather's short stature that causes the toes of his boots to "angle down like a ballet dancer's" (17), this epistemology turns him from a dignified family patriarch into a comic figure. Her grandmother is described no more sympathetically, with a rather unkind emphasis on her "nostrils wide in her startled bony face" (17). Most telling, however, is Naomi's description of her grandparents' collective pose as "look[ing] straight ahead, carved and rigid, with their expressionless Japanese faces and their bodies pasted over with *Rule Britannia*" (18).

This insistence on the "expressionless" condition of Japanese faces contradicts the claim that Grandma Kato's face appears startled. Combined with the implication that her grandparents have deceptively hidden their Japanese selves behind a façade of loyalty to Britain, this contradiction alerts the reader to Naomi's use of military metaphors. She speaks of her grandparents seated "like an advance guard" forming "a brigade" and of Grandpa Nakane with his "hand, like Napoleon's, in his vest" (17-18). The simultaneous militarizing and belittling of her description has an effect similar to that of the game her brother Stephen was once thoughtlessly given at Christmas, a Made in Canada game called *Yellow Peril*, which depicted the Japanese enemy as yellow, weak, and small (152). Naomi's ekphrasis reveals the constant presence in her life of "trick lenses" by which she aligns herself—or perhaps, more accurately, is aligned—with the dominant gaze even while she studies images of those with whom she must identify intimately.

Nevertheless, as Naomi gazes at the photograph, she allows her postmemory—the term Hirsch uses for the memory of the child of survivors “distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection” (22)—to inform her description.<sup>8</sup> Her narration of Grandpa Nakane’s immigration to Canada not only aligns her subjectivity with his, but also forces the reader to shift from the dominant viewpoint to one imaginatively linked with this man who “left his familiar island [to] bec[o]me a stranger, sailing toward an island of strangers” (18). At the same time, it confronts the reader with the continual presence of Naomi’s family in Canada since 1893, the year of her grandfather’s arrival, half a century before their internment during the Second World War. Thus, as the image challenges received representations of family by offering “Japanese” faces in a conventional North American pose, the words contextualizing this representation extend the challenge by showing that the grandparents have spent more of their life in Canada than in Japan.

The same transformation is performed through the narrative that opens the visual representation of a young Obasan, Naomi’s aunt, and Uncle Isamu to reveal the pain they suffered as both their children were born dead. This time, Naomi tells their story before describing the image, so that when she finally directs us to the photographic representation she makes us see “an exquisite tenderness in Obasan’s slanted eyes,” a “smile more sad than demure,” thus acknowledging and contesting the dominant view that sees only the slant of the eyes, and that must see the Japanese female smile as demure (19).

Still, Naomi does not simply alert us to the cultural screen—the trick glasses—that inflects our perception of the photographs. She also challenges their documentary

value by noting that, although Aunt Emily never appears without glasses, she wears none in the portrait. While the photographic occasion, years before Naomi's own birth, might predate Emily's need for glasses, a more likely explanation is that her glasses were removed at the photographer's suggestion to provide a "more attractive" female image. Even more intervention was required for Mother's face as her eyes, according to Obasan, "were sketched in by the photographer because she was always blinking when pictures were being taken" (19). Significantly, both interventions serve to control not only the look of the photograph, but also the "look" of the photographed.

Naomi's awareness of the photograph's deceptions leads her to meditate on the nostalgia this portrait regularly triggers in Obasan for "Such a time [as] there was once"; as she comments, her maternal grandparents seem satisfied with the camera's "message for the day that all is well" (20). While pointing directly at the camera's participation in the discursive production of the "happy family," she also recognizes her family's complicity with that production. Reviewing what she has heard of Grandma Kato's many visits to Japan, accompanied always by only one daughter, Naomi's Mother, while her husband and other daughter were left behind, Naomi wonders "if the Katos were ever really a happy family" (20). Yet Aunt Emily, the daughter left behind, strenuously denies any suggestion that the families might have been fragmented, insisting on the wartime internment as the only cause of the family's fracture. Here Naomi alludes to the complicated struggle for representation that invariably exists within families: who can speak for this small and intimately connected community, marked so clearly by hierarchy? At the same time, she suggests that this struggle is further complicated in the case of a family that has been racially minoritized by the dominant society. For Aunt

Emily, any hint of prior dissension within the family seems to weaken the case against the federal government.

While the camera offers evidence of the Nakanes and the Katos together as the original “togetherness people,” Naomi adds that the families were knit together by her parents, and that their marriage—“the first non-arranged . . . in the community”—was originally opposed by Grandpa Kato “until his frail daughter became ill” (20). She goes on to note, provocatively if subtly, that the child, Stephen, whose christening the photograph celebrates, was born prematurely. If his beginnings caused dissension, his birth led to “all the picnics at Kitsilano, and the concerts at Stanley Park. And the Christmas concert,” at which Stephen sang (all Kodak moments, surely) (20). But the photograph’s very genre suggests another, more distant, future to which the birth should also have led. When Naomi comments that “Some families grow on and on through the centuries, hardy and visible and procreative,” she is reflecting on the implicit promise of a family portrait which poses three generations at the birth of a first grandson. Immediately, she counters this master-narrative from her own postmemory, saying that “Others disappear from the earth without a whimper” (21). While phrased as a generalization, Naomi’s statement refers indirectly to the dispersal her own family suffered through internment and relocation, and, more specifically, to the disappearance of her mother, a disappearance associated with silence because of the surviving family’s desire to protect the children from knowledge of its horrific cause.

Naomi’s opposition of the visibility of the procreative families with the voicelessness of those who disappear recalls Heffernan’s word-image dichotomy, which pairs image with silence. But Naomi’s formulation of hardy, visible, procreative families

contrasted with non-whimpering, disappearing “Others” is curiously asymmetrical: although she has described her family as visible in its racial difference, its voicelessness now somehow erases this visibility.<sup>9</sup> Further, the silence of the disappearing implicitly attributes voice as well as visibility to the successful, dominant families. As Naomi attempts to claim a voice through her narrative, she is also restoring her family’s visibility, and insisting that they be seen as well as heard. Word and image, voice and visibility are thus exhorted to work cooperatively to contest a hegemonic familial ideology, rather than simply struggle against each other for representation.

It is Naomi’s narration that negotiates the many implications of the photograph, further evidence for Heffernan’s model of word finally mastering image. Yet the novel’s structure belies such mastery: if the image has been mastered, surely it should yield to the word; however, not only does ekphrasis of a photograph recur throughout, but this particular photograph appears again, suggesting that the word does not, indeed, master or vanquish the image. Moreover, it is only at this later appearance that the reader discovers that, besides offering Naomi an image of her family, the portrait also functions as a reminder of the moment she finally accepted the death of her father. She details an earlier interpretation, for a schoolmate, of the christening portrait and recalls the girl’s comment that the man Naomi points out as her father does not look like him. Realizing that the girl, Penny, has always assumed that Uncle Isamu is her father, Naomi calmly replies, “My father’s dead” (211).

Yet the gap between the knowledge she has previously held in silence and the sensation of “actually hear[ing] myself talking” yields “a strange shock as if I am telling a monstrous lie” (209). She “find[s] [her]self collapsed on the sofa with a sharp pain in

[her] abdomen and a cold perspiration forming on [her] forehead” (211). The repressed knowledge which suddenly assaults her, the suggestion of the uncanny in the “strange shock” point to the complications which the unconscious poses to representation, complications which suggest the inexhaustibility of the image, the ultimately unmasterable gap between image and word. Certainly, through its association with the other “few framed photographs on the kitchen sideboard,” the second appearance of the christening portrait tells us more about the death of Grandpa Nakane, and the disappearance of Mother and Grandma Kato. But, at the same time, the repetition of this image makes clear that words may never be able to completely capture or express all that this image holds.

Beyond suggesting the impossibility that words might ever exhaust the image, the recurrence of the christening portrait emphasizes a tension between spoken and unspoken words. Whereas ekphrasis generally poses the image as silent and words as capable of envoicing that silent image, Naomi’s announcement that the father pictured in the portrait is dead suggests an opposition between words spoken and words unspoken, the possibility that words can also be silent. After all, it is not the knowledge that her father is dead that gives Naomi a “strange shock,” but rather the experience of “actually *hear*[ing] [her]self talking” (209, my italics). Further, although Naomi knows she is speaking the truth, the shock which accompanies this move from silenced to spoken words makes her feel “as if [she is] telling a monstrous lie” (209). Besides emphasizing the inexhaustibility of an image’s possible interpretations, then, this recurrence of the portrait also suggests that words can be deceitful. It offers a nuanced view of words, a view that might both

complicate and inform the struggle between the verbal and the visual that ekphrasis represents.

This nuanced view is supported in both *Obasan* and *Medicine River* by the treatment of numerous written artifacts. Letters, diaries, and other written documents in these novels materialize words; collectively, they signify the verbal as much as they do any specific content. These documents are sought out and scrutinized alongside the photographs; juxtaposed this way, the written material and the photographs—the verbal and the visual—signal representation without any sense of one finally mastering the other. Instead, they seem to work in tandem, exposing the gap between what the dominant culture expects of a family and what these two families experience; moreover, they tie that gap to injustices imposed by this dominant culture.

In both novels, words are associated with silence in a manner that challenges the dichotomy Heffernan and most theorists of ekphrasis generally subscribe to. While the passages describing letters, diaries, and other written documents are not themselves ekphrastic, they inflect ekphrastic passages by suggesting that words can be as silenced as images can. In fact, both novels present words *as* images. In *Medicine River*, for example, the letters from Will's father that punctuate the novel mimic snapshots mounted in an album through their size, shape, and indentation from the main text. Similarly, the “[e]xcerpt from the memorandum sent by the co-operative committee on Japanese Canadians to the House and the Senate of Canada, April 1946,” which is appended to *Obasan*, arguably also signals through visibility—its formal layout and its separation from the text proper. As well, Naomi's characterization of her aunt's words as “like

scratchings in the barnyard. . . . those little black typewritten words” clearly establishes writing as image (189).

Certainly, whether or not words can be linked to images by their shared visuality, these novels demonstrate that words can be as silent as images; if, as a recurring trope, ekphrasis performs the envoicing of a silent image, giving voice to silenced words is also a crucial concern of *Medicine River* and *Obasan*. In fact, while both narratives are supported and interrupted by the ekphrastic descriptions of family photographs, they are also centrally structured by the unveiling and narrativization of what is revealed in letters long held secret within the respective families. And, in both cases, this secrecy, this silence, is marked by negotiation with the same hegemonic understanding of family that marks the family photographs.

*Medicine River*, for example, begins with an excerpt from a letter. The reader gradually recognizes this excerpt, and others that follow, as an extract from a package of letters Harlen gives Will, identifying them as letters from Will’s father to his mother. Harlen traces the path of the letters from their storage at Granny Pete’s house to Wilma Whiteman’s, and from there to Louie Frank’s wife’s girl, Edith, who “gave them to Bertha over at the centre, and Bertha gave them to Big John, and Big John gave them to me” (3). The carnivalesque fluidity that describes the movement of the letters is later recalled in the portrait-taking session by the river. At this point, however, this circulation provides an ironic commentary on Will’s memory of the letters: while they have now been widely shared through the First Nations community to which Will has returned, and have certainly been read by some—Harlen comments that Will’s father “wrote a good

letter [and that] Bertha said they made her cry” (10)—Will was forbidden, as a boy, to read the letters and they were locked in a chest to protect them from his curiosity.

That the letters, together with a number of photographs, were locked away from Will, and that he was severely chastised for once breaching his mother’s privacy, points to two important overlapping concerns of the novel. One is his mother’s (and thus Will and his brother’s) legally-mandated exclusion from the First Nations community of her heritage. Perhaps because of shame and anger at the failed marriage that caused this exclusion, Will’s mother tells him very little about his father. Hence the second concern the letters point toward: not only Will’s interest in his father’s identity, but the implications that that identity has for his own subjectivity. In the absence of a father, how might Will assume subjectivity either within the First Nations community to which he returns or within the dominant society?

Throughout the novel, excerpts from the letters allow the story of Will’s father’s abandonment of his family to emerge in his voice. His story is contrapuntal to Will’s narrative, yet the two male voices are also subtly aligned through their use of words. As well, since all the letters are from Will’s father, they emphasize insistently, perhaps overdeterminedly, the gendering of the word as male, while the photographs with which they are stored are of his mother and her family, and so operate as exemplary female images. In fact, reading Will as forming part of a triangle between the male-gendered word of the father-identified letters and the female-gendered images of the mother-associated photographs allows an exploration of the difficulties Will’s racialized status poses to his negotiation of subjectivity. This triangular positioning suggests the Oedipal complex that figures so importantly in both Freudian and Lacanian accounts of

subjectivity. Yet attempting to use such models to account for Will's subjectivity shows both the inadequacy of these models to account for an intersection of race and gender and the particular difficulties posed by this crisis for one who must renounce, along with his mother, the First Nations heritage that nevertheless visibly marks his inability to identify with his white father.<sup>10</sup>

An Oedipal reading is supported by Will's actions in reading the letters after illicitly opening his mother's locked chest, an act that echoes the forbidden trespass of the Oedipal complex, a trespass whose boundaries are enforced by the threat of castration. But the obvious analogies to the Oedipal complex become more difficult to sustain even as Will is caught violating his mother's "box." This too-suggestive reference is immediately complicated by Will's desire to read the letters which represent his father. The threat of punishment that accompanies his violation is made not by his father but by his mother, who answers Will's challenge to her privacy with "Do I have to burn them before you'll leave my things alone? Is that what I have to do?" (7).

For Will, the threat of punishment (figuring the Oedipal castration) is not accompanied by any compensatory promise of eventually occupying the father's position. The letters, after all, represent the father's absence, as much as they do his male word, and Will has never known a father with whom he might identify. Even more than his father's absence, however, his father's whiteness has also robbed Will of other male figures from the aboriginal side of his family with whom to identify, and it has done so through Canadian law. As readers, we come to this recognition gradually through the movement an adult Will makes between the letters he reads and the photographs he recalls finding with them in his mother's locked chest so many years earlier.

The photographs offer Will both promise and frustration.<sup>11</sup> In his description of the many images “of groups of men and women standing against the prairie and the sky,” the men “tall and dark in white shirts and cowboy hats” and the women in “long dresses,” the reader recognizes a record of genealogy similar to that held in many family albums. Young Will, however, only notes that his mother is in most of the pictures, and recognizes the pictures of “George Harley on a horse”; otherwise, he comments, “I didn’t know who the rest of the people were, I supposed they were family.”<sup>12</sup> The gap between his description of the photograph “of an old man with braids sitting in a straight-backed chair on the edge of a coulee” and his remark that “[y]ears later, Granny Pete showed me a picture of the same man and said he was my grandfather” laconically but powerfully suggests the intervening years in which this knowledge was denied to him.

This denial of knowledge is dramatized in Will’s mother’s response to his contravention of her privacy. Finding her son reading the letters from her ex-husband, she slaps him, something she has never done before, and insists on her right to keep them private while Will argues that he and his brother have an equal right to them. The scene is an intensely emotional one; Will remembers his mother “on her knees, crying and trying to gather up the letters”(6). The next day, acquiescing to her demand for privacy, Will nevertheless signals his defiance of her authority by once again going into the chest, this time to tape the letters to its bottom.

If an analogy to the Oedipal complex is to be sustained, this accepted curtailment of his desires (however grudgingly given) should be compensated by Will’s identification with his father. By juxtaposing the memory of the forbidden letters with the memory of recognizing his exile from the reserve, the novel ironically suggests that the state has

indeed imposed such an identification, although it appears more punitive than compensatory: after Will's father's death, a cousin tells him that Will and his brother can not move back to the reserve because they are "not Indian any more" since their "mother married a white" (9). When Will tries to argue the point, the cousin agrees that Will and James can visit whenever they want, but they "can't stay. It's the law" (9). After years growing up in Calgary where "none of my mother's brothers ever came by" and the boys only knew about the rest of the family through Granny Pete, Will must continue to remain at a distance from the uncles he finally meets, the uncles who affirm him as "the man of the house" (8). Rather than offering him the possibility of modeling this putative manhood on one of these uncles, the law declares Will to be "not Indian." While he asserts that it "wasn't so much the law as it was pride" that kept his mother off the reserve, the move between the two memories connects the double losses Will experiences—first that of his father, and then the loss of his family's Indian identity—thus suggesting the inadequacy of any model of subjectivity that fails to consider race as well as gender.

With his white father absent early in his life and distanced by law from his First Nations relatives, Will's access to possible models of adult masculinity is further curtailed by the shame his mother apparently holds toward her marriage, a shame indirectly alluded to in Will's assertion that "it wasn't so much the law as it was pride" that kept his mother off the reserve (9). This shame, accompanied perhaps by anger and hurt, is suggested in the strength of her response to Will's transgression of her privacy. Will learns years later than his Granny Pete was unhappy about the marriage, and this unhappiness seems to be related to his father's whiteness—at least, Granny is annoyed

that George Harley, a “[d]amn bottle Indian” knew no better than “to show off his relations to whites” (8). But this shame and its possible relation to his mother marrying a white man and losing her status is never directly discussed; in fact, whenever Will tries to find out more about his father, his mother evades or denies his curiosity.

Consequently, as an adult, Will finds himself fabricating identities for, and narratives about, his father to complete strangers, particularly on airplanes, but the stories stop after his mother sends him a photograph of his father for his twenty-seventh birthday. This photograph arrives with a letter in which Will’s mother points out which man in a group of four is Will’s father: “‘That’s him,’ the letter said, as if knowing was an important thing for me to have” (87). As I discuss in my chapter on Findley’s *The Piano Man’s Daughter*, this sentence’s peculiar syntax highlights its epistemological emphasis; while in that chapter I am concerned with the role of the photographs in the epistemology of family secrets, here I would like to stress the collaboration between photograph and letter. Not only does the mother’s letter offer information that helps make sense of the photograph, but the photograph itself is marked by an imagistic form of writing: “My mother had drawn a circle around him with an arrow pointing at the side of his head” (86).

What is further significant about this collaboration of image and word is how little information either offers. In the photograph, Will’s father is virtually indistinguishable from the other three men, wearing, as he does “a pair of jeans, a work shirt and a hat that was pulled down over much of his face.” The accompanying letter is equally reticent, adding to its birthday greetings the words “Found this picture. Third from the right. That’s him” (86). But Will reads beyond the words “That’s him” to imagine his mother’s

motivation, her recognition that “knowing was an important thing for me to have” (87).

Through Will, King provides the reader an example of how to read the gaps between a chapter in which the mother denies Will the information and a later one in which she sends him a photograph of his father. Doing so, we can perhaps agree with Harlen that the packet of letters that have reached Will so circuitously after so many years must also have been intended for him; despite her early shame and anger, Will’s mother, Harlen says, “must have kept them for you and James” (10).

In their imagined attribution of motivation to Will’s mother, Will and Harlen show a sensitivity to the communicative possibilities of silence; at the same time, as I suggest above, they model a way of reading, listening, and looking that pays attention to that which is not articulated. This sensitivity is matched by their own tendency throughout to address issues indirectly. At one point, in fact, Will calls this trope of indirection “Harlen’s trick of strolling around a topic,” not recognizing, apparently, that his own epistemology as it is informed by his family also develops through this trope (155). Yet his narrativization of this epistemology requires the reader to see the connections between stories that initially appear disparate. Though those connections are almost never explicitly stated, they often make important points. Will never explains, for example, what his memories of Mrs. Oswald have to do with the story of Jake and January Pretty Weasel, but this juxtaposition suggests that domestic violence is not only a problem of native communities. *Medicine River* never explicitly presents this indirect approach as a native cultural tendency. Instead, it encourages the reader to speculate about differing cultural epistemologies while it models the power of the unsaid to communicate effectively.

Letters, silence, words, and images are equally imbricated in *Obasan*. For example, the memories of family togetherness triggered for Naomi by the family portrait are interrupted by her recollection that “[a]fter that—there was the worrying letter from Grandma Kato’s mother in Japan—and there were all the things that happened around that time. All the things. . . .”(20-21, ellipsis in original). As so often happens in this novel, the reference to the letter, a verbal representation, delivers the reader to elliptical silences and vague phrases that circle around painful knowledge.<sup>13</sup> Words alone are inadequate to convey the betrayals this family experienced, but Naomi relies on metaphors to describe the blanket the family was once knit into as deteriorating into “no more than a few tangled skeins—the remains of what might once have been a fisherman’s net” (21). The memories that remain for her become “[f]ish swimming through the gaps in the net” (21).

Naomi does not rely on words alone to more fully contextualize the family portrait, to attribute directly to government injustice the family’s descent from togetherness to internment to dispersal. Rather, she juxtaposes images and words, moving from the family portrait to the memories it generates and then to the letter from Grandma Kato. Next she comments, obliquely enough that the reader must make the connection to systemic racism, that “Aunt Emily, after graduating at the top of her class in Normal School, was unable to get a teaching position,” while Naomi’s father, a university student when the picture was taken, later “helped Uncle, designing and building boats” (21). From these memories, she turns back to the visual, remembering a snapshot which shows her uncle and her father standing beside “an exquisitely detailed craft” designed by her father, and executed “over many years and winter evenings” (21). This visual memory is

juxtaposed with the words of the RCMP officer who saw it in 1941, words “shouted as he sliced back through the wake” (21). The words, “What a beauty!,” indicate only the officer’s appreciation of the craft; the reader must fill in the gap between the officer’s appreciation and the boat’s disappearance, for Naomi does not use words to directly accuse the policeman of government-sanctioned theft. Instead, she acknowledges the “whirlpool of protective silence” that “drown[s]” her memories, a silence through which both words and images are filtered (21).

An even more direct juxtaposition of words and image is seen in the identification card Naomi and Obasan find as they “search[] through bundles of old letters and papers” in Obasan’s attic (24). The card offers the “uncle’s face, young and unsmiling in the bottom right-hand corner, Isamu Nakane #00556. Beside the picture is a signature that looks like ‘McGibbons’—Inspector, RCMP” (24). Again, Naomi refuses to comment directly on the implications of an identity card required by Japanese-Canadians, or on the role of the RCMP in enforcing such a requirement; instead, she relies on her reader to interpret her silence. Her silence adheres to cultural guidelines that Aunt Emily vehemently challenges. Frustrated with her family’s preference for silence, Emily exhorts action through words directly. Indeed, Naomi, confronted with a hardcover diary of the war years entrusted to her by her aunt, calls Emily “a word warrior” (32). But even Emily, with her faith in the efficacy of words, is conscious of their potential for deceit.

For example, Naomi remembers Emily’s excitement after a conference, from which she returned brandishing a pamphlet containing facsimiles of various government documents endorsing the wartime treatment of Japanese Canadians. In Naomi’s recollection, “[w]herever the words ‘Japanese race’ appeared, Aunt Emily had crossed

them out and written ‘Canadian citizen,’” thus pointing out the elision which accommodated such injustice (33). Aunt Emily continued to point out the government’s deceitful use of language by telling Naomi of a conference paper by “a man who was looking for the source of the problem in the use of language. You know those prisons they sent us to? The government called them ‘Interior Housing Projects’! With language like that you can disguise any crime” (34).

Finally, however, Aunt Emily both acknowledges the contingency of verbal representation and defends her own use of language when she notes that “[s]ome people . . . are so busy seeing all sides of every issue that they neutralize concern and prevent necessary action. There’s no strength in seeing all sides unless you can act where real measurable injustice exists. A lot of academic talk just immobilizes the oppressed and maintains oppressors in their positions of power” (35). Thus, despite her skepticism about the limitations of language, Emily echoes Habakkuk’s exhortation to “[w]rite the vision and make it plain” (31). Like Habakkuk, her task is to record the injustices perpetrated upon her people, to rely on others to carry on this witnessing and act on it. Here again, therefore, image and written word take parallel rather than oppositional positions, both similarly dependent on future interpretation and action.

While the word “ekphrasis” denotes a rhetorical figure, its literal translation from Greek means simply speaking out. Reading written words and images as similarly dependent on future interpretation and action allows us to transcend an understanding of the term as the “verbal representation of a visual representation” and to see it instead as representing a speaking out against the hegemonic coercion to silence (as well as an understanding of silence as speaking out). Further evidence of words as being, with

images, needful of ekphrasis is found in Naomi's comment that "[a]ll of Aunt Emily's words, all her papers, the telegrams and petitions, are like scratchings in the barnyard. . . . But what good they do, I do not know—those little black typewritten words. . . . The words are not made flesh" (189).

For Naomi, of course, the flesh that she is yearning for these words to deliver is that of her mother; as she says when the words of her grandmother's long-silent letters are finally spoken out by Nakayama-Sensei, "for a child there is no presence without flesh" (243). She acknowledges, however, that "perhaps it is because I am no longer a child [that] I can know your presence though you are not here" (243). If her mother's and grandmother's letters "are skeletons. Bones only," "the earth still stirs with dormant blooms" (243). Envoicing the letters, speaking out their silent words, may not have made them flesh, but has nevertheless released their regenerative potential.

In *Obasan*, then, as in *Medicine River*, letters figure words as silent partners to images, dependent on someone to "speak them out," rather than simply an oppositional form of representation. By placing more strictly ekphrastic passages within such a context, both novels suggest a more nuanced reading of ekphrasis than a dichotomized struggle between modes of representation, a vying for mastery between image and word. Instead, they focus on a racialized subject whose identification is as much with image as with word, a subject motivated by a desire to contest hegemonic representations of family and subjectivity, to speak out through both image and word.

Yet if *Medicine River*'s and *Obasan*'s movement between image and written word can expand Heffernan's model of ekphrasis as a dichotomized struggle, his reading that ekphrasis highlights representation proves most productive in understanding the

exigencies of representation in both novels. Where, for example, Heffernan poses a single poet describing the work of a single visual artist, multiple perspectives dominate the figure of ekphrasis as it appears in *Obasan*; the mastery Heffernan attributes to ekphrasis is here replaced by a multiplicity that interchanges one point-of-view with another as Naomi first describes the portrait from the dominant viewing position, then adopts the stance of the racialized subjects it purports to represent, and then questions even the validity of the stories these subjects, her family, have told.

Even more than in Naomi's description of the christening portrait in *Obasan*, multiplicity is an integral aspect of the ekphrasis performed in *Medicine River*. In the most obvious manifestation of multiplicity, Will narrativizes two family portraits, rather than only one, thus disrupting the symmetry of Heffernan's model—one poet and one visual artist. Further, the ekphrasis of the portraits extends and accentuates this multiplicity as a central aspect of the ethics representation raises. The portraits comprise the formal studio portrait of Will, his mother, and his brother—which, as already argued, depicts not only the hegemonic representation of family, but also the ways in which Will's family fails to meet those normative demands—and another portrait which challenges this discursive understanding of family and, indeed, of portraiture. This second photograph is described more as a process than in terms of its final image; in this chaotic, fluid, and inclusive process, the native community of which Will has become part defines family for itself, asserting its claim to self-representation.

Again in contrast to the single poet/speaker of traditional ekphrasis, *Medicine River* offers an example of the mode that allows Will to incorporate a second viewer, his friend, Harlen, who also offers a description of the family portrait. Further, Will

complicates the reader's assessment of his and Harlen's responses to the photograph by offering the reader a contextualizing narrative as background to the childhood family portrait. We know, for example, that Will's father, who had earlier abandoned the family, died a week before the sitting; that the family's finances were such that Will wonders how the sitting was paid for; and that the clothes the brothers wore for the photograph were not their own, but somehow connected to their mother's job loss. By sharing this information with the reader but not with Harlen, Will makes Harlen's response appear rather unsympathetic, and he emphasizes the effect of point-of-view on representation.

Will's own description of the photographic image is scanty, yet it subtly acknowledges the contingencies which affect both representation and perception. When he says, for example, that it depicts his mother "staring at the camera, her face set, her eyes flat," we may either be confronting this stare from the camera's position, or assuming a third point-of-view that brings the camera as well as the mother facing it under our scrutiny (213). He notes that he and his brother "looked smart in those white shirts and blue wool pants, our hands on our mother's shoulders (213). This phrasing is ambiguous enough to imply *either* a straightforward rendering of the photographic image *or* simply his remembered perception of how he looked; there is the suggested possibility that the camera may have failed to capture this sense of having "looked smart." The gap between the smile he remembers trying to produce for the camera and Harlen's remark that no one is smiling in the photograph further strengthens this ambiguity.

But perhaps Will's most significant reference to the contingencies of representation is his recollection of the photographic surface not in terms of the image

depicted, but of its exposure to time. Thus he speaks of the fact that once thumbtacked to the kitchen wall, the portrait “stayed there until the paper began to curl up and the colours started to fade” (204). This emphasis on the degradations of time echoes the anxiety that marks ekphrasis in Romantic literature. The tension between belief in the timelessness of visual art and the threat to that belief by the perishable materiality of painting and sculpture is connected, Heffernan argues, “with the birth of the public museum, which aims at once to preserve the history embedded in works of art and to protect those works *from* history, from the ravages of time” (93). Arguably, I think, the family photograph shares these aims in some way, so that “Kodak culture” is as concerned with the preservation of representation as it is about representation itself: a recurrent major point of camera and film advertisements is the ability of a photograph to resist time in a way which memory might not be able to do.

In place of the anxiety displayed in Romantic ekphrasis, Will’s attention to the effects of time on his family’s portrait reveals a move away from a representational system that has hurt and limited him toward a system that grants him agency within a community. Will is able to connect his memory of the damaged portrait to a memory of his brother’s childhood response to having one of his drawings destroyed. Across the years, his brother as child artist frees Will from seeing the family portrait as representing only failure to meet the norms of a hegemonic discourse that demands an obviously happy, two-parent, well-dressed family preserved and displayed for future generations. Rather than lamenting, with the Romantic poets, the medium’s inability to transcend time, Will turns to his brother’s model of another possible response, a way of seeing time’s destruction of one representation as simply providing the opportunity to create

another, a way of seeing that emphasizes representation as a continually re-negotiated process rather than a fixed product.<sup>14</sup>

What Will remembers is that, when James finds that his paintings have been defaced, he simply goes to the butcher shop for more brown paper, draws another eagle and hangs it out their bedroom window. Expecting James to be angry, Will is startled to find that, instead, “all he talked about was the eagle and how he was going to do a whale next” (23). Will details the weather’s deleterious effect on this new drawing in terms later recalled by the family portrait curling up and fading on the kitchen wall. In his words, “The rain came first and soaked the butcher’s paper and plastered it to the side of the building. The wind came a few days later and tore the drawing loose. Some of the ink bled through, and for a long time after, you could see a faint outline of the eagle in the brick. James could draw. He really could” (24). This passage holds the effects of time in tension with the image’s ability to persist, but ends by asserting James’ ability to draw, so that process is emphasized over product.

While Will has always seen himself as losing the family talent competition to his brother, this memory, subtly triggered by the family portrait, prompts him to take advantage of opportunities time provides in its destruction of old representations. As he remembers old quarrels with James, he is prompted to fix up the old family photograph he had lying around, make a new negative, and send his brother a copy. Thus the old, faded representation of family becomes a site that initiates or re-activates new versions of that institution. Will also begins to renegotiate his understanding of family through narrativizing his childhood rivalry with his brother from a more mature standpoint. As well, he photographs a new family, one that challenges the terms by which the first was

disciplined. This family, and its photographic image, are also the results of the opportunities provided by time's ravages: Will first meets Harlen after his mother's death, and this meeting leads him eventually from life in Toronto back to the native community that teaches him what family *can* mean (91-93). Only after the loss of his mother to the ultimate effect of time—death—does Will risk becoming involved with Medicine River.

As Will re-makes the old photograph, he adds multiplicity to the figure of ekphrasis. In contrast to the traditional understanding of the model in which one verbal artist interprets the single work of one visual artist, Will crosses the border between the visual and the verbal to be both the novel's narrator and its (second) photographer. But Will would never advance himself as a visual artist. In fact, his unwillingness or inability to see his photography as a form of art is matched by his valorization of the "artist" in a way that highlights the hierarchy often obscured within traditional ekphrasis, a hierarchy that generally ensures a focus on "high" art rather than on "low" or popular art, and on art rather than on photography—or if on photography at all, then on the art photograph rather than on the family photograph.<sup>15</sup> This subtle attention to the hierarchical valuing within Eurocentric cultures of visual representation further intensifies the emphasis directed by the novel's ekphrasis toward the politics of representation.<sup>16</sup>

An example of Will's valorization of the artist is his boyhood conviction that he lacks artistic ability, in contrast to his brother, James, who "had all the talent in [the] family" (12). Will's reference to this talent as being "just like magic" mirrors a Romantic view of the artist as seer or priest or visionary—a Romantic view that continues to influence viewers, readers, and audiences, often obscuring the politics of representation

that accompany or shape the artist's work. Will further contrasts his own abilities with these more magical ones in his recounting of the first meeting with Susan. In his narrative, she is a sophisticated (and white) viewer of a painting by a Cree artist at the McMichael Art Gallery, where he is taking candid shots of the show. In this invocation, the magic is attributed to Susan because of her presumably greater knowledge, while Will sees himself, the lowly photographer, as the warty, croaking frog waiting to be transformed (105-06).

Certainly, Will's early memory of the photographer who took the family picture is more frog than prince or magician. He remembers "the guy who took the picture" quite clearly as "a short plump man in a thick black sweater" and "a wet, pink hand" (203). Nonetheless, despite his unprepossessing appearance (and that of his studio that "smelled of disinfectant"), the photographer has the power to point out and record the lack at the centre of Will's family. As he thoughtlessly, if unknowingly, accentuates the family's trauma (having just lost to death the father who abandoned them years earlier) by asking if "the mister [is] going to be coming along soon," he also bullies the brothers into demonstrating their love for their mother according to the dictates of the genre, getting in close to her, smiling, with their hands on her shoulders (203-04). As a white male in this directive position, the photographer rather oddly completes the family portrait's lack, somehow standing in for the white father who is also out of the lens' range. Thus Will's re-creation of this early and battered photograph, even if he does not see his photographic skills as equal to those of an artist, is a step toward his own assumption, with important differences, of the paternal position.

These differences are most evident in the ways that Will allows the community to collaborate in making the photograph of Joyce Blue Horn's family. At first, like the short, plump man who took his family's earlier portrait, Will has his own expectations of what a family should be, and insists that "the photo special is for immediate family" (205). Harlen, however, challenges Will's assumption that this will mean Joyce, Elvis, and their eleven children, and argues that, with Elvis's and Joyce's parents, brothers, and sisters, immediate family means they are "only talking about fifty people or so" (205). Convinced that Harlen is exaggerating, Will clears out his studio to make room, but when over fifty people have filled it to overflowing, he begins to listen, and accepts Louise's suggestion that they move down to the river. As he says, "There were probably lots of reasons why it wasn't a good idea to try to take a family portrait down by the river, but before I could think of any, Louise was over talking to Joyce, and Joyce was talking to Elvis, and Elvis was talking to his sisters. . . ." (207). As this final ellipsis implies, Will is becoming aware of a more fluid, open-ended, connectivity, and consequently relinquishing, albeit reluctantly at first, some of the representational norms that have long influenced him.

Following the decision to move to the river, Harlen and Elvis take advantage of the extra space now available to further expand the representation of family. They begin to call more community members, while Louise suggests stopping "by the centre [to] see if Bertha and Big John and Eddie want to come" (207). A more carnivalesque reversal of the earlier photographer's cramped appointment schedule and dark, disinfected back room is hard to imagine. The challenges to the notion of a single artist with the sole right to, and responsibility for, representation of a community continue at the river where

picnicking takes precedence over photography, until Harlen reminds Will to “watch[ ] the sun [and] [d]on’t . . . forget about that portrait” (212). Yet, even at this point, Will reveals himself to be in the grip of a hegemonic understanding of family and photographic control as he assures Harlen he can fit everyone in by “[p]ut[ting] Joyce and Elvis off to one side and lin[ing] the kids up” (212). Similarly, he dismisses Harlen’s concerns about providing sufficient chairs for the grandparents with his comment that there are “[j]ust the two sets of grandparents” (212).

Given the prevailing power of this hegemonic vision of family, Will is understandably nonplussed to realize that Joyce’s photograph must accommodate all present. Harlen’s hilariously ironic response, “You said you could do it, Will. Everybody’s depending on you. You’re the boss,” underlines just how patently Will is not, in his role as photographer, any recognizable form of boss whatsoever (212). His role is further undermined when Joyce insists he should be in the picture too, and Harlen remembers the time-delay device that would make this possible. This device has a threefold effect: first, it clearly minimizes the photographer’s role as artist by hinting that the photographic apparatus renders him unnecessary; second, it strips away the “artist’s” dignity by presenting him rather comically “set[ting] the camera, hit[ting] the shutter-delay button and run[ning] like hell” until he was “red-faced and aglow with sweat by the time I came to the end of the roll” (215); finally, it erases, or at least renders permeable, the barrier between the viewer and viewed, photographer and photographed.

Perhaps the most meaningful contrast to the studio portrait of Will and his brother—hands on their mother’s shoulders, trying their best to smile—is the fluidity of the group Will attempts to capture. As he says,

the group refused to stay in place. After every picture, the kids wandered off among their parents and relatives and friends, and the adults floated back and forth, no one holding their positions. I had to keep moving the camera as the group swayed from one side to the other. Only the grandparents remained in place as the ocean of relations flowed around them. (215)

Significantly, this fluidity is anchored by the grandparents. While the absence of elders was not significant to the photographer who took the earlier family portrait, a heightened cultural sensitivity to different understandings of family alerts the reader to this important difference between the two images.

Noting how the grandparents provide an anchoring stability in an ocean of movement, the reader recalls young Will puzzling over the identities of the “groups of men and women standing against the prairie and the sky” (4). Posed similarly outdoors, the possible parallels between the portrait Will is now participating in and those photographs locked away in his mother’s trunk signal the loss of the anchoring presence of grandparents and other elders in his life. At the same time as these images gesture toward the painful consequences of legal declarations of identity, another grandparent, Floyd’s granny, offers a healing possibility. Her suggestion that “maybe she should adopt [Will],” and perhaps even Will’s later recognition of his mother’s look in Floyd’s granny’s eyes, signal different criteria for claiming identity and self-representation within a community. Instead of legal reasons, Floyd’s grandmother bases her suggestion on the recent loss of her own son, of whom Will reminds her, and on Will’s recent loss of his mother.

If Floyd's grandmother is suggesting a different possible identity for Will within the community, the community clearly influences, if not determines, his position as photographer, forcing him to respond to its movement. As King notes in an interview with Constance Rooke, Will is invited by the community to leave the position from which he is "speaking for them, in a sense, with his camera," and instead come "into the picture, so that the community speaks for itself" (King, "Rooke Interview" 63). The movement shows Will abdicating a certain form of authority (which allows him to represent the community from outside it) for a form of shared agency by which the community represents itself. This new form of shared agency and representation is in stark contrast to that by which "photographs of Indian people . . . are taken by non-Natives who come to the community, take a picture of it, and are never a part of the community. . . . "simply vanish[ing and leaving] . . . what they call the historical record" (63). Rather than an artist or photographer who privileges his own authoritative representation of a community, Will accepts his place within the community, beginning to draw his own identity from that community as he participates in its self-representation.<sup>17</sup>

By participating in this self-representation, Will is responding to an implied exhortation to "Write the vision and make it plain," as he and Naomi are also doing in their respective narrations, and as King and Kogawa are in their novels. As they do so, all are also questioning which vision that definite article—*the* vision—refers to, and pointing out the problems inherent in establishing what might be "plain." Ekphrasis, a rhetorical mode that combines both writing and vision with the exegetic demands of "making plain," is particularly well-suited to supporting such a project; while a classical

understanding of the term might more strictly define it as writing the visual, or the visible, or, simply, the image, there is nonetheless more than the suggestion of the visionary in the role of artist over which poet and visual artist contend. Habbakuk's command is similarly useful in confounding the strict division between word and image, suggesting a movement between what is envisioned or perceived by whatever means and what is articulated or, to use the most literal understanding of ekphrasis, "spoken out."

Both novels end with ekphrastic descriptions of their narrators stepping out into new possibilities: Will leaves his footprints, like marks on a page, on newly fallen snow; Naomi, against a background which includes the symbolic elements of moon, stone, and moving water, honours a sense other than the sight and hearing which have dominated her narrative, turning instead to follow the scent of a rose.<sup>18</sup> But I would like to close this chapter instead by remembering briefly how these narrators "wrote the vision," specifically the vision of their mothers as recorded in their family photographs. This vision, as they have written it, demonstrates the discipline imposed by the photographic frame, but also shows the ways in which both mothers challenge that discipline.

Will's mother, of course, challenges the camera's demand for smiling expressions by staring at it with "her face set, her eyes flat" (213). As well, as Will comes to recognize, she directs him to look beyond its frame, to "refuse to be contained by the static definitions and stereotypes imposed . . . by the dominant culture" (Peters 70). Naomi's mother, as Thy Phu argues, adopts a different strategy: she "[r]etreat[s] from the coercion of the camera by symbolically repeating its action," blinking so that her eyes have to be drawn in later (135).<sup>19</sup> By performing the rhetorical act of ekphrasis, these narrators engage with their mothers' vision, both writing it, and making clear the

impossibility of “making it plain.” Through their strategical movement between word, image, and silence, they resist the coercive hegemony of the family photograph, using the photograph instead to disrupt its painful legacy, substituting, in the space of that disruption, a new sensitivity to what the photograph might be witnessing.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Stuart Christie extends this hegemony to the “alliance of photographic technologies with literary genres of American realism” (52). He sees this alliance as having “origins in nineteenth-century representations of ‘the noble savage,’” as “persist[ing] in representing tribal identities and cultures as artifacts of their own inevitable disappearance,” and as “establish[ing] fundamental rules of representation [which] until the last generation or so, excluded subjectivities and identities for whom the ‘real’ has been, distinctly (and often violently) different” (52). Christie argues that “the pictures Will ‘discovers,’ much like those that he will subsequently shoot, offer King’s critique of photographic realism” (52).

<sup>2</sup> In “‘Tell Our Own Stories’: Politics and the Fiction of Thomas King” (*World Literature Written in English*, 30.2 (1990), 77-84), Percy Walton points out that “the expression on Will’s mother’s face can only be deciphered metadiscursively” and that once informed by the collective photograph described later in the novel, we see Will’s mother, like Floyd’s granny, “looking beyond the frame in which she is caught, and . . . refusing, therefore, to be confined within it” (83).

<sup>3</sup> Mary M. Mackie considers the ramifications of “the patriarchal lineage system being instilled by the Indian Act” in “Status, Mixedbloods, and Community in Thomas King’s *Medicine River*,” *Journal of American Studies of Turkey* 8 (1998):65-71, <<http://www.bilkent.edu.tr/jast/Number8/Mackie.html>>.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas King makes this explicit in an interview with Constance Rooke (“Interview with Tom King,” *World Literature Written in English*, 30.2 (1990): 62-76) saying that the “question itself is enough to remind the reader of the range of stereotypes and clichés that go into the popular portrait of the Indian in Canada” (62).

<sup>5</sup> Grant F. Scott also argues, in *The Sculpted Word: Keats, Ekphrasis, and the Visual Arts* (Hanover and Lond: UP of New England, 1994), that ekphrasis is “[a]s much agon as mimesis,” and that it “tries to defeat the dominion of the image by writing it into language” (xii).

<sup>6</sup> Katy Aisenberg also argues that ekphrasis constitutes a gendered struggle. Even more specifically, she sees it as figure “in which the poet seeks, through iconophobia or iconophilia, to idealize and appropriate the powers of the image,” powers which she claims inhere in the image’s transparency of meaning, and she finds its “literary description of a work of art or material object” to be “less of a marriage than a rape” (1-2) (Aisenberg, Katy, *Ravishing Images: Ekphrasis in the Poetry and Prose of William Wordsworth, W.H. Auden and Philip Larkin*, New York: Peter Lang, 1995)

<sup>7</sup> In fact, in his discussion of prosopopeia (“the rhetorical technique of envoicing a silent object”) in ekphrasis, Heffernan suggests that in “talking back to and looking back at the male viewer, the images envoiced by ekphrasis challenge at once the controlling authority of the male gaze and the power of the male word” (7). I see this as an example of word and image collaborating in their challenge to male hegemony. Yet no sooner does Heffernan mention this envoicing of the image than he restates his belief that ekphrasis “is a literary mode that turns on the antagonism – the commonly gendered antagonism – between verbal and visual representation.” Tellingly, however, this is the point at which he acknowledges that the mode also “commonly reveals a profound ambivalence toward visual art, a fusion of iconophilia and iconophobia, of veneration and anxiety” (7).

<sup>8</sup> Hirsch continues: “Postmemory is a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation. . . . Postmemory characterizes the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood nor recreated” (Hirsch 22).

<sup>9</sup> Kirstie McAlpine also confounds silence and visibility in her essay “Narratives of Silence: Marlene Nourbese Philip and Joy Kogawa” (in *The Guises of Canadian Diversity: New European Perspectives*, Ed.

Serge Jaumain and Marc Maufort, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1995, 133-142), saying that both Philip's *Looking for Livingstone* and Kogawa's *Obasan* question textual representations of history by working "to reinstate the silences [historical] texts make invisible" (133). If such texts can make silence invisible, the implication (further strengthened in the possible reinstatement these novels work toward), is that silence—strictly speaking, an absence of sound—was previously visible.

<sup>10</sup> In "Father Land and/or Mother Tongue: The Divided Female Subject in Kogawa's *Obasan* and Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*" (*Gender & Genre in Literature: Redefining Autobiography in Twentieth-Century Women's Fiction*, Ed. Janice Morgan and Colette T. Hall, New York & London: Garland, 1991, 119-34), Donald C. Goellnicht problematizes the universalizing and ahistorical tendencies of Lacanian psychoanalysis in relation to the particular difficulties represented by *Obasan* of "a girl from an immigrant Asian minority" (122).

But Goellnicht's problematic equation of silent pre-oedipal language with the maternal and figurative language with the paternal in *Obasan* is critiqued by Tomo Hattori in her "Psycholinguistic Orientalism in Criticism of *The Woman Warrior* and *Obasan*" (*Other Sisterhoods: Literary Theory and U.S. Women of Color*. Ed. Sandra Kumamoto Stanley. Urbana & Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1998, 119-38).

<sup>11</sup> I further thematize photographs as offering both promise and frustration in Chapter Three.

<sup>12</sup> *Obasan* offers a somewhat similar passage in which Naomi is unable to recognize relatives from whom she has been separated because of the wartime internment and subsequent dispersal of Japanese-Canadians; in this passage, Stephen shows Naomi "a recent photograph of Aunt Emily standing behind a frail Grandpa Kato in a wheelchair. The picture was taken this year. They are strangers to me" (215).

<sup>13</sup> So many studies have provided provide more sustained (or simply complementary) consideration of silence in *Obasan*: see, for example, Goellnicht, Hattori, and McAlpine as well as Shirley Geok-lin Lim's "Japanese American Women's Life Stories: Maternity in Monica Sone's *Nisei Daughter* and Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*," (*Feminist Studies* 16.2 (Summer 1990), 289-312; Gary Willis's "Speaking the Silence: Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*," *Studies in Canadian Literature* 12.2: 239-49; Chinmoy Banerjee's "Polyphonic Form and Effective Aesthetic in *Obasan*," *Canadian Literature* 160 (Spring 1999): 101-119; Erika Gottlieb's "The Riddle of Concentric Worlds in *Obasan*," *Canadian Literature* 109 (Summer 1986): 34-53; and King-Kok Cheung's "Attentive Silence in Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*," in *Listening to Silences: New Essays in Feminist Criticism*, Ed. Elaine Hedges and Shelley Fisher Fishkin, (New York & Oxford: Oxford UP, 1994) 113-129.

<sup>14</sup> Percy Walton also finds transformative potential in the effects of time on the photo, noting that "if the image fades, then it ceases to be fixed within the boundaries of the picture" (83). However, she does not comment on Will taking advantage of this potential by remaking the photograph, nor does she connect his actions to his brother's earlier example.

<sup>15</sup> Constance Rooke establishes "the parallel between Will as photographer and [Thomas King] as writer," noting that "[i]n each case, the slightly detached Native artist is engaged partly in making a record of Native life" (62). I agree that this parallel exists for the reader, that we can see Will as an artist, but I would nonetheless argue that Will does not see himself this way.

<sup>16</sup> While Heffernan reads ekphrasis as verbally representing a visual representation, thus downplaying any insistence on either representation being, necessarily, "art," Scott prefers to stress "more specifically aesthetic elements"; for Scott, ekphrasis is "a creative process that involves making verbal *art* from visual *art*" (1). Scott also alludes to the cultural privileging traditionally associated with ekphrasis, noting that "[i]f ekphrasis is technically about citing a work of graphic art within a work of verbal art . . . it is *socially* a means of acquiring status and legitimacy by quoting cultural references" (19-20). This traditional aspect of ekphrasis reflects some of the anxieties Will has about his apparent lack of status and legitimacy vis-à-vis the Eurocentric discourse of art which Susan represents. It also makes his own performance of ekphrasis, choosing family photographs—not traditionally considered works of art—something of a political act.

<sup>17</sup> In an interview with Jeffrey Canton ("Coyote Lives," in *The Power to Bend Spoons: Interviews with Canadian Novelists*, Ed. Beverley Daurio, Toronto: Mercury P, 1998, 90-97), King responds to a question about the significance of an Indian or Canadian identity, saying "For Native people, identity comes from community, and it varies from community to community. I wouldn't define myself as an Indian in the same way that someone living on a reserve would. That whole idea of 'Indian' becomes, in part, a construct. It's fluid. We make it up as we go along" (90-91). King also addresses this issue in a conversation with Hartmut Lutz (*Contemporary Challenges: Conversations with Canadian Native Authors*, Saskatoon: Fifth House, 1991, 107-116), particularly in terms of his own identity as a Canadian writer. While acknowledging that he is "not from one of the tribes from up here," he simultaneously argues that "that becomes a problem only if you recognize the particular political line which runs between Canada and the US and if you agree with the assumptions that that line makes" (107). While he prefers to avoid defining Native literature too strictly, he does think it is somewhat helpful "to keep those kinds of lines straight because otherwise we begin to have non-Natives doing the same that they have done for years and years, and that is to speak for Native people" (109).

<sup>18</sup> Marilyn Russell Rose points out that this "detail . . . recalls another of Kogawa's motifs [noting that] Naomi has called her mother's story 'a rose with a tangled stem' (229)," and she also claims that "the novel itself . . . is also a rose—a story of mother, aunts and a child which is at bottom a loving, healing history because it is, in experiential terms, a kind of release for both teller and reader" (224). ("Politics into Art: Kogawa's *Obasan* and the Rhetoric of Fiction," *Mosaic* 21.3: 216-226.)

<sup>19</sup> Phu's argument is further bolstered by Ila Goody's observation that Naomi also 'fills in' her mother's eyes for the reader when, elsewhere in the novel, she recalls how her mother's eyes were "steady and matter of fact—the eyes of Japanese motherhood" when she picked up the chicks which had been attacked by a mad hen (163). While Goody's point is that Naomi indirectly contradicts the photograph's "truth value" by implying that her mother does not blink, her connection of these two passages suggests that Naomi's mother's blinking could, indeed, be a deliberate response to the camera's invasive property. ("The Stone Goddess and the Frozen Mother: Accomplices of Desire and Death in Tanizacki, *Tay John* and *Obasan*, *Nature and Identity in Canadian and Japanese Literature*, Ed. Kinya Tsurata and Theodore Goossen, Toronto: U of T—York U, Joint Centre for Asia Pacific Studies, 1988, 143-166.)

## Chapter Three

“As If Knowing Was an Important Thing for Me to Have”: The Family Photograph and Hidden Histories in Timothy Findley’s *The Piano Man’s Daughter*

While the title of this chapter promises a focus on Findley’s *The Piano Man’s Daughter*, the quotation it incorporates, which I discussed briefly in Chapter Two, is drawn from *Medicine River*. This overlapping indicates the importance my thesis attaches to the emphasis, in the novels I study, on the narrators’ epistemological concerns, their drive toward “knowing.” In the context of mourning, this epistemological drive is also important to the elegiac romances Kenneth Bruffee explores, in which the heroic quest of the traditional romance is replaced by the narrator’s quest to understand his own life by tracing the life of his deceased hero. Nevertheless, in elegiac family romances, or novels in which the narrator is mourning a parent, this quest is complicated by the realities of inter-generational relationships: that is, significant portions of the parents’ lives take place before these narrators are born. Further, during their lives shared with their parents, the rules and constraints of the parent-child relationship prevail over the child’s access to knowledge. The trope of knowledge being withheld from, or forbidden to, children by parents intersects, in these novels, with the trope of the family photograph to reflect these epistemological challenges. Through this significant intersection, the photograph comes to stand for both access to, and denial of, knowledge of the past.

A moment in Michael Ignatieff’s *Scar Tissue* exemplifies the intersection of these two tropes: shortly after his father’s death, the unnamed narrator puzzles over the identity of a young boy in a photograph he finds in his father’s desk. Observing that the boy could

have been either his father or his father's long-dead twin brother, he remembers asking his father about life in Odessa. Although the older man satisfied some of his son's curiosity, he also rebuked him, when asked "why he talked about it so little," with a reference to "fool questions." The narrator remembers insisting that he "just wanted to know, and couldn't see why he wouldn't tell me more"; his memory also includes being rebuffed by the answer, "there's nothing back there." Years later, recalling this conversation, the narrator speculates that perhaps his father never talked about Odessa "so that his sons would be free too [as the father perceived himself to be after emigration], whether they wanted to be or not" (93). This last phrase, of course, suggests the ambivalence of a man torn between appreciative recognition of a father's desire to free his children from a difficult past and his own desire to know about that past.

Similarly, Naomi in *Obasan* is protected by her surrogate parents from the painful knowledge of what happened to her mother. She pores over old photographs, as well as over letters and other documents, trying to negotiate the gap between the family unity and harmony she remembers from her early childhood and the subsequent traumatic dissolution and dispersal of that family. In a letter written when Naomi is a child, but which she is only allowed to read as an adult after her uncle's death, her Grandma Kato commands Obasan and Uncle, "'Do not tell Stephen and Naomi'" (241). In this, she echoes the wishes of Naomi's mother who, "continu[ing] her vigil of silence. . . . sp[eaking] with no one about her torment. . . . specifically requested that Stephen and [Naomi] be spared the truth" (236). In an observation that specifically links the trope of withheld knowledge with the trope of the family photograph, Naomi notes that "Obasan and Uncle hear your request. They give me no words from you. They hand me old

photographs” (242). Still, although the photographs are silent, Naomi studies them for any clues that will help her understand the traumatic loss of the family she once knew.

The tropes of the family photograph and of forbidden knowledge intersect in *Medicine River* in the scene in which Will illicitly opens his mother’s locked chest. While Chapter Two considers this scene’s revelation of the effect of Canadian law separating Will from his First Nations heritage, it also suggests the role his mother’s shame about her marriage played in this separation. An adult Will remembers that it is only many years after he first saw among the photographs “one of an old man with braids sitting in a straight-backed chair on the edge of a coulee” that his “Granny Pete [shows him] a picture of the same man and [says] he was [Will’s] grandfather” (4). The years that intervene between Will’s original viewing of the photograph and Granny Pete’s eventual provision of the genealogical information signal the frustration that these photographs symbolize by both promising and denying access to knowledge. He similarly hints at this frustration when he remembers that his “mother was in most of [the other photographs], and while I didn’t *know* who the rest of the people were, I *supposed* they were family” (4, my italics). The tension between these two verbs, “know” and “supposed,” suggests the child’s quest for knowledge about his past, the distance between attempting to gain and achieving such knowledge.

In particular, as a child, Will wants to know more about his father, whom he never clearly identifies in the pictures in the chest, although he pauses to describe “a man in a uniform” who kneels behind his mother “with his hand on her shoulder” (5). In his quest to know about his father, the boy reads through the letters stored with the photographs in the chest, letters written from his father to Rose, Will’s mother. But when Rose discovers

Will reading the letters, she slaps him, crying and insisting on her right to privacy, countering Will's argument that he has a right to see the letters with the threat that she will burn them if her privacy is violated again. While this blatant reference to forbidden knowledge is specifically associated with letters, the letters are in turn closely associated with the photographs that also signify knowledge barred from Will.

In Chapter Two, I pointed out that the fluidity with which these letters circulate through the community is ironically juxtaposed against their fierce safeguarding during Will's childhood. This irony echoes the larger irony underpinning these novels: that while the narrator sincerely mourns the death of a parent, that very death gives access to the long-denied knowledge that allows the narrator a more complete understanding of his or her own life. As Harlen hands Will the letters, he says, "You should read them, Will. Your mother must have kept them for you and James" (10). And Will, receiving the letters, remembers the same picture he has described when recalling his childhood transgression and his mother's angry response—the picture of the man in uniform kneeling behind his mother—with the difference that this time, he comes nearer to acknowledging the man in the photo as his father: "And I remembered the picture of *the two of them*" (10, my italics). While he had earlier described the man simply in terms of what he is wearing, in the context of his conversation with Harlen, "the two of them" seems to imply a relationship between the two that has a direct relevance to Will, even if he does not specifically name them as his mother and father.

The change in Will's description of the man pictured with his mother in this early photograph, though subtle, suggests a new relationship to knowledge. Whether this new relationship results from his access to new materials concerning his past or simply from a

reconfiguration of old information now seen in a new light, it seems to mark a distance between his perception as an adult and that of his childhood, as well as to reflect a change in his mother's attitude. This change, inherent in Harlen's contention that, in her later years, Will's mother wanted him to have the very letters she had earlier forbidden him access to, is supported by a letter the narrator describes. In this letter, his mother sends him birthday wishes along with a photograph of his father, and she points out which man in a group of four is Will's father: "'That's him,' the letter said, as if *knowing* was an important thing for me to have" (87, my italics). The curious syntax emphasizes "knowing" as product and possession, but also stresses the transmission of this knowledge from mother to son. That is, we first read the word as a verb whose subject is the mother, and must do some stumbling and re-reading to recognize that it functions, instead, as a noun representing an important bequest.

Yet while the novel later implies that Will's mother comes to acknowledge and perhaps respect her son's epistemological drive, the opening chapter foregrounds the parent's control over genealogical and other information pertinent to the adult child's understanding of and ability to narrate his life. It does this, as already discussed, by outlining a certain tension between a childhood disturbed by conflict over forbidden access to letters and the later freedom of access to that material. In so doing it proposes, as does *Obasan*, that a parent's (or, in the case of *Obasan*, a surrogate parent's) death expedites the adult child's narration, even as it occasions it. Both novels imply that accompanying the mourning that structures the narratives is the satisfaction of a long-frustrated desire to learn more about the narrators' and their parents' personal past.

The intensity of this desire to know about the past, particularly about the past of one's parents, is summed up, for me, in a key moment in Michael Ondaatje's *Running in the Family*, the moment when, in the narrator's words, "[m]y aunt pulls out the album and there is the photograph *I have been waiting for all my life*. My father and mother together. May 1932" (161, my italics). Though slightly hyperbolic, the italicized phrase implies a desire powerful enough to be sustained from birth through adulthood. What is it about this particular photograph that has made it so desirable? The narrator tells us that "[i]t is the only photograph I have found of the two of them together" (162). In a work which explores, among other aspects of the narrator's personal past, the effects of his parents' troubled relationship on himself and his siblings, the photograph stands as evidence that the couple was once happy together.

Significantly, the photograph is taken when the couple is "on their honeymoon," a particular period that translates the reference to "[m]y father and mother together" into a euphemism for that which always stirs the child's curiosity: the parents' sexual life. That this lifelong quest culminates with the discovery of a photograph representing parents at what is arguably the most sexual period of their relationship recalls Freud's comment that our instinct for knowledge is "attracted unexpectedly early and intensively to sexual problems and is . . . possibly first aroused by them" ("Three Essays," 270). For Freud, "the first problem with which [the instinct for knowledge] deals is not just the question of the distinction between the sexes but the riddle of where babies come from" (270). Further, "[t]he sexual researches of these early years of childhood. . . . constitute a first step toward taking an independent attitude in the world, and imply a high degree of alienation of the child from the people in his environment who formerly enjoyed his

complete confidence” (272). In the context of novels whose narrators’ epistemological quest takes them back through their own and their parents’ lives, Freud’s insights into the relationship between knowledge and sexuality bear consideration.

While a first reading of either *Medicine River* or *Obasan* fails to reveal a narrator explicitly concerned with sexuality, Will’s reading of his mother’s letters when he is a boy is, if not sexual research, at least research into a relationship marked by the necessary sexuality of parents. Further, the reading certainly marks a step toward “an independent attitude” and also implies alienation of the child from his mother. Similarly, Naomi’s quest for knowledge about her mother is accompanied by her exploration of alienation from her mother she experienced as a child through her traumatic encounter with Old Man Gower. In both novels, the trope of knowledge being withheld points to the relationship between knowledge and sexuality, even if neither novel explores this relationship overtly.

Freud’s speculations about the origins of our instinct for knowledge are more explicitly relevant to Timothy Findley’s *The Piano Man’s Daughter*, a novel in which the forbidden knowledge concerns parentage, and in which the epistemological drive takes the adult mourner directly to the primal scene of conception. This epistemological quest also reveals a mother who challenges patriarchal expectations of class and gender, while the detective work involved in the narrator’s quest for his father’s identity draws attention to the role knowledge plays in marking the move from childhood to adulthood. The narration of this quest concludes with an announcement of parenthood marking the changed subjectivity that accompanies the newfound knowledge and the supposed completion of mourning.<sup>1</sup>

This changed subjectivity results, at least partly, from the narrator's negotiation with the culturally constructed boundaries between adulthood and childhood, and with the way his relationship with his mother positions him in reference to those boundaries. If Freud's theory about the beginnings of our instinct for knowledge is rather culturally specific, *The Piano Man's Daughter* exemplifies the kind of culture on which it is contingent, one which purports to protect children from knowledge about sexuality. One scene in particular is illustrative of this, the scene in which Lily asks her mother if she might share a room with Lizzie on their trip to Munsterfield. Aware of the inadequacy of "because" as a reason for why this is inappropriate, Ede remembers "that, at Lily's age, her own curiosity about the burgeoning world of boys had been intense—and intensely frustrated" (209). Nevertheless, despite clear memories of frustration at this "well of ignorance [which] no one offered to dispel," despite her previous defiance of social mores in the conception of her daughter outside marriage, and despite her struggle to protect her daughter from those who misunderstand her illness, Ede accepts that it is now "Lily's turn at the well [and so]. . . Ede would have to play the adult villain, the reticent interlocutor with the fudged answers—whose determined vagueness could so easily be seen through" (209). Ede clearly conceptualizes this exchange with her daughter in terms of a division between adults and children marked by a division between knowledge and ignorance.

Recognizing the inefficacy of this cultural stricture, and remembering her own response, Ede straddles the borders between childhood and adulthood even as she enforces them. There is more than a hint of this straddling, of the overlapping of child and adult subjectivity within Ede, in her resignation at having "to play the adult villain" (209). The verb's doubled connotation suggests not only the pursuits of childhood, but also the

constructedness, even falseness, of adult behaviour. Ede's sympathies still align her with Lily, whose confusion about why she cannot share a room with Lizzie mirrors ten-year old Ede's frustration at not being allowed to sleep in the drive shed with the hired hand. Nevertheless, as did her mother before her, Ede explains her ruling inadequately, justifying this adult response by musing to herself that "[o]f course, because *is not good enough. But it's all you have when you want to save the innocent*" (210).

Ede's claim that she only wants to save the innocent is belied by the cruel choice she forces herself to make when she blames Lily's illness for the separate rooms rather than make any reference to sexuality. The high cost of this cultural determination that childhood be marked by innocence about sexuality forces a separation between mother and daughter, marked by Ede's inability to face Lily during this conversation, her gladness at having "her back to the child" (209). Despite the high cost, however, Ede's memory of her childhood response to the "fudged answers" with the "determined vagueness" she "could so easily [see] through" suggests that this refusal to speak directly to children about sexuality is more enticing than it is efficacious as a barrier to knowledge. As a child, Ede had decided "*There's something they don't want me to know*"; as an adult, "she wondered if Lily could be steered away from the same decision" (209). Ede's observance of her adult/parental responsibility to protect her daughter's innocence highlights the cultural border between childhood and adulthood; at the same time, her movement, through her memories, to a childhood subjectivity, suggests the permeability of that very border.

But it is with Lily's son, Charlie, that we most clearly see the consequences of the cultural demand that distance must be maintained between adulthood and childhood. His

recollections of childhood describe the border as both arbitrary and permeable, particularly because his relationship with his mother subverts any clear boundaries between adult and child, innocence and knowledge. As a child, Charlie must often assume an adult role, yet he regularly confronts barriers to knowledge; there is a surprising disjunction between what he knows and what he cannot know. For example, Charles<sup>2</sup> recounts the story of Lily's conception and birth: "Lily's legend," he calls it, "as it was recounted to me by my grandmother" (61). Ede describes Lily's *plein air* conception and birth, scenes from which one might expect her to shield a child, given her earlier reticence in Lily's childhood. Yet when Charlie once enquires about her father's reaction to her pregnancy, Ede responds as if her grandson had struck her. She refuses to offer an explanation, declaring only that she "never talk[s] about that" (62). Charles speculates that this might have been because he was ten, that her refusal to discuss the matter had "[s]omething to do with the impertinence of a child who seemed to suggest there could be a conversation between a ten-year-old boy and a fifty-four-year-old woman on the subject of having an illegitimate baby. *And what did your father say?*" (62).

As Charles notes, although his grandmother is open in discussing Lily's unconventional conception and birth, she balks at discussing the patriarchal response. Charles makes a connection between his great-grandfather, James, and his own father, saying that "so many fathers in this story" have, aside from parenthood, "only one thing in common: their habit of disappearing when you least expect them to" (62). Remembering his grandmother's refusal to discuss her father's reaction to her pregnancy leads him to consider the disappearance of his own father—twice, as he says, "once, when Lily lost him in the fog of her illness, and again, when he disappeared with her death" (62).

Having connected Ede's father to his own through the motif of disappearance, he goes further to connect the search for his father's identity with his own recourse to photographs. Now that all memory of his father, even of his name, has disappeared with Lily's death, Charles continues to hope "at least" for "[s]omeone's finger descending to his face in a photograph and saying: *him*" (62).

This hope is one that Will's mother recognizes and meets in *Medicine River* when she sends him a photograph accompanied by the letter saying, "That's him." This recognition that "knowing" is important for Will to have marks a movement from the position Rose took in his childhood, as well as marks the reconfiguration of their relationship which comes with Will's adulthood. By contrast, in *The Piano Man's Daughter*, the dependence implied by his hope continues to render child-like the adult Charles, as he waits for someone to grant him knowledge about something as basic as his own parentage. At the same time, this hope recalls the child's determination to acquire this knowledge, a reminder of Freud's theory that, as quoted above, "[t]he sexual researches of [the child]. . . . constitute a first step toward" independence. This hope, then, for knowledge of his father's identity, reveals the latent independent adult in the child even as it shows us the child in the adult. Further, while Charles is finally granted knowledge by someone outside his immediate family, the research he undertakes throughout his childhood is often shared with his mother, whose own subjectivity continually confounds the borders between childhood and adulthood.

It is in this collaboration between Charles and his mother over the search for his father's identity that we find the most striking challenge to the borders between childhood and adulthood that Ede so steadfastly and rather cruelly defended. While Lily's inability

to satisfactorily play the adult role often hurts Charlie, it also grants him a subjectivity heavily imbued with a sense of connectedness, an awareness of his inter-subjectivity. Thus, as Charles later says, “there were moments when being Lily’s son was on a par with almost any persecution you can name [and yet now] I know that my life, without Lily’s presence in it, would have been no life at all. Not a life, at any rate, I would want to claim” (8). He claims his life as an adult who remembers the childhood inclination to disown his mother during her epileptic seizures, an inclination accompanied by his knowledge—adult knowledge—that he would have to claim her if she died. As well, he marks the distance between the child he was and the adult he is now with his acceptance that “[n]ow, she is dead and I claim her” (12). At the same time, the proximity of his references to claiming his own life and to claiming his mother further confounds the borders between them, and insists on the connectedness his mother always taught.

Charles’s search for his father’s identity, then, both marks and is marked by his own and his mother’s oscillation between the poles of childhood and adulthood, a shared oscillation that directs us to consider the possibilities of different, more collaborative, family relationships than those that separate parent and child through insistence on linear hierarchies. The contrast between a collaborative network and a hierarchical linearity is modelled by Charles and Lily’s parallel efforts to record their lives. Charles foregrounds the difference between his chosen narrative form and Lily’s more elliptical, determinedly nonlinear “way of telling everything—all of it sliding sideways, drifting off in little dots—all her sentences unfinished, the way her life was lived” (6). Nevertheless, he incorporates his mother’s style not only by lifting passages directly from her notebooks, but also by emphasizing that his narrative choice involves mixing memories of his own

experiences with tales told to him “in the way most family stories are told, some with prejudice, some objectively—always a mixture of myth and reality” (6). Thus he acknowledges the network within which his story is generated, as did Lily for whom “everything [was] always a beginning before there could be an ending to the part that went before” (6).

In acknowledging this interrelatedness, a “mixture of myth and reality,” Charles follows Lily’s lead in engaging in what Nicola King calls “a cultural struggle over the construction and meanings of memory within culture, the ways in which we construct the very means and possibility of remembering” (5). King points out that “assumptions—often untheorised and taken for granted—about the functioning of memory underpin the ways in which a culture positions itself in relation to the past,” and it seems to me that some of these assumptions become more clearly manifest, and hence easier to challenge, through Charlie and Lily’s collaborative search for his father (5). The chronological organization of the family photograph album, together with the distinction between the family stories told and those family stories kept secret, supports a positioning of the bourgeois patriarchal settler culture out of which Lily has emerged. The propriety of this culture depends on a memory that records a patriarchal lineage; Lily disrupts this propriety by conceiving a child out of wedlock, but also by refusing to remember “properly.” Instead, she uses the photographs, that signal memory, disruptively, indicating a confusion of possible connections rather than a patriarchal linearity.

The network out of which Charles’ and Lily’s story is generated is most clearly signalled throughout the novel by photographs. As Charles first begins to offer his life story, he recalls the family history:

all that is left of the others now—or most of them—is Lily’s album of photographs. Its pages can be dismantled, mingled and rearranged at will, forcing them outwards into a circle of exploded time. Though each of these photographs is titled and dated . . . the dates, the faces are of less importance than the circle of light that closes round them—the aureole whose radiance they share.

Nothing within the circle fades. Time, it seems, is powerless here—loses its authority and casts no shadows. Each of these lives is equal in its moment with each of the lives that surrounds it—all of them reaching out together through the camera’s lens to meet the common gaze that greets them. (15)

In Lily’s album, the photographic representation of past family members is an equalizing one, erasing the hierarchies of the generations, the hierarchies that separate adult from child. As time “seems . . . powerless here,” the only surviving authority is that of the “common gaze” that “greet[s]” the photographs, the gaze that can dismantle, mingle, and rearrange the album pages at will. Although Charles peruses the images alone after his mother’s death, during Lily’s lifetime, mother and child are often united in their efforts to coax knowledge out of these pictures.

This unity is an important aspect of Lily’s disruptive use of photographs, her refusal to remember *properly*, that is tied to the subversive peculiarity of the mystery she and Charlie try to solve together. The openness of their shared quest demands different metaphors than those generally associated with secret-driven plots. In so many novels whose plots are built around a secret, “metaphors of archaeological excavation and the finding of keys to open the locked doors of memory suggest the act of remembering as the uncovering of a *secret*” (King 15). But while Ede was pleased to marry Frederick, thus

covering up the illegitimacy of Lily's birth, Charlie's illegitimate status is never obscured. Rather, while Ede's marriage allows her compliance with patriarchal propriety, with all that latter word's etymological suggestion of ownership,<sup>3</sup> the fact that Lily not only conceived outside of marriage, but further cannot even remember who the father might have been, is surely a red flag guaranteed to enrage bourgeois sensibilities. In an odd twist, this plot is driven by a mystery—who is Charles's father?—that challenges social proprieties because the knowledge that would solve it does not, according to Lily, exist—reprehensible as it might be to have a child out of wedlock, having more than one candidate for putative paternity is even more so. Lily's failure to know who fathered her child renders the metaphors of archaeological excavation and finding of keys inadequate. Instead, we see an emphasis on the interplay between elements of chance and individual will achieved through the intersecting tropes of memory figured through photographs: photographs both offering and withholding knowledge, and photographs as playing cards.

Perusing the photograph album's images on his own after his mother's death, Charles speaks of how the album's contents can be rearranged "at will"; his depiction of the times she spent poring over the photographs is marked by his recurrent reference to card games, suggesting an element of chance at least as strong as that of will. Yet when he claims that in "laying out the pictures of her life and mine" his mother "had the fingers of a card sharp," Charles imputes to her considerable control. In contrast with his grandmother, Ede, who scrupulously dated each photograph, Lily's unwillingness or inability to keep track of the sequence of her life's events makes her, in Charles's eye, "the mistress of her own seasons" (299). By comparing her fingers to a card sharp's, with all the connotations of cheating, Charles hints at his own resentment as he "watched her

shuffle time away as if it had no place in her personal chronology” (299). For Charles, dating photographs is important in his search for his father’s identity. Knowing his birthdate, for proof of which he relies on his birth certificate rather than on his mother, he looks for photographs from 1909 or 1910, photographs “in which—so, my mother told me—my father might appear” (299). Again, he depicts his mother in terms that suggest both his sense of her control and will and his awareness of chance.

Charles’s ambivalence toward his mother in relation to his search for his father’s identity is manifest in his references to her as both seeking and concealing information. When he speaks of their move to Number 84, for example, he remarks that “Lily’s quest for who my father might have been continued,” and presents as evidence his “vivid memories of her laying out *solitaire* hands of photographs” (383). He uses the same metaphor for other earlier memories of her as she “lay the photographs out on tabletops—sometimes by lamplight, other times by daylight” (313). Always the image is of a child watching as his mother lays out the cards; here the impression of the mother searching for information from the photographs is intensified by the references to the quality of light.

Yet, while the comparison to a game of *solitaire* implies an element of chance in the dealing of the cards, Charles’s memory imparts control to Lily as she lays out her hand. He remembers a “dominant card” at the top of each row, under which “master images . . . Lily would set out the matching photographs like hearts and clubs, spades and diamonds [so that t]he faces in the dominant photo would then be shown in other locales and other lights” (314). This recollection neatly captures the tension between the seeming randomness of Lily’s organization and its surprisingly concomitant sense of order. This tension suffuses the question-and-answer routine that binds mother and child together

over these photographs; it results largely from the fact that Lily and Charles's interaction over the photographs conforms to what Richard Chalfen, in his sociological study of "Kodak culture," calls "the home mode of pictorial communication" (2). Because of this apparent conformity, Lily's inability to meet the demands of this mode over a seminally (the pun seems unavoidable) important piece of information takes on heightened significance, and challenges patriarchal and bourgeois expectations of family.

Charles's descriptions of his mother laying out photographs like solitaire cards suggest that the two are familiar with "Kodak culture" and able "to participate appropriately in . . . the home mode of pictorial communication" (Chalfen 10). Thus Charles's narration observes such conventions as offering album labels or titles for each photograph: "THE FIELDS BETWEEN CAMBRIDGE AND GRANCHESTER. SS FRANCONIA. MUNSTERFIELD" (314). From these labels, Charles moves to what his mother says as she lays out the snapshot: "*this is the ship that brought us home. He won't be there, but you are*" or "*the grass [in Richmond park] is greener than any other green in the whole wide world!*" (314). From his mother's interpretative comments, Charles moves to his own perceptions of the proffered photo along with any memories he might or might not have of the recorded moment: "And there I was—aged four—in Lily's arms . . . as she sat in a deck-chair. . . . I have no memory of the ship itself, though I have a sense of the sea from that time" (314). The progression Charles notes from the photographs' labels to his mother's interpretative statements to his own responses is typical of what Chalfen calls "exhibition events," in which, while "[c]omplete silence . . . is socially inappropriate behavior . . . [the] accompanying remarks appear to be as conventionalized as the imagery itself" (129).

But in the question-and-answer exchange between Charles and Lily we also locate the challenge Lily presents to the system of representation with which she appears to conform. At first, Charlie asks apparently conventional questions, ones designed to elicit the kinds of “[c]omments, in the form of storytelling and various recountings, [that] serve to expand and complement minimal identifications common to other kinds of written captions” (Chalfen 129). He asks why his mother was wearing white, what they were doing in Richmond, whether or not he was born yet, and then asks the question that announces his most urgent interest: “Do you think Frank and Carrie knew who my father was?” (315). Up to this point, Lily’s answers place her in the conventional role of the mother as repository of a child’s past. But as Lily answers these questions about a picture of herself in London’s Richmond Park, she lays down another photograph or, as her son describes it, she “play[s] another card” (315). And at exactly the point at which Charles’s interest becomes clear, his description emphasizes his perception of her control over the interpretative process.

The photograph Lily lays down at this point shows her with her Uncle Frank and Aunt Caroline in the garden of their Richmond home. Beside her is “a grinning young man in his shirtsleeves” who Charles hypothesizes to be “*Father number one*” (315). Notable in Charles’s recollection not only of the photograph but also of the interpretative incident regarding it are his numerous suggestions of Lily as being in control (despite the preponderance of chance he implies with his reference to *solitaire*). He comments, for example, that Lily “is *refusing* to smile” in the picture, although he finds “something *playful* about her expression—a *deliberate*, cheek-biting scowl” (315, my italics). When he recalls her response to his questions about the young man, he claims that Lily “was

being *deliberately* provocative” (316, my italics), a statement echoing his earlier description of her “*playing* for time” while trying to recollect the young man (316, my italics).

The continuity between Lily’s playfulness, her refusal to conform to expectations in her young adulthood, and the deliberately provocative quality of her responses as a mother underlies Charlie’s narrative of his search for his father’s identity. Even as he articulates his basic premise that Lily has never known who his father is, apparently accepting her claim as true, there is the hint of an accusation of wilful secretiveness. In fact, there is an unspoken collusion between mother and son over their shared search for the father’s identity, a collusion that overturns expectations. Thus Charlie learns, even as a child, to protect his mother by pretending not to care that she does not know who his father is (316). Together they mimic the usual conventions of mother and child viewing a photograph album, with child asking questions and mother answering them. But there is a departure from the social norm as Lily sniffs a picture to remember the putative father, and she recreates his voice in her mind to determine his putative English nationality. This departure is further accentuated when Charles wonders if Aunt Carrie might know the identity and Lily replies that she and Aunt Carrie would never talk about such matters, believing them to be “indiscreet” (319). Lily’s explanation that a discussion of such private matters would embarrass Carrie recalls Ede’s discomfort a generation earlier over Lily’s questioning, as well as Ede’s later sharpness with Charlie’s inappropriate questions. The parallels between these three moments reveal Lily’s own inability—perhaps refusal—to observe the boundaries of propriety as well as those that mark adults as knowing and children as innocent.

This inability or refusal to observe boundaries exacts a cost from Charlie as a child. This cost is implicit in Charles's recollection that "[w]ith school came a necessary withdrawal from the invented worlds I had co-habited with my mother," and that he welcomed the boundaries it introduced, "learn[ing], for instance, there was no more need to *run until the demons could not find us*" (330). The cost is also clear in his simultaneous recollection that his welcoming of these boundaries placed him "in that state of denial during which Lily called me *Peter*" (330). This concept of denial is introduced to him by Lily when he is seven, shortly before the incident that leaves him with a lifelong sense of guilt. His mother has "one of her episodes," falling to the ground in a public place at his school. Rather than claiming her, or offering an explanation, or helping in any way, he remains silent, turns away, and runs. As he narrates his life story, Charles still cannot forgive himself, yet he "suppose[s] [he] could be excused . . . on the basis of her own willingness to be denied." He comes even closer to a potential excuse when he remarks that "[s]he urged me, after all, to call her Lily and to treat her as any relative other than the one she was" (11). In other words, although he is unable to specifically articulate the possible justification for his behaviour, Charles intuitively finds its source in his mother's inability and/or refusal to be the adult mother to her child. Strikingly, he seems not even to consider the possibility that his behaviour might be justified by his youth—even as an adult recalling this incident, he is unable to excuse his act as one of a child in a difficult position.

By pointing out the costs to Charles of Lily's inability to maintain firm boundaries between parent/adult and child, I intend neither to fault Lily for her illness nor to essentialize motherhood. I am, rather, arguing that as the adults in his life deny the young

boy the knowledge he seeks, they either ignore or exacerbate the difficulties he faces; intentionally or otherwise, they insist on a condition of childhood innocence that is, for Charlie, only partial or illusory. There is, however, an important difference between the way Ede imposes innocence on Charlie and the way that Lily does. Ede chooses to observe culturally constructed boundaries between adults and children even while she recognizes their lack of efficacy, while the phrase “Now it was Lily’s turn at the well” suggests that Ede does so in the name of cultural continuity (209). Lily’s interactions with Charlie show a much more complicated relationship with cultural expectations, one marked by both continuity and subversion, and moderated throughout by their focus on photographs.

Inhabiting an uncertain territory between childhood and adulthood, Charlie is left to make sense of his mother’s revelation, as they look at the Cambridge photographs, that in her youth she and her friends daringly met “young men by the dozen . . . without the usual older woman or couple to enforce the proprieties,” and, most daring of all, that sometimes they “even swam in the nude” (322). Lily’s youthful escapades do not only challenge convention here; that she shares such anecdotes with her young son defies the proprieties respected by Ede’s refusal to explain why Lily and Lizzie may not share a room. Ironically, though, both approaches leave Charlie as a child without the necessary information for understanding: in response to his mother’s openness, he notes that “[w]hen she told me this, I thought *the Nude* was the name of the river. *Naked*, I knew, but not *nude*” (322). Yet Charles’s recollection of a connection he later makes between this anecdote and an awkward garden-party incident demonstrates that children intuit more than they are able to verbalize or articulate in a way that makes sense.

This later incident coincides with the day that eight-year old Charles discovers the gift of his perfect pitch. Searching for his mother so that he might share this exciting news, Charles finds her in the dark of the garden house “with one of the wounded gardeners. He was naked—and so in a way, was she. Her dress was undone down the front” (402). In response, Charles remembers, “All I could think was: *they’ve been—or they’re going—to the River Nude*” (402). Noting the difference between his child and his adult self, he acknowledges that “[e]ven then, I knew it was a crazy thought,” but in defence of his young self, he adds that “so was what I saw. It made no sense at all” (402). As the interrupted adults adjust their clothes, Lily tells Charles that he should not be there, to which he resists retorting that nor should she. Instead, he asks what she is doing, and, without “even think[ing] about it,” she answers, “Mister Arbuthnot and I are friends. We were talking” (402). Again suppressing his first response, Charlie remains silent rather than challenging her answer with his one-word question, “Naked?” (402).

Replying, perhaps, to his unspoken question, Lily rather surprisingly and certainly unwittingly reproduces the earlier moments when Ede’s mother denied Ede’s curiosity, and Ede in her turn refused to answer Lily’s questions. After all, for Lily to advise that “there are things people talk about that don’t concern you, Charlie. And this is one of them” is to enforce the boundaries between adult knowledge and presumed childhood innocence with a refusal of the child’s request for information about sexuality (402). The resemblance between these three mother-child vignettes in a novel whose narrator draws so heavily from family albums and anecdotal history suggests the power of reproduction of family patterns from generation to generation, even as Lily is at her most transgressive. In the context of the discourse of the family photograph, this scene, together with the

earlier scenes it recalls and the subsequent incident in which Lily's presentation of the gardener to the tea party guests is interrupted by Ede's appearance, draws attention to what can and cannot appear in the family record.

Most particularly, this scene draws attention to the unspoken censoring of the family record by its subtle echoes of the two earlier mother-child moments. The repetition of classic poses across the generations is a standard theme of family albums, so that we will find in most albums images of christening scenes, wedding scenes, first days of school, family reunions, and so on, marked by the changing hair and clothing styles of the changing generations. We see the repetition of a certain pose in the aftermath of Charles's garden shed discovery. Except for the awkward presence of the third party, Mr. Arbuthnot the gardener, the proximity of Lily and Charles in obviously-charged conversation visually echoes the similar scene involving Ede and Lily, and the one featuring Eliza and Ede—in the same way Charles's christening photo might recall Lily's, Lily's Ede's, and Ede's Eliza's. Yet, while "Kodak culture" allows and expects the recording of christenings, weddings, and family reunions, there is no room in this discourse for recording the parent-child "sex talk."

Thus this scene alerts us to the layers of censoring with which Lily complies or to which she submits—the censoring of information children may experience—and gestures to the censoring implicit in the family album. At the same time, of course, the scene is markedly different than the earlier two, primarily thanks to Mr. Arbuthnot, whose presence reminds us that Charlie's curiosity was stimulated by circumstances much different from those either his mother or his grandmother experienced. Even if Lily's behaviour should remind us that Ede, too, once dared to defy social boundaries in the

impulsive act that resulted in Lily's conception, the reminder only serves as a contrast with Ede's subsequent choice to conform. As Lisa Salem-Wiseman notes, "Ede has given up her conspiracies in favour of social conformity, and soon discovers that Lily, the product of a former conspiracy, is now '*a liability*' (207) in the world to which she and Frederick aspire" (435).

Lily, on the other hand, might unwittingly comply with some of the cultural censoring of children's knowledge, but she refuses to conform to the bourgeois censoring of her social interactions. Instead, once she and Mr. Arbuthnot have been discovered, she insists on walking the gardener through the garden party crowd and introducing him to guests whose discomfiture is obvious. Charles remembers that the guests were "clearly baffled as to why they were being introduced to a gardener [who] . . . appeared to be unshaven," and that the gentlemen had to face the dilemma of whether or not "*one shake[s] hands with such a man*" (403). As Lily releases Mr. Arbuthnot back to his duties, she finally offers Charles the instruction he will carry away into adulthood, long after he has solved the mystery of "the River Nude": "Never bother with your betters, Charlie. It isn't worth the effort" (404). This is perhaps Lily's most explicit statement of her unwillingness to conform with class-based expectations, although its defiance is tempered somewhat by the hurt suggested in the effort it "isn't worth."

On the day he discovers his gift of perfect pitch, then, Charlie also intuits the coercive pressures of social conformity on his mother. While transgressive in her coupling with the gardener, she nevertheless reproduces the status quo in barring Charlie from answers to his questions about sexuality, in contradistinction to their earlier rather free discussions. Yet she returns to her defiance of social norms as she introduces the gardener

to the surprised crowd and also as she moves from that scene to admire a friend who plays the role of gypsy violinist. At this point, Charlie clearly notes that his mother behaves differently from the rest of the guests, “watching [the violinist] with the same amusement I had expected all the others to exhibit” (404). Against his expectations, as he explains, Lily “was alone in producing this reaction. For the rest, there was a continued sense of nervous apprehension” (404). Perhaps Charlie’s perfect pitch pertains to more than music. As he becomes increasingly aware of his mother’s behaviour against these norms, he seems to be developing a sense of pitch regarding social expectations as well.

To help solidify his sense of his mother’s difference, Ede appears, accompanied by her children. Strikingly, the adult Charles says that “[i]f [he] had been able to take a photograph of that moment, it would have borne all the traces of its place and time. *This is what upper-class matrons in their fifties wore in 1918 . . . their children would be presented thus . . .* (405, ellipses in original). The caption to Charles’s potential photograph establishes Ede as the very model of her place, time, and, particularly, class; as well, the use of the word “matron,” with its connotations of sober propriety, together with the use of separate clauses for matrons and their children, denotes a family structure with a hierarchy Charlie has scarcely experienced.

By contrast, Charles has spoken earlier of an imaginary photograph of Lily, “part of my private collection—a series of Lily-portraits that have no external counterpart. There are no photographs of what I see, and yet what I see is images—all of my mother—in which she never moves. Time is not in them” (235). While the photograph he imagines taking of Ede and her children could exemplify a very particular time and place, the virtual photograph of his mother transcends time, with “Lily . . . caught in the way that

objects are caught and exhibited in museums [such that the] time is always now, yet now holds everything that ever was” (235). In this picture, which Charles labels “*Lily with matchbox*,” she sits alone at a table, a matchbox in one hand, a lighted match in the other. While she cannot see Charles, he is there, watching. As he looks back, he notes that “[i]n all my life with her, I never thought of her as being *crazy*. . . . *psychotic*. . . . *madwoman*. But in this picture she is all these things, and I am her only witness. When I testify in my mind, I say so” (235).

The different relationships these two imaginary photographs have with time—the one reflecting its particularity, the other somehow escaping it—point to a paradox that Chalfen outlines. He insists that “we must acknowledge how functional interpretations of photographs reinforcing cultural membership and continuity are related to the apparent paradox that they document *change*.” Puzzling over this apparent paradox, Chalfen comments

that while home mode imagery documents repeated patterns of visible change and development, the parameters of “allowable” change are *not* unrestricted. These patterns of patterned change remain stable through time. And so, while photograph collections document changes, these changes are predictable, stable, culturally expected and approved. In this way photography maintains a culturally structured status quo. It does this through continuity in both subject matter *and* format. . . . while albums of snapshots usually document or trace changes in the ways that people and things appeared over a period of years, the cast of characters remains much the same, and the *ways* in which people and things were looked at with cameras—the format—is quite stable and

consistent. (141)

Ede's costume and that of her children fit the parameters of "allowable" change, but Lily, with her matchbox, transgresses or transcends the status quo that photography maintains. While the photographs of her, especially those labelled and dated by Ede, display an acceptable continuity, her son's narrative, particularly where it includes her diaries,<sup>4</sup> describes a Lily inadmissible to the family album.

That Charles's imaginary photograph of Ede recalls his imaginary photograph of Lily and that, similarly, Lily's refusal to satisfy Charlie's curiosity recalls Ede's earlier evasiveness with Lily establishes the garden-party scene as a nexus for exploring boundaries; the bourgeois connotations of this social event intensify this emphasis. What is significant in Charles's recollections of this afternoon and its resonances with earlier moments is that they suggest that the adults who maintain the boundaries separating Charlie from the information he needs themselves oscillate between roles of gatekeeper and transgressor, adult and child. Ede, for example, is the consummate adult, the enforcer of boundaries in the photograph Charles imagines taking; yet recalling her unwillingness to give Lily an honest answer about why sharing a room with Lizzie is inappropriate, she momentarily occupies a child's subjectivity, at least in her memory. And Lily, who generally remains child-like and wilfully transgressive, plays the adult as she shows Charlie the limits of acceptable curiosity.

Besides suggesting the permeability of the boundary between childhood and adulthood, these instances demonstrate that the boundaries are culturally constructed, connected with other boundaries that maintain the bourgeoisie in their hegemonic position. While the stability his grandmother appears to offer to her children is, at times,

as seductive to young Charlie as his mother's instability is painful, his adult recollections show his awareness of the cost of this stability. His grandmother, also once an unwed mother, has achieved "social respectability and importance as the wife of Frederick Wyatt," her dead lover's older and very ambitious brother. In doing so, however, she has "[f]ollow[ed] Frederick's lead [and] created a family that [can be identified] with the repressive forces of society that promote conformity and obedience" (Salem-Wiseman 434). Once herself capable of acting impulsively with little interest in "conformity and obedience," Edith has transformed herself into the quintessential upper-class matron, now associated with the forces that promote these virtues.

These repressive forces are precisely what Lily challenges through her behaviour with Mr. Arbuthnot. Narrating these events after his mother's death, Charles foregrounds his own oscillation between the positions of bewildered child wondering about "the River Nude" and the premature adult bearing responsibilities beyond his capabilities. The cost of his mother's non-conformist behaviour is clear. Yet even as Charles registers the bewilderment and resentment such behaviour caused him when young, he appears to appreciate her "subver[sion of] "the artifice, hypocrisy, and rigidity of the conventions by which the . . . world is governed" (Salem-Wiseman 433). Thematizing his childhood relation to knowledge, he moves gradually toward an adult position in which he first goes beyond his mother to get the information he has always sought; in this adult position, he finally acquires this information and, with it, a fuller, albeit posthumous, connection with, and appreciation, of his mother.

An instance of Charles's thematization of his childhood relation to knowledge follows closely after his description of the imaginary photograph of Ede and her children.

This portrait indirectly establishes a contrast between Charlie and his young aunts and uncle which reveals how much less protected is Charlie's childhood innocence. Ede, in fact, remarks on this obliquely, calling him "[v]ery wise—and very knowing" (413). Charlie anticipates her qualification, "For someone [his] age," but his grandmother denies thinking this, countering that "[w]isdom begins in the cradle" (413). Once again, Charlie represses his response: "What about *knowing*, I wanted to ask her. But didn't" (414). Not surprisingly, perhaps, the young Charles, consumed with the desire to know his father, observes his grandmother's elision of knowledge between her first comment and her second; his repressed response both acknowledges and challenges the separation Ede makes between knowledge and age.

The impossibility of the distinctions Ede wants to make between what children should and should not know is clearly revealed when Ede tries to explain to Charles why Lily will eventually have to be institutionalized. Charles knows enough both to divulge his mother's night-time conversations with an imaginary man named John and to hate his own words for their betrayal of his mother. Against efforts to construct him in terms of childhood innocence, Charles knows that his mother is mad and believes that it is his responsibility to save her: as he says, "I already have. I can do it again" (416). Whereas Ede's reference to Charles being wise and knowing modulates to focus exclusively on wisdom, abandoning consideration of knowledge's place in childhood, here he shows himself to be more knowing than wise: from the perspective of wisdom, surely neither the ability nor the responsibility to save his mother can belong to such a young child.

Knowledge carries central importance for Charles in terms of assessing his subjectivity. On his eighth birthday, he feels himself to be "an accredited adult . . . and a

man of the world”; he bases this conviction on the fact that “[t]here was little I did not *know* about the human condition that any child can *know*, who has been given a loving parent and a place to stand” (417, italics mine). Significantly, this conviction comes only weeks after he puzzles over his mother’s entanglement with the gardener and fails to get an explanation from her. Perhaps Charlie has since satisfied his curiosity through his own researches, or perhaps either his childhood self or the remembering adult have forgotten or pushed aside this obvious gap in his knowledge. Another possibility is that the adult Charles now recognizes and acknowledges that this gap in his knowledge is appropriate for an eight-year old child with a loving parent. While we cannot be sure which, if any, possibility explains this ellipsis, what is certain is the passage’s revelation of the movement between childhood and adult self, with the eight-year old Charlie feeling himself an adult, and the remembering adult Charles speaking about himself as a child.

Further, this passage shows the adult through whose consciousness these memories are filtered becoming aware of the gift, paradoxically, of *not* knowing. Even as his narrative draws our attention to the apparent injustice of requiring a child to assume adult responsibilities while denying him information, Charles seems to arrive at an appreciation of what he has been given by his mother. For after asserting that his knowledge, loving parent, and stability equate him with other children, the narrator goes on to say that he “was not just *any* child” (417). Instead, Charles has “been given . . . a unique religion of reverence for life,” and this has been granted through “a profoundly mysterious companion and a sense of being wanted and cared for by someone whose whole concern for me could be defined in a single word: *wonder*. I was also given someone to decipher—someone to protect—someone to ponder” (417). The words

“mysterious,” “wonder,” “decipher,” and “ponder” all point to the quest for knowledge that Lily initiates for Charles. And while this quest may have begun, as Freud suggests, out of a desire for knowledge about sexuality, and while this curiosity may have had, as Freud also notes, an alienating effect in the relationship between mother and child, the adult Charles seems to be reconfiguring this quest to see himself and his mother as being reciprocally curious about each other.<sup>5</sup> As well as their shared instinct for knowledge, Charles recognizes the reciprocity of their care for each other: he had “a sense of being wanted and cared for,” while he was “given someone . . . to protect” (417).

Thus while Charles’s descriptions of his mother laying out photographs like a card sharp emphasize her control over information he needs, and his recollection of the scene with Mr. Arbuthnot marks his perception of her as denying him knowledge, as an evaluating adult he comes to a recognition of his mother as encouraging his curiosity, of validating his quest. When he finally discovers who his father is, it is at least in part because he has heeded his mother’s cues and clues, and learned from the way her use of photographs insists on a network of connections both continuous with, yet disruptive of, conventional “home mode of pictorial communication” (Chalfen 2).

When Lily holds a photograph that might include Charlie’s father, for example, she holds it to her nose, remembering a smell of mint, insisting on alternative pathways to memory than the visual (316). She plays at the detective process, deducing that the young man, “*Father number one*” in Charlie’s mind, must have been a friend of the family or he would not have been in his shirtsleeves (316). She interprets his mischievous expression as a potential flirtation, depending on whether or not her aunt, Caroline, took the photograph (316). She also follows a flash of memory through to the words of “the Mock

Turtle's song from *Alice in Wonderland*. . . a touchstone for [Charlie's] father's possible identity" (318). While Ede "was scrupulous with dates [so that] every photograph or note was marked precisely. . . Lily herself did no such thing" (299). Instead, she guides Charlie in a different movement toward the past.

So guided, Charlie later takes the same photograph of his putative father and stands in front of a mirror, singing the Mock Turtle's song and comparing the face of the young man with his own. His mother's influence is clear, as it is when he extends his visual comparison to other senses, first touching his hair to note the bit, similar to the hair in the photograph, that would not lie down. Next he smells his wrists looking for mint but finding instead that along with "the faintest whiff of plain yellow soap" was the memory "of a dusty afternoon spent in the hayloft" (320). When he takes the photograph back to his room to wonder about the person he has hiding in himself, his father, he eventually connects this young man with all of those carried off by the war "*all dressed up in their god-damn youth*" as Lily says "*waiting for the god-damn bugle call!*" (322). Already he follows Lily's lead: unable or unwilling to relinquish the search for his father's identity, Charlie's connection of the photograph of one young man to all the other young soldiers is one step closer to the position his mother articulates just before her death, that remembering the father's name is unimportant, that Charles "look[s] like a boy I was in love with, once. . . . I know that you are his, and that's enough" (5).

While Charlie is able to connect his father to all the other young men lost in the war, he continues his quest for a specific and individual identity. As he recalls the circumstances during which Lily drew his attention to a second putative father, the adult Charles describes the intensity of his desire to know his father, a desire that continues

through his narration of the past. He notes that he finds himself “endlessly searching the figures of the young men in Lily’s pictures” (325). Indirectly acknowledging the uselessness of this activity, he remarks that he has already “looked at them through magnifying glasses in every kind of light my eyes will bear” (325). Yet he would go further, driven by his intense and frustrated desire to know, and “would tear out their faces and set them under a microscope if I thought it would reveal some element that would confirm my parentage” (325). The incipient violence in this comment reinforces the magnitude of the lie Charles tells his mother just before her death when she asks if he minds not knowing: he answers “*no*, because that was what she needed to hear” (4). During his mother’s lifetime, Charles must balance this desperate desire to know his father’s identity with his matching desire to protect his mother.

But having just described the useless intensity of his current perusal of old photographs, the adult Charles recalls a session with his mother when he was nine or ten and they once more laid out the Cambridge photographs. This time, her finger selects one of the young men; she says, “There,” and then “Red” (326). Charlie’s questions establish that his name is neither Red nor Fred, nor does he have red hair, at least “*no—but maybe*” (326). This is all his mother can tell him about the young man Charlie sees as “a natural desperado” (326). Something in his stance appeals to the young boy who therefore wants him for a father. But looking through the rest of the Cambridge pictures he finds another image of him that shows a “one-eyed stare at the camera [that] has lost all its mirth and is devoid of its former recklessness” (327). While Charlie had wanted the young man as his father, he now wishes he had not found the second picture with the “hard-eyed version” he could not accept. Later in life, he realizes that the two pictures need not have been

taken in the same year, that perhaps the young man he chose *is* his father, and the hardened version an irrelevant image.

Lily could not tell him which photograph had been taken first, but years later he comes across more information about the young man. “[Q]uite by accident,” he finds a copy of the *Illustrated London News* which shows father number two as a long-distance runner setting a world record at the 1912 Olympic Games (327). “Red” is, indeed, the athlete’s name, taken from his habit of wearing “a red bandanna tied around his head as a sweatband when he ran” (327). Yet just as the second photograph he found complicates Charlie’s first image of Red, so this more recently-discovered photograph is complicated by its caption—*Famous Athlete Murder Victim*—that provides yet another image of this young man. Charles’s further research reveals that “The Honourable Charles ‘Red’ Russell,” the brother of Lily’s close friend, Phoebe, “had been stabbed repeatedly in the groin” by Phoebe and had “bled to death” (328). The violence revealed by Charles’s research more than matches the violence of the imagery with which this strand of his narration began, the imagery of heads being torn off, if only photographic heads.

What I find significant about the results of Charlie/Charles’s independent investigations of these two photographed fathers is that they lead him to knowledge that, while not that which he seeks, is nevertheless meaningful. With the first photograph, he begins to recognize the connection between his father and all the young men lost in war. The second also forces him to confront violent loss, but, primarily, it alerts him to the limits of what a photograph will reveal, even if submitted to bright lights and enlargement. For in the place of the one young man Charlie wants to claim as his father, he finds three other versions. Finally, his mother’s confusion and agitation over the

identity of the face she responds to as “Red” and her frustratingly inadequate “*no-maybe*” makes as much sense as any other response.

The pursuit of fathers number one and two, then, leads Charlie to recognize that his putative father’s identity has the potential both to broaden outwards to a connectedness with the rest of his generation and to split within itself to reveal its own shifting identities. But while the pursuit of these two fathers’ identities begins with Lily over family photographs, Charles’s awareness of father number three begins after his mother’s death. Through this final quest, Charles consolidates the knowledge he has gained from pursuing the earlier quests with his mother; his narrative of this search emphasizes connections and shifting identities. By its conclusion, he finds his father, acknowledges the strengths his mother bequeathed him, and accepts himself as an adult preparing to accept responsibility for his own child.

The narrative of the search for father number three begins with an emphasis on Lily’s constant role-playing, the fluidity of identities she models, if unwittingly. That Lily herself “play[s] a game with her identity” is something Charlie learns from Caroline when he is “twelve or thirteen and capable of understanding more—though, sometimes, of visualizing less,” a time when he has withdrawn “from the invented worlds I had co-habited with my mother” (330). He attributes this withdrawal to his school attendance, citing the boundaries of the world he lived in then, and noting that “[e]ducation demands less of our imagination and more of our obedience” (330). So when Caroline tells him of the period during which Lily believes herself to be Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Charles is dubious. He notes that he “had seen such things. The Ant God being worshipped. The intellectual, turning her world into an exercise in French. The star-gazer, lost at the

window. The fire-watcher, crouching near the flames. I had run with her from demons. Watched her *playing with matches* . . . But I had never met Elizabeth Barrett Browning” (332). Significantly, Charles introduces this narration with references to the “invented worlds he [has] co-habited with [his] mother,” worlds he acknowledges now; he can scarcely imagine and visualize those she inhabited before his birth. His skepticism regarding Caroline’s story is at least partly due to its extension beyond his lifetime into a period of his mother’s life he cannot know directly (330).

Trying to learn about his mother’s activities in the period of his conception, Charles has long attempted to find Eleanor Ormond, a close friend of his mother in those early years. Having finally abandoned this search, he receives a call from her “three weeks after Lily’s death” (334). As he hangs up after agreeing to meet her, he looks down at “a faded picture of Eleanor, Phoebe and Lily leaning on the rail of the *SS Franconia*, summer of 1909.” His comment that follows—“It was as if the photograph had spoken” (335)—reflects more his mother’s magical approach than his own inclination to enlarge, rip up, and scrutinize photographs under bright lights. As Charles enters the King Edward Hotel where he is to meet Eleanor, he is magically transported into “Lily’s company” at the tea dances he accompanied her to when he was seven or eight. Remembering the exhilaration he felt dancing with his mother as “*Lily-Vernon and Charlie-Irene-King and Queen of the King Eddy Ballroom-Spring of 1917*,” Charles recognizes what they shared. Further, he argues this shared exhilaration against possible reader assumptions that Lily or Charlie must always have been unhappy. He advises his readers to “[m]ake no mistake of it—Lily knew happiness—Lily knew joy. We both knew heaven” (338). As he adds “All those years ago,” he emphasizes his role as an adult who

is reconfiguring knowledge about his mother and his relationship with her. Having begun his narration of this search for his third putative father by referring to his move away from the invented worlds he co-habited with his mother, he dances himself back into the magic they shared.

With this memory as background, Charles meets with his mother's old friend, explaining to her "that the authorship of my life seem[s] to have been misplaced" and reminding her that he was "born on the 30<sup>th</sup> of October" in 1910" (339). Eleanor tells him that she was there at the time, and then last saw his mother just before the War. On that occasion, Lily proudly introduced a three-year old Charlie to a roomful of people, and Eleanor's husband, Karl, held the boy, who had to be "practically [torn] from his arms" so that his nanny could put him to bed (340). Eleanor points out that "from the moment we knew [Lily] was pregnant [Lily] hadn't the slightest idea who it might have been" (341).<sup>6</sup> Charles emphasizes the equanimity of his response to the implications of this remark by noting that he was "[s]miling" as he commented "lightly" to Eleanor that she "ma[de] it sound as though [Lily] had any number of men to choose from" (341). Eleanor acknowledges the discomfort a son might feel at such discussion of his mother, but Charles argues that, far from imagining his mother as "a loose woman," he knows that she was simply "lost" and thus "ran straight into the arms of strangers" (341). Adding to this what tremendous fun his mother was, Eleanor tells him the story of Lily's disappearance, with "a wistful eagerness . . . to remember as many details as she could, because she felt she owed their retrieval to Lily" (345). There is a sense here that Charles is the beneficiary of this information because of his mother's death. Coming so soon after his loss, the knowledge reaches him as an indirectly relayed inheritance.

Eleanor recounts her trip to retrieve Lily after a frightening three-day disappearance. Alerted to Lily's location by a phone call, Eleanor arrived at a rooming house filled with artists, writers, and a German flautist, Karl, to learn that Lily had followed Karl home, and then refused to leave his bed. Moments later, Eleanor meets Karl, her future husband and Charles's "*father number three*," "the man with whom Lily had been so passionately bedded that another man and a woman had had to come and remove her" (352). Later, Karl admits to Eleanor that "there had been intercourse," and Eleanor describes to Charles the primal scene of his potential conception as Karl had described it to her: "She would not let go of him. She clung to him . . . as one would cling when drowning. She had to be torn from his arms" (353).

This description of Lily being torn from Karl's arms echoes Eleanor's earlier description of a three-year old Charlie being similarly separated from Karl, and thus hints at a connection between Karl and Charlie. Nevertheless, at this point, Eleanor claims that Lily's disappearance took place in November or December rather than in January, the month of Charles' conception. Charles shows her "the photographs that had seemed to show the most likely candidates in the search for my father," and she identifies them for him. Considering their names—Carroll, Charles, and Karl—Charles observes that "[e]ach [is] the name of someone who might have a son called *Charlie*" (353). While this observation marks Charles's continuing focus on assembling clues that will lead him to his father, it simultaneously reveals his awareness of the interchangeability of the candidates for that position. The observation, then, resonates with Lily's comment earlier that Charles's father "*was a man, that's all. . . . his blood is in you, that I know*" (300).

Indeed, earlier in his narration when he recounts Lily's truisms about his father, Charles makes his own connections, noting that Lily's identification of her father was not as vague as her identification of his. Charles goes on to say that he has "often pondered the twinning of these two absent fathers. . . . Though [Lily] never said so, she must have felt, as I did, the absence of a father one could reach out and touch, if only in memory." Of himself, Charles admits that he "long[s] to have some sense of his [father's] presence"; he is sure that "[i]f he had held me, even once . . . I would remember it. If he had laid his hand and spread his fingers on my head, as I have seen so many fathers do with their young, I could hold that, too, in memory. I would know it then for certain. . . . But there was no such moment, so there is no such memory" (300). Arguing that the same was true for Lily since "Tom, The Piano Man [sic] died without ever seeing her" and since he thus "had no notion of her existence," Charles establishes another connection between himself and his mother on the basis of their "two absent fathers" (300).

Twinning himself and his mother as fatherless children, Charles goes on to claim with considerable certainty that, for himself at least, this absence would have been mitigated significantly by a single moment in which his father held him. He is certain that if such a moment existed, he would remember it. Yet when he learns that Karl was, indeed, his father, he realizes that while Karl "died before I knew him . . . [t]here was, after all, that moment which I must have retained without awareness—when he stood in the living-room at Richmond Park and held me in his arms—with his fingers splayed to the shape of my head" (452). Acknowledging his failure to recall a moment he had earlier assumed would be indelibly imprinted in his memory, Charles repeats the drama of the

incident—that he “had to be dragged from his embrace. As Lily once had been”—thus making yet another explicit connection with his mother at the moment of identifying his father.

Being finally offered, in the space provided by his mother’s death, an image of his mother and father together for which, like the narrator of *Running in the Family*, he has been waiting all his life, Charles finds this knowledge of paternity to be somewhat inconsequential. Although it solves a mystery for him,<sup>7</sup> knowing his father’s identity does not result in his identifying with Karl, but rather with Lily. Charles does, however, identify with Lily’s version of Karl, memorizing the Elizabeth Barrett Browning poem about “the great god Pan” that he finds copied in Lily’s notebook. Having learned from Eleanor that his mother mistook Karl for the god Pan, Charles says that he cannot tell “[w]hether [he is] the reed or its music” (452). Through the interchangeability signalled by this remark, Charles pays tribute to his mother’s insistence on the connectedness of all things.

In telling the story of his mother’s life and thus bearing witness to her, Charles confronts and surrenders many of his assumptions about narration and memory, along with his assumptions of what it would mean to know his father, to have once been held by that father. In the manner of the narrators of Bruffee’s elegiac romances who, through telling the story of their deceased heroes, are able to let go of their crippling reliance on them, Charles is able to relinquish his fascination with his father. And like those elegiac narrators, in so doing he also overcomes a crippling impasse in his immediate circumstances: despite having jeopardized his marriage through his refusal to risk bringing another child like Lily into the world, he and his wife have nevertheless

miraculously conceived a child during a brief reconciliation on his last military leave; he discovers this after having been emasculated by a land-mine and assuming children are now an absolute impossibility. But while the narration of his epistemological quest has allowed Charles to release the investment he has long held in his father's identity, the move forward in his personal life is equally due to his newfound appreciation of all that his mother has taught him.<sup>8</sup>

Indeed, interestingly, Charles' unlikely fatherhood parallels Will's assumption of that role in *Medicine River* with the gift to South Wing of the spinning top his father once promised him but never delivered. In both novels, the narrators' epistemological concerns originally focus on discovering more about their fathers, but gradually both men come to appreciate what their mothers, both single parents, teach them. As they do so, both narrators construct a new relationship with the past and with the future. With photographs suggesting simultaneously both the possibility and the impossibility of knowing the past, these narrators filter childhood memories through adult consciousness, comparing stories and images. Finally, they perform their own versions of paternity, acknowledging their own paternity, looking toward the future, past the camera's frame with Will's mother, making a connection with community in order, as Lily urges to "*pass it on.*" remembering that "We were not—and we will never be—alone" (460-1).

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The announcement of parenthood at the end of *The Piano Man's Daughter* finds a parallel in the conclusion of *The Worlds Within Her* which suggests that Jasmine and Jim may consider sponsoring her young cousin's immigration to Canada, thus taking on the role of surrogate parents. King's *Medicine River* also has Will assuming a surrogate fatherhood with the gift he makes to South Wing. That three of the six novels in this study use an assumption of parenthood, at least in some form, to trope an assumption of adult subjectivity is at once problematic and intriguing, and I hope to make this the basis of a future study.

<sup>2</sup> Throughout, I use Charlie when I am referring to the child and Charles to refer to the narrating adult.

<sup>3</sup> *The Concise Oxford Dictionary, Ninth Edition* offers this definition and etymology: **1** fitness; rightness (*doubt the propriety of refusing him*). **2** correctness of behaviour or morals (*highest standards of propriety*). **3** (in *pl.*) the details or rules of correct conduct (*must observe the proprieties*). [Middle English, = ownership, peculiarity, from Old French *propriété* PROPERTY].

<sup>4</sup> Chalfen observes that although there is a relationship "between making personal pictures and writing or keeping a diary . . . a diary is considered personal [whereas] the visual home mode context is addressed to more people." While he acknowledges that "the recordkeeping functions are clear in both cases, Chalfen's research indicates that "going one step further to the selection of topics found in diaristic intra-communication, we are likely to find the mention of sad, difficult, or even tragic moments in life – topics that will be selectively eliminated from the snapshot, slide, or home movie" and he suggests that "[m]ore work could be done on comparing and contrasting visualizations in relation to verbalizations of personal moments in life" (134).

<sup>5</sup> As Anne Geddes Bailey notes in "Finding Lily: Maternal Presence in *The Piano Man's Daughter*" (*Essays on Canadian Writing* 64 (Summer 1998): 56-81), that Charles, "at twenty-nine . . . is still pondering and deciphering his mother . . . does not indicate either an inability to differentiate from her or a desire to return to undifferentiated bliss; rather, it indicates his awareness that his mother always was and still is both intimately connected to him and profoundly distinct from him. What he learns over the course of time is how to live with this contradiction and find it productive rather than stifling, as is generally the case within patriarchal notions of maternal ties" (66). Bailey is concerned to demonstrate, reading Findley's novel through Jessica Benjamin's model of intersubjectivity, that "Charlie's narrative is his attempt to regain that intersubjective space they once inhabited" (67).

<sup>6</sup> Although Eleanor presents Lily's inability to remember the conception as an unavoidable part of Lily's illness, I do wonder whether, by the time the pregnancy became obvious, Eleanor and Karl's mutual love was also obvious. I can easily imagine Lily being generous enough to not want to complicate their love and subsequent marriage with her own claims on Karl.

<sup>7</sup> And not only the mystery of who his father is, but also the mystery of who paid Charlie's school bills through the years: *E. Anderson* is revealed to be Lily's friend, Eleanor.

<sup>8</sup> Bruffee's narrators, along with their deceased heroes, are all masculine.

## Chapter Four

Looking at/for Her People: History, Geography, and the Family Photograph in  
Neil Bissoondath's *The Worlds Within Her*

*[T]he act of returning, as everyone knows who has gone away, is an attempt to know oneself, just as the initial departure sprang from the same source. You think it's the landscape you want to see again, but really you're looking for yourself. Coming back to the place you are from, after a long absence, you see things the way they were, not as they are—you come face to face with surprising ghosts, invisible to everyone else, and some of the ghosts wear your face.*

Isabel Huggan, *Belonging* 94

While this epigraph from Isabel Huggan's *Belonging* applies in many ways to Yasmin's journey in Neil Bissoondath's *The Worlds Within Her*, some of its assumptions limit its pertinence. The claim that one's "initial departure" sprang from "an attempt to know oneself," for example, implicitly assumes some volition and control over that departure, while Yasmin, taken from her homeland as a child, exercised no choice. Her childhood departure from the Caribbean problematizes Huggan's apparent assumption that one would have enough memory and knowledge of the place one is "from" in order to "see things [on returning] the way they were, not as they are." The relevance of Huggan's depiction of voyages away from and back to a supposed place of origin is further compromised by her failure to consider the role politics might play in these journeys. Yasmin's relationship to "the place she is from," was complicated, even before

departure, by colonial and postcolonial politics, politics that influenced, if not forced, her departure.

Huggan's formulation of "the act of returning" does not allow for the special circumstances of Yasmin's return: Yasmin's confrontation with the "surprising ghosts" of her past landscape takes place at the bequest of her recently deceased mother, the parent who took her, as a child, away from the place to which she is coming back. Still, despite all its limiting assumptions, this epigraph draws attention to the important relationship between visibility and self-knowledge through its attention to "looking," "see[ing]," and "com[ing] face to face" as being integral to the act of "know[ing] oneself." Similarly, *The Worlds Within Her* highlights this relationship, most particularly in Yasmin's attention to family photographs as a way of learning about her family's past in a place she scarcely recalls. Through this attention to photographs, the novel explores and disturbs assumptions about both the places we are from—indeed, even about what "from" could mean—and about the possibility, and the significance of returning to those places.

Scott McQuire suggests some of the ways that attention to the family photograph might both complicate and complement Huggan's understanding of "the act of returning." Claiming that, "as much as it symbolizes family unity," the family photograph "functions as a sign of the family's dispersion," McQuire argues an inherent link between the camera and "the era of mass migrations in which the experience of separation has been generalized." His assertion that "the family photograph assumes its full—fetishistic—force only when it represents a family unit which has all but disappeared" is particularly relevant in the immediate context of Yasmin's mother's death (60). Carrying her mother's

ashes back to the place they are both “from,” Yasmin studies family photographs in an effort to learn more about the history of a family unit that, for her, has all but disappeared.

As in Findley’s *The Piano Man’s Daughter*, the family photograph functions as both invitation to, and barrier against, forbidden knowledge. As well, both novels repeatedly stage scenes in which the protagonists are guided in their interpretation of images from the family album by other family members. But the two differ in Bissoondath’s attention to the geographical displacement that is a significant part of the family history. Not only has the family long ago moved from India to the Caribbean as indentured labourers, but in more recent generations they have moved to England for education and careers, and then moved back to the Caribbean. Finally, Yasmin and her mother’s move to Canada seems to have curtailed any connection with her childhood home until the funereal obligations with which the novel begins. Throughout *The Worlds Within Her*, the trope of the family photograph must be read within this context of displacement, of movement across family-separating oceans, and particularly within a context in which Yasmin, returning, is an outsider within her own family.

Accompanying the photographic trope in this novel is the image of Yasmin’s frozen core being gradually melted as she abandons some of her reserve to engage more fully not only with her husband but also with her newfound extended family. Indeed, we might even say that, as is so often their use within Kodak culture, photographs function in this novel as ice-breakers. While Yasmin first denies any interest in her extended family, even as she returns to the Caribbean to dispose of her mother’s ashes, she arrives at a more engaged relationship with newly-met relatives through their shared interaction over photographs. Particularly interesting is the way that the novel’s narrative structure reveals

that the knowledge Yasmin gleans through the “exhibition moments” with her Caribbean relatives is knowledge consistently withheld from her by her mother, Shakti. In effect, the gap between Shakti’s narrative and the narrative of Yasmin’s journey metaphorically represents the geographic gap separating the family as well as Yasmin’s consequent separation from knowledge of her family history.

The narrative structure of *The Worlds Within Her* differs from the other novels of this study that use the first-person narrative typical of Bruffee’s elegiac romance. Certainly, sections of first-person narrative abound through *The Worlds Within Her*; however, these are not addressed to any presumed reader, but rather have the effect of being overheard. While the other novels are narrated in the first person by the bereaved adult child, it is Yasmin’s mother, Shakti, who narrates the first-person sections of Bissoondath’s novel. Thus readers hear this voice as a spectral one, since we know that its owner’s ashes are being delivered to the Caribbean. Further complicating this voice is the fact that its primary audience, Mrs. Livingstone, is in a stroke-induced coma for most of the conversation.

That Shakti’s spectral voice narrates her history into the void seemingly figured by Mrs. Livingstone’s inert and silent body effectively tropes and highlights the censoring and the geographical distance which separates Yasmin from information about her past. These first-person narrative sections interrupt the third-person narrative that details Yasmin’s journey to make some connection, even reconciliation, with that past, even as she denies any need or desire to do so. A further structural complication is that the latter narrative is contrapuntally juxtaposed with narrative sections, also in the third person, that describe Yasmin’s life from the time of meeting her husband, through the joys of their

newlywed years, the delights in raising their daughter, the trauma of her sudden death, and the gradual dissolution of her marriage to the presently unsatisfying relationship she contemplates leaving.<sup>1</sup>

The narrative's division into these several strands shows Yasmin to be cut off from significant knowledge about her family history, knowledge that the reader, ironically, possesses. This division, coupled with a plot that outlines Yasmin's first return to her birthplace, charged with funereal responsibilities, confronting a past she can only know through relatives she scarcely remembers, points to ways significant family moves effect memory and family narrative, and, ultimately, subjectivity. This geographic displacement figures in the other elegiac family romances of this study, yet in none is the protagonist so strikingly isolated from her own family history as Yasmin is.

The narrator of *Scar Tissue*, for example, regrets, while recognizing the motives for, his father's decision to protect him from the family's history in Eastern Europe. His separation from this history, though, is at least somewhat mitigated by being shared with his brother; further, the narrator did have both parents present throughout his own childhood and into maturity. In *The Piano Man's Daughter*, Charles, like Yasmin an only child, has also been affected by a major family move: his grandmother's long-sustained silence about the genetic source of Lily's mental illness would not have been possible in the Old Country where John Fagan's history would have been part of communal as much as familial memory. But unlike Yasmin's mother, Eliza eventually chooses to share her knowledge of the family legacy when her daughter becomes aware of Lily's condition. Thus she passes on "'The Story of Uncle John Fagan' as if the story was a legend with a title. Or a fairy tale by the Brothers Grimm," and she extends the tale back to her parents'

marriage in 1840, her birth in 1843, and the burning-down of their house and subsequent emigration to Canada (113). Further, Charles has a considerable network of family and friends to help him complete his story. As he says at the outset of his narrative, “[s]ome of what follows I lived and some was told to me,” either through “Lily’s notebooks, or told to me by others” (6).

By contrast, “Yasmin’s grandparents are long gone, and her mother’s only brother, Yasmin’s uncle Sonny [has many years earlier slid] into a lonely Alzheimer’s twilight. There are cousins perhaps, but too distant in blood and time to be sought out. Her mother never spoke of them, and so Yasmin has no memory—has been given no sense—of having known them” (3-4). The weakened family ties emphasized are attributed indirectly to time rather than place; significantly, they recall parallel weakened family networks in both *Obasan* and *Medicine River*. In the former, while generations in the adoptive country have allowed the establishment of new and continuing family networks, these have been weakened, if not entirely destroyed, by the separations and traumas imposed on the family by the Canadian government during the WWII internment. In *Medicine River*, weakened ties are similarly attributed to a move legislated by the Canadian government. Thus while Will spends much of his childhood trying to learn more about his father, he is also cut off from much of his mother’s family, as is manifest in his response to the photographs he finds in his mother’s trunk, images of family and of ancestors he cannot recognize. But, while both Naomi’s and Will’s families have suffered the deleterious effects of legislated dispersals of community, both narrators connect to the past through a family member able to interpret family photographs for them. The contrast between these two and Yasmin becomes strikingly clear when we look again at the characterization of Yasmin’s lack of

knowledge of her extended family: “Her mother never spoke of them, and so Yasmin has no memory—has been *given* no sense—of having known them” (3-4; emphasis mine).

Yasmin’s lack of knowledge, along with her inability to remember, is equated with her mother never speaking of relatives, and both negatives—not knowing, never speaking—are equated with a gift withheld.<sup>2</sup>

Yasmin appears to recognize the gravity of her mother’s behaviour when she tries to account for the withheld information to her husband, Jim, who asks why Yasmin knows so little about her father. Initially, Yasmin claims responsibility for the failed transfer of information, acknowledging that, while “it must seem strange . . . [, she has] never been all that curious about him” (5). She justifies her lack of curiosity by saying that if she “had any memory of him, it might’ve been different, maybe I’d have wanted to know more, about him and the island. But you can’t miss someone you don’t remember knowing. And I had mom, you see. She was enough” (5).

Yasmin does eventually acknowledge that she picked up the cues for her lack of curiosity from her mother who “never really wanted to talk about him, I don’t think. And you know my mom—she’s good at keeping her mouth shut when she wants to” (6). Here Yasmin’s disavowal of interest about her past is more clearly exposed as an allegiance to her mother. But while Charles, in *The Piano Man’s Daughter*, occasionally pretends indifference about his father’s identity for his mother’s sake, Yasmin tries to convince Jim and, one suspects, herself that her early life is irrelevant. Yasmin’s rationalization suggests that her curiosity has been squelched or hidden. If so, perhaps the effort required to dampen or hide this curiosity is connected with the frozen core Yasmin senses in herself.

This core, also identified by both her friend and her husband, resembles a childhood image Yasmin carries of the Caribbean she left behind.

This childhood image is generated by the first photograph introduced in the novel, one whose description interrupts the third-person narration of Yasmin's arrival in the Caribbean. The image arises as Yasmin remembers an earlier journey, a childhood trip through eastern Canada with her friend Charlotte's family. In this memory, Charlotte charts their progress on a map while Yasmin's gaze surreptitiously "wander[s] south . . . past New York, Philadelphia, Washington, Richmond, Savannah and Miami; past Havana and Port-au-Prince, Santo Domingo and San Juan; and farther south still" to where she sees the island of her birth, so small that it is "almost obliterated by its own name" (20). When she tells her friend that she's looking at her birthplace, Charlotte expresses surprise at the idea that Yasmin is "a foreigner" (20). While Yasmin has, as her friend's surprise indicates, always appeared Canadian to Charlotte, the simple disclosure of being born elsewhere seems to compromise her citizenship in Charlotte's eyes.

In response, Yasmin finds herself wondering if she is, indeed, a foreigner; as well, she apparently relinquishes any curiosity about her identity in relation to her first home. At least that is what is suggested by the time lapse of "[t]hree years . . . perhaps four" before her interest is caught by the photographs accompanying a *National Geographic* article, "Volcanoes of the Caribbean," lent to her by her mother's friend, Mrs. Livingston (20). While the text of the two pages devoted "to a long-dormant cone in the island of her birth" does not particularly interest Yasmin, she is fascinated by the photographs—"[a]n aerial shot of the cone . . . [a] rectangle of townscape . . . [a] rectangle of beach, water and horizon"—which merge into the composite image of "the island [which] remained with her

for decades. Impossibly small, swathed in primary colours, with a molten heart forever stilled” (21).

In a narrative about a protagonist whose epistemological quest is guided in large part by shared viewing—and interpretation—of photographs, Yasmin’s focus on these images is significant for several reasons: first, they are introduced in the context of a journey during which Yasmin finds herself identified as a foreigner; second, they suggest the possibility of Yasmin’s continued but clandestine childhood interest in her country of birth, against her mother’s assertions to the contrary; and finally, but perhaps most importantly, the image they offer of “a molten heart forever stilled” is mirrored throughout the novel in the references made to Yasmin’s own heart. In fact, a plot summary of the novel could reductively describe it as the eventual melting of this frozen heart thanks to Yasmin’s confrontation and reconciliation not only with her personal and family history, but with individual family members as well.

Of significance in this reductive summary is that this melting takes place as Yasmin mourns her mother; the novel connects her heart’s frozen condition with her relationship with her mother. Shakti’s death frees Yasmin from the allegiance which stifled any curiosity she might have had about her past.<sup>3</sup> Thus it releases her to the ice-breaking potential of the photographs. Examining these with the guidance of her newfound relatives, she begins to drop the façade of non-curiosity she has maintained in deference to her mother. At the same time, this exploration of her past through photographs reveals the impossibility of ever getting beyond façades to any absolute essence, and provides a tension that works against the plot’s simplistic conclusion that returns Yasmin, melted heart and all, to her marriage.

This plot summary must also place the changing condition of Yasmin's heart within the context of her marriage. The mourning narrator-protagonists of Kenneth Bruffee's elegiac romances confront and overcome a crisis in their immediate personal life even as they ostensibly describe their deceased hero's life; similarly, Yasmin must confront the difficulties within a marriage that has become increasingly unsatisfactory since the death, years ago, of her young daughter. Her journey to transport her mother's remains to the Caribbean is marked at its beginning by her recognition that "she is no longer sure" that "her going alone has nothing to do with Jim"(5); she meditates throughout on the state of their marriage and "[t]he possibility of dismantling the life that has outlived its beauty" (344); finally, however, her return to Canada is marked by her "feel[ing] herself grow warm. . . . [and] beginning to melt" as "[Jim's] lips graze hers" and accepting "with delight . . . his words, their warmth and their weight" (417).

The twinned association of Yasmin's frozen heart with both her marriage and with her mother is first signalled in the passages describing her engagement and subsequent marriage. When Yasmin announces her engagement to her friend, for example, Charlotte enquires whether she should warn Jim about "that little fridge you've got somewhere around your left ventricle that switches on when they start not measuring up" (119). Within pages, a much more subtle reference links Yasmin's coldness with her mother's, and their shared coldness with a supposedly shared response to parody; the parody, in this case, is recognized by both, according to Shakti, in a wedding ceremony which represented "[r]eligious theatre unsupported by belief," and which, as the latter tells Mrs. Livingston, "left them both cold" (123). Yet while Shakti, claiming that Yasmin shares her assessment, sees only parody, the reader knows that the wedding's form is shaped by

Jim's parents' racist concerns about a union of what they term "cultural differences" (122); after they refuse to attend the ceremony, Jim's sensitivity leads him to suggest that Yasmin speak to her mother about "how she imagined her daughter's wedding" (123). Thus it is entirely possible that for Yasmin, as for the reader, Jim's sensitivities, reflected in the wedding ceremony, mitigate against an easy equation of that ceremony with parody.

Shakti's confident assumption that Yasmin's perceptions mirror her own ignores important differences between their two weddings, differences the reader can perceive only by paying attention to the parallel narrative that Shakti offers to Mrs. Livingston. The attentive reader thus learns that the earlier wedding did indeed serve as theatre. That groom, Shakti's husband Vernon, was far less sensitive than Jim to the concerns of his bride, using, as Shakti tells it, "the occasion of our wedding" to break the unwritten but clearly understood social convention that had previously maintained the site of their wedding, a private club called The Majesty, as whites-only (39). The levels of façade that marked this wedding as theatre are flagged by the newspaper photographs and accompanying "lengthy stories turned out by the hacks," as well as by the distance between these superficial accounts of a wedding and "the real story . . . that the Majesty Club could not go back to its old ways" (42). Shakti depicts her wedding day as having served as a convenient façade exploited by Vernon so that he might cross the black-white border and enter the Majesty Club to claim it for others of his race. When Mrs. Livingston asks if Shakti minded having her wedding co-opted for political purposes, Shakti concedes that she "did think . . . that he might have chosen a more appropriate occasion" (42); overall, however, she says that "on our wedding day my husband reclaimed the dignity that had so long been denied us, and dignity opens up the world" (43).

While her husband reclaims the dignity long denied dignity his race, Shakti denies or at least defers her emotions. Describing her marriage to Mrs. Livingston, she recognizes that “it all sound[s] so cold-blooded . . . But it wasn’t.” Rather, she claims, “[t]he emotion . . . was . . . displaced . . . not the narrow and utterly selfish emotion of the love of a man and woman for one another [but] an emotion that was a great deal less personal, but no less important for that” (26). Overall, Shakti’s description of her wedding (and her insistence that Yasmin similarly views her own wedding ceremony as façade, if to less grand purposes) is so revealing that a reader might understand if Yasmin, like the narrator of Ondaatje’s *Running in the Family*, had been looking for a photograph of it all her life. In fact, she is neither privy to Shakti’s description nor do the photographs she studies with Penny and Cyril include any of her parents’ wedding. For Yasmin, who has known little about her father and nothing of his propensity for theatre, her childhood is marked rather by her mother’s displacement of emotion and her mother’s own reliance on pantomime, on performing a role.

When Yasmin remembers Shakti, she “ha[s] no memory of hugs and caresses, or of kisses beyond the obligatory”; she recalls her mother “administer[ing] medicines and rub[bing] her back and chest with ointment,” but can summon “no sense of companionship, of maternal vigil” (217). As she gets older, Yasmin evaluates her relationship with her mother as an intellectual one, knowing “her mother to be what others called a charming woman,” but knowing that “charm . . . required distance in the way that *stagecraft* did; there was a vital element of wilful illusion to it. . . . a certain measure of personal *theatre* was important to her mother, a woman of affectation but not of pretence. Her airs were meant not for others but for herself. She practised the idea of

her life in a way that avoided sham and hypocrisy, happy behind the *façades* that made her real to herself” (217; emphasis mine).

While this assessment of Shakti’s “airs” avoids simplistic references to essential identity, the denial of any self-alienation is revealed as problematic and unsustainable by the spatial difficulties, if not impossibilities, of the metaphor that claims Shakti as somehow existing happily “behind the *façades* that made her real to herself” (217). And the third-person narrator admits that “it was those *façades*, to which they both played, that denied Yasmin the physical affection whose absence she noticed only when [she became] a mother herself” (218). This admission alerts us not only to the damage effected by these *façades* but also to Yasmin’s complicity in them. Perhaps the clearest illustration of this complicity is found in Yasmin’s response to Mrs. Livingston’s annual Easter gift. In contrast to her mother’s tasteful “single large Belgian chocolate egg,” their neighbour offered what Shakti “sometimes referred to, with dissatisfaction bordering on disdain, as drugstore Easter eggs.” Accepting the gift, Yasmin performed “what she later understood to be a baffling pantomime of loyalty: with a show of gratitude to Mrs. Livingston, with a covert glance of disgust to her mother” (216). In fact, Yasmin found Mrs. Livingston’s gift “by far the more appealing,” but she allowed her mother to believe the Belgian egg remained uneaten for weeks in order that she might “relish it for as long as possible” (216).

This association of bafflement with pantomime, of confusion or bewilderment with play-acting, recurs throughout the novel.<sup>4</sup> For example, when Yasmin and Jim first make love, the narrator describes their “limbs *in pantomime*, rearranging themselves [with Jim] hover[ing] above [Yasmin] like a man momentarily *bewildered* before a feast”

(116; emphasis mine). And when Cyril and Ash accompany Yasmin to the hotel room to retrieve her belongings, she is aware that for them “watching her watching [the policeman] take her passport to a figure flagrant with authority through wearing casual civilian dress,” she is “now part of the pantomime” (140). As she “follows another booted policeman up the stairs of the hotel,” she is again conscious that “she is, for Cyril and Ash, once more merging with the pantomime” (141). In contrast to the commentary quoted above that draws attention to the different perspectives offered from in front of and behind Shakti’s façades (even while claiming a happiness for her behind them), the narrative here notes that “even from within, the pantomime retains its *enigmatic* movement: life slowed to a flipping of frames. *Mystery* in shards, *riddles* partially posed” (141; emphasis mine). Enigma, mystery, riddle—here is an insistence on pantomime as baffling, even for the one who performs it.

This recurrent reference to pantomime suggests two similar terms potentially productive to the reading of a photographic trope which brings together visuality and subjectivity in a postcolonial context. These terms—mimicry and masquerade—are linked to the notion of pantomime in their shared relation to play-acting as well as in their implication of a watching audience. The former term, mimicry, has figured largely in the theorizing of Caribbean identity since even before Bissoondath’s uncle, V.S. Naipaul, published his 1967 novel, *The Mimic Men*. Indeed, when she speaks of herself, Shakti reflects the self-alienation which Frantz Fanon considers when introducing the notion of mimicry into postcolonial discourse in his ground-breaking *Black Skin, White Mask*. As she describes the clarity with which she “see[s] this persona I have built,” she recognizes her own absurdity in becoming the “Englishwoman” she is mockingly called (360).

At the same time, the self-awareness, the calculation, as well as the struggle inherent in her persona-building recall Homi Bhabha's assertion that mimicry signals a certain agency. Bhabha reads this agency as subversive, in that its ambivalence destabilizes the relationship between colonizer and colonized. Shakti's depiction of her own mimicry seems subtler, more complex, and appears to move beyond the colonial situation in which this mimicry was formed to the postcolonial society in which it now, perhaps inappropriately, persists as part of her performance of self. As Shakti says, those who laugh at what they consider her airs

fail to realize just how clearly I see myself. How clearly I see this persona I have built—everything from the hair so perfectly moulded to the words that I use to the cadences of my speech: they do not realize that I know how unlikely all this makes me, how absurd. The Englishwoman, they call me behind my back. Nor do they realize that this shaping of the self was the only one available to people of my generation, rising out of that backward colonial society. Some of us, it is true, surrendered our selves whole, but every struggle has its casualties. I have struggled not to be a casualty. (360)

Shakti's self-analytical description suggests the risible "mimic men" of whom Naipaul, writes; simultaneously, however, her startling clarity of vision persuades the reader against laughter. As she draws attention to the complicated agency involved in her shaping of self, she places her performance as "[t]he Englishwoman" within a visual field; her references to both seeing herself and seeing those who mockingly view her "behind her back," direct the reader's attention to the multiple sightlines intersecting over this play-acting.

In her reference to moulded hair and to the building of a “persona,” Shakti alludes to the other term, masquerade, that is also relevant to the novel’s recurrent references to pantomime. Like pantomime, masquerade is part of theatre and performance. Shakti connects the two when she recalls that after Vernon, her politician husband, has been sabotaged into exile in England, he “managed through language and theatre to reverse his fortunes” on their return (233). Her recollection of this reversal of fortunes through theatre includes a memory of Vern’s vehement denunciation of the masquerade performed by the English, whose “children roast cats alive for pleasure.” While “[t]hey’ve lived for so long pretending to be refined and mannered . . . they can’t prevent the primitive from breaking through the masquerade from time to time. That’s when you see what they’re really like. English reserve? Afternoon tea? Theatre, my dear! Masquerade!” (220). Vern’s angry denunciation exposes an irony that further complicates Shakti’s façade of English reserve and afternoon tea-taking with her neighbour: her mimicry, it appears, mimics a masquerade.

Vernon’s characterization of English reserve and afternoon tea as masquerade depends not on an intervening material mask but rather on English manners and refinements themselves as forming the façade they present to the world. While masquerade often depends only metaphorically, as in Vernon’s usage, on a physical mask, the term’s basis in the use of such a mask encourages us to think about the materiality of the visual borders between self and others which are so constitutive of our subjectivity. To diagram, for example, the intersecting looks between colonizer and colonized, we might draw a line representing the colonizer’s view of the colonial subject’s mask, but potentially this line would have to pass through the colonizer’s own mask before viewing

the other's façade; similarly, the colonized might, as indeed Shakti's admission indicates, see both masks while looking at the colonizing Other.

The novel's references to masquerade, in other words, draw attention to visuality's role in subjectivity; while Shakti looks at the way she shapes herself, aware all the time of those who are looking at her, Vernon directs his sight back at the English and critiques the façade they present to the world. Thus he reminds us of the potential importance of the watcher's role, of surveillance, in masquerade's network of intersecting looks, complicated as it is by the intervention of masks. While Shakti describes looking at herself as seen by others, and Yasmin, too, is surprised as a child to find herself viewed as "a foreigner," numerous scenes place Yasmin's parents, particularly her father, Vernon, in positions of surveillance. When Yasmin then adopts a modified form of this stance to view the family photographs, she must contend with a complicated visual field in which the intersecting network of looks prevailing in a colonial and postcolonial context are further overlaid with the intersecting looks of the family.

Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin discuss the ramifications of colonial and postcolonial surveillance in their discussion of Jeremy Bentham's eighteenth-century panopticon as read by Michel Foucault. They first observe that surveillance "implies a viewer with an elevated vantage point [with] the power to process and understand that which is seen" and that it also "objectifies and interpellates the colonized subject in a way that fixes its identity in relation to the surveyor" (226). Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin move on to note, in the penal setting of the panopticon, a consequence of this surveillance that has immediate relevance to our consideration of masquerade: a process of 'conversion' in which an inmate adopts the staff view of himself

and “tries to act out the role of the perfect inmate” (Goffman 63). Applying this insight from the penal institution to the colonial setting, the three theorists find that the “process of conversion in colonization is far more subtle but just as potent.” While “imperial power over the colonized subject may not be necessarily as direct and physical as it is in a ‘total’ institution,” nevertheless, “power over the subject may be . . . enforced by the threat of subtle kinds of cultural and moral disapproval and exclusion,” with the result that “[t]he colonized subject may accept the imperial view . . . and order his or her behaviour accordingly” (227). Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin demonstrate the imbrication of surveillance and masquerade when they note that imperial power “will produce colonial subjects who are ‘more English than the English,’” thus suggesting that “Englishness” can be performed to varying degrees. Further, they demonstrate the complications inherent in conversion’s folding together of surveillance and masquerade, arguing that “[m]ore often, such conversion will be ambivalent, attenuated, intermittent and diffused by feelings of resistance to imperial power, leading to what Homi Bhabha calls ‘mimicry,’ a ‘conversion’ that always teeters on the edge of menace” (227).

The ambivalence of colonial conversion, already apparent in Shakti’s awareness of her own pantomime, influences Yasmin’s father’s subjectivity also. A man who wishes to take his country from colonial to independent status, Vernon is described to Yasmin, on her first meeting with her uncle Cyril, as occupying a position of surveillance. His stance recalls Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin’s argument that the importance of the gaze in postcolonial discourse rests on the potential reversal of surveillance. Positioning himself as watcher rather than watched, he potentially exemplifies “a particularly potent aspect of the menace in mimicry: the displacing gaze of the disciplined, where the observer

becomes the observed” (228-229). According to these insights, Vernon “metaphoric[ally] displac[es] and return[s]. . . the imperial gaze [by] appropriat[ing] . . . imperial technologies, discourses and cultural forms” (229). While he displaces and returns the gaze, however, the technologies, discourses, and cultural forms he appropriates mask Vernon’s colonial subjectivity with a veneer of power that complicates his relationship not only with his political constituents but also with his family, including his daughter.

This complication is hinted at in Cyril’s description, also offered to Yasmin at their first meeting, of her father as “a romantic [who] use to stand here, on the balcony . . . an’ just look out, for hours on end. Dreamin’ his big dreams” (69). While this description softens the political implications of Vernon’s stance of surveillance by emphasizing his romanticism and dreaminess, Yasmin appears to intuit the drive for power inherent in the position: as she also looks out toward the horizon over the water, she notes that the view “is one made for big dreams [in that it] not only offers the spectacular but, because of the extra elevation of the house, dominates it” (69). Even before learning much about her father, Yasmin is already alert to the potential difficulties he faces in occupying a position capable of looking back at the colonizer. To assume the commanding height affords him big dreams but potentially isolates him in his power.

Astutely, Cyril puts Vernon’s surveillance and its accompanying dreams into a colonial context:

“They say that from here you could o’ watch the whole history of the island,”

Cyril continues. “Five hundred years ago you would o’ seen Columbus sail across the bay. Then the Spanish treasure galleons goin’ to and from South America. The raiders of one kind or another. French, Dutch, English. The traders. And the

slaveships. For a very long time, the slaveships. And when the slavers stopped comin', other ships came, first with the Chinese and when they didn't work out, with our people." (69)

This trope, whereby history can be read in landscape, is common to postcolonial discourse. Here Cyril traces the succeeding waves of those who have exploited the island—raiders, as he calls them, of various nationalities—and of those who were exploited here—slaves and indentured labourers—although he fails to mention whether any indigenous people once lived on the island. Against this complicated intersection of geography and history, Yasmin's unspoken question—"Our people?"—reflects a reluctance to identify herself with her family and its historical base as indentured Indian labourers brought to the Caribbean island generations ago. Her scepticism also reflects an inability, or reluctance, to accept an essentializing cultural identification based on ethnicity.<sup>5</sup>

Vernon's stance of dreaming surveillance reflects, in Cyril's explication, the history associated with this landscape. At the same time, although neither Vern nor Cyril share Yasmin's reluctance to identify with their people, her father's stance, in its mimicry of the colonizer's surveillance, suggests the same slipperiness of identity his daughter experiences years later. The novel continues to question the possibilities for colonial and postcolonial subjectivity by juxtaposing Cyril's use of the term "our people" with the next chapter's invocation, by Shakti, of the concept of a collective identity as she asks Yasmin's fiancé where "[his] people" are from (71). Shakti asks this question from her own position of surveillance, using her binoculars to survey the action on the cricket field near her high-rise apartment. Just as the landscape Vernon surveys tropes its colonial

history, the cricket field Shakti views, situated as it is to the right of “the grey stone buildings of educational privilege sitting adamant in the sunlight, girdled by an intimidating moat of lawn and sports fields,” provides “a paradigm of the old world transported to the new”(71).

Through her discussion of the game’s history, and particularly of its status in the West Indies, Shakti introduces the subject of her husband’s prejudice, noting that while he “couldn’t help admiring [the black West Indian players’] talents . . . he regretted their race [feeling that] the Indian cricketers of the West Indies never got their due” (74). In her reference to the “racial prism” through which her husband viewed the world, Shakti again foregrounds the visuality so emphasized in these adjoining chapters (74). Her critique of her husband’s racism is softened by the fact that she appears to share his tendency to judge an individual by who “his people” might be; that she primarily seems to regret that Vern’s “racial prism” held him back in his political career; and, finally, that she similarly occupies a position of surveillance. Shakti’s position, however, is inflected by the binoculars which imbue it with the same sense of distance and reserve that Yasmin associates with her mother.

From her position of surveillance, Shakti has always been Yasmin’s only interpreter of their family history; whatever information Yasmin offers Jim about her past is offered from Shakti’s perspective. After he comments that her mother “seems very . . . British,” for example, she tells him that this propensity developed after the time her parents spent in London, a period her father hated and her mother loved, with the result that “[he] became an anglophobe, she became an anglophile” (76). When Jim wonders what Yasmin might remember about London, she answers that “[f]rom what I gather”—to

which the reader might add “from Shakti”—her father wasn’t ready for children yet, still focussed on what he had to do “[f]or his people” (76). When Jim echoes her words back as a question—“His people?”—Yasmin hurries ahead, before changing the subject. Thus the chapter ends as the last one did, with an echo—a mimicry—which subversively twists itself into a question. This questioning echo intensifies both chapters’ emphasis on surveillance and the possibilities it offers for colonial mimicry and resistance.

While the reader might be able to recognize the ironic echoes inherent in Yasmin’s parents’ positions of surveillance separated, as they are, by years, distance, and very different subject positions in their respective national communities, Yasmin’s perspective is much more limited. Following her mother’s lead, she has denied that the Caribbean holds much interest for her, and has eschewed any identification with “her people,” whoever they might be. In the wake of her mother’s death, however, and charged with taking her ashes back to her first home, Yasmin steps out of her position (as news anchor) in front of the camera to instead survey its results. For someone who has constructed a persona to be looked at, this role reversal paradoxically exposes a vulnerability in Yasmin, revealing, in her desire to look at the photographs, a deeper desire, perhaps, to see and know more of her family. Yasmin’s surveillance of family photographs complicates the implications of this term. While her father’s surveillance has subversively mimicked that of the colonizer, its subversion nonetheless acknowledged the colonial gaze, “indirectly support[ing] its unilateral claim to be *the gaze*” (Hsu 118). By suggesting the importance of “other forces,” familial ones, comprising the visual field, Yasmin’s surveillance works towards an alternative “ethics of visibility, an ethics that pursues heterogeneous alliances rather than the fixed terms of identity politics” (Hsu 108).

Admittedly, viewing photographs in the context Chalfen calls “exhibition moments”—allowing other family members to display and interpret the images for her—does not exemplify surveillance as clearly, if at all, as do the respective stances of Vernon and Shakti. Nevertheless, there are clear parallels between these respective positions of viewing; the examination of the photographs offers the same element of distanced vantage, and some of the same conflation of epistemology and power. In particular, the examination of the photographs makes explicit a concern with the effect of cultural identity on subjectivity that is, implicitly, part of the earlier moments.

Comparing the three viewing positions yields this almost immediate observation: Vernon stands alone in his elevated viewpoint, while Shakti, although sharing hers, simultaneously establishes herself as the authority who imparts knowledge; Yasmin, however, must depend on others if she wishes to understand the photographs. Searching one image for “the merest suggestion of people, of place, and of time,” she admits resignedly that “[s]he will have to be led into it, will have to depend on others to show her what she cannot see, no matter how hard or how often she wipes her eyes” (164).<sup>6</sup> How frustrating for Yasmin, who “has no belief in the romance of family ties,” who sees “no point in comparing the thickness of blood and water,” who feels that “with time, with distance, with no network of shared experience, blood might as well be water”; her position as viewer of the family photographs forces her into a relationship with, as Cyril might say, “her people” (45). Reconfiguring her family history and, indeed, her own past, results in a reconfiguration of her present, and demands a renegotiation with the contingencies that determine her subjectivity.

This reconfiguration and renegotiation begins for Yasmin almost as soon as she meets her Caribbean relatives and begins to learn something of her family past. Having assured her husband earlier that she has “never been all that curious” about her father, a desire to know more manifests itself as she listens to Cyril and Penny (5). Against these earlier protestations denying curiosity, her satisfaction at receiving a box of her father’s belongings resonates powerfully. Telling her husband that she has set this box “on the dresser, beside the smaller box that holds the urn that holds [Yasmin’s] mother’s ashes,” she comments, “It’s the first time in years we’ve all been together in the same room” (150). Admonished by Jim “not to be macabre,” she muses to herself that “she does not intend to be macabre. What she does not know is what she does intend. The word ‘completeness’ occurs to her. It is for now just a word, though, weightless but resonant” (151). That an absence-signifying artifact—whether ashes, photograph, or personal belonging—might offer a sense of completion recalls Ondaatje’s satisfaction at finding “the photograph I had been looking for all my life” (161). In echoing the satisfaction of Ondaatje’s narrator, if inadvertently and subtly, Yasmin invites speculation that she may also have yearned all her life to picture her parents together.

Significantly, the imaginary plenitude Yasmin experiences by collecting artifacts which connect her to her absent parents is juxtaposed with a scene in the parallel narrative describing Jim and Yasmin’s relationship. In this scene, he tells her that what he “ha[s] been trying hard [to do] . . . all [his] life. . . . [is] not to be like my parents” (148). Once again, the Ondaatje phrase is echoed in the intensity of a lifelong focus on knowledge of one’s parents. Jim searches for knowledge about how his mother and father have become who they are: “Were they always like that, or did the years make them so?” (148).

Although he has grown up knowing both parents, he feels a need to “picture them young,” a need for which, as he says, “photos don’t help” (148). This denial of photographs’ efficacy suggests that, like Yasmin, Jim has occupied the surveyor’s stance to study his parents’ past faces in an attempt to better understand himself. Ostensibly directed outward at images of his parents, his surveyor’s stance actually allows him to look inward in his effort to avoid becoming like his mother and father.

Jim’s dismissal of the helpfulness of photos is connected to his awareness of “the lie of snapshots,” found in the “regrets and dissatisfactions momentarily displaced for the camera” (54). While his comments expose the documentary limitations of “Kodak culture” with all its censoring mechanisms, Jim ignores the revelatory possibilities of family photographs. Limited by the masks and/or screens which intervene between camera and subject, photograph and viewer, photographs nonetheless offer an opportunity to glimpse those interruptions of the visual field. These opportunities are particularly helpful in a novel which invokes notions of masquerade and pantomime.

Marianne Hirsch reads several photographic projects<sup>7</sup> which invoke both literal and metaphoric notions of masking. Of these, she observes that “[o]n the one hand, the mask is a metaphor for the photograph’s power to conceal, for the frustrations of the photograph’s surface” (85). These frustrations cause Jim to dismiss photographs’ helpfulness in his quest to know about his parents’ earlier selves. Hirsch goes on to gesture with “the other hand,” though, pointing out that masks also serve “as a metaphor for the semiotic lenses or screens through which we read photographs, and through which the images themselves are constructed as objects of social meaning” (85). Thus they

might allow Jim to recognize the presence of the invisible lenses and screens through which he looks at his parents, and indeed, at himself.

Noting the proliferation of masks converging in the photograph, both in its making and in its reading—those we assume in posing as well as those we project in reading photographs—Hirsch comments that “[f]amiliarity can be thought of as such a mask” (86). If nothing else, the photographs Jim dismisses as unhelpful might help him see that the masking effected by familiarity is centrally important in his ability to understand, or even to see, his parents. Against his dismissal of the helpfulness of photos, surveying family photographs might afford both Jim and Yasmin the opportunity to survey the masks they assume and project as well as those masks assumed and projected by others in the visual field of their family histories.

The ability of the photograph to reveal and to withhold information fascinates Yasmin. As an outsider to the photographs Cyril and Penny show her, she is sensitive to the “screen of familial myths [projected] between camera and subject” (Hirsch 11). These familial myths accommodate Vern’s need to construct his own image for the camera. For example, Penny notes that, from childhood, Vern thought of his cheeks as too fat, and “as soon as somebody pointed a camera at him he use to suck them in, to give them a more sculptured look, he use to say” (97). Cyril suggests that the family colluded in preparing Vernon for the public eye, saying that the latter “wasn’t able to see himself” therefore, the family “had to make sure he dressed properly” and help him groom hair and moustache to avoid the error of looking like Hitler and Stalin (98). Vernon’s inability to be self-reflexive, to “see himself,” is significant given his introduction in the position of surveillance; in occupying this position, he fixes his gaze outward, in contrast to Yasmin

and Jim whose surveillance of others is motivated by a desire to see themselves. Further, the family's collusion in preparing him for his public points to the broader gaze within which the familial myths operate. It also points to the ironies inherent in the necessity for would-be politicians, particularly colonial ones, to assume the most effective poses and masks, lest they be mistaken for, or even revealed as, dictators comparable to Hitler and Stalin.

These layers of myths, collusions, maskings, and screens seem to be part of what Yasmin has expected to find and, as noted earlier, she has resigned herself to "hav[ing] to be led into" the photographs, "to depend on others to show her what she cannot see" (164). Thus she is pleased with herself, looking at a newspaper photo of her father "deep in conversation with another man," to perceive "a grain of authenticity: what he reveals despite himself." Immediately, though, "she wonders whether she is reading too much into the image," and whether the tension she has interpreted as "a masculine desire to crush" might "come from merely a headache or hunger. . . . from irritation with photographers or responsibilities awaiting him elsewhere" (198). Recognizing that she "can never know the answers" but instead "must draw her own conclusions," Yasmin consoles herself by likening this task to "writing a novel or researching a biography" (198), thus apparently equating fiction and life-writing. Unlike Jim, however, Yasmin does not dismiss the photograph as unhelpful but seems, instead, to appreciate the opportunity to speculate, to "draw her own conclusions."

Although Yasmin will never "know the answers," the novel's parallel narrative appears to divulge these answers to the reader. Most scenes in which Yasmin studies a snapshot, either alone or with Cyril and Penny, to arrive at a qualified understanding of it,

are matched by another scene in the novel providing the reader, but not Yasmin, with either a contradictory or a more extended explanation from Shakti's confidences to Mrs. Livingston. For example, Cyril points out that the man Vernon is speaking to in the newspaper photograph, a man who eventually became prime minister, held her father "in great esteem . . . born of the fear and hatred one has for an equal who may yet spoil one's own dreams [and cleverly] sent Ram [the family's nickname for Vernon] to London [hoping] that Ram would disappear" (199). In the parallel narrative, the reader learns that Shakti associates this posting with Vernon's promise, subsequently broken, that "he would no longer allow his work to impede [their] life together" (179). Yasmin never learns this, however, and the gap in her knowledge about her parents' relationship signals the epistemological difficulties associated with family histories.

This parallel narrative structure which offers the reader access to information withheld from Yasmin effectively highlights the impossibility of her ever arriving at the truth. At the same time, paradoxically, the structure emphasizes the importance and value of Yasmin's quest. The reader's awareness of the barriers which separate Yasmin from the knowledge she seeks accentuates her admission and acceptance of her curiosity, as well as her willingness to risk the repercussions of satisfying it. This emphasis is heightened by the imagery of Yasmin's frozen core melting in response to the incremental revelation of the masks and screens of representation. This imagery is accompanied by a detailing of Yasmin's corporeal response to the process of looking through the past in family photographs.

The risk Yasmin takes in trying to satisfy her curiosity manifests itself as she "shuffl[es a handful of her father's photos] into a picture gallery of the passing years"

(252). Noting the progression they display of hair greying and thinning, “flesh thicken[ing], skin darkening,” she sees “the years made manifest” and “feels suddenly that she is seeing the wordless minutiae of him, peering at a road map to shapeless darkneses within his soul” (253). Yasmin finds these changes “more graphic than she can stand [offering] a closeness of encounter she is unprepared for,” and in response, “[h]er hands grow moist. Her heart pounds [and] . . . [w]ith a sweep of a hand she banishes them from sight” (253). As Cyril observes, “looking so much into the past” is not only hard on the eyesight, but also disturbs the equilibrium Yasmin has maintained for so long. Although Yasmin’s icy core is not invoked here, the corporeal changes marked by her moist hands and pounding heart demonstrate a certain unmasking of emotional responses that she has tended to keep private.

Perhaps because the photos disturb Yasmin’s equilibrium, the third-person narrative voice, closely aligned here with Yasmin’s perspective, uses language attentive to their contingency, their openness to interpretation, the very ambiguity that renders family photographs so unhelpful to Jim. As her husband has done with his family photos, Yasmin dismisses many of the images as unable to “take her beyond their stilled moments” (205). Reminding her of her own “snapshots of similar decomposition . . . [these are] too hasty, too shorn of personal context to be repositories of memory” (205). Nevertheless, she pauses at several, arrested despite their limitations. The description of a childhood shot of her father and his siblings is particularly marked by such ambiguities of interpretation:

*PHOTO: THE DAY may have been CLOUDY, OR perhaps THE YEARS HAVE EFFACED THE CLARITY OF SUNSHINE BY IMPOSING ON THE BLACKS AND GREYS A POWDERY FILM THAT HAS TURNED THE IMAGES*

*TENTATIVE. THEY ARE LINED UP . . . IN FRONT OF A LOW WALL, A CONCRETE FENCE perhaps, ABOVE WHICH IS A SKY SO BLEACHED THAT IT suggests NEITHER COLOUR NOR CONTEXT. . . . THE BOY WHO WAS TO BE HER FATHER . . . OFFERS A HALF-SMILE TO THE CAMERA, AND A SQUINT THAT appears to be TRYING TO SEE THROUGH THE LENS TO THE PHOTOGRAPHER'S EYE. (213; my emphasis)<sup>8</sup>*

Not only is there a preponderance of qualifying verbs and adverbs in this passage. As well, almost every phrase here emphasizes the impossibility of knowing the specific context of the photograph at the time it was taken, while the passage itself further insists that the physical effect of time modifies the original image.

The description also draws attention to the relationship between viewer and viewed as that relationship is mediated and modulated through the camera lens. While Vern displays an early desire to use the lens for his own ends, Penny is described as “gazing not at the camera but just past it.” “[T]he way her arms hang down her front” and the way she “seems not to know what to do with her body” reflect her discomfort in front of the camera. In contrast to Vern’s half-smile and Penny’s “inexpressive” face, Cyril offers “a toothy grin [which] screws his face into a guileless delight.” This guilelessness is underlined by the additional note that Cyril’s “eyes gaz[e] with frankness into the camera” (213). The attributes that this early photograph supposedly captures are confirmed by what Yasmin and the reader learn of the adult versions of the three children. At the same time, the emphasis on the subjects being posed and on the difficulties of interpretation renders the accuracy of this attribution questionable.

What is unquestionable, though, is the narrative emphasis on Vernon's continued interest, as an adult, in controlling the visual field. Another newspaper photograph, for instance, depicts him as

*LOOKING UPWARDS FROM THE GROUND TO A DAIS WHERE HE IS IN FULL RHETORICAL FLIGHT, EYES NARROWING OUT TOWARDS AN UNSEEN CROWD, THE REACH OF THE GAZE AND THE ANGLE OF THE HEAD SUGGESTIVE OF LARGE NUMBERS. HE IS PLAYING TO HIS AUDIENCE—THAT IS OBVIOUS—BUT ALSO TO THE CAMERAS, ENERGY DIVIDED BETWEEN THE HEATED EXPECTATION OF LISTENERS AND THE COOLER EYE OF THE LENS. HIS POSE APPEARS CADENCED FOR POSTERITY, A FLUTTER OF VANITY LIFTING HIS CHIN AND LENDING ELEGANCE TO HIS GESTURING HAND. (279)*

This description is exemplary in claiming that Vernon controls his audience by relying on the falseness—or façade, mask—suggested in such phrases as “full rhetorical flight” and “playing to his audience . . . but also to the cameras.” The delineation of tension between the listeners’ “heated expectation” and the lens’s “cooler eye” is both fascinating and problematic: the description clearly gestures at the masks and screens interposed by broadcast media, particularly in the context of colonial politics. At the same time, the description implies an objective recording machine, detached from the media apparatus responsible for this photograph appearing in a newspaper as representative of some aspect of colonial politics.

The problems inherent in the implicit claim that journalistic photography is objective are heightened by the narrative peculiarities: while narrators of the other elegiac

family romances I study speak in the first person about their own family photographs, this photograph is described in a third-person voice that slides into an apparent identification with Yasmin's thoughts by attention to Vernon's "gesturing hand," a hand that is

*SHARPLY DETAILED IN THE BLAST OF LIGHT, THE WRIST THICK AND ENCIRCLED BY A NAME-BRACELET OF HEAVY SILVER, THE SPLAYED FINGERS PLUMP, THE NAILS BROAD AND TRIMMED SHORT. A HAND SOMEHOW SUGGESTIVE OF A CERTAIN EASE, A SELF-SATISFACTION. THE KIND OF HAND, she thinks, THAT WOULD ENGAGE WORK WITH ENTHUSIASM BEFORE CONFERRING ITS COMPLETION ON OTHERS. BUT A HAND OF RELISH, TOO: EASY TO IMAGINE THE FINGERS PINCHING A SCRAP OF BREAD INTO A PLATE OF FOOD, SCOOPING UP RICE AND CURRY SAUCE WITH THE DEXTERITY OF A MAGICIAN.* (280; my emphasis)

This move from a description of Vernon's rhetorical posture to a focus on his hand somehow grounds and lends credibility to the assessments made of his stance, gaze, and control of audience. While the earlier part of the description makes spurious claims—how, really, does the angle of a speaker's head suggest large numbers? how does a photograph capture the division of a speaker's energy between his listeners and the camera?—the movement to a close consideration of the hand seems to make the abstract concrete, corporeal.

At the same time, this description of the hand, corporeal and grounded as it is, moves quickly to the interpretive, emphasizing the impossibility of reading a photograph except through a screen. Beginning with an oblique reference to the lens's "cooler eye," here seen in the flash's "blast of light" that "sharply detail[s]" the hand, the description

appears equally cool and objective, offering such specifics as the thick wrist, the heavy silver name-bracelet, and the plumpness of the splayed fingers. But the claim of objectivity is belied by the selection of details offered; the focus on the hand's plumpness and on the trimmed nails insinuates other claims, under the guise of the camera's objectivity. These claims become more explicit with the narrator's note that this hand is "somehow suggestive of a certain ease, a self-satisfaction." What is not clear is who is making these claims. Although the next sentence puts the thoughts in Yasmin's head, the comments directly attributed to her tend to balance and even humanize the judgements which precede them.

For example, the assessment that precedes the direct reference to Yasmin's thinking couples the rhetorical gesturing of Vernon's position as a colonial politician with the wealth (the heavy silver of his bracelet), ease, and self-satisfaction manifest in his hand. This coupling effectively puts Vernon's political integrity under suspicion and implies that his actions are self-serving. Further, the evaluation suggests a leader who wishes to direct, but is removed from labour, someone who claims to be one of the people, but is removed from them in terms of class. Yasmin, however, sees this hand as likely to "engage work with enthusiasm before conferring its completion on others." In other words, while she might concede that this hand charges others to complete the work it directs, she nonetheless sees a willingness to labour enthusiastically that contradicts the manicured complacency depicted in the preceding words.

As noted, the description begins in an ostensibly objective third-person voice that appears to depict Vernon dispassionately as does, supposedly, the lens's "cooler eye," although this objectivity is belied by references to the speaker's "flutter of vanity" and to

the “self-satisfaction” seen in his hands. This account becomes more obviously subjective when it is identified with Yasmin’s thinking, at which point Vernon’s hand is more positively associated with a willingness to labour. This movement from the supposedly dispassionate to the admittedly subjective, from judgement to mitigation, resembles the oscillation Shakti performs as she describes her husband to Mrs. Livingston; understandably, Yasmin’s assessment might be influenced by her mother’s rationalizing of her father’s political behaviour. But the description of the photograph moves beyond this, to an act of imagination that makes this hand more corporeal and personal yet.

In this act of imagination (presumably Yasmin’s, although the narrator does not specifically state this), the fingers of this hand are pictured “pinching a scrap of bread into a plate of food, scooping up rice and curry sauce.” Significantly, while the earlier description has presented the hand as compromised by marks of class that might separate its owner from the politics he espouses, an identification or even allegiance is made here through both the food and the manner of eating. The passage recalls several earlier pages in the novel in which, in parallel narratives, Penny describes to Yasmin how Yasmin’s grandmother “use to eat,” and Shakti describes her mother-in-law’s habits to Mrs. Livingston (81, 86). Both passages focus on the older woman’s love for spicy food; as well, Cyril and Penny’s attentiveness to Yasmin’s ability to recognize island foods and tolerate their spiciness establishes this ability as dividing community members from outsiders.

Further, both passages contrast Yasmin’s grandmother’s table manners with those of the British. Penny, for example, insists that while her mother always ate with her hands, this was “not because she didn’t know how to use knife and fork” (81). Rather, as

Shakti tells Mrs. Livingston, “[s]he was quite at ease with cutlery, but usually insisted on using her fingers in the traditional Indian manner, gathering the food into a shred of roti” (85). Shakti’s account places her mother-in-law’s eating style into a tradition, preempting those who, judging her by British values, might call her unmannered. As well, Shakti’s recollection that “it was delightful watching her eat” emphasizes the visual field in which this eating takes place. In this visual field, those attempting to set hegemonic standards might disapprove of Yasmin’s grandmother’s table manners; at the same time, however, she is a “delightful” sight to others who are themselves aware of being watched and judged. Shakti’s sketch places the imagined eating action of Vernon’s hand in solidarity with the family and cultural traditions demonstrated by the relish with which his mother eats.

Vernon’s hand in the newspaper photograph, then, points toward the imbricated politics of class and race which complicate his fight for the colony’s political independence. His family is of a class and race well able to mimic the table manners of the British, but they nevertheless often choose to enjoy their own traditions. Viewing this photograph, the reader knows that for this family, particularly for Vernon, ability to imitate the British and pride in their own culture are often accompanied by an intolerance of other races and a disregard for those of a lower class. However, Yasmin has inherited little knowledge about her father from Shakti, and she studies the photographs of him with Penny and Cyril, the siblings who tend to mythologize him. Thus the words “she thinks” in this ekphrasis potentially mark a collusion between the third-person narrator and the reader, a collusion which emphasizes Yasmin’s distance from knowledge of her father. Yasmin’s desire to overcome this distance makes her focus on his hand particularly

poignant. While she attributes to the hand “the dexterity of a magician,” she herself appears to conjure a more intimate vision of a father generally pictured in a political context.

Within the Barthesian *studium*—in this case the field would be “the orating colonial politician”—her father’s hand appears as a *punctum*<sup>9</sup> inviting Yasmin’s imaginative act, subtly revealing her heretofore-denied desire to know her father. This revelation explains Yasmin’s dramatic sweeping away of the photos that offer her “a picture gallery of [her father’s] passing years” (252); that she has denied this desire for so long suggests that her equilibrium has depended on the repression of earlier losses. Indeed, when Shakti describes her granddaughter’s happiness and energy, she comments that the young girl “reminded me of Yasmin before she lost her father, before she and I came alone to this land” (259). The comparison suggests the gravity of Yasmin’s twin losses (of father and homeland) and marks them as the onset of a certain sadness for Yasmin. Yet Yasmin, against Cyril’s expectations to the contrary,” has no memory of ever having cried for, or because of, her father” (331). Amie, the family servant and her childhood nurse, tells her that while she’s “grown up nice,” she hasn’t changed “deep inside.” Amie remembers that Yasmin “was a quiet little girl. Like you had a sadness deep-deep inside you. And it still there. Deep-deep inside you. As if you knowed things you shouldn’t know” (373). To the suggested layers of losses and denials within Yasmin, then, Amie applies a language of inside and outside which returns us to the earlier image of Yasmin’s frozen heart.

This image was introduced by Charlotte’s reference to Yasmin’s refrigerator heart, made somewhat jestingly in response to Yasmin’s announcement of her engagement;

years later, Yasmin's husband, Jim, echoes Charlotte's depiction more seriously to tell her that "[t]here's a coldness at [her] centre. . . . A ball of ice that survives beneath all those layers of warmth" (345). What Amie recognizes as "a sadness" both Charlotte and Jim experience as a coldness within Yasmin; the persistent sadness Amie notes is indirectly acknowledged by Jim in his characterization of the ball of ice as "surviv[ing] beneath . . . layers of warmth." Together, Amie's insight that Yasmin's inner sadness marks something she knows, but shouldn't, and Jim's observation of the ice's persistence suggest that Yasmin's perusal of the photographs might yield knowledge she already holds but against which she protects herself through denial.

Understanding Yasmin's search this way explains her perception of the pictures she shuffles through as offering "a road map to shapeless darkneses within [her father's] soul" (253). This perception denotes the powerful screen through which she views images of her father. Within this context, her focus on his hand reflects the ambivalence of her response to him, the mixture of approbation and desire for intimacy that are both part of her need to know. Yasmin's focus on a single point in a photograph in order to move beyond the surface representation to her intuited knowledge parallels her response to another image, one from the family's personal snapshots. In both instances, the photograph plays a dual role as both barrier and doorway: as *studium*, each offers an image in which mask and screen enforce strict limits on representation; the *punctum* in each, however, invites the individual viewer to use the photograph as a starting point for looking beyond.

The second photograph that seriously arrests Yasmin is also described in a third-person narrative and set apart from the surrounding text by upper-case italics; in it,

“*VERNON, SHAKTI AND PENNY POSE IN SWIMSUITS FOR THE CAMERA,*” while “*IN THE FAR BACKGROUND, SITTING ON THE SAND AND STARING OFF TO THE HORIZON IS AMIE, YOUNG.*” Underlining Amie’s relationship to the rest of the posing party, the description comments that “*SHE IS INCIDENTAL, NOT A MEMBER OF THE PARTY.*” Unlike the others, she is not in a swimsuit, but rather “*IS WEARING A LONG DRESS. A THICK BRAID HANGS DOWN TO HER LOWER BACK*” (226). As Yasmin studies this picture, Penny recalls an evening when Vern imitated Amie’s snoring to such hilarious effect, Penny claims, that they all laughed “so hard,” even Amie, who “laugh[ed] so hard she break two-three plates” (227).

Yasmin’s reading again forms an apparent counterpoint to the upper-case italics. While these italics purport to simply describe, Yasmin’s focus is more interpretive, noting “[t]hat little body: legs drawn up, arms reaching around the knees in a clasp of self-comfort” (226). Having remarked on Amie’s isolated vulnerability, the voice that appears to be Yasmin’s notes the dress fabric’s pattern and the braid’s intricacy. The latter, in particular, individualizes Amie beyond her role as servant. While the rest of the family is amused at their servant’s expense, the *punctum* constituted by the fabric pattern and the intricate braid moves Yasmin to think, “Dear Amie. Dear, dear lady . . .” (230). Although the photograph represents Amie as being both marginal to, and different from, the family she serves, it offers details that prompt Yasmin to consider Amie’s role within the family, particularly, her relationship to Yasmin, more carefully. By revealing some of the masks and screens that operate in the family’s visual network, the photograph prompts her to pursue a fuller vision than the family’s record provides. Finally, it delivers her to a moving encounter with Amie.

Moving beyond the representations offered by photographs, Yasmin is guided by her relatives' memories and comments, as well as by her own alertness to the filtering effected by both photography and memory. Dropping her own mask of denied curiosity, Yasmin admits her investment in looking as she attempts to understand the masks and screens that mediate her view of her familial past. While she is unable to assure Cyril that she feels herself to be "one of them"—one who, "understanding things without all the words. . . . [ , would thus] know that [she is] home"—she follows his guidance to a more intimate vision of her father (351). His assessment is more honest, brutal even, than her aunt Penny's, revealing as it does her father's willingness to sacrifice friends and family in his drive to political power. However, it also reveals her father's strengths. Finally, Cyril's guidance leads her to an encounter with the hand whose imagined gestures beckoned to her from the newspaper photograph; she traces, on a cliffside, the initials her father had traced, even as her daughter had once traced Jim's (327).

While this move from photographic representation through the family myths to her own understanding of, and rapprochement with, her father's character might be expected to satisfy Yasmin's quest, she wants more. Initially approaching Amie as if she were simply a difficult interview for Yasmin's news program, a "space opens up in her mind" when she realizes that Amie knew her well when she was small (170). When Amie says that she was "Baby-sitter. Nurse. . . always . . . the maid," Yasmin asks if she has any grandchildren or, at least, a husband (170, 174). To the negative response, Yasmin thinks "you cannot just have been a slave all your life." She finds, however, that the "gap between thought and words is unbridgeable, and so all that remains is silence" (174). Nevertheless, Yasmin begins bridging this gap between thought and words, prompted by a

photograph that both asserts the servant as peripheral to the family and, simultaneously, as someone who carefully braids an intricate design in her hair.

Just as she finally accepts her father's absence through her sense of touch by tracing his initials in the rock, so she moves toward Amie's revelation through touch. Allowing Amie to rub coconut oil on her bruised knee, Yasmin overcomes the silence between them to find out more about her childhood. Recalling a deceptive trick Vernon used to perform to impress others with his strength, Amie comments that some people consider "the dead more important than the livin'" (375). As she says this, her fingers press Yasmin's foot, "releas[ing] a sudden electricity that sizzles along her sole into her ankle and toes" (375). Once again, information about the past elicits bodily changes in Yasmin. These changes transform Yasmin more dramatically than the pounding heart and sweaty hands she experienced earlier, pushing her beyond her stance of surveillance and her role of careful, but uncommitted, observer.

Stimulated by Amie's touch, Yasmin is suddenly charged with anger; characterized by the narrator as "irrational," this anger jolts her from her usual demeanour to demand of Amie that she tell her "everything" that has been withheld about her past (376). What she learns brings her directly to the "darkness" she searched for in the photograph of her father. Yet this new information would never be recorded by a camera: no photograph would ever show his rape of Amie, nor the way that his response to the rape's consequences destroyed her prospects for any life beyond that of a servant. Although a photograph—pierced, for Yasmin, by Amie's braid—brought her to this knowledge, no photograph would ever show the way Vernon alienated Amie from her own family by placating her father's indignation with money; neither would one show the way he gave

away her child for someone else to bring up, not even telling her “if it was a boy-chil’ or a girl’chil’” (383).

Thus Amie reveals to Yasmin the shape of her father’s darkness, a darkness masked in all the photographs she views, and equally obscured by the family’s version of Vernon. This more complete knowledge releases Yasmin to accept her mother’s death and dispose of the ashes; further, it releases her into “a sense of intimacy—never before experienced with the woman whose ways and manners cultivated warmth from a distance” (394). In her moment of communion with her mother’s remains, she cries tears for her daughter, her mother, and herself, and the narrator emphasizes, through repetition of the words “hot tears,” the heat that brings Yasmin to release, farewell, and relief. Against the references throughout to her icy core, this emphasis on heat suggests a change in Yasmin, a melting that allows her to drop some of her reserve, relax her own protective masking.

This connection between tears and melting mirrors another incident in the novel, in which Yasmin’s young distant cousin, Ash, cries tears, and Yasmin “feels herself melting” as she caresses his cheek in an “unthinking attempt to soothe” (367). This incident, in which Yasmin momentarily connects Ash’s tears with her daughter’s, is recalled at the novel’s conclusion. The conclusion presents the melting effect of Yasmin’s confrontation with her family’s past on her icy core, so that she is now more willing and able to interact with others. Specifically, she begins to overcome her reservations about her marriage—the narrator comments that Yasmin “feels herself grow warm. Feels herself beginning to melt” at her husband’s kiss. Even more, she moves a step closer toward

accepting her extended family as “her people” by suggesting that she and Jim might help Ash immigrate to Canada.

This rather simplistic “happy ending,” with its suggestion that Yasmin’s quest has released her into a warmer and thus more complete self, is belied by the novel’s parallel first-person narrative. While Yasmin has confronted the family’s dark truths to accept her parents, her past losses, and, finally, herself, the reader learns that Yasmin is still missing essential information about her biological parentage. This revelation returns us to the notion of pantomime, with Shakti telling Mrs. Livingston of the “charade” through which she acted out a pregnancy, noting that “the theatre” was only challenged once (384-5). Never having been able to tell Yasmin that she is adopted, Shakti asks the comatose Mrs. Livingston to keep her secret should she ever awake, although she acknowledges that her daughter should someday be told the truth.

Thus the reader’s awareness that Yasmin’s knowledge is still significantly incomplete complicates the trope by which her discovery of family secrets completes her journey. The novel’s apparently simplistic happy ending is undermined by a brief reference to a message Mrs. Livingston has for Yasmin. Further, Shakti’s final words, with which the novel concludes, warn explicitly against simplistic answers: “I am not a final product, Mrs. Livingston. I am a process. As are you. As is everyone. It is to me the most unsettling, and most reassuring, truth about what young people today call ‘identity.’ My dear I haven’t got *an* identity. None of us does. What a great tragedy that would be, don’t you think?” (417).

In conveying the notion of a shifting and contingent identity, Shakti’s final words invite further consideration of the epigraph with which this chapter began. Particularly

notable is the quotation's attention to the surveillance inherent in returning as well as the tension Huggan sets up between seeing and looking: "You think it's the landscape you want to *see* again, but really you're *looking* for yourself. . . . you *see* things the way they were." Also noteworthy is Huggan's suggestion that the attempt to know oneself through looking at past landscapes is complicated by a tendency to people these landscapes with "surprising ghosts, invisible to everyone else . . . some of [which] ghosts wear your face." In the tension between looking and seeing, Huggan points to the complexities of the visual field Yasmin grapples with; Huggan outlines another layer of complexity in her reference to the ghosts who, in "wear[ing] your face," are masked as well. Finally, her quotation applies directly to the act of returning to past homes through surveillance, as modelled by Yasmin, of photographs. Where else do we go so often to look at past landscapes "looking for [ourselves]" only to "come face to face with surprising ghosts [some of whom are] wear[ing our] face."

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This mixture of first- and third-person narratives, together with the interweaving of several chronologies, seems to establish structural parallels between *Taken* and *The Worlds Within Her*; as well, in both novels the mother assumes a ghostly presence. In Marlatt's novel, however, the bereaved daughter appears to be both the first-person *and* the third-person narrator. While aware that parts of the past, of her family history, have been censored, the daughter, in contrast to Bissoondath's Yasmin, is less interested in recovering documentable or reliable information about that past (and indeed has little confidence in the validity or value of such information) than she is in the process of imaginatively re-membering that past for herself.

<sup>2</sup> A topic for a future paper could be the various generational relations to knowledge as these relations are effected by both race and diaspora. The unnamed narrator of Ignatieff's text is not a visible minority and his father's reasons for silence about the past seem more tied to an unwillingness to revisit past traumas than they do to any stigma or shame connected, in the new country, to ethnic or racial identity in the old. Silence about the past is somewhat connected to shame (about mental illness) in *The Piano Man's Daughter*, but that is overcome (by Eliza) in response to Ede's needs. In this novel, class, rather than race, provides the possible source of shame. And Marlatt's *Taken* features a white narrator whose complicated relationship to the mother country and the colonies she and her family move through does invoke issues of race but, again, would require its own extended treatment.

<sup>3</sup> In Chapter 3, I more fully discuss the irony inherent in the freedom narrators find for their epistemological concerns within the space of their mourning.

<sup>4</sup> Without belabouring the point, I note that "baffle" is not only a verb which means "to confuse or perplex a person" but also a noun which refers to "a device used to . . . limit the emission of sound, light, etc.," and I note that in this overlapping of meanings, as well as in the word's possible origins in the Old French *beffer* 'mock, deceive,' there is a hint of the mask which figures in pantomime.

<sup>5</sup> Not surprisingly, Yasmin's thoughts echo the words her creator, Neil Bissoondath, offered in response to interviewer Penny Van Toorn's comment that a "critic has accused you of turning your back on your people": "Who are my people? I fear the automatic assumption of racial allegiance. My friends are of different colours, genders, sexual preferences, religions and so on" (132). ("Building on Common Ground: An Interview with Neil Bissoondath," *Canadian Literature* 147 [Winter 1995]: 127-35.)

<sup>6</sup> Here, the frustrated intensity of the epistemological drive to extract information from the photograph recalls Charlie's willingness, in *The Piano Man's Daughter* to "tear out [the] faces [of his potential fathers] and set them under a microscope if I thought it would reveal some element that would confirm my parentage" (325).

<sup>7</sup> Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe's *Portrait de l'artiste en general*, Ralph Eugene Meatyard's *The Family Album of Lucybelle Crater*, and a number of Cindy Sherman's portraits.

<sup>8</sup> The capitalized italics used to describe photographs throughout the novel seem intended to suggest an extended version of the sort of captions one might write in a photograph album or a scrapbook. We see a similar treatment in Findley's *The Piano Man's Daughter*.

<sup>9</sup> Here, of course, I am using the term by which Roland Barthes denotes that which disturbs the *stadium* or field of the photograph "that accident which pricks me but also bruises me, is poignant to me" (27). (*Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, Trans. Richard Howard, New York: Hill and Wang, 1981.)

## Chapter Five

Haunting Images, Haunted Places:  
Memory and the Photograph(ic) in Daphne Marlatt's *Taken*

Daphne Marlatt's *Taken* resembles Bissoondath's *The Worlds Within Her* in that both explore the significance of place in family history. The families respectively represented in the novels occupy different positions in the colonial and post-colonial hierarchies involved in their migrations; however, both protagonists are similarly concerned with the effects of diaspora on their respective families. Perhaps not surprisingly, then, the novels also share structural similarity in that their plots unfold through parallel narratives that confuse the expected correspondences of time and space. Whenever *The Worlds Within Her* destabilizes readers with the first-person interruptions of the protagonist's recently-deceased mother, though, its third-person narrative settles us with its straightforward linearity. Thus while the novel questions the workings of memory and the representation of the past through its protagonist's focus on the family photograph, it does not defy the metaphysical assumptions by which the past and the present, the near and the far, are generally separated.

Marlatt's novel, however, actively challenges these assumptions. While it also explores the hermeneutics of the family photograph, and the generational and cultural hegemonies that contribute to those hermeneutics, *Taken* augments this exploration by examining the links between the representation of the past and our insistence on viewing our surroundings through a positivist lens. The novel's structural and stylistic strategies—that mimetically evoke the photochemical process of development—and its layered and interwoven tropes—of the family photograph, of haunting, of place as an aid to memory,

and, finally, of natural, particularly vegetative, forms of light-writing—encourage us to at least lower this lens, if not to abandon it completely.

The photograph, deployed or appealed to as documentary evidence, is usually aligned with positivistic systems of knowledge and representation, systems that insist knowledge can and should be drawn only from that which is materially observable and verifiable. But all the novels in this study have pointed in some ways towards the other side of the photograph and the photographic—the possibilities they offer for alternative modes of representation and for knowing that which cannot always be directly and materially observed or verified. For example, in *The Piano Man's Daughter*, Charlie sniffs a photograph for clues to his father's identity. By doing so, he stresses the photograph's limitations in recording the impressions of only one sense, and suggests ways to transcend these limitations. Similarly, the "trick glasses" imaginatively donned by *Obasan's* Naomi call attention to the alienating effect of the viewing lens, but simultaneously indicate its magically transformative abilities, as well as the power inherent in recognizing these effects. In *The Worlds Within Her*, the photograph's documentary evidence of such intricate details as the braid in Amie's hair is complemented by Jasmine's intuitive and oneiric responses to these details.

Indeed, all the novels considered in this study critique the photograph's complicity with hegemonic and positivist systems of knowledge and simultaneously outline the possibilities it offers for transcending such systems. *Taken* represents the most sustained critique of this complicity and the most comprehensive exploration of the possibilities the photograph and the photographic offer for knowing that which cannot be ascertained through positivistic approaches. Playing on the photograph's move from

negative to positive, the novel emphasizes knowledge that is obscured by an insistence on positivist, scientific methodology. It suggests the value of knowing the negative and of being willing to admit that which we cannot know materially, yet it does not dismiss the unknowable as immaterial. To explore the photograph's relationship with epistemological systems, the novel emphasizes the photochemical process of development from negative to positive, and the relationship between that process and vegetative light-writing. Further, Marlatt joins this emphasis to an association of the photographic with the magical and the ghostly, demonstrating that while the technology lends itself to the project of establishing positive knowledge, it also supports ways of knowing that are perhaps less exclusionary and less hegemonic, and certainly more imaginative and more intuitive.

The novel effectively evokes the photochemical process and associates it with the value of negative knowledge in two important ways. It overlaps the trope of reading and imaginatively interpreting photographs with the trope of haunting and the trope of leaves that change their appearance in different light conditions. As well, its various interwoven narratives gradually coalesce to form a cohesive picture, the result resembling a positive image emerging in a darkroom, so that first one corner, then another, achieves visual sharpness. For example, the opening words of the novel are overtly reminiscent of the photographic process: they describe "leaves [which] come up in the half-light, translating themselves from misty grey to yellow" (3). Paralleling this visual translation is the reader's gradually-dawning comprehension of the opaque and indeterminate various narratives and their relevance to each other. While the first-person narrator is unidentified, we can situate her in some "November" in a "space through which those

leaves glimmer, alder and fern in the wet earth” (3). These leaves link the narrator to an unidentified “she” who “begins to coalesce somewhere behind my eyes, behind the hand over my mouth,” and we learn that there “were ferns where *she* was in the Blue Mountains of Australia” (3; my emphasis).

From one paragraph to the next we shift from first- to third-person narrative and from present to past tense. More specifically, the novel’s second paragraph situates its subject, whose identity and relationship to the narrator is still not clear, during a “War time.” Again, the developing process is invoked in the description of the military background. Thus war is signified by “black and white time, whole cultures reduced to dirty adjectives under the acrid developer of national will” (3). Compared to the lyrical description of the leaves that the gentle morning light allows to “translate themselves,” this description decries the harsh reductive qualities of the “black and white.” Coupled with the reference to the “acid developer of national will,” this description applies most directly to the photographic apparatus as co-opted by the national media representations of war. At the same time, though, the other common currency of “black and white” is its reference to epistemological systems that permit or acknowledge no middle ground. And of course a system by which an entire nation or culture can become the black in absolute opposition to another nation or culture’s white allows and justifies the horrors of war, horrors that might be less acceptable should both groups see themselves overlapping in greys.

The evocation of the photochemical process in these two opening paragraphs points to two representational systems. One system allows vegetation to represent a specific place, signaling it by the glimmer of its leaves; the leaves also represent and even

“translate themselves.” Green by virtue of chlorophyll, they attain their infinitely variable shading through another conspiracy with light. The second system of representation comprises conventional photography as used in both family albums and media representation of world events. Although also capable of much variation between the poles of negative and positive, dark and light, this system is generally associated with a more reductive epistemology, as suggested by the connotations of the cliché “black and white.” The contrasting descriptions of these two systems mark one of the novel’s primary concerns: how to create a narrative that provides a readable and cohesive positive print without occluding all that a negative might indicate—most particularly the value of the darkness and the not- or the just-barely-seen.

Although negatives can be read, they are generally associated with darkness and indeterminacy. The narrator’s reference to the nighttime “depth of not-seeing before light begins to silhouette shapes we can identify” (7) proposes their value. Her comment that “[a]t night we could be anywhere” suggests the loss of possibilities which accompany a move into light and expanded visibility. This move leads to a signifying system that makes identification easier, but in which the surrounding visual materiality prevails over imagination, insisting on our locatedness in the here and now. The darkness offers more oneiric possibilities; it holds the “unremembered dream” from which the narrator startles, “losing indolent edges, my body’s warm uncurling float in tropical seas” (7). Thus it connects the narrator to her tropical past, and also, through the suggestion of the amniotic, with her mother.

Nor is the darkness associated only with the narrator Suzanne’s oneiric past. As she drives her lover, Lori, to the ferry, the headlights of the car pick out two deer “who

stare across the road at a smaller movement disappearing,” a movement which may or may not have been made by “the tail end of a cat” (19). As the car continues, “dark closes in beyond us, tree walls of dark enfolding a world cats and other creatures inhabit” (19). The light that illuminates the animals fails to provide a clear understanding of what it discloses. Further, the dark that closes behind the car demarcates a border between Suzanne’s world and that which “other creatures inhabit.” As it “enfolds” this world, the darkness veils it from a world that only sees the illuminated. At the same time, the word “enfolds” establishes darkness as protective rather than menacing.

The novel alludes to darkness consistently through narrative strategies that situate the reader in the half-light of transitional knowledge—knowledge that is incomplete, contingent on context or information either withheld or unavailable. This insistence on the impossibility of knowing completely, and on the concomitant possibilities offered by the darkness of incomplete knowledge, is explored through the photographic trope. The opening contrast between the developing and the reductively black and white is followed by pages that situate a protagonist named Esme somewhere in the British colonial Pacific “trapped in transit by the Japanese invasion of Malaya” (4). This Esme, whose relationship to the narrator is not yet clear, contemplates the photo of a man identified only by his absence, that she “feels . . . opening like a void she has failed to prepare for” (4). His arm, then his elbow, materialize, and he is transformed into “a man who adores her” (4). Gradually his worried expression appears, then his sports jacket and tie, and finally a name, Charles. Through this description, the evocation of a character mimics the photochemical process as the apparent void of the film’s surface is gradually transformed to offer a visual image.

And just as the resolved image of a photograph requires interpretation, so Charles' image must be contextualized. The narrative advises that this snapshot was taken as Charles and Esme were on their way to celebrate the news of her pregnancy; that, by a "stroke of luck," they had "been on leave in Australia to visit her parents . . . when Malaya was invaded"; and that Charles has since decided to "go back—to do his duty" (6). Ironically, just as we begin to feel "in the picture," the picture itself is revealed as a flawed or incomplete representation, dependent on the narrative for further contextualization. The documentary clarity of the photograph, we realize, does not disclose news of the pregnancy, nor can it tell us of Charles' imminent departure to further military service. The narrative details that supplement the description of the image reveal the photograph's inadequacy in representing a past moment, a moment that conflates the personal and the more conventionally historical.<sup>1</sup>

Through the following pages, other photographs connect past and present as the two interwoven narratives challenge the reader to assemble their meanings. These narratives generally conform to the pattern set on the opening page of a division into a third-person, past-tense narrative—primarily concerned with imagining and re-telling the story of Esme's wartime years as a young bride and mother—and a first-person, present-tense narrative in which Esme's daughter, Suzanne, confronts her lover's departure and meditates on the role family history plays in that relationship. The boundaries between the two narratives, however, quickly begin to blur: in one early section, for example, the narrator, observing the early morning leaves, muses, "i can almost touch her skin"; no transition is made between this and the following sentence with the confusing result that we assume that the speaker who can "almost touch her skin" is also the voice who

complains that her eyelashes are “[m]ingy” (6). Only with a careful re-reading does this become clear, so that just as “she” only gradually “coalesces somewhere behind [the narrator’s] eyes” on the opening page, so does this “she” gradually coalesce for the reader to become Esme, the narrator’s mother. This identification is only indirectly confirmed when the narrator speaks of her father proposing to this woman we have watched resolve from “she” to “Esme” and, finally, to the narrator’s mother.

While the slippage between first and third person in the passage discussed above contributes to the deliberate indeterminacy of the narrative, the comments and thoughts attributed to “her” can credibly be read as coming from the narrator’s own store of family memories, from the family’s discourse. More difficult for the reader is that this slippage is often marked by a problematic assumption of omniscience that challenges any easy identification of first- and third-person. In one section, for example, the narrator wonders if “she f[ou]nd the nights quiet in Leura,” and then imagines Esme reading a letter from her husband (8). In this letter, Charles writes that, while comfortable enough in his hotel, he is working so hard that he hasn’t even time to enjoy a quiet *stengah*. This reference to the ritual of the social drink “explodes with its flash of associations,” and the narrator proceeds to describe her mother having drinks at the Lone Pine Hotel (9). This description is then revealed as another invention, suggesting that “perhaps she was not really there at all but longing to be with him, imagining herself there in his hotel room” (11). Over the next few sentences this narrator and her metafictional musings seem to disappear, replaced by an omniscient rendition of her mother’s “imagining [that] went that far, as far as herself in cheong sam . . . hibiscus in her hair . . . like some concubine’s . . . Isn’t that what he would like?” (11).

The young bride supposedly speculates about “what all men liked” and then wishes that “she could have given herself . . . just once, just once holding nothing back” (11). Such speculation is obviously too private ever to have been accessible to the daughter except by the sort of imaginative re-creation she performs here. Thus it blurs the borders between the first-person narrative and the third, simultaneously blurring the borders between the respective subjectivities of mother and daughter. These overlapping subjectivities mirror the shifting subjectivities invoked by the camera and its products, connoted, in the description above, by the reference to the photographic “flash of associations.” The narrator’s apparent ability to know her mother’s thoughts recalls the comment by a character in Marlatt’s earlier text *Ghost Works* that she wants to use her camera “to see, into them, into their hearts as if that might let her know them” (Marlatt *Ghost Works* 10).

Rather than rendering the photographed person an object, Marlatt seems to suggest, photography can also be a means of exploring another (an Other) subjectivity imaginatively. She also reminds us that, as Marianne Hirsch says,

existing in time, the subject is also always temporally other, that is, always in addition to the present self, a previous or subsequent and anticipated self. By selecting one instant out of the subject’s temporal existence, the photograph stages the subject’s own specular self-encounter as an encounter with otherness: the subject represented in the photograph is always *other* to the one looking at the picture. (89)

Prompted by a photographic record of one instant from her mother’s temporal existence, *Taken*’s narrator imaginatively explores her mother’s other potential selves, other

unrecorded instants of her subjectivity. While the novel provides few instances of the narrator confronting an image of her own *other* in a photograph, the narrator's use of the third-person pronoun to refer to her childhood self denotes the same metaphysics of contingent, shifting subjectivity.

For the reader the effect of this othering of the narrator's childhood self, through the third-person pronoun, is, once again, to experience a gradual coalescence or development. While we may assume that the child Suzanne, introduced by name on page 79 as "[t]heir child [who] was born into a fragmented circle of refugee friends," must be the narrator's younger self, the choice of different pronouns to refer to adult and child defers *positive* confirmation of this knowledge until page 98. Simultaneously, of course, such deferral prolongs an exploitation of the possibilities allowed by the state of not knowing, the possibilities of the negative, while drawing attention to the multiplicity of selves the narrator explores while viewing the "album full of baby photos, grandparents and babies, Mummy or Daddy with babies" (95).

Confirmation of the child's identity for the reader, and integration of selves by the narrator, come through a repetition of a sentence which explicitly identifies the "i" of the first-person narrative with the young Suzanne: "So she would know where she lived" becomes "So i would know where i lived" (98). Significantly, this passage connecting the narrator with her earlier self and clarifying the reader's comprehension deals explicitly with the relationship between place and identity, thus highlighting a central interest of *Taken's*—the role of place in representation and memorialization. After the adult narrator integrates her childhood and adult selves through a change of pronouns, she remembers

that her father taught her about place through stamp-collecting: “[s]o she would know where she lived, what she was (always with reservations) part of” (98).

Suzanne’s narrative moves between pronouns—her easy slippage into first-person when offering her mother’s imagined thoughts as well as her tendency to discuss her childhood self in the third-person—mark an exploration of subjectivity across time, but equally draw attention to place. The changing pronouns mark movement between Suzanne on her British Columbian Gulf Island and her mother in Leura, imagining herself *someplace* else. This movement recalls the indeterminacy of the opening pages whose images only gradually become clearer, and in which vegetation suggests the importance of situatedness in and on the earth—the importance, in other words, of place—and simultaneously links the place of the narrator’s present and the Blue Mountains “where she was,” so linking what we gradually recognize as daughter and mother, Northwest Pacific and Australia, present and past. The subsequent association, then, of changing pronouns with childhood geography lessons intensifies this emphasis on place and its role in both identity and representation of the past.

The legacy of these geography lessons, perhaps, directs Suzanne’s exploration of place as a way not only of knowing her present, where she is, but also of understanding her past. In a convergence of several tropes, Marlatt’s narrator finds an antidote to what Paul Virilio calls “topographical amnesia” (Virilio 116). More precisely, she explores and exploits this amnesia, paradoxically, to restore memory by placing her personal and familial memories within the historical context of British colonialism, World War II, and that war’s Japanese prisoner-of-war camps, and by insisting on the relation between that past and the immediate context of the Persian Gulf War of the late twentieth century.

To develop his claim of a prevailing cultural condition of topographical amnesia, Virilio outlines the fall through history of our relationship with space, the ways that we image, imagine, and, consequently, remember our place in the world. Thus he describes the Method of Loci that “Cicero and the ancient memory-theorists” used to “consolidate natural memory”; this was a “*topographical system . . . an imagery-mnemonics* which consisted of selecting a sequence of places, locations, that could easily be ordered in time and space.” As Virilio describes it,

you might imagine wandering through the house, choosing as loci various tables, a chair seen through a doorway, a windowsill, a mark on a wall.

Next the material to be remembered is coded into discrete images and each of the images is inserted in the appropriate order into the various loci. To memorise a speech, you transform the main points into concrete images and mentally ‘place’ each of the points in order at each successive locus.

When it is time to deliver the speech, all you have to do is recall the parts of the house in order. (110)

Virilio accompanies his description of the Method of Loci with an account of its birth: interrupted in a poem recitation by a summons to another part of the house, Simonides of Chios returned to the banquet to find that, in his absence, the dinner guests were “crushed to a pulp” by a collapsed roof; by recalling the exact place each diner had occupied, Simonides helped identify the bodies, and thus recognized “what an advantage this method of picking places and filling them in with images could be in practising the art of poetry” (110).<sup>2</sup>

The centrality of trauma to this classical technology of memory is echoed in the relationship between the traumas and technologies of the battlefield. This coupling of traumas and technologies, Virilio argues, augmented by the aural and visual technologies of the everyday, has disrupted our relationship to space such that we have arrived at a condition which he calls “topographical amnesia” (116). In place of the previously existing “*topographical memory*” that allowed “one [to] speak of *generations of vision* and even of visual heredity from one generation to the next,” Virilio laments that we now have “a eugenics of sight, a pre-emptive abortion of the diversity of mental images, of the swarm of image-beings doomed to remain unborn, no longer to see the light of day anywhere” (117). He attributes this loss of our visual heredity to the “fusion-confusion of eye and camera lens” and suggests that our dependence on this “fusion-confusion” has standardized our “ways of seeing” and, consequently, reduced our “mnesic choice” (118).

In situating Suzanne’s mourning of her mother’s death and her lover’s departure against the backdrop of the media representation of the Persian Gulf War, Marlatt similarly indicts technology. Suzanne’s constant reference to place as she struggles with personal and familial memory illustrates aspects of topographical amnesia, echoing its disorienting and displacing effects. Although it takes place far from Suzanne, the Gulf War has so invaded her life as to be partially responsible for Lori’s departure, the lovers having quarrelled for weeks over their responses to it. For Lori, the American military action in Iraq constitutes “another Vietnam, stacked in much the same way,” and thus is unequivocally wrong (35); Suzanne, equally troubled by the conflict, is, nevertheless, “caught in the echoes of an earlier war, caught in the meshes of defending brutality to stop brutality” and thus unable to make such a black and white assessment (38). Suzanne

acknowledges the media's role in shaping her conception of the war: "Tuned to a consuming serial drama, we begin to think like them as the space around us fills with controversy" (38). By formulating the Gulf War as a television serial that fills "the space around us . . . with controversy," she points precisely to the disrupted relationship with space that Virilio attributes to the various tele-technologies of the twentieth century.

Through these tele-technologies, the representation of war fills the space around the lovers. Even further, through a combination of such technology with the magic of optical illusions, "in [their] own kitchen hushed, listening to the news," they see themselves "figured in the window like apparitions on a TV screen" (81). In this spectral form, they are magically transposed to "Baghdad blowing up," where they become images to accompany "[t]he sound of bombs, an excited journalist's voice describing the street from his hotel window" (81). This image of the lovers as apparitions imaging the war echoes the question Suzanne posed earlier: after relating the pleasure otters take in their environment to the lovemaking which dissolves boundaries between Lori and herself, she asks, "How put it together with the news we are occupied by, preoccupied, so that this fades" (15).<sup>3</sup> Juxtaposing the pleasures and the dangers of porous borders, she wonders, "[a]s the war machine gears up across all media. . . . Once it begins, where does it end?" (15). Strikingly, as Suzanne struggles to integrate the "here" of lovemaking and otter-watching with the "there" of war, both scenarios intolerant of boundaries, she forms a question that also confounds division of time and place. That is, while her question poses the beginning of the war machine's gearing up in temporal terms—"Once it begins," the termination is posited spatially—"where does it end?"

Suzanne returns to consider this relation between the war *there* and her life *here*, a West Coast island. Enclosed by a seemingly “tangible skin [of rain] around the house, she muses, “A wet morning here and the war there in the late afternoon of the desert—they coexist” (37). By asserting this coexistence and attempting to understand it, she resists the media representation of the desert as “‘a tactician’s dream,’ ideal for tank warfare [as] the Canadian Institute of Strategic Studies says” (38). Similarly, in response to a reported quotation from “an expert from the Mackenzie Institute [who speaks of] the crew [being destroyed] like eggs in an automobile accident, she comments, “‘ Crew’ meaning ‘people’—a term to erase the being of ordinary men” (38). Thus she grapples with the technologies of the media that bring the horrors of a far-off war into her bedroom and kitchen, confusing here and there, but that simultaneously and paradoxically maintain, through objectifying language, the distance they have collapsed. (Indeed, as Virilio points out, “[t]he panoply of acts of war . . . always tends to be organised at a distance, or rather, to organise distances” [112].) As well, the resonance of her earlier denigration of wartime’s reductive representations as “black and white time [in which] whole cultures are reduced to dirty adjectives under the acrid developer of national will,” insists that “here” and “there” cannot be considered without also thinking about “now” and “then.” Like Virilio, she unites the technologies that mediate her relationship with place—collapsing distance, bringing the “there” here—with the technologies that shape our relationship with the past, that determine what and how she remembers.

Thus, trying to chart a personal topography capable of incorporating scenes of lovemaking and of loss together with images of a far-off war, Suzanne finds that the photographs through which she mourns her mother are implicated in the same vision-

defining apparatus as that which mediates her relationship with the Persian Gulf War.<sup>4</sup>

The photographs show only those versions of her mother that suit the camera lens, the photographer's eye, and the sanctioned poses of the family album. Rather than impatiently dismissing the photographic apparatus, however, Suzanne explores and expands the possibilities it offers for other ways of imaging and remembering.<sup>5</sup>

One example of this exploration is the way Suzanne reads the optical illusion which turns herself and Lori into haunting images of a far-off war. By comparing the darkened window that holds their reflection to a television screen, she subverts the media's attempt to represent the Baghdad bombing as distant, instead folding herself and Lori into the regularly-televised battle scenes where they are "historically accountable and furious at a complicity neither of us [want] to recognize" (81). Through this comparison, Suzanne exploits the disruption of her normal, empirical relationship with space by tele-visual technology. The vision of accountability and complicity offered through this disruption pushes her to explore ways of living ethically in a global community. She challenges this technology's scientific base—and its attendant claims of documentary objectivity—by insinuating a comparison to magic, haunting, and the trickery of an optical illusion. The scientific ability to transport moving images from far-off wars is matched by the startling effect of an apparition that depends on the darkness outside as much as on the light within the room.

Similarly, in her search for other ways to see and remember in order to arrive at a fuller understanding of her mother and of family history, Suzanne does not merely indict the narrowness of photographic vision. She also works to broaden its inherent, but often ignored, possibilities. While her opening reference to the alignment of the snapshot's

black and white representation with a military-nationalistic stance testifies to her awareness of the potential limitations of seeing photographically, she transcends these limitations by considering other elements of the photographic. She regularly meditates on its negative capabilities, not only in the specific sense of the negative print from which a positive image is made, but also in the more general sense of what a photograph does not show—and what this negation might represent. Her recurrent musings on images omitted from the family album, for example, recall John Berger's claim that "[t]he true content of a photograph is invisible, for it derives from a play, not with form, but with time [and thus a] photograph, whilst recording what has been seen, always and by its nature refers to what is not seen. It isolates, preserves and presents a moment taken from a continuum" (293). Suzanne is at pains to remember or to imagine all those moments that the camera failed to record—her mother's desire for a meaningful career, for example, and the ways that desire was dismissed by her mother's parents (23).

Suzanne's musings on what is omitted from the family's photographic record also recall Walter Benjamin's comments regarding the photograph's representation of the invisible. Benjamin finds that "a different nature . . . speaks to the camera than speaks to the eye: so different that in place of a space consciously woven together by a man on the spot there enters a space held together unconsciously" (202). Like Benjamin, Suzanne exploits the ability of the photograph to reveal an "optical unconscious" (203). Like Benjamin, she finds a relationship "between technology and magic" in photography's potential to "open[] up . . . the physiognomic aspects of the world of images, which reside in the smallest details, clear and yet hidden enough to have found shelter in daydreams" (203). Even more, Suzanne's recurrent references to vegetation recall the series of plant

photos by Karl Blossfeldt in which Benjamin grounds his discussion of the camera's revelations.<sup>6</sup>

While Benjamin's insights about the optical unconscious were inspired by photographs of plants, Suzanne discusses the vegetation directly, rather than photographs of it, presenting the leaves themselves as images under photo-chemical development: she speaks, for example, of "ghost leaves . . . translating themselves from misty grey to yellow" (3). Doing so, she inadvertently evokes the Blossfeldt photos as well as those earliest calotypes William Henry Fox Talbot used to illustrate his 1844-1846 publication, *The Pencil of Nature*. Thus she reminds us that plants are another way of writing with light, and that, as Eduardo Cadava stresses, "There has never been a time without the photograph, without the residue and writing of light" ("Words of Light" 87). At one and the same time, she invites us to see plants as representing place, writing it with light, and to expand our idea of what it is to see photographically. The light-writing of photosynthesis is evident throughout the novel in the leaves and ferns of the opening pages, the ferns that mark the rock-faced cave of Suzanne's childhood dreams (95-96), the cedar and fir so characteristic of her temperate island home (7, 19), the branches she connects with words (21), the green surface of trees reflected on the green depth of the lake (104), the cedar plume that draws unreadable characters in the wind (129), and the cottonwood trees that launch their seeds onto a breeze on the final page. If these plants perform a version of photo-graphy, of light-writing, Suzanne allows us to see that what they are writing is place, that photo-graphy here becomes topo-graphy.

By invoking the earliest recordings by the "pencil of nature" through her descriptions of leaves and ferns, Suzanne also invokes a body of writing that theorizes

photography as moving between the two poles Benjamin speaks of: technology and magic. Subtly, then, she recalls a tension long recognized as inherent to photography, even at its most “black and white,” once again working within the photograph to transcend its limitation. This is a tension pointed out, for example, by Geoffrey Batchen, who finds it “reproduced in the word *photography* itself,” given that the word comprises “two Greek components—*phos* (light) and *graphie* (writing, drawing, and delineation) [and thus] posits a paradoxical coalition of ‘light’ (sun, God, nature) and ‘writing’ (history, humankind, culture), an impossible binary opposition ‘fixed’ in uneasy conjunction only by the artifice of language” (101). While an easy alignment of Batchen’s nature/culture with Benjamin’s magic/technology is clearly untenable, Batchen’s observation complements the earlier theorist’s analysis to suggest the complexities comprised by photography, complexities Suzanne takes advantage of through her recourse to the natural and the supernatural world.

Photography’s oscillation between technology/science and magic is manifest in André Bazin’s characterization of the photograph as “produc[ing] an image that is a reality of nature, namely, an hallucination that is also a fact” (243). In this description, Bazin reflects two centrally important elements of the photograph: its material presentation of something that is necessarily absent—a moment in time; and its peculiar indexical relationship with the object it is *of*. In fact, much of the oscillation inherent in the photograph rests on its ontological status as “this paradoxical image . . . that we read without disclaiming the notion that it retains something of the reality from which it was somehow released through its physiochemical makeup.”<sup>7</sup> The photograph challenges by asking us to read its representation as being “the direct, physical emanation of the object,

its luminous imprint,” while it simultaneously “maintains the object as absolutely separate, distant, *opposite to the real*.”<sup>8</sup> Although the photochemical processes that have left this “luminous imprint” are undeniably the result of science and technology, this “most exact technique,” as Benjamin says, “give[s] [the resultant images] “a magical value” (202); the technology involved makes of the photographer both “witness” and “seer” (Sekula 152).

Because of this peculiar indexical relationship through which the photograph (either scientifically or magically) testifies to the absence of the “that-has-been” that it signifies,<sup>9</sup> it has come to be closely associated with, even to symbolize, death.<sup>10</sup> This association, in a medium that hints at magic, has established the ghostly and haunted as a significant focus of photographic theory. Philippe Dubois, for example, speaks of the photographic image as “haunted by the one intimate moment it had with a real that has vanished forever,” and he credits “this hauntedness, formed by distance in proximity, absence in presence, the imaginary in the real, the virtuality of memory in the effectiveness of a trace,” for “draw[ing] us to photographs and giv[ing] them their aura” (167).

It is precisely this hauntedness in her family photographs that Suzanne works with in attempting to transcend their limitations as positivist documents. She acknowledges the photographic as part of a technology which brings a media-constructed version of a far-off war into her kitchen, but she also turns to the medium’s magical dimensions to explore her relationship to a globalized space and a historicized past. Finding the photographic in vegetation, she emphasizes photography as a photo-chemical process rather than simply as visual product, thus seeing it as a process that allows her to recognize the

invisible in each representation. By pointing to the ghostly and the haunted, she reminds us of all the absences these photographic presences signify, as well as of the possibilities they offer for exposing the “optical unconscious” and rendering the invisible visible. If this understanding of the photograph leads to a very different technique from the classical Method of Loci, it is an understanding, nevertheless, in which image and place work together to stimulate memory.

This recourse to the ghostly as a possible expansion of seeing photographically is introduced in the opening of *Taken*, already offered as an example of the novel’s mimesis, in its style and structure, of photo-chemical development. This opening also demonstrates an imbrication of photo-chemistry, vegetation, and ghosts to support an exploration of place, of topographical memory. In this opening, where “Ghost leaves . . . transl[at]e themselves from misty grey to yellow” while the narrator’s mother “begins to coalesce somewhere behind my eyes,” the glimmering leaves of “alder and fern in the wet earth” specifically signify the temperate island home of the narrator, but they also signal a connection to the ferns of another place and time, those ferns that were “[t]here . . . where she was in the Blue Mountains of Australia” (3). Photographic in its susceptibility to the changing effects of light, the vegetation is also ghostly in allowing one space and time to occupy or haunt another; present-day West Coast alder and fern are haunted by the ferns of the Australian Blue Mountains as daughter is haunted by mother.

This ghostly vegetation offers a space for the imaginary, as implied in the “somewhere behind my eyes” where “she begins to coalesce” and also in the space at which either narrator or mother stares, the “space through which the leaves glimmer” (3). In both their ghostliness and their photographic sensitivity to light, these leaves also

signify and, at the same time, confound the borders between past and present, the dead and the living, the represented and the un-representable. Whether through the vegetation itself, or through its translation from darkness to light, from unseen to seen, the narrator is able to explore the presence of her mother “somewhere behind her own eyes” and to see the entanglement of subjectivities as moving her to other places she occupies, “not in the flesh” but through “the memory-trace of it on [her] tongue” (3, 7).

Suzanne’s family photographs are implicated in a technology of memory that troubles her by its exclusions. She explicitly notes these exclusions in her observation that Esme paradoxically begins to “disappear from [Charles’] cine footage” just as “she has begun to show” as a mother (95). But instead of relying only on photographs to trigger her memory, Suzanne supplements them with her attention to vegetation and its response to light, its photo-graphy. This attention allows her to begin a ghostly re-visioning of her mother. It supports her desire to “jump that . . . crevasse, between my eyes watching [the young Esme on film], my hands remembering the feel of black straw stiff with disuse, and her body there on the bed, brown deathspots already making their way to the surface of her skin” so that she can “go back to her body warm and cool in the wind off those rocks, her slightly embarrassed stance, eager to see herself as he saw her” (24). The movement from the dead maternal body makes of the younger celluloid version a kind of ghost, a re-animation of a dead loved one. This imaginary and imaginative movement also more fully animates the filmic record to read her mother’s emotions; it exemplifies Suzanne’s attention to the haunting possibilities of the photographic, particularly as manifest in the luminous and liminal transformations of the surrounding

vegetation, even as these possibilities are linked to the photograph's concomitant limitations as documentary witness.

While the narrator looks at old photographs in an attempt to remember her mother, she notes that “[a]s the branches assume dim shapes in the half-light, there, really there outside in the dark, my connection fades” (21). This assumption of shape in the half-light recalls the darkroom development of photographs; here, though, the developing clarity of the image yields precedence to the shape-shifting possibilities of the process itself. Only in the liminal “limitless space” of dawn’s transition from dark to light can she “open to her [mother’s] presence in a way she never could when [her mother] was alive—or only in the very beginning perhaps. Mother and child” (21). With this realization,

[a]nxiety pushes [the narrator] out of bed . . . to write [her mother], reach her, bring her bodily out of the nothing, which is not nothing because she is there. . . on the other side of a thin membrane that separates, so thin that we communicate, but not in words. I reach toward her with these half-truths, half-light fading into ordinary time and space. (21)

What she is trying to recover, she says, “is not left so much as embalmed in my childhood. Like a ghost it goes on living alongside this reality, occasionally felt, an inner twinge, the merest flicker of memory, unlocatable, indistinct” (120-1).

Notably, in neither of these formulations—whether half-truths, incomplete knowledge, or ghostly—does Suzanne present these attempts to recover the past intuitively or imaginatively as any more frustrating or limited than her attempts to recover her mother through the documentary records and the family’s oral history. Instead, she sees her approach as both imperative—she is “push[ed] out of bed” to do so—and

worthwhile as a move to supplement and complicate memorialization. A similar urge follows the loss of her lover, impelling her, after Lori's departure, to invent other ways of tracing the past so that she herself becomes ghostly, "haunting," as she says, "the evidence of what preoccupied you, books you left by our bed, fragmentary lists, telephone messages." Lamenting that her lover has left "no telltale traces that i might sniff," she is relieved to find Lori's clothes "alive [and] thick with [her] smell in the closet" (52).

While her attempts to remember her mother are initially guided by the visual, via the family photographs, she allows her sense of smell (demotically feminine, according to Freud<sup>11</sup>) to help her remember her lover. She is frustrated at not being able to "remember what we ate the night before you left [because] this seems terribly important, like a sign i haven't read," an indicator that "the wind is shifting, but i can't see how" (52). At the same time, attempting to recover her lover through synaesthetic rather than strictly visual memory, she decries the limited possibilities for remembering: "Not *memento*, not even *evidence*: those words won't do. It's the horror of knowing that, even as i remember in bits and pieces, i alter you into the ghost of someone you weren't" (121). So Suzanne is both ghostly herself and capable of turning her lover into a ghost.

That Suzanne can "haunt" her lover's belongings, and through this haunting "alter [Lori] into the ghost of someone [she wasn't]," suggests a fascinating imbrication of inexhaustible ghostliness. This doubled ghostliness, accompanied by the frustrating phenomenon of a memory which offers only "bits and pieces," horrifies Suzanne. At the same time, however, this fragmentation of memory prompts her to emphasize the provisionality of her own integrated narrative: "How," she asks, can she "put together a

narrative of brightly coloured *bits* turned, turning as if to focus, and the falling patterns then. Beautiful forms. Illusions of continuity, of completion, made by mirrors” (26; my emphasis). Here, the “bits” can be provisionally integrated to create a beautiful appearance of wholeness. But while she celebrates this beauty, she warns against the seductions of the kaleidoscopic illusion, reminding the reader that the unity into which the “brightly coloured bits” are assembled is only momentary, provisional. Thus even as she pulls together a narrative of her family’s past she notes that there is

So much i don’t know, all that preceded me. . . . The tentative deciphering of what gets passed along in body tissue, without words. Not so much their history even, but the ambiance of their lives, what they took for granted, the smell, the feel of their time my own beginning intercepted. I’m reaching for another kind of story, a story of listening way back in the body. And is this memory? Or fiction? (25)

As with her attempt to “sniff out” memories of her lover, she turns here to other senses, to other epistemologies beyond the visual, and to ways of communicating beyond words.

Two specific associations of the ghostly make it particularly useful to Suzanne’s attempts to recover the past and reach the absent presences of both her mother and the departed Lori: the association of the ghostly with a way of knowing through the body—“a story of listening way back in the body”; and an association of the ghostly with finding other ways to assemble a narrative. The latter association explored by Marlatt/Suzanne is the novel’s third narrative. This is an italicized voice that periodically interrupts the novel’s other narratives to imagine the experience of those captured by the Japanese. In their second-person address, these interspersed sections echo the adult Suzanne’s apostrophic remarks to her lover, Lori, but the ‘you’ in italics is apparently a composite

figure, shifting and unstable, and it cannot be identified clearly with anyone else in the primary narrative. Marlatt refers, in an interview with Sue Kossew, to these italicized voices as “something like a Greek chorus of women’s voices” (50). It is a chorus which comprises “a child and . . . women of different ages” who Marlatt represents deliberately as “anonymous because that’s actually how many of them died” (50). This posthumous anonymity combines with the visual contrast of the italicized text, I believe, to suggest the ghostly. Certainly, the narrative these voices offer is a haunting one, and although their descriptions are often materially graphic, it is not clear that they are ever registered by anyone in the material world.

The first section of this italicized narrative follows a description of Esme and her parents reading newspaper accounts of the chaotic evacuation of Singapore to supplement the official media reportage with a highly subjective, immediate, imagined version of this historic event. Further sections, however, are much less directly connected to the central narrative, and it is difficult to identify the narrating voice or the audience it addresses. While the ‘you’ hailed by this narrator appears to be a woman with children in the first section, other sections appear to address a woman without children, while yet other sections are apparently directed to a young girl. These disconcerting shifts delay the reader’s gradual understanding of this narrative as an imaginative memorialization of the prisoners of the Japanese wartime camps.

Not only does the ‘you’ shift in these sections, but the slippery personal pronoun is accompanied by the same limited omniscience which marks Suzanne’s imaginative remembering of her mother’s past. This omniscience alerts readers to Suzanne’s narrative mediation; as well, it works to blur the borders of subjectivity. Speaking as if from within

that other, imagined, subjectivity, for example, the narrator says of an interchange with a Japanese soldier who confiscates the fresh bananas found by the prisoners: *“you can’t speak of this so that anyone could understand . . . all you can think is waste, the lost children, dead babies who will never taste banana, and that woman shuffling beside you like a sleepwalker—you can’t speak of it to her, you can’t break through her pain”* (63). Clearly, if ‘you’ could not speak of this, the words would still be locked in silence, yet the narrator speaks them movingly.

Such a blurring of the narrator’s subjectivity and the subjectivities of those whose lives she imagines also blurs the boundaries between public and private, or familial, memory. It insists that, along with the immediate loss of her lover and the earlier loss of her mother, Suzanne must also confront her share of the collective cultural loss and trauma represented by the prisoners of war. Blurred subjectivity further manifests itself in the confusion of identities between the narrator, Suzanne, who foregrounds herself as a writer creating “this strange composition of fiction and memory” (30), and the author, Daphne Marlatt, whose acknowledgements at the end of the novel include citations for lines of poetry which Suzanne offers without reference.<sup>12</sup> These acknowledgments prevent any reductive separation, by the reader, of the narrator’s subjectivity from the author’s; they also point the reader to other texts which haunt this novel.

These acknowledgements comprise a marginal reference, appearing in pages bound with, but not part of, the novel proper. Yet this marginal reference to documentary sources complements the italicized third narrative to provide the novel’s most explicit and complex attempt to contend with the relationship between ghosts and photographs. While this narrative’s second-person address proffers what appear to be imaginatively-

remembered experiences from the female prisoner-of-war camps, of which little or no photographic representation exists, Marlatt acknowledges, in the pages following the novel, Tim Bowden's *Changi Photographer: George Aspinall's Record of Captivity* as one of her sources. This account of a young Australian soldier who spent several years in Japanese prisoner-of-war camps emphasizes the contingency of that which we are able to visualize and memorialize culturally.

Aspinall was captured by the Japanese shortly after receiving a camera as a gift. His serendipitous choice of a folding Kodak, that allowed him more easily to hide the camera from his captors, provides further evidence of the element of chance in Aspinall's photographic record of his captivity. Despite the camera's lower detectability, however, Aspinall's choices of what to photograph were still dictated by whether or not he could do so with safety, and this often entailed finding a vantage point from which he could see and not be seen. Already, then, every click of this captive's shutter represents, besides the image it records, a series of contingencies which limit and inflect the snapshots it is able to capture.<sup>13</sup>

But the emphasis on contingency is not exhausted by a description of the camera and its hiding places; it also extends to the other materials required by photography—film and developing chemicals. Thus Aspinall tells his readers that he quickly realized that he had only “five or six 620 films [with] eight exposures” each, and that without chemicals to process it, that film and all exposed negatives would quickly deteriorate in the tropical conditions (46). Chance again asserts itself: thanks to knowledge gleaned, during his five pre-capture weeks in Singapore, from “a Chinese photographer called Wong Yeow” (18), the captured Aspinall recognizes developing fluid, fixative, and x-ray paper while

unloading warehouse stores for his Japanese captors. Removing these supplies and hiding them in his camp carries a constant risk, not only of punishment, but also of termination of his attempts to document camp conditions. Further, taking and developing photographs with these materials depends entirely on experimentation; with neither timer nor thermometer, Aspinall's early efforts were, in his words, "basically hit and miss" (68).

Of course, Aspinall's photographs, emphasizing as they do the contingency of representation, particularly in the form of photographic evidence, are never directly mentioned in the novel; they hover at its margins by virtue of Marlatt's acknowledgements. By so haunting the novel, they echo the narrative's concern with ghosts. Resonance with the novel's trope of haunting is further found in the burial and eventual disinterment of these photographs. Buried to avoid discovery and destruction by the Japanese, they are dug up later to provide testimony at the Rabaul War Crimes Trials. If this disinterment suggests the snapshots' ghostliness, their return from the tomb to serve as evidence suggests that such haunting can be beneficial. Paradoxically, the positive visual proof that these photographs provided at the trial is exactly what their ghostly presence in this novel, drawing attention to the contingency of representation, serves to warn against. Suzanne specifically mistrusts "this urge to fix an image so it won't fade over time" and contrasts the "[p]ositives preserved in all their purity" with "what we actually experience—quicksilver, transient" (95). Should a reader be haunted enough by the author's reference to search out the Aspinall narrative and photographs, the detailing of the difficulties, almost impossibilities, surmounted to obtain this representation, invites an exploration of the knowledge(s) hidden in the darkness beyond the camera's flash.

From outside the pages of *Taken*, then, the ghostly knowledge Aspinall offers insists on the relevance of the marginal and rewards our interest in what might appear immaterial by confirming its relevance to “what matters”<sup>14</sup> to the more clearly central plot and characters. His text points to the gap between authorized and suppressed knowledges. The more obvious ghosts, whose nameless narratives are offered in the italicized sections of the novel, represent an attempt to enter this gap through intuition and imagination. Exemplifying this gap between official, widely-circulated information and suppressed knowledge, Suzanne imagines her mother commenting that, while the deaths of men fighting in wartime “had meaning, were written up in newspaper accounts, memorialized in poems,” many other deaths were denied meaning (91). Suzanne responds to the challenge imaginarily posed by her mother by integrating past and present. She braids together her narrative strands so that the graves of those who died in the prisoner-of-war camp are described and memorialized within the narrative of Suzanne’s personal and family history. Thus, on the novel’s penultimate page, the ghostly italics that have separated this narrative of evacuation and imprisonment from the rest of the novel become part of a section in which the central narrative refers directly, for the first time, to the camp.

Significantly, as this section brings past and present together, it also emphasizes the importance of place to memory, particularly to memorializing the dead. The italicized lines (taken, Marlatt’s acknowledgements tell us, from a poem that appears in *Women Beyond the Wire*<sup>15</sup>) describe the hand-tied twig markers on each grave, while the present-day narrator notes that these are no longer there:

. . . Muntok . . . Banka Fever . . . a wavering path into the jungle . . . the living  
weak digging graves with makeshift tools . . . no markers, nothing left

*Each in a burial space,*

*By women's hands, filled in and beautified*

. . . *a cross of twigs so simply tied* . . . (129)

For the women who survived, however briefly, their fellow captives, it was important that the place of burial be marked, if only by “a cross of twigs.” The eventual erasure of these markers by time, though, compounds an irony: that in the “beautification” effected by this effort to memorialize, the dead are being further silenced as the horrors of their experiences are obscured by the disturbing beauty of their graves. The narrator further complicates the erasures and ironies inherent in the representation and memorialization offered by these graves when she suggests the similarity between gravediggers and ghosts. In its proximity to the term “the living dead,” often used to signal ghosts, her phrase “the living weak” asserts as porous the boundaries between life and death, living and ghostly, past and present.

Porosity of these boundaries is already highlighted by the novel's narrative structure, the way it moves, apparently through Suzanne's imagination, into different places, times, and subjectivities, as she tries to find different ways of finding what she “do[es]n't know, all that preceded her” (25). The ghostly is heavily associated with her search for new ways of putting together a story, particularly through her use of a haunting, italicized, indeterminate narrative complemented by its marginal gesturing to ghostly photographs and memoirs; she also exploits another association of the ghostly in

order to find what she doesn't know—the association of the ghostly with knowing through the body.

Suzanne's efforts to "decipher . . . what gets passed along in body tissue, without words" by "reaching for another kind of story, a story of listening way back in the body," recall comments Marlatt makes while speaking to Janice Williamson about her poem "The Month of Hungry Ghosts" (a text which has a significant thematic overlap with this novel). Marlatt describes an aspect of memory unacknowledged by such visually mastering epistemologies as form the foundation for the classical Method of Loci. Not predictably triggered, this is "a memory that was in the body somehow, but wasn't consciously accessible until I got there" (185). The memory is both Benjaminian and connotative of the photographic in that it appears as "an immediate flash," and it encompasses the future as well as linking present and past: "at a certain point, rounding that corner, I got an immediate flash of what I would see when I got around that corner" (185).

Suzanne muses on exactly this type of memory when she wonders why it is that, "[m]aking waffles . . . in this West Coast kitchen, [she] should be visited suddenly by the smell of new cloth at the Chinese tailor's in Penang?" The memory comes as "a flash, flush of sensation through the body. Unbidden" (43), presenting an image of her mother, gorgeous, being fit for an evening gown, of smells and touch commingled as the child Suzanne waits, staring out at the pedestrian traffic. In the memory, she can "[s]ee, for just a second, what it might be like to be that girl, younger than me, hanging around the kedai across the way . . . staring with that territorial rudeness i know . . . at me, outsider in her father's? uncle's? shop, while i just as rudely stare back" (43). The flash that delivers this

memory suggests, inevitably, the photographic moment, inflected to become the retrieval, rather than the capture, of a visual perception. And Suzanne further inflects this flash: through one changed vowel, the moment of visual perception modulates into an even more corporeal knowledge, a “flush of sensation.” The memory comes “[u]nbidden” and flash-like to present a “true picture of the past” that, as Benjamin professes, can be “seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again” (*Illuminations* 247).

As such a Benjaminian image, this “true picture of the past” offers Suzanne what Michael Taussig calls “an essentially inarticulable and imageric nondiscursive knowing of social relationality” (367). Taussig is speaking primarily about the “magically empowered imagery” by which “the contemporary shamanic repertoire” objectifies “certain historical events, notably political events of conquest and colonization” (367). Yet his description seems both relevant and useful to the sudden image Suzanne experiences: it prompts a reading of Suzanne’s memory-flash as objectifying the historico-political event of colonization. As well, it points to the gap between “implicit social knowledge” and its representation, and connects the image that suddenly appears to Suzanne to her concern with knowing that which is “essentially inarticulable” (Taussig 367).

Here, the social knowledge that Suzanne grasps imagistically is a recognition of her family’s position as colonial outsiders, indeed trespassers, as the young girl’s territorial rudeness declares. Further, the emphasis, in Suzanne’s memory of visiting the tailor, on Esme’s appearance, suggests that any privileges which inhere to the role of colonizer are complicated, for her mother, by Esme’s position as a white woman within a

patriarchal colonialism. Twice in this passage Suzanne calls her mother “gorgeous.” In her memory, she “only [has] eyes for that creamy flowing” of the yards of new white cloth which will decorate her mother’s beauty (43), implying a displacement of Esme by the clothes she must wear, the role she must occupy.

Indeed, the priority Suzanne accords her mother’s appearance reflects its determining role in Esme’s life. In an earlier passage, Esme appears to remember coming “out from school to Malaya” as a teen to parents so “delighted with the attractive girl their daughter had become” that an entire wardrobe was bought for showing her off (40). Writing to a friend at that time, Esme calls herself an “[u]gly duckling turned swan” (40). Enclosing a photo of her newly outfitted self, posed with her parents in front of their Malacca home, she notes that “the duck is only hiding under all these extravagant feathers” (41). If travelling from Malaya to school in England and back again is exemplified by the transformation from duckling to swan, the duck hidden beneath the new feathers carries with her the pain of these disruptive moves.

In a *mise-en-abîme* narrative structure, Suzanne, trying imaginatively to retrieve her mother from the past, pictures Esme trying to remember her own past. In this imagined memory, Esme specifically recalls the exile to her London boarding school. She does not associate this exile with missing her mother, of whom “[s]he had no clear memories . . . in London except for the word Pneumonia” (40). Rather, “[w]hat she remembered missing was her ayah’s soft voice and endlessly forgiving arms” (40). Her ayah, who is recalled not visually but in terms of sound and touch, offers another version of mothering. When Charles later comments that Esme’s parents “have no idea how to raise a child” and wonders how they managed with Esme, she answers that “They didn’t .

. . My ayah did” (80). She realizes that it “was impossible to imagine [her mother, Aylene] ever nursing a baby [and realizes that] she must have been handed over to a wet-nurse, an ayah hired so that her mother could carry on her social round” (113).

A doubled maternal loss accompanies Esme’s delayed recognition of the impact the colonial social structure had on her infancy. Having been denied an elemental connection to her mother by a social structure that restricted Aylene to the role of socialite, the adult Esme is left with a slightly bitter sense of having been “hand[ed] over.” Her emphasis on the fact that her ayah was hired makes of the wet-nurse a commercial commodity, denying her body’s significance to the child as a maternal presence. As Mieke Bal suggests in a reading of her mother’s childhood portrait, posed with her nanny, “although the child seems better off with the hired substitute mother, her nanny, the woman is no mother.” Instead, the embrace in the portrait “is a gesture of expertise, not of love; not of ‘family’ but of subordination, a woman doing her job, and doing it well” (242). Bal illuminates the relationship between Esme and her ayah, making the politics of that relationship more explicit, when she observes of her mother’s portrait that “[a]lthough the scene is set in her country and culture, [the nanny] sits there as irredeemably other, in a chair that, carved by her tradition, belongs to the masters, with a child she is kind to, but whom she can treat only as one who will be taken away at the masters’ volition” (242).

Not surprisingly, Esme experiences a delayed sadness at the erasure of that surrogate mother’s identity. As she wonders “Who had that first ayah been? with what child of her own or child lost?,” she introduces the possibility of another ghost. Her concern with this ayah’s long-obscured identity might be read as another haunting,

particularly given her musing on what might have been “covertly passed to Esme in her [ayah’s] milk, what tastes, what feelings?” (113). Later, as Aylene watches Esme caring for Suzanne, Esme is “surprised by [a] note of regret” in her mother’s voice over what she might have missed by delegating her mothering to servants. She decides, however, against exploring the issue with her because she is sure her mother would only ask “what does it matter now” (113). Years later, Aylene and Esme both dead, Suzanne wants to answer for Esme that “what we cut off from us by cognitive amputation, comes back to haunt us” (113). To counter such cognitive dismemberment, Suzanne insists on remembering, imaginatively, the family’s relationship with the dark body of the colonial Other that her grandmother preferred to obscure.

Indeed, while Aylene sees no scandal or horror in her daughter sharing the milk of the colonial Other, this acceptance does not extend to blood being shared between colonizer and colonized. Having insisted throughout her life on her Scots-Irish background, her “good blood,” Aylene would have been indignant at the comments after her death on “how tiny she looked in the coffin, skin like a venerable Chinese lady, no white face powder to cover it” (107). This indignation would have “echoed the story Esme told of [commenting on her daughter’s] black hair, thick black lashes [that] she look[s] like a Chinese baby” and of her mother snapping at her for speaking such “Utter drivell . . . about your own child” (107). As Suzanne finds out later, people in Penang thought of the family as “‘chi chi’ . . . mixed blood” (7). The intensity of Aylene’s denial within a social structure whose hierarchies measured the darkness of one’s hair and skin and the purity or mixedness of one’s blood suggests spectral knowledges within her family history that might account for Suzanne’s obsession with ghosts.

Nicholas Abraham argues that the phantom plays an important role in objectifying “the gap that the concealment of some part of a loved one’s life produced in us” (287). The vehemence of Aylene’s denials invites speculation about a concealment that complicates any possibility of understanding home and place. Certainly, the chance of the family blood being “mixed” would place them in a different relationship with their colonial home than that expected of British masters. But even the repeated insistence on the “goodness” of British blood, so far from the metropolitan centre that the family nevertheless continues to call home, suggests the “gap” or woundedness that Suzanne and her mother (and very likely Esme’s mother before her) have experienced because of a concealed ambivalence to whichever place they must call home.

Suzanne, musing on the “colonial stories that perpetuate a making-strange,” wonders, “was it that they had spent so long, three generations born in the East, that they themselves began to feel un-English? Or was it that they were, and it was easier to make a life, to pass as English, if you erased the mixed part?” (107). Whatever the reason, the result was an insistence on the family’s difference from, and superiority to, their Asian neighbours and servants. At the same time, although they “continually referred to [England] as ‘home,’” it “was no mother to Esme,” but rather “[h]ome that was not, misplaced home that could never be” (7). If “Mother England” could be neither mother nor home to Esme, the putative family erasure of “the mixed part” and the concomitant insistence on “pass[ing] as English,” meant they could never completely home in the colonies either. The concealment Suzanne imagines and suspects produces a gap of the sort Abraham argues is objectified in the form of a phantom. As Suzanne notes, remembering on her temperate island the haunting smells, tastes, sounds and sights of her

family's tropical life, "Ghosts are those who occupy a place, but not in the flesh, those who are left with only the memory-trace of it on their tongues" (7). Once again, she formulates a description of ghosts that is intricately ambivalent—not only do ghosts occupy a place in her formulation, but a place also haunts, in the ghostly form of words, still tracing itself on her tongue many decades after she has left it.

For Suzanne, ghosts both occupy and remember place; they advocate a memory that examines her relationship with place to insist that her family history be understood in broader historico-political terms. They are ghosts, in other words, who argue for, or perform, a topographical memory, contradicting, or at least providing an alternative to Virilio's "topographical amnesia." But the topographical memory advocated by the ghostly differs significantly from the topographical memory offered by the classical Method of Loci. Central to this difference between a place-based memory as Suzanne develops it and the technology developed by classical rhetoricians is Suzanne's refusal of an epistemology that distinguishes between the material and the immaterial. By allowing the places she remembers to be haunted by the immaterial, Suzanne moves towards a new way of telling the story. Thus, for example, she insists on including that which others prefer to dismiss when she answers her grandmother retroactively, on her mother's behalf that "what 'doesn't matter,' . . . comes back to haunt us" (113). Her reflection on the "assumptions the daily is grounded on, housed in" further asserts the imbrication of the material and the immaterial through her use of the concrete, solid verbs—"grounded" and "housed"—that solidify assumptions, often dismissed as irrelevant (113).

As well, by thus "housing" that which supposedly does not matter, Suzanne indirectly invokes the architecture that supported the technology of classical memory.

Elsewhere she suggests that this architecture, particularly in its most domestic manifestations, is already potentially undermined by the supposedly immaterial. “House” and “home” are, admittedly, not synonymous. Still, Suzanne’s reference to “home, the impossible place” associated with “the blurred ideal each of us carries” at least muddies the mental image of a house through which one might walk, recovering detached objects in an organized and linear fashion (96). And if the mental image of a house provides the matrix for the classical approach to memory, Suzanne’s etymological play throughout the novel broadens the notion of place as matrix for memory to include material and immaterial and to make room for the unconscious alongside the conscious.

Throughout, Suzanne plays with the terms “mater,” “matter,” “material,” and “immaterial.”<sup>16</sup> For example, after declaring that the question of “who had preceded them” has “bec[o]me material” (111), she states that “Esme had become mater, like her mother” (112). The materiality of the former question is thrown into relief by the very immateriality of where those ancestors had led, “(into that otherwhere that ghosts and dreams come from),” an immateriality underscored by parentheses (111). This oscillation between the material and the immaterial is mirrored by the movement between “mater” and “matter.” The domestic is often considered immaterial, even invisible, as demonstrated through the film footage on which Esme disappears as she enters maternity. Here, though, Esme, “becom[ing] mater,” has “become solid, stamped with public approval” because “[l]ike other mothers, she held the future of the nation in her hands” (112).

Suzanne begins to delineate a matrix that allows for an imbrication of the immaterial and the material so strenuously separated in the classical method of memory

when she “dream[s] of [her] childhood place—wet fern, wet rockface, the cave [she] wanted to crawl into and wasn’t allowed,” a cave with subliminal overtones of the forbidden maternal body (95-96). As *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* defines it, a matrix may be, among other less relevant possibilities, the environment in which something is developed; a womb; a mass of rock embedding gems or fossils; or, in biology, the substance between cells. The dictionary also offers the word’s etymology—“Latin, = breeding-female, womb, register, from *mater matris* ‘mother’”—thus clarifying the dream relationship between the womb and the cave’s rockface. The mass of rock has a direct etymological connection to the womb, just as the definition of matrix is itself marked by an interconnectedness, a relationship between elements that makes it difficult to clearly separate subject and object.

This notion of interconnectedness within a matrix is echoed by Marlatt in her interview with Williamson. As she describes the Benjaminian bodily memory she cannot consciously access, she connects this memory with place, saying that “I could not have foretold [the bodily memory] until I was in that actual movement around that particular spot” (185). Further, she connects its operation in the flesh and in a particular place with our “very deep subliminal connection with the mother because what we first of all remember is this huge body which is our first landscape and which we first of all remember bodily” (185). Suzanne’s dream similarly connects bodily memory and landscape, particularly the earliest maternal landscape out of which our subjectivity takes shape.

Suzanne’s insistence on the relevance of immaterial to material, indeed, on the impossibility of separating the two, also resonates with Marlatt’s response to a query by

Williamson. Williamson asks about a shift from the emphasis in Marlatt's earlier work on the material conditions of class and race to her later work's predominant focus on gender. Marlatt notes that feminism forced her to "an examination of the creation of my female psyche [and] the origins of consciousness," and she acknowledges a retreat from an analysis of class and race. However, she argues that her work must still be considered a materialist analysis in its determination to "[come] to terms with the actual *material* of my existence as a writer: language" (193; my emphasis). Both Suzanne's and Marlatt's arguments for materiality of the immaterial are reflected in another dream of Suzanne's. Through this dream, she recognizes that "[e]ven as I dream you [Lori] . . . 'You' escape, you other than my dreaming designs. I forget (are we always complicit?) that dreams are drawn to the blurred ideal each of us carries-home, the impossible place, love, the mother our own mothers, amid the urgent particulars of their lives, could never live up to" (96). For Suzanne, the haunting presence of the past, far from being immaterial, is part of the matrix in which she lives and loves.

Lori, however, objects to Suzanne's obsession with the immaterial. While Suzanne insists that "[e]ach of us [is] already haunted," Lori dismisses talk of ghosts as superstitious, preferring to focus on "material conditions that must be changed" (99). She approves of friends who met the immaterial with a practical and material approach, demanding of their crockery-flinging ghost that "if you're going to hang around . . . fix the washing machine" (99-100). In telling Suzanne that Esme is not a ghost, but is "in photos, on films, in letters . . . all these mementos you carry around," Lori appears to subscribe to a binary opposition of materiality and immateriality (103). But Suzanne points to the way the immaterial is embedded in the material mementos, saying she

wouldn't use such a word ("mementos") "for the evidence i felt compelled to keep" (104). Such compulsions, physically immaterial, determine what material is saved as representation; thus Suzanne contends that "Maybe ghosts have something to do with presence and absence, both" (104). When Lori responds to this tentative characterization of the ghostly by asking her how it differs from memory, she comes closest to understanding what Suzanne is saying: ghosts and memory are not so different; both haunt, shape, and inform their lives.

Suzanne's insistence that the ghostly and the immaterial are crucial to understanding the past reflects Marlatt's desire to get to that which "[w]e can't consciously remember [but which is] there in our unconscious. . . in all the repressed babble, the language that just ripples and flows—and it isn't concerned with making sense." Instead, it is "concerned with the feel: the 'feel' of words has something to do with the feel of that body, of the contours of early memory" (Marlatt, Williamson interview 185). Again, she relates this memory to "the earliest sense of a whole body image, and later, much later, a whole landscape" and notes that "it's only later that we separate ourselves and everything into subject and object" (185).

This refusal to separate the material from the immaterial, subject from object, body from landscape leads Suzanne to supplement the photographic as a prompt to memory with attention to the light-writing of vegetation as well as with a willingness to haunt and be haunted. This refusal of an epistemology that demands such separation also allows her to begin a ghostly re-visioning of the disappearing woman who is/was her mother and, simultaneously, to revise the Method of Loci. This classical technique of places and images relied on a clear and exact correspondence between the visualized

image and the memorized words it recalled. Suzanne's memories, however, are much more web-like, with one image often triggering several memories whose relationship she must then determine. The Method of Loci clearly separated the remembering subject, who walked through the visualized building, from the objects s/he recovered. Suzanne, instead, allows her subjectivity to dissolve in her memories, as manifest in the constant slippage between pronouns. Finally, the classical technique relied on a linearity that moved the remembering subject through the building from room to room, recovering words in the order necessary to the required rhetorical performance. Suzanne's technique is a circular and, ultimately, indeterminate one.

Crucially important in the revisions Suzanne makes in her own method of loci, of relying on place as an aid to memory, is her willingness to admit that place may be occupied by ghosts that influence memory in unpredictable, perhaps un-knowable, ways. At the same time, to see, or trope, memory as ghostly is, arguably, to attempt to make it corporeal; after all, ghosts are often understood as taking a bodily, if ethereal, form. Thus Suzanne's is an attempt to translate the immaterial into the material, to place the former in a matrix where it matters. Further, associating ghostly memory with imagery of vegetation that changes its appearance, photo-graphically, with different light conditions roots, or grounds, these ghostly emanations, making them visible. At the same time, however, the emphasized contingency of the vegetation's visibility on light is a way to transcend the problematic and exclusivist aspects of the systems of representation and memory that Suzanne is interrogating.

While the photographic is implicated in the restrictive and exclusivist focus of the war machine, the light-writing of plants alerts us to other possible ways of seeing

photographically. Suzanne speaks of the indistinct time of mornings with their first light before “things . . . harden into the clarity of the everyday, of separate categories, dissociated,” and then contrasts that time with the light of noon when “we pull in our senses . . . and limit ourselves to what we select of the visible” (116). In mourning her mother, she is also “[m]ourning the loss of early light which opens first to sound or smell or touch, not sight” as well as “[m]ourning the loss of being before knowing narrowed into the dangerously exclusive we label meaningful, or what counts” (116). Part of this mourning is also for a time when “[t]he eye, unfocused, gazes at water, air, all that envelops us, pre-dates us. Post-dates us too” (116). This unfocused eye accepts itself as an undifferentiated part of the landscape, its matrix.

An unfocused eye is also alluded to when Suzanne describes the background to an argument she once had with Lori. In a novel which warns against the dangers of dismissing the immaterial, of separating the world into subject and object, this background is relevant to an argument about how ghosts are different from memory and the relative importance of both. The description is of the “lake . . . mirroring back the trees of the ridge, the lawn of the farm across the way. . . . Green surface on green depth. Glimmering. And everywhere micro-factories of light combining photo-chemical cells, radiant *background* to our words, our will to challenge each other” (104; my emphasis). Note that in its mirroring effect, the lake performs another way of writing with light, offering an alternative to photography, and recalling the optical illusion that transformed Suzanne and Lori into television screen apparitions. Simultaneously, the “micro-factories of light,” presumably the lake’s green growth, offer yet another version of organic light-

writing. This green lake surface glimmers, recalling the glimmering leaves of the novel's opening page.

The verb "to glimmer," defined by *The Oxford Concise Dictionary* as meaning to "shine faintly or intermittently," challenges any notion of a mastering and clearly focused eye. Defined as noun (and this definition adheres at least connotatively to the verb), the word poses an even greater challenge: the noun can mean "a feeble or wavering light," or "a faint gleam (of hope, understanding, etc.)," or finally "a glimpse"; none of these meanings connote visual mastery. The limitations suggested by this word contrast vividly with the photograph's clear black-and-white assertions of knowing and mastering vision as well as with the camera's flash of illumination. As much as the weakness and, perhaps, contingency, connoted by this word is the sense of diffusion of light that it carries.

Nevertheless, it is in recognizing the limitations suggested by the word "glimmer" that Suzanne finds her resolution. The indeterminate way that landscape is written by the vegetation growing on it clarifies for her the connection between past and present, here and there, the tropical island where her parents lived through the Second World War, the far-off desert of the contemporary conflict, and the temperate island on which she mourns her mother's death and her lover's departure. By extending the notion of the photographic to include that inherent in the landscape, she not only expands the possibilities by which the traditional photograph can offer her access to the past. She also suggests an answer to Virilio's concern over topographical amnesia: despite the disruption which tele-technologies have effected on our relationship with space and memory, topography can still potentially return us to an ethical memory.

Thus, in both a writing of place and a writing of light, “something keeps inventing itself,” although it does so “[w]ispy and silhouette-clear as a cedar plume drawing unreadable characters in the wind against that grey, that light nothingness” (129). Suzanne acknowledges that this diffused and organic writing, that refuses a separation of subject and object, is not so easy to read: “There was always something and nothing, it just wasn’t clear how they turn in the wind. How they might even be the same” (129). For Suzanne, however, this limitation is simultaneously a value. This intimate relationship between “something and nothing,” between the material and the immaterial, confirms for her the importance of connectedness, of a matrix that allows her to probe hers and Lori’s complicity in the wars which impinge on their personal and family histories.<sup>17</sup>

She finishes by imagining the cottonwood seeds, the “long cottony filaments launch[ing themselves] on a breeze spinning them into nests, the gullets of fish, sludgy eaves troughs we failed to clean, an unseasonal snow no camera will catch. . . . They go on spinning out of eyeshot, snapshot, beyond the reach of evidence. The stories we invent and refuse to invent ourselves by, all unfinished . . .” (130). Like the leaves and ferns of the opening pages, these seeds will connect one place and time with another, yet to be imagined. If the camera claims to catch an instant of linear time, the cottonwood seeds belong to a cyclical time beyond the reach of an eye or lens that attempts to master them. Full of possibilities for the future, like the unfinished stories by which we invent and refuse to invent ourselves, the seeds are marked both by a certain agency— “launch[ing themselves]”—and by a vulnerability to forces they cannot control—the “breeze spinning them into nests.” While these seeds signify future growth, their destinations in “sludgy

eaves troughs” and “gullets of fish” also signal the decay and death that form part of the cycle in which they are spun.

Suzanne both describes and performs a cycle here; her image of the cottonwood seeds imagines a move into the future yet simultaneously returns readers to the leaves of the opening pages. Her circular movement offers an alternative way of envisioning time and place to the visual epistemology generally associated with the photograph. Yet as she mourns her mother and argues with her departed lover, Suzanne has explored other aspects of photography. Her emphasis on the photo-chemical process of development and her recurrent focus on the ways that vegetation writes with and is written by light, as well as the attention she pays to the spectral, all demonstrate her insistence on the absolute imbrication of the material and the immaterial, past and present, here and there. Mourning her mother becomes mourning her lover becomes mourning the victims of war as her three narratives weave in and out of each other.

To Lori, who has finally “return[ed] to [her] own layers of family never and, yes, ever outgrown,” Suzanne declares that, like the cottonwood seeds, they must recognize both decay and death as well as the possibilities for new life. Like the cottonwoods, subject to the breezes that move them through life, they must also claim some agency, even if only in the decision to “launch themselves” into the unfinished stories. Finally, Suzanne’s work of mourning brings her the compensatory knowledge that she offers Lori, the knowledge which is its own power: “We *are* complicit, yes. Folded into the wreckage of grief and power” (130).

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Later, the narrator imagines Esme deconstructing the photograph even further as “she stares at [it] for the hundredth time [draining it] of all familiarity [so that it] became merely a picture of a man in uniform” (57).

<sup>2</sup> Virilio footnotes his account of this banquet to “The important work of Norman E. Spear, *The Processing of Memories: Forgetting and Retention* (Hillsdale, NJ: Laurence Erlbaum Associates, 1978)” (Virilio 121), but Spear acknowledges that his account is drawn directly from Frances Yates’s *Art of Memory* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966). Yates’s version includes the role of the gods, Castor and Pollux in the story. Apparently, Simonides had offered a poem praising the host of the banquet, but had also included a passage of praise for Castor and Pollux. In response, his host told the poet that he would only receive half the agreed-upon sum for his panegyric, and could obtain the balance from the twin gods. Shortly after, Simonides received a message that two young men were waiting for him outside. He went out to meet them, but could find no one. During his brief absence, the roof caved in, and thus, as Yates states, “[t]he invisible callers, Castor and Pollux, had handsomely paid for their share in the panegyric by drawing Simonides away from the banquet just before the crash” (Yates 2). As Yates points out, this “vivid story of how Simonides invented the art of memory is told by Cicero in his *De oratore*” (Yates 2).

<sup>3</sup> Marlatt’s narrator subtly teases out the range of meanings comprised by the verb “to occupy,” its challenging conflation of the military with a sense of emplacement as well as with the notion of domestic residence.

<sup>4</sup> Lynne Kirby, in “Death and the Photographic Body” (in *Fugitive Images: From Photography to Video*. Ed. Patrice Petro. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1995, 72-84) outlines recent writing on “the disappearance of photography and its replacement by video and digital technologies,” pointing to photography historian Fred Ritchin who deplores the current abandonment by the press of the traditional photograph for the electronic one (71). Kirby discusses the Gulf War as “the best-known and most profoundly disturbing instance of the triumph of video and computer imagery in the popular media,” as well as its “spurning [of] the photochemical image” (73). She notes that Ritchin contrasts the Gulf War coverage with that of the Vietnam War which was “essentially a photographer’s war [which] inculcated [a] consciousness of bodies” (73). She suggests that the “absence of bodies” in the coverage of the Gulf War “is perhaps for Ritchin the most important effect of the absence of photography,” explaining that “[i]f, as has been argued, photography and film both always bear the work of death . . . the repression of photography in this case is the repression of death [and] of memory” (73). Kirby concedes that here “the technological argument seems to hold water: Photography traffics in fixed, stable images; electronics in highly unstable ones” (73). But she argues that “what matters in this fluctuating multimedia landscape is not so much the medium itself as the institutions of mass media. The battle over technology is also a battle over the repression of information” (74). She worries that “photography is waved as a banner of objectivity” while “new technologies of representation are being a priori framed as instruments of repression” (75). Instead, we need to recognize “that censorship, whether official and organized . . . or unofficial and self-imposed . . . privileges no medium” (75). Kirby wants to move away from “looking at photography and video as adversaries in a battle for truth [in order to] focus . . . on how they might be seen together . . . as modes of inquiry, to talk about war, death, violence, bodies, memory, and repression in alternative ways” (76).

<sup>5</sup> Philippe Dubois, in his article, “Photography *Mise-en-Film*: Autobiographical (Hi)stories and Psychic Apparatuses” (in *Fugitive Images: From Photography to Video*. Ed. Patrice Petro. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1995), specifically connects photography with the ancient *ars memoria* Virilio discusses. While Virilio restricts his consideration to the Method of Loci, Dubois, referring to Frances Yates’ important work, compares photography to the mental image of wax tablets used by the classical rhetoricians, saying “photography is a modern form particularly well suited to the arts of memory. Light-sensitive plates have replaced wax tablets, but the material base matters little, since everything happens within the subject’s mind. For if memory is a psychic activity that finds its technological equivalent in

photography, the metaphor is of greater interest in another sense, as a positive/negative inversion: photography as a psychic phenomenon as much as . . . an optical-chemical activity; or photography as a memory machine, made of *loci* (the framing receptacle or window) and *imagines* (impressions, images that slide in and across the frame" (158).

<sup>6</sup> After the sentence quoted in the previous paragraph, Benjamin goes on to say, "Thus Blossfeldt, with his astonishing photographs of plants, brought out the forms of ancient columns in horsetails, the bishop's staff in a bunch of flowers, totem poles in chestnut and acorn sprouts enlarged ten times, gothic tracery in teasel" (203).

<sup>7</sup> Hubert Damisch makes this observation in "Five Notes for a Phenomenology of the Photographic Image," in *Classic Essays on Photography*, Ed. Alan Trachtenberg, (New Haven: Leete's Island Books, 1980) 199-216.

<sup>8</sup> Dubois, 167.

<sup>9</sup> This is the characterization of photography that Roland Barthes makes in *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, Trans. Richard Howard, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), saying that "in Photography I can never deny that *the thing has been there*. There is a superimposition here: of reality and of the past. And since this constraint exists only for Photography, we must consider it, by reduction, as the very essence, the *noeme* of Photography. . . . The name of Photography's *noeme* will therefore be 'That-has-been,' or again: the Intractable" (76-77).

<sup>10</sup> Corey Creekmur, in "Lost Objects: Photography, Fiction, and Mourning," *Photo-Textualities: Reading Photographs and Literature*. Ed. Marsha Bryant. (Newark: U of Delaware P, 1996), 73-81, usefully summarizes the long association of photography with death, citing Bazin's discussion of the mummy complex and of 'postmortem' or 'memorial' photography, Berger's recognition that "photography, because it stops the flow of life, is always flirting with death," Barthes's assertion that there is "in every photograph the return of the dead," and Susan Sontag's well-known claim that "all photographs are *memento mori*."

Cadava argues that rather than offering a faithful reproduction of the photographed, "the photographic image conjures up its death" ("Words of Light" 89). Explaining that "the photograph tells us we will die, one day we will no longer be here, or rather, we will only be here the way we have always been here, *as images*," he claims that "The conjunction of death and the photographed is the very principle of photographic certitude: the photograph is a cemetery. A small funerary monument, the photograph is a grave for the living dead" (90). thus, as he goes on to say, "Photography is a mode of bereavement. It speaks to us of mortification. Even though it still remains unthought, the essential relation between death and language flashes up before us in the photographic image" (90).

<sup>11</sup> In a lengthy footnote in *Civilization and Its Discontents* (Trans. & Ed. James Strachey, New York: Norton, 1961), Freud notes the evolutionary "diminution of the olfactory stimuli by means of which the menstrual process produced an effect on the male psyche" and the usurpation of their role by "visual excitations," and he suggests that this diminution "seems itself to be a consequence of man's raising himself from the ground, of his assumption of an upright gait" (46). The devaluation of the olfactory sense, then, is clearly linked to the "fateful process of civilization" (46).

<sup>12</sup> As the novel's back fly-leaf points out, "Daphne Marlatt was born in Melbourne, Australia, and grew up in Penang, Malaysia, until her family immigrated to Canada in 1951." Thus there is at least a superficial resemblance between Daphne and Suzanne, and the reader of *How Hug a Stone* and *Ana Historic* will recognize other similarities between Suzanne's narrative and those of these earlier works.

<sup>13</sup> That the captive is capturing snapshots with his title is, of course, an irony echoed in Marlatt's title, *Taken*.

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<sup>14</sup> In another example of the blurring of subjectivities within and without the novel's boundaries, Suzanne's concern with "what matters" echoes the title of an earlier work of Marlatt's, *What Matters: Writing 1968-70* (Toronto: Coach House, 1980).

<sup>15</sup> Lavinia Warner and John Sandilands, *Women Beyond the Wire: A Story of Prisoners of the Japanese 1942-45* (London: Michael Joseph, 1982).

<sup>16</sup> In doing so, she reflects Marlatt's longstanding exploration of the possibilities of language, particularly through etymology. Perhaps the most powerful example of Marlatt's attempt to express women's experience within a patriarchal language is found in her essay, "Musing with Mothertongue" (*Touch to My Tongue*, Edmonton: Longspoon, 1984), in which she notes that "hidden in the etymology and usage of so much of our vocabulary for verbal communication (contact, sharing) is a link with the body's physicality: matter (the import of what you say) and matter and by extension mother" (46).

<sup>17</sup> As well as extending the notion of the photographic here, Marlatt can also be seen to be writing a new kind of ekphrasis, which comprises, as Peter Barry says of Margaret Atwood's "This is a Photograph of Me," a "strange process of writing about a painting or photograph which not only *doesn't* exist, but couldn't." As Barry suggests Atwood's poem does, Marlatt's novel thus "offer[s] the possibility of some kind of breakthrough in the ongoing negotiations between poetry [or, in Marlatt's case, writing] and the real. . . . [working at] reality, projecting it, developing it, fictionalizing it" (165). (Peter Barry, "Contemporary Poetry and Ekphrasis," *Cambridge Quarterly* 31.2:155-165)

## Conclusion

“Beyond the Reach of Evidence”: Picturing Our Stories in the Future

*Old tattered album. Respect the tatteredness. The tatteredness is the secret:  
portrait of the family memory. Album, memory, cemetery, abandoned.*

Hélène Cixous, *Rootprints: Memory and Life Writing*, 179

In the elegiac family romances of this study, I have argued, the trope of the family photograph functions to figure an interminability within the family narratives constructed at the loss of a parent. The trope both accommodates and subverts the linearity of narratives of mourning: as a single narrator re-interprets family photographs to question the hegemony of the prevailing stories, s/he constructs a story whose own authority is thus already revealed as contingent and provisional. Nevertheless, this story has an integrity of form that allows it to be passed along at a pivotal moment in family history, the loss of a parent, the move from one generation to another. The elegiac family romance thus supports the efforts of its narrator to tell an individual story as part of a collective family history that might otherwise threaten to silence or overpower. Its ability to do this rests, in large part, on its recourse to the paradoxically-twinning fluidity and fixity of the oral-photographic alliance as represented in the trope of the family photograph.

Yet the elegiac family romance, although it might adopt a conversational tone and evoke the orality of the “exhibition moment,” is a written genre, not an oral one. At some level, then, while it might rely on, celebrate even, the fluidity offered by the oral, it comes

down finally, if only marginally, on the side of fixity, providing what Heffernan calls a “museum of words.” Having spent much of this dissertation arguing the collaboration (rather than contestation) between the visual and the verbal, I would like to close by considering the corollary relationships between the oral and the written, the fluid and the fixed. The ramifications of these relationships became particularly pertinent to me as I prepared and presented a paper in March 2004 at *Mosaic’s* conference, *The Photograph*.

The paper I presented at this conference explored the relationship between fictional and non-fictional responses to mourning, particularly in regards to their respective recourse to the photograph. Drawing on my theorizing of the fictional photograph’s function in elegiac family romances, I considered the role of photographs in my family’s experience of my father’s death. My focus was on two artifacts: a PowerPoint montage of photographs presented at my father’s funeral four summers ago, and another montage, a quilt of photograph-imprinted fabric. The subsequent disappearance of both (one to theft, the other to cremation) invited a meditation on the translations, transferences, retrievals, and losses that mark mourning’s burden: remembering and memorializing.

One important difference between the fictional narratives and the artifacts that represented my family experience is that the former comprise a lapse of time between death and the narrator’s recollection of its effect while the latter were assembled in the immediacy of loss. Marianne Hirsch finds that the narrativization of the family photograph offers possibilities for challenging dominant family histories with individual memories. As my sisters quilted together fabric squares imprinted with selected photographs, however, these possibilities were limited by the shared family concern for

Dad's palliative care. Certainly, narratives prompted by the photographs were challenged, yet nothing of the quilt's pleasantly jumbled collection of images suggested the bitterness which erupted during its making. An absentee quilter, I pieced together a version of that bitterness from conflicting stories told by those who were there, and consequently, I could never look at the quilt without seeing it as simultaneously clamorous and silencing. For me, it signaled the struggles for representation inherent in any family, as well as the potential impossibility of such struggles ever being resolved satisfactorily, particularly within the context of mourning. I have since come to see it as associated with an orality resistant to permanent fixed recording, yet persistent in its own way.

Less contentious was the PowerPoint montage my brother-in-law presented at my father's funeral. While the quilt offered a jumbled assortment of family snapshots, the PowerPoint provided a visual narrative of Dad's life, enhanced by cleverly-chosen music, effective quotations about the meaning of life and death, and the magic of a technology by which my own and my siblings' pixelated selves changed from infant to child to adult and then finally dissolved and resolved on screen as our own children, one generation turning into another. So effective was the presentation that many funeral guests asked my brother-in-law for copies, that he promised to make for them. The following week, however, his laptop, with the only copy on its hard drive, was stolen from his vehicle. Like the quilt that shrouded my father in his coffin and was cremated with him, the memorializing PowerPoint presentation has itself become only a memory for the family. Because of this, what interests me most about both artifacts is not the way they point to such prime elements of memorialization as selection and combination. Neither is it the way that these processes themselves indicate the politics of representation that always

mark the limits of what memories (and whose) may and may not be articulated and to whom. What primarily interests me, rather, is the parallel between the actual disappearance of these artifacts and the always threatened disappearance of memory, whether collective or individual.

The disappearance so strikingly exemplified by the quilt's cremation and the computer's theft is only a more dramatic illustration of the generally slower process inherent in any memorialization, and, of course, in memory itself. Most obviously, the photographs themselves fade, are torn or creased, or are lost. As well, they are marked by the change from one medium to the other as the photographic image is transferred, in the quilt, from paper to fabric, or, in the software program, into electronic pixels. And of course these photographs record moments our memory only partially and selectively holds. While these moments are more sharply recalled, refreshed, and also reshaped with each viewing, these newly-focused memories begin to fade, yielding to the quotidian once the snapshots are put away again.

To theorize the loss that so struck me about these memorial artifacts, my paper drew on my exploration of the fictional photograph's role in elegiac narratives, particularly on reading the narrative interpretation of the family photograph as an example of ekphrasis. I emphasized the central trope to which James Heffernan refers in his important work on this literary figure, *Museum of Words*: this trope, as his title suggests, signals as a central impulse of ekphrasis the desire to use words to protect material objects—generally objects of visual or sculptural art—from the vicissitudes of time. Heffernan argues that ekphrasis pits the verbal against the visual in the struggle for representation and the concomitant struggle to transcend time's effects. In Chapter Two

of this study, I build on Heffernan's work to read ekphrasis, in the novels I study, as emphasizing a struggle for representation. I argue, though, that the verbal and the visual work together in an effort to contest the dominant ideology of the family. In theorizing the loss of my family's memorializing artifacts, I again consider the two collaborative rather than contestatory; in this case, the collaboration is directed towards protecting memory against the passage of time. Further, the collaboration between the verbal and the visual is inflected by the relationship here between the oral and the written word.

Recognizing that words and images work together in the ekphrasis of family photographs rather than seeing them struggle against each other for representation means seeing the rhetorical figure's particular aptness for fortifying memory against inevitable fading. Photographs often surprise us by bringing long-forgotten events back into words, and words reciprocate by offering fuller contexts to the image. But with the passage of time, as the gap widens between the visual document and the memories of the event it represents, this collaboration becomes more difficult. More than in the traditional ekphrasis which takes works of art as its subject, I believe that ekphrasis of family photographs demands exegesis as much as mimesis, and the widening gap of lapsed time between document and memory renders this added demand a challenging one. This widening gap signals the most significant aspect of the deleterious effect of time as manifest in, and represented by, my family's funeral artifacts.

To appreciate the collaboration between word and image and the pressure placed on that alliance by the passage of time, we can compare the written ekphrasis that occurs in the elegiac family romances with the oral version that happens each time a photograph is verbally described and that is exemplified in the quilt and the PowerPoint presentation.

While the novels' narrators must admittedly contend with the passage of time having robbed images of context, their own description, explanation, and interpretation of the photograph, once written, remains in the literary present. The same words, in the same order, will always inform the reader that Will, the narrator of Thomas King's *Medicine River*, accompanied his mother and brother to a photographer's studio to have their family portrait taken. While Will remembers that his mother later thumbtacked this portrait to the kitchen wall where it stayed "until the paper began to curl up and the colours started to fade" (204), the memory he recovers, along with the image he has the reader visualize, are now clearly linked in an association of word and image, an association that rescues them from a similar fading.

Outside the written pages, however, the oral version of ekphrasis is much more ephemeral, changeable, and contingent. Of the two artifacts I remember, only the quilt could easily be described ekphrastically, with reference, perhaps, to its size, colourful borders, and squares of fabric imprinted with photographic images. As well, it comprised countless possibilities for ekphrasis of its individual images. This ekphrasis, though—whether of the quilt itself or of the images that covered it—was extrinsic to it, if triggered by it, and has so far not been written down. Whether in contexts of pleasant nostalgia, gentle curiosity, and deep sadness at my father's bedside or in the angry disputes about memories stimulated by the photographs, words and images were only provisionally linked, and were thus vulnerable to separation through time.

The PowerPoint presentation also comprised innumerable possible sites of ekphrasis in its many photographs. However, as a whole which occupied time as much as space, it cannot satisfactorily be described through ekphrasis. The presentation did

contain written words, but most of these offered aphorisms related to mourning rather than captions referring to the photographs, although it did include, in writing, my father's name, birthdate, and date of death. As well, the form and syntax of the presentation clearly suggested an accompanying verbal narrative, if a minimalist one, that traced a young boy's growth to manhood, courtship, and family life. Interestingly, the pacing of the images' presentation in the multimedia format privileged narrative over ekphrasis, working subtly to assert an implied consensus of representation, pre-emptively if gently forestalling any disagreement.

That the quilt did not incorporate any words nor order its photographs into an implied narrative made it particularly suitable for its role in stimulating conversation. At the same time, these features also made it more dependent for meaning on the verbalized memories it triggered. Had it not been cremated, the passing years would have faded the photocopied snapshots, softened the cotton, and frayed the seams, just as they curled the paper and faded the colours of Will's family portrait in *Medicine River*. But whereas an adult Will records a version of that portrait in writing, by the time I presented my conference paper, a gap had been widening for over three years in my family between the images on the quilt top and the words that described, explained, and interpreted them. While the images might have faded somewhat, if the quilt had escaped cremation, the words, transmitted orally and through memory, would change with each telling, many of them disappearing completely through forgetfulness both natural and willed. The loss dramatically illustrated by cremation would, in its gentler forms, eventually have produced a memorial artifact that challenged memory as much as aided it.

The computer presentation, on the other hand, had it not been stolen, was somewhat more self-sufficient in terms of memorialization. Escaping theft, it might nonetheless have suffered the eventual accidental erasure of digital information; escaping such erasure, it would surely have someday required transfer of this information to another format. However, had the file survived, future viewers, even unaided by the interpretive memories of anyone who knew my father, would have learned the basic shape of his life, although not his occupation nor the names of any of his children. Because images were linked to words—those explicitly written as well as those implied through form and limited through pacing—the gap between the visual and the verbal would be less susceptible, although certainly not immune, to broadening. The program would thus safeguard a version of my father's life for future generations.

My ambivalence toward the loss of the program is due precisely to its safeguarding my brother-in-law's version of my father's life. The narrator of *Obasan* argues the danger of memorialization—or rather, the propensity, within the family setting, for a concomitant insistence on forgetting. Artifacts of memorialization seem to me to harden this insistence, fixing an official version of family history which becomes more difficult for individual memory to challenge, particularly if the artifacts have been hallowed through their association with death. I argued, in my conference paper, that I was relieved to be delivered from this fixity through the twinned losses of cremation and theft which delivered us back to our own deteriorating memory. Indeed, guided by *Medicine River's Will*, I read the deleterious effects of time on these artifacts as offering fluidity in place of fixity. As discussed in Chapter Two, Will remembers that his brother, as a child, saw the destruction of his painting as an opportunity to paint another; Will

later follows the example of this memory to metaphorically remake a torn and faded family portrait into a more inclusive image of family.

This ability to reconfigure the past according to new understanding, I argued, is integrally linked to the fading of existing representations. The single artifact, authoritative in its materiality, often obscures the varying memories through which that artifact might be re-viewed. Thus, for me, the space of the lost artifacts provided an opportunity to bring together consensus and contention in a way neither quilt nor PowerPoint were able to do, thus potentially reviewing and renewing them in an ongoing process of memorialization.

My comfortable acceptance of the loss of these artifacts, however, and my celebration of the possibilities offered by this loss, was profoundly unsettled by Eduardo Cadava's keynote presentation, "Palm Reading: Fazal Sheikh's *Handbook of Death*." Cadava focused on two photographs from a series of images taken in Afghan refugee camps along the Afghanistan/Pakistan border in the winter of 1997. In this series, single hands hold a photographic image of a loved one killed in political conflicts.<sup>1</sup> The photographs have been taken illegally and covertly after the Taliban's ban against images and were taken to preserve the memory of the violent history that led to the deaths. Cadava argues that they tell us something about the force of decontextualization that takes place in every photograph.

Reading Sheikh's photographs, Cadava reminds us that an image always bears several meanings at once, and that any attempt to stabilize the meaning of the image imposes a violence and a repression. He notes that the hands in these images are not grasping meaning but rather display their fragility and vulnerability. At the same time, the

hands transmit; they manifest a desire to hand over a memory, to pass something over. They speak to the viewer, asking him or her to testify, and this call for witness demands that we pass along our reading of the images, negotiating the dangers of contextualization and decontextualization.

In comparison to the threat of erasure manifest in these photographs, the loss of my family's memorial artifacts dwindles in significance. At the same time, these images, and Cadava's reading of them, caution against the easy acceptance of any such loss. While the domestic squabbles silenced by deathbed etiquette in no way equate to the violence and repression experienced by wartime refugees, the images representing the latter are as insistently domestic as they are political. Their power, in fact, resides in their suggestion of intimate family ties severed as well as in the poignant fragility of memorial family artifacts in conditions of homelessness. American novelist Jayne Ann Phillips has noted that shelter is a primary requirement for mourning, and these images argue the difficulty of mourning and memorializing in the absence of that basic need.

The images, in other words, while representing political violence and repression that might appear to render my concern with familial memory trivial, in fact point back to the importance of the domestic as a repository for memory. The threats that reduce their transmission of stories to that of a silenced and disembodied hand holding forth the image of a lost family member, insist on the urgency of balancing the dangers of contextualization and decontextualization. The fragility of these images in these hands must risk these dangers to counter the obliteration effected by mainstream media representation in a world resistant, Cadava laments, to seeing the singularity of Afghan deaths.

In struggling against the fate of “obliteration,” these images call on the collaborative potential of the visual and the verbal, the oral and the written. To obliterate is to “blot out, efface, erase, destroy, leave no clear traces of.” The verb has its roots in the Latin word for letter; *litera* is also the root for “literature,” “literate,” and “literary,” all denoting some association with the written word. This written word helps transmit Fazal Sheikh’s powerful and painful images to the world, contextualizing them to resist their ob-literation. Cadava’s presentation insists that they be read in the context of what is inaccessible to visualization, and more particularly, within the context of the attack on the World Trade Centre. The written word collaborates with the image to resist erasure. Interestingly, while Cadava’s presentation clearly exists in the written format from which he read, I have so far only been able to find an online recording of it. Presented orally numerous times, it is not yet available as a written transcription.

The elegiac family romances, as well, use the letter, the written, to work against obliteration of stories. Certainly, they recognize the dangers the written narrative represents in the authority conferred by its material form and its fixity. However, they counter these dangers by combining the visual with the verbal, by pointing to the inexhaustibility of the image. Cadava argues that to read an image, one must contextualize and decontextualize at the same time, always keeping in mind the absolute unsaturability of the object, the referent. He also argues, in another essay, that “what makes the image an image is its capacity to bear the traces of what it cannot show, to go on, in the face of this loss and ruin, to suggest and gesture toward its potential for speaking” (“Lapsus Imaginus”). Through the trope of the family photograph, these novels incorporate the image’s reference to loss while attempting to realize its “potential for

speaking.” They encourage us to read family stories as we read images, simultaneously contextualizing and decontextualizing them. At the same time, they insist that although these stories are provisional and contingent, spinning them into the future is the only way to guard against “disappear[ing] from the earth without a whimper” (Kogawa 21).

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<sup>1</sup> One of these photographs is included in a very brief profile of Fazal Sheik in the online journal *fotografnet* (<[http://www.fotografnet.cz/web\\_1\\_eng/fazal\\_sheikh.htm](http://www.fotografnet.cz/web_1_eng/fazal_sheikh.htm)>).

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