

Negative Visions: The Referential Authority of Photography in
Contemporary Literary Fiction

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ABSTRACT

Heather Klomhaus-Hrács: Negative Visions: The Referential Authority of Photography in Contemporary Literary Fiction
(Under the direction of Eric Downing)

Early thinking on photography typically posits the photographic referent as author of the image, conceiving of photography as an apparatus much like the “pencil of nature” described by Fox Talbot. This dissertation argues that such thinking continues to influence present perception of photography and determines that issues of authority and authorship remain the subtle but central focus of such thinking. This study expounds upon the manifestation of photographic referentiality in the literature of six contemporary authors: Isabel Allende, Anne-Marie Garat, John Irving, Penelope Lively, Leïla Sebbar, and Michel Tournier. I conclude that the photographs depicted therein form illustrative examples of what I have termed the “authentic photograph,” which are images that maintain allegiance to their subjects regardless of the spectator’s or photographer’s manipulative impositions of memory and desire.

This dissertation explores the complex interactions between image and text that play across the space of literature. I consider what it means to write the image when this act requires translation of a manifestly visual medium into a purely verbal format. I ascertain that the photograph’s connection to its referent is an intrinsic aspect of photography in fiction. Moreover, photography becomes inseparable from these authors’ evaluations of writing,

memory, and history as kinds of representation. The photographic referential authority is in itself a complicated issue; production of the photograph's visual representation of the real in a literary work of fiction is even more complex, becoming the central problematic that drives narrative and plot development. I deduce that the ontology of photography, specifically its embodiment of reality, defines the general structure and thinking of these narratives. As such, I argue that visual literacy becomes an essential component of textuality and is necessary for any thoughtful consideration of writing on photography. This study takes part in the growing dialogue concerning photography in contemporary culture and contributes to the study of the text-image relationship through its revelation of the essential visual component of certain texts. It offers renewed emphasis on the photograph's referential authority and reveals that photography still symbolizes reality despite technological advances that provide ample opportunity for manipulation.

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CHAPTER 1

I. Introduction

Over twenty years ago, author Alan Trachtenberg concluded the introduction to his authoritative text Critical Essays on Photography with the suggestion that, given the numerous writers who have experimented with photography and photographers who have turned to writing, “A history of photographic criticism must take into account the important and largely uninvestigated transactions between photography and formal literature.”¹ Since the appearance of Trachtenberg’s collection of essays, present consideration on the interactions between visual art, specifically photography, and literature has become more prevalent, manifesting itself through a variety of critical essays and anthologies about photography, such as those by Jane M. Rabb.² This increased interest is likely due to the current emphasis placed on inter- and multidisciplinary research by academic institutions, in addition to growing fascination with and access to visual media and technology, which has spurred this medium’s absorption into nearly every aspect of contemporary society in industrialized countries. Author and visual theorist W.J.T. Mitchell refers to the “pictorial turn” presently influencing the human sciences, concluding that, “while the problem of pictorial representation has always been with us, it presses us inescapably now, and with

¹ Alan Trachtenberg, “Introduction,” Classic Essays on Photography, ed. Alan Trachtenberg (New Haven: Leete’s Island Books, 1980) xiii.

² Jane M. Rabb, ed., Literature and Photography: Interactions 1840-1990: A Critical Anthology (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995); Jane M. Rabb, ed., The Short Story and Photography: 1880’s-1980’s (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998).

unprecedented force, on every level of culture.”³ Photography has become ubiquitous: visual culture theorist Nicolas Mirzoeff writes, “Modern life takes place onscreen... (Imagery) is not just a part of everyday life, it is everyday life” (1).⁴ This proliferation necessitates analysis of the political and cultural implications of the medium, particularly because, as postmodern theorist Linda Hutcheon establishes, no form of representation is free from politics or history.⁵

Conscientious consideration of any subject necessitates situating it within a historically-minded perspective. Photography is a particularly convoluted topic whose complexities inevitably encourage positioning one’s ideas within a polarized dichotomy of embrace or fear of the medium. This dissertation therefore employs a diverse range of methodology by incorporating a variety of critical approaches, both historical and contemporary, in the fields of visual theory, literary criticism, art history, media studies, and cultural studies in order to consider the role of photography in literature. Clearly, such a study will be neither comprehensive nor conclusive, and is instead limited to providing close readings of a selection of photo-centric works of literary fiction written between the late 20th and early 21st centuries. This selection of texts is governed by the use of photography as a central theme or organizational principle, through which the author explores the problematic nature of the photographic referent and the authority of representation as two particularly entangled concepts. The primary focus of this dissertation is the exploration and analysis of the role photographic referentiality—meaning its potential to represent the real—plays in

³ W.J.T. Mitchell, Picture Theory (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1994), 16.

⁴ Nicholas Mirzoeff, An Introduction to Visual Culture (New York: Routledge, 1999).

⁵ Linda Hutcheon, The Politics of Postmodernism (New York: Routledge, 2002) 44.

literature, chiefly its capability to influence the construction of authority and authorship in fiction.

Photographs in literary works often serve a descriptive or illustrative function, adding an element of realism specific to the photographic medium by virtue of culturally encoded concepts of evidential value. Photography is unique among the arts for its representational abilities and indexical relationship with its subject. While several unshakable associations haunt photography, the most tenacious is its derivation from the real. In his essay “Photography” (1960), Siegfried Kracauer suggested:

Many an invention of consequence has come into being well nigh unnoticed. Photography was born under a lucky star in as much as it appeared at a time when the ground was well prepared for it. The insight into the recording and revealing functions of this ‘mirror with memory’—its inherent realistic tendency, that is—owed much to the vigor with which the forces of realism bore down on the romantic movement of the period. (247) ⁶

Although most histories of photography cite its origins centuries prior to the early 19th century experiments of Nicéphore Niépce and Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre, Kracauer’s suggestion that 19th century intellectual trends laid the foundation for photography’s acceptance into contemporaneous culture is profoundly insightful. Clearly, however, such 19th century movements as Realism, Positivism, and Industrialization not only prepared for the advent of photography, but also instituted the mindset for understanding photography within the confines of established values that embraced the ideals of unbiased observation and absolute objectivity. It is precisely these characteristics of inbuilt realism and objective recording that continue to define modern discourse on photography. Over a century later,

⁶ Siegfried Kracauer, “Photography,” Classic Essays on Photography, ed. Alan Trachtenberg (New Haven: Leete’s Island Books, 1980) 245-68.

Roland Barthes would term this attachment of the photographic subject to the real object as its “intractable reality” in his influential work La chambre claire (1980), translated into English as Camera Lucida (1981).⁷

Early theory of photography typically cites the photographed subject as the author of the photographed image, as if photography were an autobiographical act.⁸ Despite a certain 19th century propensity to use scientific method, which included supposedly pure objectivity and an idealized reliance on technology, early perspectives—both theoretical and literary—on photography are often evince a subtle awe for the photographic process. Scientific analysis quickly gives way to mysticism, spirituality, and the symbolic. While Daguerre’s invention signals a degree of subjectivity through paternal allusion, i.e., the “daguerreotype,” a name that quite literally relates the technique and creation with the inventor, much early consideration of photography takes for granted an idealized mode of representation in which the subject of the photograph always preceded its image. William Henry Fox Talbot lauded the photograph as “the pencil of nature,” as though nature had imprinted itself by its own means, thereby creating the photographic print. According to Gaspard Félix Tournachon Nadar’s memoir, Honoré de Balzac’s photophobia was reportedly predicated on the suspicion that the photograph would steal a layer of his spectral existence; for Balzac, the photograph was quite literally formed from the original subject.⁹ Balzac’s purported explanation of

⁷ Roland Barthes, La chambre claire (Aubin à Poitiers: Seuil, 1984); Camera Lucida (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981).

⁸ Clearly, “autobiography” is a problematic term. Here, I employ it in its most ideal sense as a form of self-representation, devoid of external influences or designs. However, photography and autobiography both present comparable representational issues, specifically in terms of authority.

⁹ Félix Nadar, Quand j’étais photographe (New York: Arno, 1979). Nadar indicates in his memoirs that for Balzac “chaque opération Daguerrienne venait donc surprendre, détachait et retenait en se l’appliquant une de des couches du corps objecté” (6). (“Each Daguerrian operation did thus intercept, detach, and retain one of the spectral layers of the body in question by applying this layer onto itself”) (Author’s translation).

photography does not differ substantially from Talbot's. These commentaries also illustrate the mysticism that enshrouded the photographic process, likely because this new technology was not yet entirely understood. Balzac's fear can therefore be understood to originate with the technological advances that removed the hand of the human operator. Representation and reproduction are no longer a voluntary process because the autonomy and objectivity of photographic technology usurp the controlling influence of the artist, as well as the subject's ability to author and authorize his own image.

Similar concerns over the autonomy of technology and preoccupations with the referent's lack of authority echo throughout subsequent thinking on photography. Questions of authorship and control lie at the heart of contemporary theory on photography, as many critics continue to endow the photographic image with a symbolic connection to its referent. Roland Barthes practically channels Balzac's suspicions concerning the spectral layers emanating from a photographed subject: "la photo est littérairement une émanation du référent. D'un corps réel, qui était là, sont parties des radiations qui viennent me toucher" (La chambre claire 126).¹⁰ Susan Sontag's influential text On Photography (1973) is predicated on the assertion that the photographic referent is inexorably coupled with the photograph itself. Sontag warns that despite possible distortion, the photograph always provides "incontrovertible proof" of the subject's past existence.¹¹ Sontag concludes, "it is the nature of a photograph that it can never entirely transcend its subject...Nor can a photograph ever transcend its visual self" (95). The photograph is still considered to be an inseparable part of

¹⁰ "The photograph is literally an emanation of the referent. From a real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately reach me, who am here" (Camera Lucida 80).

¹¹ Susan Sontag, On Photography (New York: Anchor Books, 1973) 5-6.

its subject. Christian Metz echoes Sontag's deductions, stating in his article "Photography and Fetish" that, "photography is a cut inside the referent, it cuts off a piece of it, a fragment, a pan object, for a long immobile travel of no return."¹² The influences of the photographer and the spectator have become the principal preoccupation for most contemporary thinking on photography precisely because the photograph's indexical status distinguishes it from all other representative media. Contemporary photophobia derives from the possibility of misunderstanding and misappropriation of the photographic image. If the photograph is indeed part of its subject, what becomes of that part once the photograph is circulated to the public? Sontag later warns that confusion between the photographed subject and object may provoke a kind of symbolic possession of the subject through the vehicle of the photograph (On Photography 14). However, it is of particular importance to note that the origin of such fears harkens back to Honoré de Balzac and the naissance of theory on photography. In short, our current preoccupations with photography derive from our continued inability to separate the photograph from its original subject. The tenacity of the photographic referent can be frustrating and frightening; it is not surprising that photography is still associated with the paranormal and the uncanny.

It may thus be understood that much theory of photography points to the significance, and thus influence, of photographic referentiality. Such umbilical linking between the subject and its representation has not been lost in literature. In fact, the presentation of photography in the selection of literary works included in this dissertation is definitively influenced by the iconic and indexical authority of the photograph. Historically, photography has been endowed with a peculiar and unique authority because of these deictic properties. In other words, the

¹² Christian Metz, "Photography and Fetish," The Photography Reader ed. Liz Wells (New York: Routledge, 2003) 140.

photograph's claim to the real is founded upon the subject's ability to define and shape its reproduction. In La chambre claire, Roland Barthes maintains that it is impossible to consider photography without returning to the individual referent.¹³ Nevertheless, the complex nature of photography, specifically its inbuilt reproducibility, renders inherent referential authority a problematic claim. Indeed, only a few short chapters later, Barthes admits that the photograph causes a disturbance in propriety by divorcing the object from itself.¹⁴ In this manner, the process of ownership and autonomy, particularly in photographic portraiture, is disrupted: the self becomes an object external to the self. The indexical authority of the photograph is based on the establishment of its symbolic value; photographic referentiality requires a certain degree of culture-based recognition on the part of the spectator, who must accept that this object (the photograph) stands for that subject (the referent).

Contextualization becomes a key aspect to the establishment of referential authority. Nicholas Mirzoeff writes, "seeing is not believing, but interpreting. Visual images succeed or fail according to the extent that we can interpret them successfully" (Mirzoeff 13). The spectator's ability to recognize the subject of the photograph provides one form of contextualization. Most photographs, particularly those that enter into public circulation, rely on writing. Walter Benjamin suggests that only the caption can wrench the photograph from contingency and approximation.¹⁵ Detachment between the subject and its object disrupts the chain of ownership, as Barthes suggested, but it also destabilizes the ability of the subject to maintain control over the context, production, and distribution of its representation. The

¹³ La chambre claire 18-20; Camera Lucida 6-7.

¹⁴ La chambre claire 27-28; Camera Lucida 12-13.

¹⁵ Walter Benjamin, "A Small History of Photography," One-Way Street (New York: Verso, 1997) 240- 257. Benjamin writes, "This is where the caption comes in, whereby photography turns all life's relationships into literature, and without which all constructivist photography must remain arrested in the approximate" (256).

implications of such detachment are taken several steps further by Czechoslovakian philosopher Vilém Flusser, who echoes Walter Benjamin's critique of the inherent reproducibility of the photograph in Towards a Philosophy of Photography.¹⁶ Flusser concludes that such reproductive autonomy renders both the photographer and the subject obsolete, suggesting that without origin, original print, or possibility for (exclusive) ownership, the photograph has no true worth or longevity: "as an object, a thing, the photograph is practically without value, a flyer and no more" (52). Flusser's perspective may be a bit extreme, yet his realization that the complex ontology of the photographic image clouds definition of its origins, authors, and authority provides a valuable distillation of a photophobia that continues to shape contemporary thinking on photography: it is precisely where one goes to find authority in photographic image that such authority dissolves.

Roland Barthes maintains that no writing can give the certainty of the photograph.¹⁷ Yet, photography is defined by its propensity to establish and undermine its representational abilities concomitantly, making this medium one of paradox and the unknown. W.J.T. Mitchell asserts that, despite the preponderance of visual theory, "we still do not know exactly what pictures are, what their relation to language is, how they operate on observers and on the world, how their history is to be understood, and what is to be done with or about them" (Picture Theory 13). How, then, are we to begin to understand the referential authority of photography in a work of fictional literature? Furthermore, what constitutes the photograph in fiction? For the purposes of this dissertation, the definition of a photograph is extended to encompass the verbal presence of a photographic image in a literary work of fiction. This

¹⁶ Vilém Flusser, Towards a Philosophy of Photography (London: Reaktion, 2000) 51.

¹⁷ "Cette certitude, aucun écrit ne peut me la donner" (La chambre claire 134) ; "No writing can give me this certainty" (Camera Lucida 85).

selection of texts does not incorporate the illustration of actual photographs, and is limited to contemporary fiction written during after 1970 in which photography, a photographer, or photographic act serves as a dominant structural motif or literary trope. This does not mean that an actual photograph is made ekphrastically manifest by verbal description. Rather, as certain works will show, specific detailing of individual photographic images or acts may not appear at all, regardless of the fact that photography provides a persistent thematic or metaphoric presence, making this medium as essential to the development and construction of these literary works as writing itself.

The presence of photography in this selection of literature pertains to stretching the dimension and conception of virtual space within the textual arena of fictional literature, but it additionally suggests that visual literacy is indeed a necessary component of textuality.¹⁸ However, visual and verbal representations occur through fundamentally different formats, and the process of making a visual image into a verbal description alters the photograph's status as a uniquely visual object, an aspect of photography that Susan Sontag considered indelible.¹⁹ This inclusion of a distinctly visual medium in a purely verbal format immediately gestures at dissimilarity and potential conflict, primarily through the necessary transformation of genre. In W.J.T. Mitchell's exploration of ekphrasis, he suggests that there is an initial stage of indifference, during which the reader is confronted with the futility of transcending genre, meaning representing in words that which is represented visually (Picture

¹⁸ W.J.T. Mitchell proposes that the present "pictorial turn," which he perceives as occurring in the human sciences, suggests, "visual experience or 'visual literacy' might not be fully explicable on the model of textuality" (Picture Theory 16). My comment echoes Walter Benjamin, who writes, "The illiteracy of the future... will be ignorance not of reading or writing, but of photography" ("A Small History of Photography" 256). I suggest that visual literacy is actually required for the understanding and interpretation of certain texts, particularly fiction literature about photography.

¹⁹ As stated in the previous paragraph, Sontag writes, "it is the nature of a photograph that it can never entirely transcend its subject...Nor can a photograph ever transcend its visual self" (On Photography 95).

Theory 152). For Roland Barthes, the condition of the intractable referent renders impossible the act of effectively writing or speaking about photography. In his essay “The Photographic Message,” the denoted message of the photograph supersedes linguistic description and is in conflict with both the linguistic and connoted message.²⁰ Barthes explains that “the description of a photograph is literally impossible; *to describe* consists precisely in joining to the denoted message a relay or second-order message... to describe is thus not simply to be imprecise or incomplete, it is to change structures, to signify something different than what is shown” (Image Music Text 18-19). A modification in genre therefore alters the very code of meaning on which the representation depends. In addition, Barthes underscores a fundamental philosophical argument explored most memorably by French surrealist artist René Magritte’s painting, La Trahison des images (1928-1929: The Treason of Images), in which visual and verbal representations of a pipe are clearly differentiated from the actual object and linguistic and imagistic signs are shown not to be identical (See fig. 1). Barthes’ perception of photographic representation in “The Photographic Message” is particularly tinged with an idealistic belief that photographs provide an untainted analogue of their subjects. Yet, his conclusion that manipulation and/or transition of structures can open the door to difference and insufficiency highlights a central issue concerning fiction writing about photography.

²⁰ Roland Barthes, “The Photographic Message,” Image Music Text, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977) 15-31.



Figure 1. René Magritte, La Trahison des images (The Treason of Images), 1928-1929. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles. 17 June 17, 2007.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Treachery_Of_Images>

Photographs in this selection of fiction are created by the text, so that the verbal representation functions as both image and text, as does the imagined visual image. Whether the photograph is created by the text or exists alongside it, the combination of text and image implies a mutual transfer of meaning that is marked by social and political discourse and establishes a hierarchy of meaning that typically privileges the verbal over the visual. Genre transformation and the potential impact of text are just a few of many potential threats to the indexical authority of the photograph however, they are central to any consideration of photography formed by language. Despite Barthes' adamant defense of the photograph's intractable reality, the surrounding environment (whether words or other images, or its appearance in a book or a museum) and the actors in that environment influence the meaning produced by the image. Photographs do not exist in isolation, nor can photography be limited

to “a particular technology of image-making.”²¹ Rather, author Sarah Kember points out that photography “is also social and cultural proactive embedded in history and human agency” (206). This recognition of the photograph’s vulnerability to external influences leads many critics to position meaning as something created outside the actual photograph, as an act of translation rather than pure recognition. Critic Allan Sekula concludes in his essay “On the Invention of Photographic Meaning” that, “the photograph as it stands alone, presents merely the *possibility* of meaning. Only its embeddedness in a concrete discourse situation can the photograph yield a clear semantic outcome.”²² Visual theorist Victor Burgin similarly asserts:

The intelligibility of the photograph is no simple thing; photographs are *texts* inscribed in terms of what we may call “photographic discourse,” but this discourse, like any other, engages discourses beyond itself, the “photographic text,” like any other, is the site of a complex “intertextuality,” an overlapping series of previous texts “taken for granted” at a particular cultural and historical conjuncture.²³

The photograph’s appropriation into a secondary artwork (such as a literary or critical text), the spectator’s developmental history, the intent of the photographer, subject, and spectator, and even the time period in which the image is both produced and viewed all impose diverse conditions and associations that affect the production of meaning.²⁴

²¹ Sarah Kember, “‘The Shadow of the Object’: Photography and Realism,” Photography Reader ed. Liz Wells (New York: Routledge, 2003) 202-217.

²² Allan Sekula, “On the Invention of Photographic Meaning,” Photography in Print: Writings from 1816 to the Present, ed. Vicki Goldberg (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981) 457.

²³ Victor Burgin, “Looking at Photographs” Victor Burgin, ed., Thinking Photography (Hong Kong: Macmillan, 1982) 144.

²⁴ This statement condenses Sekula’s and Burgin’s arguments: In terms of the influential secondary text, Allan Sekula writes, “The image is appropriated as the object of a secondary artwork...Again, we find ourselves in the middle of a discourse situation that refuses to acknowledge its boundaries; photographs appear as messages in the void of nature. We are forced, finally, to acknowledge what Barthes calls the ‘polysemic’ character the photographic image” (“On the Invention of Photographic Meaning” 457). For the spectator’s influence over the production of meaning, Burgin deduces, “The question of meaning therefore is constantly to be referred to the

The complexities involved in understanding photography and determining the ontology of its referential authority turn this medium into an especially challenging and polarizing topic. The extent to which the unknown pervades our perception of photography tempts reliance on previously established theories on the subject, which often privilege a linguistically-based model of comprehension over visual cognition. Nicholas Mirzoeff emphasizes this fact, stating, “Most theorists of the postmodern agree that one of its distinctive features is the dominance of the image...The peculiar dimension to such theory is, however, that it automatically assumes that a culture dominated by the visual must be second-rate” (An Introduction to Visual Culture 9). Regardless of Mirzoeff’s situation in the postmodern, most literary theory presumes the superiority of the verbal over the visual. However, the simple fact is that comprehension of the literary works included in this dissertation hinges upon the convergence of visual and verbal experiences. Sensory experience and (linguistic) reasoning (Rudolf Arnheim refers to the medieval distinctions of “intuitive” and “abstractive” cognition) form the subject as well as the ontological structure of these examples of fiction, which suggests that their authors have determined these two modes of comprehension to be particularly intertwined, if not inseparable.²⁵ Frederick Jameson refers to “bound unity” in his analysis of Bob Perelman’s poem “China,” concluding that Perelman’s reference to photographs extends the poem’s referentiality beyond language: “the unity of the poem is no longer to be found within its language but outside itself.”²⁶ The unity and meaning of the literary works included in this dissertation are likewise “bound” to

social and psychic formations of the author/reader, formations existentially simultaneous and coextensive but theorized in separate discourses” (“Looking at Photographs” 144).

²⁵ Rudolf Arnheim, “A Plea for Visual Thinking,” The Language of Images ed. W.J.T. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980) 171.

²⁶ Frederick Jameson, Postmodernism (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991) 30.

photography, which provides a supplementary but essential lens through which ideas on verbal representation, memory, history, death, and mourning are focused and composed. Because of photography's intrinsic involvement in this selection of literature, any formal study of these works additionally becomes an investigation of photography.

The relationship between photography and these literary works, while concretely established through metaphoric reference and structural motif, is not limited to referential inclusion of the medium. Moreover, the ontology of the photographic image is emblematic of, and therefore inseparable from, these authors' ideas on writing, memory, and history as kinds of representation. Eduardo Cadava establishes that photography and intellectual reflection are not oppositional forces, as largely suspected. "The extent to which memory and thought can be said to belong to the possibility of repetition, reproduction, citation, and inscription," writes Cadava, "determines their relation to photography."²⁷ If photography is fundamental to the cognitive and representational processes, as Cadava implies, it is additionally and especially a prevailing feature of contemporary Western literary culture, which is inundated with visual technology and media.

This dissertation is about images, specifically those created through the photographic process. It also addresses the interactions between literature and photography, as well as how we as readers and spectators, and authors and photographers, think about such exchanges between the visual and verbal realms of representation. This dissertation considers the role of photography in a selection of literary works of fiction written during the past forty years. This time frame is directed by the publication dates of the texts included in this dissertation. These texts have been chosen among numerous examples of modern fiction for their holistic

²⁷ Eduardo Cadava, Words of Light: Theses on the Photography of History (Princeton: Princeton University, 1998) xviii.

development of a visual, spatial form within the narrative and implicit requirement of visual literacy from their readers.²⁸ This dissertation questions how the visual and verbal interact inside and outside the space of the text, such as through the imaginative reconstruction of visual representation in the reader's mind. In doing so, it investigates the transformation of the reader into spectator, attempting to determine the differences and similarities between such roles. Understanding how authors employ and manipulate photography in their literary works provides valuable insight into the complexities of the representational process and the development of referential authority through visual and verbal means. Photography in fiction provides a remarkably intricate subject, rendered even more challenging because fictional works about photography tend to be produced in isolation within a single author's opus, a temporary theme taken up by the author, who rarely returns to the subject with equivalent depth of curiosity and exploration. It is therefore exceptionally problematic for analysis; researching a few select authors provides limited, but necessary and exemplary, conclusions regarding the inclusion and reception of photography in fictional literature.

II. The Authentic Photograph

This dissertation expands upon a selection of literary fiction by a variety of American, English, French and Chilean authors and is limited in scope by the author's linguistic familiarity. These authors been grouped together for their defining emphasis on the indexical status of the photographic referent. Photography in these works of fiction always maintains

²⁸ W. J. T. Mitchell expounds upon the concept of literary spatial form in his essay, "Spatial Form in Literature" ["Spatial Form in Literature," *The Language of Images*, ed. W.J.T. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1980) 271-299]. Mitchell concludes that spatial form can be developed in a literary text on both a "wholistic" (or macroscopic) level and a microscopic level. This dissertation focuses uniquely on works of fiction whose consistent use of photograph affects the very ontology of the work itself, or in other words, texts that employ photography on a "wholistic" level (291).

allegiance to the photographed subject; these photographs universally provide a faithful and accurate copy of their subject, allowing no cause for the spectator's misinterpretation. In short, in the selection of literary fiction included in this dissertation, the authenticity of the photograph is never placed into question; each picture unequivocally represents what I have termed the "authentic photograph." For example, photographs taken by the protagonist in Retrato en Sepia betray her husband's infidelity and her professional portraits reveal the inner truth or "soul" of her sitter; in The Photograph, the titular snapshot of the character Kath holding hands with her brother-in-law likewise testifies to their affair; the hundreds of pictures featuring two brothers that adorn the family home in A Widow for One Year document their former happy lives and provide explanation for the family's perpetual mourning over their deaths. The photographs of Algerian women referenced in the work of Leïla Sebbar unanimously testify to Frances hegemonic history in the Middle East. These examples of contemporary literature provide ample evidence of the fact that modern perception of photography continues to be influenced, even determined, by traditional assumptions about this medium, particularly in terms of photography's indexical relationship with its referent. Efforts to debunk the photograph's association with the real are predicated on the fear of such an indelible relationship. The photograph garners authority from its presumed ability to represent the real, and this authority is taken for granted by the spectator-characters in this selection of fictional works. The connection between subject and representation is considered as permanent as it is accurate. Nevertheless, photography in these novels still manages to become a particularly problematic space, regardless of the intractability of the photographic referent. In fact, the various forms of crisis that drive each plot stem from the photograph's ability to represent an unequivocal truth about its subject.

These novels therefore form part of a long history of thinking on and literature about photography that privileges the accuracy of the photograph above that of the spectator or photographer. As such, they provide an ideal selection for this study on the photographic referent as a site for photographic authority due to their literary replication and investigation of such traditional thinking on photography.

The photograph's representational authority provokes a unique state of crisis in each of the works included in this dissertation. Conversely, it is this very authority that is jeopardized by the medium's absorption into a literary work of fiction. Photography in fiction, even when its referential potential is presumed to be at its peak, is always a representation in crisis. None of these novels include any actual visual reproductions of photographs. The appearance of photography in fiction through a purely verbal representation therefore compromises the definition of the photograph as a non-verbal, visual reproduction of an actual event or object. Its authority as a truthful and accurate document can no longer be taken for granted because the inclusion of a photograph in fictional literature produces an inevitable revision of the fundamental characteristics that define this medium against all other visual and verbal media. This transition in format disrupts the iconic value of resemblance that forms the foundation of photographic authority. The photograph's referential ability now exists uniquely as a writer's device, an authorial sleight of hand that creates an illusion of the real. In other words, the aspects of photography that catalyze the crises in these novels are simultaneously the aspects appropriated by the literary work and thus denied to the photograph, which is turned into a fictional object through its inclusion in the fictional novel.

Photography in fiction is always already in a state of compromise for appearing as verbal reconstitutions of visual objects that are constructed within fictional realities. The

intractability and authenticity of these fictional photographs are therefore based on an essentially unsound foundation. Consequently, such photographs often serve as a source of instability in these novels. The photograph is additionally subjected to a secondary constraint on its authority: the influence of the verbal medium that forms and frames these pictures. Photography may affect literary production, particularly in these works, but it is additionally shaped by the implications and conditions of the fictional novel, as noted by Allan Sekula in his essay “On the Invention of Photographic Meaning.”²⁹ Sekula states that photographic meaning is determined in part by “cultural definition,” or “photographic discourse,” meaning the context that envelopes the presentation of each image (452). It follows that a photograph appearing in or with writing is additionally influenced by literary discourse. Sekula explains, “Any given photograph is conceivably open to appropriation by a range of ‘texts,’ each new discourse situation generating its own set of messages” (457). The photograph of fictional literature is a fundamentally different object than an actual photograph. It no longer exists—indeed it never existed—as an object. Rather, the fictional photograph is pure text. As such, it is largely, if not uniquely, determined by the “cultural definition” of the text. Photographic discourse is inferred by the author, but not necessarily invoked by the author or the reader, who is in part responsible for bringing an additional set of conditions to each reading. Photography in fiction typically acts as a piece of the real, and yet its claim to referential authority is severely compromised by appearing concurrently as and within fictional literature.

This dissertation follows a basic premise that manifestations of photography in fiction are largely defined by traditional presumptions that deem the photographic referent to be an

²⁹ Allan Sekula, “On the Invention of Photographic Meaning.” Photography in Print: Writings from 1816 to the Present, ed. Vicki Goldberg (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981) 452-473.

emanation of, and thus an extension of, the photographic subject. This dissertation explores the production of what I have designated the “authentic photograph,” a term guided in part by Roland Barthes’ explanation of the photograph as “noeme” or “that-has-been” (La chambre claire 120; Camera Lucida 77). The authentic photograph always establishes an iconic or indexical relationship with its referent. The iconic value, which was initially defined by Charles Sanders Peirce, and has since been employed as a model of definition by many visual theorists, refers to a unique relationship of resemblance between the object and the representation. The indexical value is based on a relationship of cause and effect. Marianne Hirsch, in her article “Surviving Images: Holocaust Photographs and the Work of Postmemory” likens the index to a trace; photographs provide the “footprint” of the object as evidence of that object’s presence, the “ça-a-été” of Roland Barthes.³⁰ Both of these values, the iconic and the indexical, help establish the concept of the authentic photograph here discussed. As explained in the previous paragraphs, the subject of an authentic photograph is never misrepresented by its reproduction; as such, its spectator never fails to recognize the referential truth in the image. The authentic photograph may be problematic for the characters, plot, or structure of the novel because it can represent a fact that undermines current perception of truth and the established mindset. However, it always supplies an authoritative, accurate representation of its subject. In addition, because the photograph positions an absolute past within a perpetual present, the truth depicted in the authentic photograph has the potential to influence present events and thinking. Roland Barthes states, “dans la Photographie, je ne puis jamais nier que *la chose a été là*. Il y a double position

³⁰ Marianne Hirsch, “Surviving Images: Holocaust Photographs and the Work of Postmemory,” The Yale Journal of Criticism 14.1 (2001) 5-37.

conjointe : de réalité et de passé” (La chambre claire 120).³¹ The authentic photograph in fiction is based on this perception that the photograph-as-object is a virtual emanation of the photographed subject during that subject’s past.

Several authors and theorists on photography and visual media illuminate this chapter, such as Eduardo Cadava, Jacques Derrida, James Elkins, W.J.T. Mitchell, Allan Sekula, and Susan Sontag. However, Roland Barthes’ additions to the theory of photography, particularly the elucidation of the denoted photographic message and the intractable reality of the photograph, supply the theoretical foundation of this dissertation. The referential truth of the photograph, which Barthes determines to be an inherent and exclusive characteristic of photography, distinguishes photography from other representational media, such as writing, painting, or film. Language, specifically writing, never communicates with the same certainty as photography; according to Barthes, language can fictionalize and repress meaning (La chambre claire 134; Camera Lucida 87). In contrast, the photograph “est l’authentification même” (La chambre claire 135).³² Barthes provides a similar explanation in his essay, “The Photographic Message,” claiming that photographs are analogues that can neither transform nor transcend their subjects (17).³³ Barthes contends that the photograph is always and only its referent. In this manner, his conclusions about photography, which have substantially influenced contemporary photographic and visual theory, differ little from early Balzacian thinking on photography that determines the referent as the sole authority over its reproduction. Barthes is particularly preoccupied in La chambre claire with substantiating the

³¹ “in Photography I can never deny that *the thing has been there*. There is a superimposition here: of reality and the past” (Camera Lucida 76).

³² “is authentication itself” (Camera Lucida 87).

³³ Roland Barthes, “The Photographic Message” Image—Music—Text (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978) 15-31.

referential ability of the photograph, a preoccupation that might be attributed to the recent death of his mother. La chambre claire, with its theoretical and literary movement into a photographic labyrinth that contains a picture of his mother as its center, is a work of mourning. As such, Barthes' insistence on the referential truth of the photograph could be understood as an attempt at her reincarnation. His ability to experience a trace or memory of his mother is hinged upon the indexical and symbolic value of the photograph.

Barthes does distinguish between the meaning of a photograph, which is potentially subject to the manipulation of the photographer and the spectator, and its referential truth, which is impervious to external influences. Barthes refuses, however, to reproduce the Winter Garden photograph of his mother, claiming it would have little value for other spectators. This refusal possibly infers a greater degree of subjectivity within the photograph's ability to project its referential truth. It should be noted that Barthes differentiates between the referentiality of the photograph and its punctum, which is an elusive detail that animates certain images for select spectators, causing a "prick" or "wound" both within the image and the spectator (La chambre claire (80-82); Camera Lucida 49-51). The punctum moves an ordinary picture into the extraordinary, transforming it into an image that might depict the essential being of its subject. The punctum does not necessarily guarantee recognition of the essential subject. It may, in contrast, lead the spectator beyond the photograph to a highly personal and subjective moment of introspection. Referential truth is not the exclusive value of the unique images such as the Winter Garden photograph. Contrary to the punctum, which occurs infrequently, Barthes maintains that Barthes all photographs testify to the existence of their referents. Barthes maintains that photography, "ne ment jamais : ou plutôt, elle peut mentir sur le sens de la chose, étant par nature *tendancieuse*, jamais sur son existence" (La

chambre claire 135).³⁴ The photographic referent transforms the photograph into a “certificate of presence” for Barthes, determining both the definition and structure for the image (*ibid.*). In fact, it seems nigh impossible for Barthes to conceive of any photograph without first considering its referent.³⁵ Consequently, the photograph is dominated by what it depicts, meaning that the referent eclipses and conceals the actual photograph-as-object. Barthes’ spectator therefore cannot focus uniquely on the image because the representation always leads directly to the original subject. This emphasis on the authority of the photographic referent makes photography impossible to consider in general terms. Just as the photograph leads back to its subject, so discussion of photography moves from the universal to the particular, and for Barthes, back to the individual subject of each photograph, and eventually to the individual spectator.

The authority Barthes has granted the photographic referent is precisely what determines the authentic photograph in each of the novels analyzed in this chapter. This dissertation explores how the referential authority of the photograph, which is founded upon visual recognition of resemblance, is translated into the verbal text and how its inclusion influences the construction, production, and comprehension of that text. In the majority of works included in this study, the main characters present ideal versions of Barthes’ spectator, whose gaze remains focused on the subject of the image, rather than the image itself. Barthes claims, “pas de photo sans *quelque chose* ou *quelqu’un*” (La chambre claire 18).³⁶ However,

³⁴ “never lies: or rather, it can lie as to the meaning of the thing, being by nature *tendentious*, never as to its existence” (Camera Lucida 87).

³⁵ Barthes admits that “certain professionals” are capable of perceiving a photograph without its signifier, but “elle ne s’en distingue pas tout de suite ou par tout le monde” (La chambre claire 16) (“it is not *immediately* or *generally* distinguished from its referent” [Camera Lucida 5]). In other words, the general population of spectators is neither capable nor willing to take this extra step toward understanding the photograph.

³⁶ “there is no photograph without *something* or *someone*” (Camera Lucida 6).

the photograph equally represents the past, and therefore tinges its subject with mortality and loss. Because of this, photographs offer the prospect of reincarnation as well and emphasize the irrevocable absence of their subjects. Barthes' insistence on the intractable referent of photography could be—indeed has been—considered naively extreme, driven by his grief over his mother's death. Nonetheless, Barthes is not alone in considering the real as the photograph's most tenacious attribute; many critics echo his predominant fixation, even while attempting to disprove photography's association with the real. Czechoslovakian philosopher Vilém Flusser presents one of the most disparaging critiques of photography's referential authority in Towards a Philosophy of Photography, and yet his entire argument is defined by his initial recognition of the photograph's ability to represent the real.³⁷ Photographer and critic Wright Morris might be positioned as Flusser's polar opposite, although both allude to the camera as a magical box, emphasizing its ability to reproduce the subject through the indexical authority of the photograph. Morris invokes French author Marcel Proust while elucidating his claim that photography possesses an ability to reinstate and reincarnate its subject. In his essay "The Camera Eye," Morris writes that photographs "restore the scent, if not the substance, of what was believed to be lost" (18).³⁸ Similar to Barthes, Morris perceives photography as a technology that preserves a specific vision of a momentary past reality. Flusser and Morris are ideal inclusions in this chapter's exploration of the authentic image because they provide two oppositional extremes of thinking on photography: from vilification to unabashed praise. Still, regardless of the differences of intent between Flusser's

³⁷ The main anxiety that drives Flusser's essay concerns a perceived depletion in symbolic value through endless reproduction. However, such concerns betray a primary concession to the photograph's potential to serve as a symbol for what it depicts. In other words, Flusser grudgingly acknowledges photography's referential authority.

³⁸ Wright Morris, "The Camera Eye," Time Pieces (New York: Aperture, 1989) 11-22.

and Morris' arguments, a fundamental recognition of the photograph's referential ability pervades both of their essays, as it does most thinking on photography, whether critical or literary. As such, there is a subtle reinforcement of Barthes' fundamental deduction that "Bref, le référent adhère" (La chambre claire 19).³⁹

The intractable referent, on closer inspection, carries much more authority than contemporary thinking on photography might immediately reveal or readily admit. James Elkins' titular suggestion that "the object stares back," for example, initially seems a naïve and implausible concept.⁴⁰ However, greater consideration reveals an alignment between the referential power of photographic representation and such widely accepted theories on ekphrasis, Orientalism, or visual theory proposed by such authors as Walter Benjamin, Roland Barthes, Jean Baudrillard, Samuel Weber, or W.J.T. Mitchell. The composition of referential authority is central to these theories and theorists through its immediate impact on the foundation and diffusion of power. It is precisely because the photograph can represent or stand in for its subject that it becomes such a problematic space, existing beyond the controlling arm of the established authority figure, whether subject, spectator, or photographer. Photography is an increasingly convoluted topic, in part because the imposition of referential authority inhibits the ability of the subject, photographer, or spectator to control private and public perception of the image. The lack of control invariably leads to moments of confusion, misperception, and personal crisis. Photography in fiction provides just as difficult a topic for analysis, particularly because the transition in format from visual to verbal ultimately undermines traditional thinking on the photograph's referential authority.

³⁹ "In short, the referent adheres" (Camera Lucida 6).

⁴⁰ James Elkins, The Object Stares Back: On the Nature of Seeing (New York: Harcourt, 1996).

III. Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is divided into seven chapters of textual analysis, each of which focuses extensively on the development, or lack thereof, of the photograph's visual, referential authority through the verbal production of the text. The primary concern of this analysis is the formation and interpretation of the "authentic photograph" in literary fiction. In order to understand better the nature and potential of the photographic authority in a visual, fiction-based medium, organization of these chapters is arranged according to the increasing significance of the photograph's intractable visual reality in the text and textual components. The suggestion of "increasing significance" does not necessarily correspond to an increasing presentation of the photograph as a "token of the real." In fact, as the following chapters will reveal, there is a complex correlation established between the referential authenticity of the photograph and its potential to subvert the verbal medium that forms and frames it. The escalating threat posed by the photograph catalyses a kind of textual rebellion during which the author employs textual components such as plot, character, or writing to conclude, deny, or exclude the destabilization caused by the photographic medium.

The first four chapters of textual analysis focus primarily on the varying potential of the photograph to represent, and thus define the identity of the original subject. Isabel Allende's novel Retrato en Sepia (2001; Portrait in Sepia) provides an ideal text to commence this study; the novel's 19th century time frame and traditional presentation of the photograph as an absolute authority over its spectator and photographer situates the subject of photography within a historical context that was particularly colored by the standards of objectivity and scientific method. The Photograph (2003) by British author Penelope Lively presents an exploration of the escalating disturbance caused by the deviation between

photographic reality and the spectator's perceived reality. Characters experience an intense personal vertigo when a photograph reveals a hidden secret that disrupts their perception of past and present events and ideas of self. The authority of the photographs in these first chapters is unyielding. They act as Barthes' violent image that does not always conform to the expectations of the subject, or especially the spectator. The fourth chapter focuses primarily on the novel La Chambre noire (1994; The Darkroom) by French author Anne-Marie Garat, but extensively references her photo-text Photos de familles (2004; Family Photos) for the author's elucidation of the photographic darkroom as a space for creative incubation and production. Photographs in La Chambre noire stimulate intense periods of introspection for the spectator. As such, the reality depicted by the image functions as the foundation for a cascade of memory and imaginative narrative development.

The photograph's referential authority, while maintaining its status as a depiction of the real, is increasingly affected by the spectator's abilities of perception and representation. The role of the spectator begins to shift from passively accepting the image, to questioning and even manipulating its depiction of reality. In addition, the crisis provoked by the photograph in these works of fiction begins to pivot in direction from an initial projection outward from photograph to spectator, to an internal focus, back to the photographed subject or the photograph itself. A Widow for One Year (1998) by John Irving celebrates the temporal distortion found in the photograph, focusing on how photographic images can be used to perpetuate a particular reality. In this novel, Irving reaches outside of the text to transition the reader into spectator by submerging her in a particular state of textual reality and provoking her assimilation to the specific vision of reality designated by the photographs in the novel. The literary work of Leïla Sebbar considered in this study also implicates the

reader as a potential spectator because of the author's reference to actual photographs and works of art likely familiar to many of her readers. The work of French author Michel Tournier, the omnipotence of photographic referential power is used as a tool of suppression against its original subject, spectator, or photographer. And yet, it is precisely the referential accuracy of the photograph that sets the stage for the mutability of authority.

Photographic referentiality is the determining characteristic of each work of fiction included in this dissertation regardless of textual length (novel, novella, or short story). The analysis of these chapters illustrates that in the works of fiction included in this dissertation, the authority of the photograph's ability to represent the real is upheld as a definitive truth. However, these works also begin to expose the fissures in the construction and maintenance of such authority: photographs do not always maintain reality, but represent a unique version of it, one which simultaneously subjects its subject to the transformative act of representation and is itself subjected to the interpretive act of the spectator, photographer, and of course the reader and author. Photographs function frequently as disruptive forces in these novels because they expose a visual distortion between how reality is perceived by the human eye and mind, and how it appears when captured and reproduced by the technology of photography. Reality is not what we see, nor how the camera sees. The literary works in this dissertation definitively show how these two types of vision are not equivalent. They demonstrate that the spectator's confrontation with this dissimilarity is often additionally a confrontation with the blindness and insufficiency of her perceptive faculties and especially her grasp of reality. Such moments can be revolutionary, ultimately leading to enlightenment. But, as with most revolutions, these moments are unavoidably disruptive, shocking, and

tainted with the pain of transition and personal crisis. As such, fiction writing about photography can be particularly disconcerting.

CHAPTER 2

Naïve Photographs: A search for the authentic image in Isabel Allende's Retrato en

Sepia

I. Introduction

Isabel Allende's novel Retrato en Sepia, known to its English readers as Portrait in Sepia, is a first-person narrative memoir spanning the later half of the 19th century.⁴¹ Published in 2001, this historical setting is likely the cause for the novel's more traditional representation of photography, an approach that is repeated through the precision and clarity of the plot and structure. The novel's 21st century origin manifests itself in much more subtle ways, such as through its representation of the personal memoir of a woman with memory loss, the protagonist's gradual realization concerning the implausibility and inaccuracy of a single, authoritative history, and the eventual revelation of the photographer's subjective involvement in the act of picture taking.⁴² On the surface, Allende's novel appears firmly

⁴¹ Isabel Allende, Retrato en Sepia (New York: HarperCollins, 2001); Portrait in Sepia (New York: HarperCollins, 2001). All English translations of Retrato en Sepia will be taken from the above HarperCollins edition, which uses Margaret Sayers Peden's translation.

⁴² Memory and photography become a familiar pairing in this dissertation and form a frequent theme in 20th century literature and film that reference the medium of photography. In Allende's novel, photography provides a means to establish missing memory and authenticate unclear memory. In the following chapter on Penelope Lively's novel, The Photograph, a photograph disproves memory, forcing the spectator to reassess his knowledge of the photographed subject. Both novels contrast the photograph's evidential properties with the mechanics of memory in order to probe our access to and representation of the past. Contemporary thinking on photography tends to depict the medium as limiting the scope of memory because the photographic image

grounded in 19th century realism, with photography serving as a visual extension of the subject and evidence of the protagonist's endeavor to achieve impartial and ethical representation. The photograph's intractable referent is an essential component to the manifestation of photography's evidential properties. However, the implicit duality of the photograph also occurs on the level of referent, establishing both "realistic" and "symbolic" meaning within the same image, the same subject.⁴³ This multiplicity is repeated throughout the novel through its recycling of realist and sentimental literary styles, its genre-bending use of memoir, and through the protagonist, who symbolizes the unification of the verbal and visual.

Photography and writing are the primary means for the protagonist's reclamation of a fractured past and authority over her past, present, and future. Retrato en Sepia is a novel about a photographer, but it is above all about memory—the establishment and preservation of personal and familial history. It is about the need for visual and verbal archives and the personal and public devastation caused by the suppression of such media of memory. Photography maintains an implicit role in the recollection and comprehension of events, people, and places not served by memory, such as history occurring outside the sphere of personal testimony or memory purposefully effaced by a dominant authority, such as political or familial. "La memoria es ficción," concludes the protagonist; it is unstable, altering over time and with each act of remembering. Memory is therefore an unreliable source, particularly when compared to the evidential truth of the authentic photograph (Retrato

represents a static representation of a single viewpoint limited by the photograph's frame. However, Allende's novel, as well as the included works by Penelope Lively, Anne-Marie Garat, and Leïla Sebbar, highlight the photograph's potential to stimulate the narrative response of memory.

⁴³ The terms "realistic" and "symbolic" meaning are borrowed from Allan Sekula's essay, "On the Invention of Photographic Meaning" in Photography in Print: Writings from 1816 to the Present, ed. Vicki Goldberg, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981) 452-473.

343).⁴⁴ The camera and the pen are the protagonist's tools of authentication and preservation. Retrato en Sepia is a fictional memoir authored by protagonist Aurora del Valle, beginning with her earliest memories growing up in San Francisco and concluding in Chile, following her paternal grandmother's decision to return to her home country. Aurora is given a camera at the age of thirteen, a gift that will influence her perception of memory, history, and community; it will additionally shape the representation and construction of this memoir. The visual and the verbal are particularly intertwined in this novel; photography influences both forms of representation, providing a method for observation and a mode for writing. This novel is itself vaguely evocative of a family photograph album through its steady focus on and exploration of the more significant and memorable events and people that form Aurora's history.

This novel traces thirty-eight years of a family scarred by the unacknowledged affair between Lynn Sommers and Matías Rodríguez de Santa Cruz that resulted in the birth of Aurora del Valle, who is the author/narrator. The chronological arrangement of this fictional memoir is as convoluted as the protagonist's past, regardless of the concise time frame and succinct divisions into three sections defined by dates (1862-1880, 1880-1896, and 1896-1910). Confusion surrounding Aurora's maternal family and the deliberate erasure of her early childhood are immediate causes for the protagonist's inability to restrain her writing and memory to the self-imposed confines of chronological partitions. The first paragraph of Retrato en Sepia describes Aurora's birth in October of 1880 in the Chinatown quarter of San Francisco, California. However, Aurora-as-narrator quickly shifts the focus back eight additional years to establish the principal personages of her personal history. Aurora's mother Lynn dies during childbirth; her maternal grandparents, Tao and Eliza, raise Aurora for five

⁴⁴ "Memory is fiction" (Portrait 303).

years, until Tao's death forces Eliza to send her granddaughter to her paternal grandmother, Paulina del Valle. Tao is murdered because of his involvement aiding enslaved child prostitutes in Chinatown, and young Aurora witnesses the attack; these unexplained scenes from her grandfather's murder haunt her throughout her life. Paulina del Valle meticulously conceals the details of Aurora's early childhood in Chinatown, particularly her mother Lynn's mixed-blood origins and Aurora's illegitimate birth, ostensibly to ease her granddaughter's acceptance into society.

Aurora's narrative mingles personal history with familial and public, national and international. Placing Retrato en Sepia within the genre of fictional memoir is a problematic act. The protagonist claims authorship, yet writes from the position of semi-omniscient spectator. Aurora incorporates, for example, direct dialogue and detailed writing about events without having been present. It seems unlikely that Aurora would have access to reliable sources for such conversations, given her family's inclination for the secretive elision of her personal history. Aurora's "memoir" becomes a complex and multifaceted act of communication rather than a private document of personal reflection.⁴⁵ Indeed, the entire first section spans the eight years preceding the protagonist's birth, reaching even further back into the past to include the history of her grandparents and great-grandfather. This initial section of Retrato en Sepia loosely documents the del Valle and Chi'en-Sommers familial histories, the short-lived relationship between Matías and Lynn, and Lynn's friendship with Severo del Valle. Matías's cousin Severo marries Lynn to bestow the del Valle name and legitimacy

⁴⁵ See Linda Hutcheon, The Politics of Postmodernism (New York: Routledge, 2002). Hutcheon asserts that postmodern fiction often displays a "paradoxical confrontation of self-consciously fictive and resolutely historical representation" (63). Narrative is no longer a construction of chronology, but rather the order imposed by the narrating figure (*ibid.*). As such, Aurora's memoir, specifically its transgression of genre-related format and chronological arrangement, should be understood within the contemporary traditions and period during which Allende writes.

upon Lynn and her daughter. The memoir's second section concerns Paulina's return to Chile with six-year old Aurora, Chilean political turmoil through a war with Peru and Bolivia and a subsequent revolution, and Aurora's adolescence and early apprenticeship under the photographer don Juan Ribero. In the third and final section, Aurora describes the pain of her loveless marriage with Diego Dominguez, their eventual separation, her personal and political developments as a photographer, and her eventual relationship with Iván Radovic, a doctor living in Chile. Aurora does not discover the details of her early youth until the conclusion of this novel, although most facts have already been incorporated into the narrative. Eliza visits Aurora in Chile only after Paulina's death, finally revealing the details of Tao's murder and providing context for Aurora's unexplained nightmares. It is therefore at the age of thirty, armed with the encouragement of Eliza and the facts of her youth that Aurora begins this memoir, attempting to negotiate correspondence between memory, learned personal history, and international historical fact using the tools of photography and writing.

Retrato en Sepia differs substantially from the other works included in this chapter through its historical setting and conventional presentation of photography. In this novel, photography is a necessary inclusion, providing a historical and factual counterpart to the protagonist's fractured memory, but it does not substantially intermingle with the act of writing. Allende maintains a fundamental distance between the visual and verbal by avoiding extensive description of photographs, despite brief textual references to hundreds of pictures and the protagonist's frequent meditations on the medium. Photography becomes the tool of the author(s)—much like references to political history or the act of writing itself—to serve the greater act of remembering. As such, the visual and the verbal remain separate and distinct modes of expression that together create a multifaceted representation about

recollection.⁴⁶ Allende additionally avoids the more complicated and often insidious implications of photographic representation that typify this selection of contemporary literary works. In this particular novel, the author shies away from any regular portrayal of photography as a destabilizing presence, focusing instead on its ability to depict the referent accurately and reveal historical fact. The photograph's referential truth is indisputable in Retrato en Sepia. It is via this intractable referent that Allende seamlessly moves between a realist and frequently sentimental novel and a complex "memoir" that questions the nature of truth, representation, and the construction of memory. This ability of the photograph to represent and destabilize the very truth and authority it denotes is of particular interest to this dissertation. In addition, the themes of loss, secret history, and memory that drive Isabel Allende's novel will frequently reappear during this particular study. Thus, Retrato en Sepia presents a vision of photography that is traditional and foundational, and therefore it provides an ideal site to begin this exploration of photography in fiction.

II. From Realism to Symbolism: Bridging the gap through photography

Photographic representation in Retrato en Sepia mirrors traditional consideration of photography that determines the referent as the primary actor in the photographic process. The terms used to describe Aurora's photography evoke Fox Talbot's description of a photograph as the "pencil of nature," meaning nature imprinting itself with minimal assistance from the photographer. Talbot's explanation of photography removes the influence of both photographer and apparatus, suggesting that there is something magical to the

⁴⁶ It is worth noting that early perceptions of photography perceived it more as a threat to the art of painting rather than writing. (Consider, for example, 19th century French painter Paul Delaroche's claim that the advent of photography would cause the death of painting.) In this manner, Allende's use of photography as a supplement to the written work coincides with its historical setting.

photographic process: a kind of miraculous, spontaneous reproduction. Aurora's mentor, photographer don Juan Ribero, believes that Aurora's portraits present the "essence" of her sitter, as opposed to his glorification of realism, documentary, and testimony. The narrator describes her pictures as humanitarian images, void of personal, social, or political agenda, and which subsequently induce the compassion of the spectator. Allende's novel clearly evokes the inherent duality of photography that allows it to act simultaneously as evidential document and symbolic object. These definitions are largely determined by character contextualization: Ribero's (masculine) realism and Aurora's (feminine) sensitivity. Aurora's uncle Severo del Valle gives the protagonist her first camera. His aim had been to alleviate Aurora's frequent night terrors; he suggests that she might use the camera to capture those images and consequently end her troubled sleep. Aurora initially takes her uncle's suggestion seriously, perceiving photography as a means to document the ephemeral images her mind cannot seize and therefore analyze. Aurora's early belief in the magical ability of the camera to capture fugitive nightmare images belies a fundamental differentiation between her and her mentor, realist photographer don Juan Ribero. However, this artist does have substantial impact over Aurora's abilities of observation and representation, particularly through her unshakable faith in the photograph's intractable referent. In other words, for both Ribero and Aurora, as long as the photographer avoids any intentional manipulation of subject, film, or apparatus, the camera will never misrepresent its subject. Production of art and the creation of an authentic image becomes as much about intention as action. The contrast between Ribero and Aurora allows Allende to explore the role of the artist and debunk realist tenets of absolute objectivity. Photography is elevated from science to an art, while maintaining aspects of each.

Photography thus becomes the dominant motif in this novel; as the protagonist's principle occupation since her youth, it influences her perception of events and people, as well as of time and space. Paulina del Valle brings her granddaughter to apprentice under don Juan Ribero because he is the preferred photographer of the elite society. However, the portraits displayed in the photographer's studio "no eran empingorotados pelucones ni bellas debutantes, sino indios, mineros, pescadores, lavanderas, niños pobres, ancianos, muchas mujeres como aquellas que mi abuela socorría con sus préstamos del Club de Damas" (Retrato 220).⁴⁷ Ribero quite literally changes how and what Aurora sees, which will also alter how she lives and works. Photography therefore espouses a way of living as well as an artistic ideal. Aurora's initial visit to Ribero's studio reveals the myopia of her privileged existence by confronting her with people outside of her social strata. Aurora concludes, "Allí estaba representado el rostro multifacético y atormentado de Chile" (*ibid.*)⁴⁸ She believes Ribero's art reveals the authentic existence of his sitters and immediately concludes that these subjects are emblematic of Chilean national identity.

Aurora quickly proves herself an apt pupil of Ribero's particular vision of photography, which she describes as realistic and founded in truthful representation of the subject. Don Juan Ribero obstinately opposes any darkroom manipulation or technological tricks. Such photographic practices reflect a principal of objective vision and reveal a dogged faith in the mechanics of the apparatus and in the scientific process typical of such 19th century movements as Realism, Positivism, and Industrialization. Ribero states that one's

⁴⁷ "were not bigwig conservatives or beautiful debutantes, but Indians, miners, fishermen, laundresses, poor children, old men, many women like the ones my grandmother helped with her loans from the ladies club" (Portrait 192).

⁴⁸ "There I saw represented the multifaceted and tormented face of Chile" (Portrait 192).

ability to see is subjected to personal desire, “el hábito de ver solo lo que queremos ver” (Retrato 290).⁴⁹ Manipulation of the reality captured by the camera re-imposes a subjectivity of vision that the photographer should endeavor to avoid. Ribero’s dismissal of other photographic techniques suggests that there is a singular relation between photographic vision and the presentation of truth, and that such truths are best represented by his particular version—or vision—of photography. Critic Alan Trachtenburg suggests that to assume “photography is unitary, a single method of taking pictures” and therefore “a universal visual language” is to ignore the social, political, and historical implications of the medium (vii).⁵⁰ Ribero’s intractability can therefore be read as an imposition of his authoritarian perspective that disseminates a singular narrative of his devising.

Later in life, Ribero suffers from blindness, a fate that actually further propagates his doctrine of objective observation. Visitors become Ribero’s sole access to visual reality and he demands that his guests recount what they have seen in exhaustive detail. These verbal descriptions focus on a single scene with the specificity of a photograph, transforming Ribero’s guests into his camera, and their visions into his own. Aurora explains:

Sus alumnos, sus amigos, y sus hijos lo visitan a diario y se turnan para describirle lo que han contemplado: un paisaje, una escena, un rostro, un efecto de luz. Deben aprender a observar con mucho cuidado para soportar el exhaustivo interrogatorio de don Juan Ribero; así sus vidas cambian, ya no pueden andar por el mundo con la levedad habitual, porque deben ver con los ojos del maestro. (Retrato 222)⁵¹

⁴⁹ “our habit of seeing only what we want to see” (Portrait 257).

⁵⁰ See Alan Trachtenberg’s “Introduction” in Classic Essays on Photography, ed. Alan Trachtenberg (New Haven: Leete’s Island Books, 1980) vii-xiii.

⁵¹ “His students, his friends, and his children visit him every day and take turns describing that they’ve seen: a landscape, a scene, a face, an effect of light. They have to learn to observe very closely in order to endure Don Juan Ribero’s exhaustive interrogation. As a result their lives change; they can’t any longer wander through the world in their old casual way because they have to see with the maestro’s eyes” (Portrait 194).

Ribero's insistence on the authentic reveals a sanctimonious assurance in his art that is intimated through the interrogations endured by his visitors. His blindness can thus be understood on a figural level as he comes to represent the naïve photographer who imposes his vision upon his subjects and spectators. Aurora's listing of the portraits that decorate his studio is decidedly suggestive of the documentation of "scenes and types" produced by 19th century colonial photographers. Ribero authors a particular history of Chile, although Aurora (and Allende) would have her reader believe that Ribero's photography presents a counter history representative of the indigenous communities and lower classes.

Don Juan Ribero's work is particularly difficult to analyze because it necessarily becomes a political statement regardless of his absolute confidence in objective observation and scientific techniques. The text imposes a particular meaning on these fictional photographs, supplying historical setting and the artist's background information, which can stand in for detailed description of his work. In this manner, photography in fiction can be represented by description of something other than the actual photograph, be it of the photographer, or even of the subject in a different setting. Photographs that are created by writing or are accompanied by writing, whether fictional, documentary, critical, etc., do not stand in isolation. These images are subjected to the context created within the text and by definition of that text. Fictional literature about photography, for example, carries a far different set of implications than a critical analysis of a photographic image. Allan Sekula suggests that photographs can be "appropriated as the object of a secondary artwork" or a form of text that can direct the development of photographic meaning ("Invention" 457). It is logical to assume that text is not limited to captions or literature, but includes the text or *context* generated by the reader/spectator. Meaning is also created by the reader/spectator's

literary and photographic education, obliging this particular critic to point out Ribero's subliminal imperialist tendencies.

Aurora's initial assessment of Ribero's photographs reveals the future of her own work and suggests the failure of her mentor's extreme realism. Aurora remains true to her technological training, "usando la tecnología como medio para plasmar la realidad, no para distorsionarla" (*Retrato* 222).⁵² However, she tempers her images with personal involvement that allows her to establish a brief relationship with her subject based on emotional recognition and attachment. Aurora explains, "Al hacer un retrato se establece una relación con el modelo que si bien es muy breve, siempre es una conexión. La placa revela no sólo la imagen, también los sentimientos que fuellen entre ambos" (223).⁵³ As a result, Aurora's photographs reveal the "soul" of her sitter, a "vital essence" invisible to the naked eye, but which is documented through her photography. Aurora's photography likely includes a far greater degree of subjectivity and sensitivity than her mentor would prefer. The character of Ribero is aligned with objectivity and uniformity of vision, as well as the singular narrative. Aurora, in contrast, represents sensitivity and multiplicity of technique, vision, language, ethnicity, class, and culture, in addition to the revision and recycling typical of contemporary literature.

Isabel Allende writes about the late 19th century during that of the 21st. Her writing therefore spans the short history of widespread public access to and knowledge of photography. Given the rather brief history of photography and the rapid changes in its

⁵² "using the technology as a medium for capturing reality, not distorting it" (*Portrait* 194)

⁵³ "When I shoot a portrait there's a relationship with the model that even if very brief is nonetheless a connection. The plate reveals not only the image but the feelings that flow between subject and photographer" (*Portrait* 195).

technology, any references to this medium or descriptions of photographic equipment or process immediately designate a specific historical setting. The inclusion of photography in Retrato en Sepia, specifically the social acceptance received by the protagonist and the nature of her meditations on this subject, specifically her faith in the technology of this medium, place this story within a precise time frame: late 19th and early 20th centuries. However, the protagonist's incorporation and ultimate adaptation of her mentor's realist lessons testify to the 21st century during which Allende composes this novel. Ribero's work also serves as a subtle reminder of the cultural and political ramifications of representation. According to Linda Hutcheon, typically references the idea that "all representations have a politics" and a history (44). Photography conveys a unique awareness of the past, often through acts of appropriation and revision of symbols and techniques that reference a particular past. Photography, through its reproduction of a moment past within an eternal present, actually spans both the past and the present. It is a medium without clear boundaries or definitions, acting as both a science and an art, producing a vision that is both specific and universal. As such, it provides an ideal medium for the contemporary novelist, allowing authors like Isabel Allende to explore the mingling of historical mindsets, literary periods and genres, as well as various artistic media. Photography plays an essential role in the construction of this novel, allowing Allende to create a protagonist who embodies such oppositional forces as realism and symbolism, the visual and verbal, the objective and subjective.

III. The Photograph in Fiction or the Fictional Photograph: Allende's absent portrait

Photography in Retrato en Sepia represents an artistic ideal by balancing the realism and objectivity of technology with the subjectivity and sensitivity of the photographer.

Truthful representation becomes equated with photography, a judgment that separates photography from other artistic media, such as writing or painting. For example, a family acquaintance advises Aurora that reality becomes fictionalized by the interpretation of the artist. The camera, however, does not distort or influence: it “captures” the real in a way that other art forms cannot. Aurora’s friend defines photography as “la suma de lo real más la sensibilidad del fotógrafo,” making photography into an ideal combination of technology and humanity (*Retrato* 241).⁵⁴ Aurora’s writing presents a sharp contrast to this definition of photography. She is incapable of writing within predetermined chronological divisions or a single genre. Her inability to follow specified conventions implies that her writing is overly steeped in sensitivity and self-reflection. This memoir forms a subjective opposite to Ribero’s objective photograph.⁵⁵ As such, it also reinforces the established division between the visual and verbal arts. In addition, writing appears as an especially problematic medium, fraught with fictionalized interpretations and personal testimony. The memoir’s chaotic format is an extension of the protagonist’s exceptionally personal response to the unknown of her past. Writing is an attempt to impose order and forge memory and meaning from the known and

⁵⁴ “the sum of the real plus the sensibility of the photographer” (*Portrait* 212).

⁵⁵ It is worth noting that through the differentiation established between Aurora del Valle’s use, approach, and understanding of photographic representation and that of her mentor, don Juan Ribero, Isabel Allende forms an especially gendered notion of representation. Ribero represents a particularly masculine, scientific objectivity, which Aurora opposes with her feminine sensibility and subjectivity. Arguably, only three characters evade such stereotypes in this novel: the influential characters of Tao Chi’en, Eliza Sommers, and Paulina del Valle each present a blending of “masculine” and “feminine” characteristics. As such, these characters stand outside of the conventional society described by Allende in *Retrato en Sepia*. Tao dresses in Western clothing and is consulted by Westerners for his medical prowess. Eliza lives with Tao in the Chinese quarter of San Francisco but is not married to him. Paulina eschews Chilean proprieties, exercises a financial competence that gains her great wealth and also maintains a non-traditional relationship with both of her husbands.

unknown, and from fact and fiction. Memory and meaning both become an act of representation, similar to photography. However, the extreme subjectivity of Aurora's memoir precludes its attainment of her artistic ideal, which she describes as "esa combinación de verdad y bellaza que se llama arte," and which is the goal of her photography (114).⁵⁶ The fractured narrative of Retrato en Sepia and Aurora's failure to produce a singular "portrait in sepia" suggests that sentimental response must be tempered with objectivity. Extremism, whether subjective or objective, results in failed representation, blindness, and even memory loss.

The technological apparatus of the camera and the scientific processing of the negative and print provide Allende's protagonist with a detachment that counterbalances the exceptionally sensitive nature revealed by her writing. Aurora explains, "con la cámara ante la cara, como una máscara que me hacía invisible, podía enfocar la escena y al mismo tiempo mantener una glacial distancia" (Retrato 290).⁵⁷ The photographic act necessarily incorporates some degree of technology and scientific procedure. For Allende, automation infers a greater potential for balance between the subjective and objective, and between humanity and machinery, therefore increasing the likelihood of achieving the highest artistic ideal. Allende's assessment of photography in this novel differs substantially from the majority of literary and critical works included in this dissertation through this valorization of the camera's objective machinery. Throughout this dissertation, the camera's technology typically conflicts with the humanity of the subject, photographer, or spectator, provoking loss of control, ownership, and understanding of both the self and the photographic process.

⁵⁶ "that combination of truth and beauty called art" (Portrait 97-8).

⁵⁷ "With the camera before my face, like a mask that made me invisible, I could focus on a scene and at the same time maintain a glacial distance" (Portrait 257).

In other words, the camera becomes a black box of the unknowable and uncontrollable, which renders it an apparatus of fear. Allende's portrayal of photography in Retrato en Sepia aligns with the time period depicted in the assumption that technology liberates humanity from a surplus of emotion. However, according to Allende, the maintenance of balance between the two is crucial for stable artistic production. This prerequisite for balance replaces Retrato en Sepia within the selection of literary works referenced in this dissertation, works which explore developing crises arising from encounters with photography. Whereas other authors presume instability through a surfeit of technology, pitting machinery against humanity, Allende perceives any form of extremism as potentially problematic.

Further analysis of Retrato en Sepia exposes a subtle valorization of humanity and personal testimony over technology and its products through the artful absence of descriptive passages about photographs from this novel. Aurora's photography builds on the established bond between referent and image characteristic of early thinking on photography. Ribero's photographs are said to reveal Chilean national identity, and Aurora's the soul of her sitter; the success of their work therefore relies on the spectator's recognition of the symbolic value of the photograph. There is an inclusion of the mystical in this act, a leap of faith on the part of the spectator that allows the representation to be perceived as an extension of the subject. Aurora likens her photography to a spiritual quest, distinguishing between the hundreds of pictures she has taken and the few prints on which "aparece el alma de una persona, la emoción de un evento o la esencia vital de un objeto, entonces la gratitud me estalla en el pecho y suelto el llanto, no puedo evitarlo" (Retrato 114).⁵⁸ Aurora's explanation of her ideal photograph expresses a glorification of the referent over its representation. Photography

⁵⁸ "the soul of the person appears, the emotion of an event or a vital essence of some object; at that moment, gratitude explodes in my heart and I cry" (Portrait 98).

therefore succeeds where memory fails or is absent. It is an ideal document that only ever represents its subject. Good photography, at least in Retrato en Sepia, always leads the spectator back to the original object rather than away from it. In other words, the ability of the photograph to symbolize its referent derives from a compression of object and subject into a single unity, ultimately effacing the representation in preference for its referent. Again, Allende differentiates her work from that of her contemporaries: rather than exploring an unmitigated power of simulacrum, Allende's focus remains on the persistence of the referent. Photography's incorporation of realism, automation, and objectivity means that it can accurately symbolize its referent. In Retrato en Sepia, this process is so effective that the subject of the photograph quite literally displaces its representation.

The durability of the photographic subject derives primarily from the establishment of a symbiotic relationship between the photographer, subject, and spectator. Aurora claims that her photographs make visible her unique connection between photographer and referent ("los sentimientos que fluellen entre ambos").⁵⁹ This inclusion of the photographer and spectator shifts the focus from the subject-object association (that typically dominates most thinking on photography) to a triangular relationship that excludes the representative object. This transference in perspective institutes a fundamental revision of Ribero's modernist doctrine of impartial observation, and of his disparagement of the influential participation of the photographer or spectator. It also circumvents the finished photograph, a point reinforced by the text, which includes minimal descriptive writing about photographs and no recognizably ekphrastic passages about pictures. Textual photographs are overshadowed by their textual referents, photographers, and spectators. In Retrato en Sepia, for which a photographic

⁵⁹ "the feelings that flow between subject and photographer" (Portrait 195).

portrait is the titular subject, actual (textual, fictional) photographs virtually disappear.

Ultimately, the only form of representation produced in Retrato en Sepia is the novel, which is a highly stylized, self-consciously fictional text that purportedly incorporates a multiplicity of perspectives and histories. In other words, it is the subject (the life and memory of Aurora del Valle), rather than the representation (a traditional memoir or a portrait in sepia), that takes precedence. It is also the contemporary novel (a fractured, self-consciously fictional narrative of multiple, individual perspectives) that subtly usurps the historical time period that provides the chronological frame for this novel.

The elision of verbally-constructed photographs from this fictional novel testifies to the tenacious division between text and image. Indeed, photography in fiction is a rarity, and fiction about photography is even rarer. Novels are often accompanied by cover illustrations that depict the story's key image and influence the reader's perception of the subject represented. However, the publishing house, rather than the author, typically creates those purposeful designs. Both the Spanish and English hardcover and paperback editions of Retrato en Sepia include a cover photograph that alludes to the final self-portrait in sepia absent from the text, but which actually represents an image from a series of private self-portraits Aurora began during her marriage with the intention of self-discovery and understanding. The cover image is appropriately chosen (despite the fact that its clarity indicates a modern photographic process), displaying a core understanding of the novel as well as insight into its marketability (the model depicting Aurora is beautiful, and the image modestly erotic).

Retrato en Sepia exemplifies one extreme of the spectrum of techniques employed by writers to manifest the photographic image in their literary works. The opposite side of this

spectrum would likely show the work of German-born author W.G. Sebald, whose novels contain actual photographs, or French author Anne-Marie Garat's Photos de familles, which includes ekphrastic meditations on individual images. Photography in Allende's novel instead serves a largely theoretical function, acting as a lens through which the writer frames a general meditation on the subject of memory and the role artistic representation plays in recollection. In fact, Retrato en Sepia is hardly about photography at all. Aurora's self-portraits ultimately do not succeed or do not exist. The failure of her portraiture reinforces the earlier point of the division between text and image; Allende maintains different objectives for photography and writing, allowing one work to effectively when the other does not. For example, Aurora's search for self-discovery is best represented through a written memoir that spans years of family and personal history. Photography represents a single moment; the exclusion of Aurora's final portrait in sepia suggests that the photographic self-portrait—even a fictional one created during a time period that valorized the singular, grand narrative—is not capable of depicting an entire life, let alone one so influenced by familial, cultural, political, and national history.

Retrato en Sepia does incorporate Aurora's brief meditations on three particular photographic images, none of which were taken by the protagonist. Aurora inherits these pictures after Eliza's final visit, after the history of her youth is made known to her. These pictures depict in rapid succession Aurora as a young child dressed in traditional Chinese clothing for a celebration, Aurora's mother Lynn, and her maternal grandparents, Eliza and Tao Chi'en in a studio daguerreotype. Lynn modeled during her youth, and so her image, while written about as if a single picture, is actually a series of postcards and calendar pictures collected by Aurora during her later visits to San Francisco. Spatially, these

photographs occupy barely a page and a half of text, likely because the only image of importance to Aurora is that of her grandparents, which she displays on her nightstand, and which she claims “es lo último que veo antes de apagar la lámpara cada noche” (Retrato 110).⁶⁰ The photographs of Aurora and her mother mean little to the protagonist because she does not recognize either person depicted. Lynn appears to Aurora “sólo como un juego de luz y sombra sobre el papel” (110).⁶¹ These pictures, particularly the images of Lynn, exist as pure document with ability to testify uniquely to the identity and beauty of their referents. The authentic photograph in fiction supplies evidential proof of existence, but it does not necessarily provide the contextualization that establishes sentimental connection. Representations of Lynn purportedly still circulate around San Franciscan shops, however, Aurora implies that they are without context and appear as empty images of pure aesthetic—examples of simulacra entirely detached from their original sign. Taking control of the camera and the written page allows Aurora to circumvent the fate of her mother, who was always (and is still) the object of the gaze and never the authority of her own image. Walter Benjamin claims in his essay, “A Short History of Photography” that “transience and reproducibility” drain the image of its particular aura, and therefore its unique value (209).⁶² The pictures of Lynn that still circulate in San Francisco hold no more value than a novelty postcard, a “play of shadows” void of meaning even to Lynn’s daughter. Allende pushes this symbolism a step further: Lynn was as vacuous during life as she appears on paper, possessing little will or independent thought. Benjamin notes in this same essay that it is the

⁶⁰ “is the last thing I see before I turn down the lamp every night” (Portrait 94).

⁶¹ “only as a play of light and shadow on paper” (Portrait 94).

⁶² Walter Benjamin, “A Small History of Photography.” One-Way Street (New York: Verso, 1997) 240-257.

role of the caption to situate the photograph within a specific context and remove it from approximation (256). For Benjamin, it is the caption that provides contextualization, establishing meaning that leads to a unique connection between spectator and photograph. In Allende's novel, this connection is an inherent aspect of the authentic photograph.

Memory and emotional connection (whether subject and spectator, or subject and photographer) contextualize the photographic image, filling it with meaning. Neither memory nor emotion need connect with the specific moment the picture is actually taken; such images are animated through symbolic recognition that occurs outside of chronological or spatial attachment. Aurora's impression of meaning on the daguerreotype of her grandparents is strikingly similar to the legendary Winter Garden photograph of Roland Barthes' mother. Barthes differentiates between "analogical" pictures of his mother, which only stimulate recognition of her identity, and this photograph of her as a child, which reveals "her truth" or "la science impossible de l'être unique" (La chambre claire 110).⁶³ This photograph—and only this one—gives Barthes "un sentiment aussi sûr que le souvenir" (La chambre claire 109).⁶⁴ Whereas Barthes does not reproduce this photograph as an actual visual image in the text, suggesting that only he could realize its value, Aurora's ideal photographs make visible to all spectators the connection established between subject and photographer. However, a cyclic relationship is thus established between memory and photography in both La chambre claire and Retrato en Sepia. Memory establishes meaning in the image, and the photograph prompts memory, which develops meaning. W.J.T. Mitchell claims that memory is a medium of reconstruction, a "dialectic between" space and time, the visual and verbal, image and

⁶³ "the impossible science of the unique being" (Camera Lucida 70).

⁶⁴ "a sentiment as certain as remembrance" (Camera Lucida 70).

word; memory is both served by and formed from these oppositional structures (Picture Theory 192).⁶⁵ Photography and writing in Isabel Allende's novel are techniques employed in the construction of memory as Mitchell's "imagetext" or "a double-coded system of mental storage and retrieval" (*ibid.*). Memory and meaning in Retrato en Sepia are the desired products of visual and verbal mechanics.

IV. Conclusion

Allende's novel Retrato en Sepia provides fresh perspective on current considerations of photography. Situating the novel within the late 19th and 20th centuries allows for a revision of historical and contemporary thinking on this medium, resulting in a valorization of the technological power of photography, claiming it to be a form of automation necessary for the preservation of the sanctity and interconnection of humanity. The importance of Retrato en Sepia to this study lies in Allende's ability to question contemporary presumptions about photography and to make her readers consider the multiplicity of roles photography plays in fiction. Allende's artful inclusion and conspicuous dismissal of photographic representation from her novel reinforces established distinctions between text and image, and ultimately reveals photography's tenuous hold over the fictional novel. Retrato en Sepia illustrates that photography in fiction is rarely its own master, but can serve as the vehicle for the exploration of other subjects, such as memory, or take part in a larger discourse, such as on the nature of representation. These revelations are reminiscent of Allan Sekula's suggestion that photography is frequently usurped by a secondary artwork and of John Tagg's claim that "photography as such has no identity" because its power varies with the authority invested in

⁶⁵ W.J.T. Mitchell, Picture Theory (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1994).

it by a dominant discourse.⁶⁶ Representation is not without a politics. W.J.T. Mitchell reminds his readers that no form of representation provides “straightforward access” to its subject (Picture Theory 188). In Allende’s novel, grandparents, memory (or lack thereof), personal desire, society, and government acts as authorities that mediate the production, distribution, and comprehension of representation. Whereas most of the works included in this study explore the enduring apprehension surrounding photographic representation, Allende determines that all forms of representation—photographic, literary, and mnemonic—are potentially subject to totalizing authority that sanctions or dismisses at will.

⁶⁶ For Sekula, see footnote 11. John Tagg, “Evidence, Truth and Order,” The Photography Reader, ed. Liz Wells (London: Routledge, 2003): 259.

CHAPTER 3

Penelope Lively, The Photograph: The intervention of photography

I. Introduction

“Whether we encounter ourselves through photography, video, digitalized computer images, palimpsestic montages, or even the dust of industrialized pollution as soon as we are captured by optical technologies that have no need for the light of the day, we already belong to the night. We are already ghosts.”⁶⁷

- Eduardo Cadava

British author Penelope Lively creates in her novel The Photograph a verbal and visual palimpsest of a woman whose death has occurred long before this novel’s timeframe.⁶⁸ Lively constructs a fascinating portrait of Kath, her main character, through a single snapshot and reconstructed memories of her relayed through internal monologues of other characters. This “portrait” reveals a woman who appeared as “ghostly” in life as she does after her death. Published in 2003, The Photograph is one of over twenty works of fiction, non-fiction, and children’s literature written by Penelope Lively and follows a thematic history established throughout her corpus.⁶⁹ Lively’s collection of writings reveals, among other things, a preoccupation with memory, the layering of the present with the past, the problematic nature

⁶⁷ “Irreversible Ruins” Ruins in Reverse: Time and Progress in Contemporary Art. 2 May 1999. CEPA Gallery. 4 Sept. 2003. <<http://www.cepagallery.com/cepa/exhibits/EXHIBIT.19981999/ruinsinreverse/RIR.04.essay.cadava.html>>.

⁶⁸ Penelope Lively, The Photograph (New York: Penguin, 2003).

⁶⁹ For a more expansive overview of recurring themes in Lively’s work, see Mary Hurley Moran’s insightful work: Penelope Lively (New York: Twain Publishers, 1993).

of linear time, and the subjectivity of history. In The Photograph, Lively uses photography to explore the subjective and fractured nature of visual, verbal, and remembered representations. Memory collides with photography, catalyzing a deconstruction of traditional concepts of representation and exposing the subjectivity of both memory and spectatorship. It is from this perspective that Lively begins an exploration of media and modes of representation, specifically memory, knowledge, photography, and writing.

In much of Lively's fiction, animate and inanimate objects stimulate memory and thus act as a kind of Proustian portal, transfusing the present with the past. A shocking snapshot in The Photograph shatters previously established opinions about the main character, disrupting memories and destroying prior knowledge of her identity. Characters are disoriented and question their understanding of the past, which they perceive as an essential foundation for their present definitions of self. This particular picture of Kath acts as an authentic photograph in that it reveals a previously unknown, yet essential truth about its referent. The authoritative realism of the snapshot in this novel eclipses all other forms of representation, particularly that of memory. The photograph's transformative properties allow it to become a site for vision and reconnection, as well as blindness and isolation. Penelope Lively's verbal photograph ultimately forms a curious crossroads for seemingly incompatible concepts: past and present, life and death, secrets and knowledge, and blindness and sight. Through photography, Lively finds an ideal medium to explore the blurring of chronological divisions and thus an emblematic expression of her belief in the present relevance of past events and the impossibility of a single, authoritative history.

The plot of The Photograph revolves around the character of Kath—specifically the memory of Kath—as she is considered and reconsidered by her family and friends through

the frame of this photograph. Kath's husband Glyn is a landscape historian and successful professor at a London university. One afternoon, he searches in an unused cupboard for some academic papers and discovers a large envelope that had belonged to his wife, who died before the time of the narrative. In this envelope, which is labeled "Keep!" in Kath's writing, are several miscellaneous documents and a second envelope on which Kath had added, "DON'T OPEN—DESTROY" (Lively 2,4) Glyn disregards Kath's written instructions, finding a snapshot of a group of people in which his wife and her brother-in-law hold hands with their backs to the photographer. This gesture appears furtive and intimate, more of a quick embrace than a gesture of friendship; their hands are hidden to all but the photographer and the eventual spectators of this photograph. A folded note included with the photograph confirms the nature of their embrace as well as the brother-in-law's identity. This note reads, "I can't resist sending you this. Negative destroyed, I'm told. Blessings, my love," and is conclusively written in her brother-in-law Nick's handwriting (5). Glyn immediately questions his relationship with his wife, wondering whether she was frequently unfaithful to him and when she might have had this affair with Nick. Such anxieties drive his decision to confront Elaine, Kath's sister, as to whether she knew of the affair or of Kath's possible adulterous behavior. Elaine and Nick separate as consequence of such revelations; Nick moves in with his daughter, further disrupting the family's status quo. Each character reconsiders his/her knowledge of Kath's life through the optic of this photograph, and debates the possible impact of Kath's and Nick's adultery. The characters gradually realize how little they knew of Kath or understood their relationships with her. Eventually, Elaine, Gyn, and Oliver Watson (a friend of Kath's and the photographer of this snapshot) each turn to Kath's good friend Mary Pakard for understanding. These meetings with Mary promote

reconciliation between memory and reality, understanding of the reasons for Kath's suicide, and ultimately allow the replacement of the photograph in the cabinet.

The Photograph denies most novelistic conventions in character, narrative structure, plot, and genre. The principal character, who supplies the main subject for this novel, does not necessarily act as protagonist; Kath committed suicide years prior to the time frame of this novel. Kath is simultaneously the central character and the frame of The Photograph, providing both context and conclusion without ever being physically present. The novel begins with her name and concludes with the word, "deprivation," which signals recognition of her death and the termination of the novel. Nick, who is also implicated in the photograph, is a relatively peripheral figure. It is therefore not simply the appearance of a snapshot and its revelation of a secret that renders Kath present; rather, it is the combination of this photograph with her death that makes her the inactive protagonist (a photographic absent presence) of this work of fiction. However, her premature death obviously precludes any direct action or immediate influence over narrative development. The novel consequently consists of a series of internal monologues by secondary characters. Memory serves as the primary vehicle for these assorted narratives that focus on the trauma caused by Kath's suicide and affair, as well as how the truth exposed by the photograph alters perception of past and present events and relationships. Chapters are typically titled with the name of the reminiscing character; the reader becomes a kind of voyeur to each character's most private thoughts.⁷⁰ The short structure and intimate nature of these chapters, which are purely verbal

⁷⁰ The short structure of these chapters and the intimate nature of the monologues, although purely verbal constructions, create associations with the visual realm of voyeurism, character sketches, and portraiture. This is only one example of how Penelope Lively interweaves various techniques of verbal and visual representation in The Photograph.

constructions, prompt comparisons with the visual realms of voyeurism, performance art, and portraiture.

Lively interweaves various techniques unique to visual or verbal representation to create an intricate, genre-bending “palimpsestic montage.” Visual characteristics influence verbal presentation and style, creating a postmodern text whose hybridity defies definition by a single genre. Topically, the snapshot provides evidence of Kath’s illicit actions, allowing Lively’s novel to access certain tendencies of the detective genre. The informal, candid nature of the snapshot and the irrefutable substantiation supplied by the handwritten note provide two forms of authentication for the picture. Photographs in fiction can function as incontrovertible proof of former actions while their presence in the present infers the continued influence of these past actions. The author also loosely follows certain traditions of the mystery novel by including two mysteries to drive this narrative. The first secret acts on the level of character: several relatives and friends research Kath’s past in order to understand the cause and implications of the affair between her and her brother-in-law. The second mystery occurs solely on the level of the reader: Lively withholds the circumstances of Kath’s death until late in the novel. The author reconstructs the day of Kath’s suicide only in the third-to-last chapter, through the perspectives of Glyn and Elaine. The author never provides omniscient narrative to explain Kath’s suicide. Kath remains a mysterious and remote character even for the reader: the ghost of a protagonist, who is as inactive in the novel as she appears in the photograph. Lively thus completes the mimetic cycle; reader mirrors character, searching for revelations among past memories.

II. Vertigo and the loss of self

Photography and death render Kath an absent and ghostly protagonist. However, critic Janice Hart indicates by the title of her article, “The Girl No One Knew,” that Kath’s enigmatic nature additionally derives from a disturbing lack of curiosity about this woman.⁷¹ The reader deduces, as the novel unfolds, that the characters presumed closest to Kath actually understood very little about her, in particular the reasons for her suicide. Former colleagues and distant cousins hint at a miscarriage as the source of her depression; whereas her sister only knew of an illness; and her husband Glyn, who had been traveling in the United States, knew nothing at all. Penelope Lively constructs an additional parallel between reader and character through the subtle revelations about Kath to her sister and husband, as each experience a disorienting juxtaposition of intimacy and unfamiliarity with Kath, which occurs both through and because of the photograph. Janice Hart contends that Lively undermines traditional expectations for photography’s realism to serve as a confirmation of something; Lively instead “employs the photograph as a strategy to confound, as opposed to confirm, everything the characters had previously thought about themselves and each other in relation to Kath” (114). However, this strategy is not limited to the actual object of the photograph. Lively employs a similar technique when writing about Kath, the principle photographic referent. Despite Kath’s predominant presence in this novel, her character is largely unknown to those closest to her and to the reader. The photograph of Kath confounds initially because of the secret revealed in the picture, but eventually does so through a lack of context and general knowledge about her. In other words, there is no explanation or vision beyond the insular frames of reference provided by the snapshot and by her family’s

⁷¹ Janice Hart, “The Girl No One Knew: Photographs, Narratives, and Secrets in Modern Fiction.” *Mosaic* 37,4 (Dec. 2004): 111-126.

reminiscence. Photography provides the ontological structure for Kath's presence in this novel, allowing this character to appear as an influential absent presence. Death makes her unequivocally absent, steeping present mention of her in the past and melancholic nostalgia, two characteristics particularly attributed to the photograph. According to Hart, Lively uniquely explores the kind of truth made manifest in the photograph and how such truth influences the characters, rather than questioning photographic truth-value (*ibid.*). However, in order for the photograph to confound its spectators to the level of crisis experienced by the characters of The Photograph, it must first confirm its referential authority; otherwise, confusion over a picture remains mildly bewildering and no more. The indexical abilities of this snapshot, which allow it to act as an authentic photograph, are an essential catalyst to any crisis provoked by a photograph. Because the snapshot of Kath proves her adultery, it therefore disproves all previous knowledge of her. Lively's use of photography lies in its ability to *confirm and confound*. The authority of the photograph in fiction has a double function, allowing the same image to authenticate and invalidate the reality it depicts. It is precisely this dual use of the photograph that allows it to act as a catalyst for the crisis in this novel.

Lively manipulates the indexical authority of the photographic image, allowing the photograph to obstruct the authority of memory and experience. The disturbance of this photograph prompts profound psychological anxiety akin to existential crisis because her characters rely on the foundation of memory and experience to determine self-identity. Glyn and Elaine, two characters who have forged their life's work from analysis of landscape and the historical implications of its present terrain, are particularly troubled by the secret revealed in the photograph. Glyn likens the discovery of the snapshot to that of

dendrochronology or carbon-fourteen dating, which upset previous historical assessments concerning the building of Stonehenge and the Pyramids (Lively 58). He explains to Elaine the impact on his personal life stating, “nothing was what it seemed to be... That what one has been carrying around in one’s head is apparently fallacious... Suddenly everything has to be looked at in a different light” (*ibid.*). Memory and knowledge are proven flawed and must be adjusted in light of this recent discovery; the photograph both destabilizes fixed opinions and prompts reassessment of what was known about Kath, each character’s relationship with her, and therefore their self-knowledge. Photographs, as Glyn suggests, can have extreme implications. The photograph’s curious ability to represent with accuracy a moment past in a present context allows this medium to undermine not just the chronological period it depicts, but also every moment up to the present. Certain shocking images may even have future impact on actions or the acquisition and representation of knowledge, providing, for example, evidence of historical events that should not be repeated, or the revelation of a personal truth that alters one’s identity. Susan Sontag writes extensively about the potential ramifications of shocking photography. “Photography can change one’s consciousness,” explains Sontag in On Photography (63).⁷² The ability to provoke change in its spectator is not an inherent aspect to all photographs. Sontag later writes in Regarding the Pain of Others, that for “photographs to accuse, and possibly to alter conduct, they must shock” (81).⁷³ Shock is caused by the photograph’s context, however, the ubiquity of photographs actually increases their potential to shock, because they can be found anywhere and any time, according to Sontag (On Photography 63). Photography, as Glyn and Elaine discover in The Photograph,

⁷² Susan Sontag, On Photography (1977) (New York: Anchor, 1990).

⁷³ Susan Sontag, Regarding the Pain of Others (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003).

can both supply and destroy the very facts that form the foundation of knowledge about our environment and ourselves.

The first page of the novel presents in miniature—or provides a metapicture of—the issues that will drive the narrative: the precarious balance of past and present, the valorizing of work over love and family, a consuming preoccupation with researching the past, and the inability to maintain chronological order. Lively describes the cabinet in which Glyn finds the snapshot of his wife:

A crisp column of Past and Present is wedged against a heap of tattered files spewing forth their contents. Forgotten students drift to his feet as he rummages, and lie reproachful on the floor. (...) Labeled boxes of photographs—Aerial, Bishops Munby 1976, Leeds 1985—are squeezed against a further row of files. To remove one would bring the lot crashing down, like an ill-judged move in that game involving a tower of balanced blocks. But he has glimpsed behind them a further cache which may well include the off-prints. (1)

Glyn does not heed the fragile stability of the cupboard and tears open the envelope regardless of its warning. Characters in The Photograph are seldom aware of how unsound their authority over existence is, until such order is disrupted. The mise en abyme strategy used in this passage is employed throughout the novel; Lively constructs a complicated system of mirroring, echoing, and miniaturizing between characters, the reader, text, structure, and the visual and verbal. These techniques render this novel simultaneously familiar and disorienting. Kath's husband and sister are particularly perplexed by the disparity between past events and memory revealed in the photograph. The shock they experience signals a shift in power; authority is transferred from personal memory to the photographic image, which diminishes autonomy and management over one's knowledge of the self and others. The photograph denies a presumed ability to control one's most private memories, and therefore possesses the object of memory. In terms of the characters in The Photograph, this

inability to control memory thwarts possession of Kath. The author breaks with traditional and modern perception of photography, which determines it to be an aggressive act of possession. Susan Sontag provides an example of this mindset, writing that photography “turns people into objects that can be symbolically possessed” (On Photography 14).⁷⁴ Nonetheless, the titular snapshot in The Photograph subverts such presumptions and reveals the fundamental impossibility of knowing or owning any object external to the self.

The snapshot found in the cabinet destabilizes what Elaine and Glyn had considered an authoritative version of the past, but this is not the effect of all photography mentioned in this novel. The group snapshot is one of several photographic images that Glyn finds in the cupboard. Kath’s husband initially uncovers several professional headshots of his wife, taken when she was considering a career in acting. These photographs barely elicit Glyn’s fond reminiscence. Only the image that shocks draws his full attention, making it stand out among other pictures and documents, turning it into the unique image denoted by the definite article “the” in the novel’s title. The singularity of this photograph and its dangerous nature derive from its ability to wrench the spectator from traditional contemplation of the subject and of the self in relation to that subject. However, the most disturbing aspect of this image for Glyn and Elaine is that Kath eludes their previously drawn conclusions. Kath was an exceptionally beautiful woman who was habitually perceived as “an asset, as accolade,” or in other words, an object to be possessed and admired, even by her husband (Lively 24). The first time Glyn saw Kath, “he knew that he had to have her, and not just for weeks or months, but for good” (*ibid.*). In this novel, memory, complacency, and a lack of curiosity are the vehicles for

⁷⁴ Sontag slightly alters this statement in Regarding the Pain of Others, published twenty-six years after On Photography, stating, “Photographs objectify: they turn people into something that can be possessed” (81). The exclusion of the adverb “symbolically” highlights the action and focuses on the subject rather than the photographer or spectator.

symbolic control—not photography. Lively’s novel consequently proposes an alternative to Sontag’s fears about possession through via photographic representations. Photography restores Kath’s identity as a unique being, a position formerly denied because of her beauty. The snapshot enacts a kind of disembodiment that separates Kath from her beauty, thereby placing her in a new position of power. The passivity of the photograph (which is heightened by her death) actually empowers the referent, positioning Kath outside the control and presumptions of her family. The snapshot becomes Kath’s resounding refusal of any act of possession and appropriation. Lively’s photograph reverses the typical hierarchy of control: rather than allowing for the symbolic possession of the referent, this photograph instead becomes the site for a psychological possession of the spectator.

The snapshot becomes central to the reconstitution of Kath’s identity. As such, it lies at the heart of a Barthian labyrinth, leading characters and readers through the tangled maze of memory to a new knowledge of both the self and other (Kath). Barthes writes of the Winter Garden photograph of his mother:

Toutes les photographies du monde formaient un Labyrinthe. Je savais qu’au centre de ce Labyrinthe, je ne trouverais rien d’autre que cette seule photo, accomplissant le mot de Nietzsche : « Un homme labyrinthique ne cherche jamais la vérité, mais uniquement son Arian. » (...) J’avais compris qu’il fallait désormais interroger l’évidence de la Photographie, non du point de vue du plaisir, mais par rapport à ce qu’on appellerait romantiquement l’amour et la mort. (La chambre claire 114-5)⁷⁵

Barthes equates the Winter Garden photograph with the essence of his mother, as if it provided the combination of a lifetime of memories of his mother. However, Barthes also identifies this peculiar image as providing essential definition of his own identity, in which

⁷⁵ “All the world’s photographs formed a Labyrinth. I knew that at the center of this Labyrinth I would find nothing but this sole picture, fulfilling Nietzsche’s prophecy: ‘A labyrinthine man never seeks the truth, but only his Ariadne’... I had understood that henceforth I must interrogate the evidence of Photography, not from the viewpoint of pleasure, but in relation to what we romantically call love and death” (Camera Lucida 73).

the knowledge of his inevitable, future death is inscribed. The Winter Garden photograph represents for Barthes all the history—past, present and future—of the author and his mother, the self and the other, and even the self as (m)other. The spectators of the snapshot in The Photograph are entranced by the image, not because the picture pleases them, but because of its disruptive singularity. Glyn's and Elaine's interrogation of this photograph is very similar to what Barthes describes as the interrogation of love and death that occurs across the image of his mother (*ibid.*). These two photographs are similar in their mirror-like abilities to redirect the spectator's gaze from the photograph to the referent, and then back to the spectator. In this manner, the object of representation confronts the spectator's gaze and deflects it.

Glyn is obsessed and disabled by the image, unable to concentrate on his work after he finds the photograph. He perceives “that everything is somehow skewed by what has just happened” (Lively 11). The recognition of Kath's affair affects him like an “illness” and a “fever” that blurs his perception of everything, especially of himself and of Kath, who now appears to him through a kind of double-vision: “Kath is both what she ever was, and she is also someone else. He is looking differently at her—he is looking differently for her” (12). The photograph temporarily disrupts Glyn's status as a spectator by blocking the continuation of his gaze. The realism of the photograph causes surrealistic effects, shocking the spectator from quotidian complacency of vision. The snapshot alters Elaine's perception as well. She immediately comprehends as soon as she sees the picture, that her previous knowledge and opinions of Kath, Nick, and Oliver (the photographer) have been permanently destroyed. Lively writes, “Even as she speaks Oliver falls apart and is reassembled—in a nanosecond, in a single destructive instant. He too becomes someone else. The Oliver who has been in her

head these last ten or fifteen years disintegrates and is replaced by a new and different Oliver, one who she does not know. Did not know” (57). The snapshot fractures perception of others as well as knowledge of the self by destroying fixed memory, becoming Barthes’ “violent image” that blocks memory, institutes a counter-memory (La chambre claire 143; Camera Lucida 91). Barthes explains, “la Photographie est violente : non parce qu’elle montre des violences, mais parce qu’à chaque fois *elle remplit de force la vue*, et qu’en elle rien ne peut se refuser, ni se transformer” (*ibid.*).⁷⁶ The photograph is violent in that it cannot be altered. Instead, it effectuates the transformation of the spectator, who must adapt his gaze to the reality depicted in the picture. Photographs like the snapshot in this novel oblige conformity, which is a submission to photographic authority. The photograph is violent because it can oppose previously held beliefs and presumptions about the world and the self, shattering the continuance of historically-based knowledge and thought. The snapshot disrupts Glyn’s and Elaine’s authoritative version of the past, which directly impacts their command of the present, and thus necessitates a radical re-examination of the self and others, in addition to past and present events and opinions.

Authors Susan Sontag and Nelly Kaplan have independently written at length about their childhood encounters with photographs taken of the prisoners in WWII Nazi-operated concentration camps. According to critic Marianne Hirsch, both Sontag and Kaplan experienced a similar rupture within their understanding of public and personal realities, despite differences in age and circumstance when they first viewed the images.⁷⁷ Kaplan and

⁷⁶ “The Photograph is violent: not because it shows violent things, but because on each occasion, *it fills the sight by force*, and because in it nothing can be refused or transformed” (Camera Lucida 91).

⁷⁷ Marianne Hirsch, “Surviving Images: Holocaust Photographs and the Work of Postmemory.” Yale Journal of Criticism 14.1 (2001): 5-37.

Sontag both divide their lives into a before/after dichotomy, hinged upon their viewing of these photographs. “When I looked at those photographs,” writes Sontag, “something broke” (On Photography 20). Hirsch describes their experiences as “a radical interruption through seeing,” which may provoke a similar sense of shock in the spectator (6). In other words, the public testimony of these shocking images alters the personal perception of general time-space continuum for Sontag and Kaplan. This interruption can be understood in terms of a chronological caesura, or more precisely, as a photographic moment, through its apparent ability to stop time and yet continue to influence the present.

The characters of The Photograph also experience what Hirsch describes as “radical interruption through seeing.” The disruption of quotidian progression and the discrediting of past assumptions stimulate a state of intense psychological disorientation. This state is characterized by the fractured perceptions of others and can include a splintering or, to use Sontag’s term, “breaking” of the self. Glyn and Elaine in particular experience a kind of existential crisis because of their personal relationships with Kath and Nick. The truth of their adulterous affair revealed in the picture profoundly influences past, present, and future for the characters. Extremely shocking photography both disorients and precisely orients its spectators, firmly placing them within a before/after dichotomy as described by Marianne Hirsch. This positioning process can be understood as an extension of the photograph’s ability to confound and confirm. Certain pictures, according to Roland Barthes, create a distortion between certainty and oblivion that can temporarily overwhelm its spectator. In La chambre claire, Barthes writes about being confronted with a picture he could not recall posing for, stating that “cette distorsion entre la certitude et l’oubli” triggered a fleeting sensation of vertigo (La chambre claire 135; Camera Lucida 87). Because the photograph acts

as a “certificate of presence,” it necessarily disproved Barthes’ memory (La chambre claire 134; Camera Lucida 85). Or rather, the picture proved the inconsistency of his memory. In Lively’s novel, the certainty of the photographic image also precludes its dismissal; characters cannot deny or ignore the authenticity of the photograph. As a result, they become temporarily mired in the volatile space between the before/after division, this space that Barthes defines as distortion between certainty and oblivion, or which Susan Sontag referred to as breaking. This temporary disruption is also similar to Walter Benjamin’s caesura of history, which Eduardo Cadava defines as a suspension of “the temporal continuity between a past and a present.”⁷⁸ In The Photograph, Glyn and Elaine become “untethered from the moorings of space and time,” as a result of looking at the photograph.⁷⁹ According to critic Mary Hurley Morgan, this psychological vertigo is frequently experienced by many of Lively’s characters when they are confronted with the traces of history through photographs, historical artifacts, etc. In The Photograph, Lively requires her characters and reader to accept a palimpsestic time that is not based on chronology, but on coincidence and recurrence; this is a fluid time in which memory and history influence, and therefore represent, the present.

⁷⁸ Eduardo Cadava, Words of Light: Theses on the Photography of History (Princeton: Princeton University, 1998) 59.

⁷⁹ See Mary Hurley Moran, Penelope Lively, 63. In her analysis of Lively’s novel Judgment Day, Moran concludes that one particular character has the tendency “to slip into a state of psychological disorientation in which he feels untethered from the basic cognitive moorings of space and time” (63). According to Moran, certain characters in Lively’s fiction rely on “structures of time and space” to reduce the anxiety of a psychological disconnect from the present moment. In Judgment Day, the character of Martin recites the date to himself, whereas the protagonist Clare Paling relies on the presence of her children to remain grounded in the current state and time. In The Photograph, memory is subject to the steady progression of time, until the snapshot lodges the past within the present continuum.

III. Penelope Lively's Ideology: Representation as imitation

Penelope Lively's The Photograph is similar to Isabel Allende's novel, Retrato en Sepia, in that photography comes to symbolize something much larger than a single snapshot. The photograph of Kath is emblematic of Lively's philosophy on memory, history, and her belief in the intrinsic flux between past and present that pervades her corpus. Lively and Allende both imprint photography with the values depicted in their novels. Photography critic John Tagg criticizes photography for always being subject to a dominant discourse.⁸⁰ Clearly, both Retrato en Sepia and The Photograph are examples of such tendencies. However, while it is true that photography symbolizes the ideologies of these authors, both Allende and Lively seize upon the unique cultural connotations typically associated with this art form, such as its ability to place the past in a present context, or the photograph's peculiar associations with death and memory. This photographic subtext echoes the principles proposed in text. Understanding which comes first, meaning whether the photograph influenced the ideology of the novel or if the author selected photography as a primary trope because it reinforces the ideas she chose to explore is a bit like trying to crack the chicken and egg dilemma. Regardless, Lively's writing imitates photography and the fictional photography in her work emulates her writing, each serving as a means for the author to express a particular, subjective set of ideals. The reader of The Photograph therefore experiences a double initiation into Lively's ideology as the author wields both verbal and visual media to suit her proposes. Photography as an art form has long been considered

⁸⁰ Tagg writes, "Photography as such as no identity. Its status as a technology varies with the power relations which invest it. Its nature as a practice depends on the institutions and agents which define it and set it to work. Its function as a mode of cultural production is tied to definite conditions of existence, and its productions are meaningful and legible only within the particular currencies they have. Its history has no unity. It is a flickering across a field of institutional spaces. It is this field we must study, not photography as such" (259). John Tagg, "Evidence, Truth and Order," The Photography Reader, ed. Liz Wells (London: Routledge, 2003): 257-260.

vulnerable to imposition of its author; photography in fiction is none the less so. However, it is just as likely that writing is as influenced by the addition of this visual medium into its purely verbal format.

Lively's novel is inscribed with her dogma: a single version or vision can never correspond to a whole. In other words, there is never a unique, authoritative version; neither photograph nor memory (nor even writing) sufficiently recreates the entirety of a human being, including its individual history. The Photograph offers multifarious perspectives through multiple, internal monologues through which each character eventually acknowledges the impossibility of any specific representational technique, photographic or other, to present a complete history. Lively's novel expresses suspicion concerning the abilities of all forms of representative media. Neither individual snapshots nor memory can replace their subjects; even painting falls short of accurate representation. Kath's husband Glyn tracks down a portrait of her made by a friend, assuming incorrectly that either artist or the man who purchased the painting could have been Kath's lover. Glyn eventually concludes that the art connoisseur who purchased the painting was entirely unfamiliar with both artist and subject. The collector relates to Glyn that he "was entranced" by the portrait, and immediately knew that he "must have this picture and that is all there is to it" (Lively 131). Mr. Saul Clements's appreciation of Kath's portrait is subliminally possessive and collusive, a fact revealed by his spontaneous purchase, his appraisal of the painting, and the fact that Glyn's revelation of some information about Kath alters the collector's appreciation of the portrait. Lively again constructs of kind of *mise en abyme*: Saul's role in this novel serves as a miniature depiction of both Glyn and Elaine through his myopic appreciation of Kath as pure image. The collector states, "So. Kath. I have always thought of her simply as—she.

Respectfully, you understand—but she has always been anonymous. Now, it will be different. Kath. And knowing that she is no longer alive” (*ibid.*). Saul Clements’s lack of curiosity concerning the subject of this preferred portrait mirrors Glyn’s own incuriosity concerning his wife. Their meeting disturbs Glyn, confronting him with his exclusion from his late wife’s life. Like the collector, he knew little about this painting. Glyn is additionally bothered by the manner in which this collector, “who was never Kath’s lover, who did not know Kath...now lives with her in strange, daily intimacy” (*ibid.*).

Glyn had brought a camera to photograph the portrait of Kath, but it is unclear if he does so. Lively instead focuses on Glyn’s sense of disquiet when he leaves Saul’s mansion: “Glyn is well used to the sense of frustration, the need for patience and tenacity. But he is not accustomed to the feelings generated by this particular project” (132). Glyn is unfamiliar with his yearning to transcend time and space in order “to go back there and ask her questions—questions he never asked her at the time. Where are you going? Why? What is it like there?” (*ibid.*). The painting, like the snapshot, falls short of revealing any truth about Kath. However, where the snapshot represents a momentary fragment, the painting, at least for Saul, forms a kind of generic and vague totality of a woman, this “respectful” “she.” Lively’s novel is actually quite similar to Allende’s Retrato en Sepia through this subtle proposal that imagistic representation need be supplemented by emotional sympathy by the spectator for the subject. Without emotional response, the spectator becomes like Saul or Glyn, an uninterested connoisseur focused primarily on the acquisition of art and beauty. This emphasis on emotional sympathy is not unlike what was understood in Isabel Allende’s novel, which urged a balance between subjective and objective actions. Aurora del Valle’s photography and her narrative blend subjective responses and objective techniques to create

an accurate representation. In The Photograph, a similar mélange is created when an objective mind (Glyn and Elaine) attempts to reconstruct the past of an emotional, ephemeral being (Kath). Either extreme causes the failure of the representation. In Lively's novel, the protagonist is neither seen by her spectators, nor is she capable of making herself seen, until the shock of a snapshot elicits an emotional response from her objective audience.

Penelope Lively's concept of memory in The Photograph, like that of representation, incorporates a similarly structured balance between objective facts and subjective, emotional responses. In Memory in Perspective, author Helen Chapman meditates on the work of four women photographers, considering their work through the lens of Walter Benjamin's writings on memory.⁸¹ Chapman's conclusions concerning the photography of these four women provide a particularly apt analysis for Penelope Lively's novel as well. "Memory is not simply the recollection of one individual," writes Helen Chapman, "rather the way in which memories intervene in the present has a broader significance. What is shown through memory has the potential for directly influencing the present. It is that which gives the present meaning and value. However, what is of importance is the need for recognition" (52).

The Photograph provides a slight alteration of Helen Chapman's statement because memory has proven flawed, overly subjected to the imposition of desire, which has altered the meaning and value of the referent. Memory acts as intervention only through the vehicle of the photograph, which provides an objective recording of an unknown event; it is only because the affair was kept secret that it was not subject to Glyn and Elaine's reassessment of meaning. The shocking truth of the adulterous relationship cannot be altered in the photograph and therefore interrupts the complacency and myopia of an established mindset.

⁸¹ Helen C. Chapman, Memory in Perspective: Women Photographers' Encounters with History (London: Scarlet, 1997).

This snapshot corrupts memory, instead establishing a counter-memory (La chambre claire 143; Camera Lucida 91). The photograph is unique in its dual ability to destabilize and reinforce historical meaning. The snapshot in Lively's novel sabotages perception of former relationships in order to reestablish the referent's existence as an individual being. The counter-memory instituted by the snapshot safeguards its referent from becoming an object appropriated by the spectator's gaze, memory, or knowledge of the subject. Representation, whether photographic, mnemonic, or literary, becomes an evolutionary process, requiring facts gathered from multiple sources in order to ascertain accuracy. Glyn, in particular, approaches the "reconstruction" of his memory of Kath as if it were one of his archeological digs. He forges Kath's history and identity by interrogating Kath's family, friends, and former colleagues. All representative media in this novel is eventually formed through multiple narratives and perspectives, an approach mirrored in the novel's structure through its incorporation of internal monologues by multiple characters. It is precisely through this process of deconstruction and reconstruction that the unique individual emerges: Kath as subject rather than object.

IV. Reciprocal Blindness

Lively infers in this novel that ideal representation is a gathering of sources and techniques. However, all acts of representation are necessarily exclusionary. No single version or vision can represent the whole, just as no single person can adequately maintain the surfeit of information supplied by so many sources. Roland Barthes reminds his readers, "l'Histoire est hystérique: elle ne se constitue que si on la regarde—et pour la regarder, il faut

en être exclu” (La chambre claire 102).⁸² Exclusion is the result of contemplation, but what and who are excluded? The Photograph contemplates the life of a woman who was never contemplated during her life, making it very much a novel about both contemplation and exclusion. Lively’s employment of a snapshot reinforces these moments of revelation and blindness that occur during intense spectatorship because photography is a medium that encourages concentrated observation, but does so within an immobilized frame that isolates the subject within a static environment and insulates the spectator within the camera’s monocular perspective.

The final action of The Photograph is Glyn’s replacement of the snapshot in the cluttered cupboard. The novel concludes with the word “deprivation,” thus suggesting that Glyn and the other characters have eventually understood what was lost through Kath’s suicide and through their disregard for her during her life. This noun also signals loss for the reader, meaning the termination of the novel, namely the access it provided into the minds and memories of the fictional characters, and of the pleasure of reading. The noun “deprivation” intimates the potential influence of loss over the present, while insisting on the finality of such loss. The conclusion to The Photograph therefore suggests that failure is an inevitable aspect of any individual form or act of representation. In other words, all contemplation includes exclusion. In The Photograph, representation mimics the photograph’s potential to act as a paradoxical site for absence and presence, past and present, sight and blindness, representation and exclusion. The found snapshot reinserts Kath into the present only to insist on her absence from that moment. It is a familiar critique of photographic technology: the proximity and immediacy of the photographic image is illusion.

⁸² “History is hysterical: it is constituted only if we consider it, only if we look at it—and in order to look at it, we must be excluded from it” (Camera Lucida 65).

Glyn eventually determines that Kath's affair with Nick was a singular, atypical relationship for her. The snapshot therefore presents truth in isolation, a fragmentary fact rather than a universal classification. Glyn and Elaine gradually realize that much exists beyond the frame of the photograph, and that a great deal can be learned from other perspectives of the same subject. Victor Burgin deduces that the photograph always shows its allegiance to the camera's lens, no matter the extent of a spectator's visual interrogation of the image.⁸³ The photograph permanently reconstructs the perspective of the photographer and the precise moment the image was created, making the photographic act one that prohibits both revision and progression. However, all vision is exclusionary. More precisely, all vision is linked to blindness: for the eye to focus on an object during the physical act of looking, other objects are intentionally blurred and ignored. Author and art critic James Elkins concludes in The Object Stares Back, "We are blind to certain things and blind to our blindness. Those twin blindnesses are necessary for ordinary seeing: we need to be continuously partially blind in order to see. In the end, blindnesses are the constant companions of seeing and even the very condition of seeing itself" (13).⁸⁴ Photography likewise works from a position of blindness. Certain types of cameras, particularly single-lens reflex cameras, obscure the photographer's view when the film is exposed to light. In most digital cameras, the liquid crystal display goes blank before the photographic image is displayed. In addition, the photographic image is conceived in blindness—it is unknown,

⁸³ Victor Burgin, "Looking at Photographs (1979)." Representation and Photography, ed. Manuel Alvarado, Edward Buscombe and Richard Collins (New York: Palgrave, 2001):142-53. Burgin writes, "The awkwardness which accompanies the over-long contemplation of a photograph arises from a consciousness of the monocular perspective system of representation as a systematic deception. The lens arranges all information according to laws of projection ... the eye/(I) cannot move within the depicted space (which offers itself precisely to such movement), it can only move *across* it to the points where it encounters the frame" (152).

⁸⁴ James Elkins, The Object Stares Back (San Diego: Harvest Book, 1996).

unseen until developed. The snapshot in Lively's novel was created from a similar moment of blindness: the photographer did not realize what he had captured on film until it was developed. Equally so, Kath and Nick did not realize that they were photographed during the exact moment of their brief embrace. As Burgin suggests, the photograph's fidelity is to the camera lens, not the photographer, subject, or spectator. The precise moment of the photographic act can therefore be understood as one of universal isolation, in which the three primary actors—photographer, subject, and spectator—are separated from one another both physically and visually. Oliver hoped the photograph would serve as a warning to Kath and Nick because it revealed the increasing visibility of their actions. However, he never intended for anyone else to see the picture. The life of this photographic image escapes the direction of its creator, the authority of its subjects, and the will of its spectators. The photograph perpetually eludes control, from the moment of its creation onward.

Jean Baudrillard states in his introductory essay to a book of photography by French artist Luc Delahaye, "Personne ne regarde personne. Seul l'objectif 'voit', mais il est caché. Ce n'est donc pas exactement l'Autre que saisit Luc Delahaye, mais ce qui reste de l'Autre quand lui, le photographe, n'est pas là."⁸⁵ According to Baudrillard, Delahaye's photography captures a kind of anonymity between subject and image, an unconscious self in a photograph that is practically unconscious of its subject. Delahaye's book of photography is comprised of one hundred portraits taken of passengers on the Paris subway from 1995 to 1997; these photographs were taken surreptitiously as a conscious objection to French law that claims

⁸⁵ Jean Baudrillard, "Transfert Poétique de Situation" *L'Autre*. Luc Delahaye. London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1999. "No-one is looking at anyone else. The lens alone 'sees,' but it is hidden. What Luc Delahaye captures then, isn't exactly the Other (L'Autre) but what remains of the Other when he, the photographer isn't there" (unpaginated, bilingual edition).

citizens are sole proprietors of their images.⁸⁶ The aim of Delahaye's photographic project clearly differs from this general discussion in so far as the photographer's intentional concealment of his identity and camera. However, Baudrillard's assessment of Delahaye's photographs create an important parallel with Burgin's statement on the invisible allegiance of a photographic image to the camera lens. The dual presence of the photographer and the camera often remain invisible, forgotten by the photographic subject, regardless of whether they are purposely hidden. Kath and Nick were clearly caught unaware by Oliver's photographic act in The Photograph. In addition, the photograph itself rarely depicts photographer or camera. Their invisibility is, however, only one aspect of the illusion created by the photographic act. The source of authority is often invisible to the spectator, who sees only the subject of the photograph. Both the photographer and the author rely, to a certain extent, on their invisibility to emphasize the verisimilitude of their art. The tendency of the reader, like that of the spectator, is to focus uniquely on the subject, excluding what is external to the representation. In this manner, even fictional photographs are subject to moments of blindness.

Photography, like Barthes' vision of history, requires a certain degree of absence and blindness. Photography becomes a cycle of blindness and illusion: the photographer is frequently hidden behind the camera, the camera is typically invisible within the image, and the spectator is unseen by the subject of the photograph. Additionally, in order for the spectator to see the image, one becomes blind to oneself and one's immediate environment. In other words, what is external to the image virtually disappears. The photographic act

⁸⁶ Luc Delahaye takes part in a long tradition of concealed photography. For example, photographer Paul Strand used a hidden camera to take photographs of New Yorkers; Walker Evans often used a decoy subject to take photographs of what he referred to as the "unconscious self."

transforms the subject, as does the act of looking. On the other hand, as the writings of Susan Sontag and Nelly Kaplan indicate, looking at photographs sometimes irrevocably transforms the spectator. The blinding interruption of shock was the catalyst that prompted Kath's family to focus on her. However, the backwards glance of the photograph reveals an absence of sight more extensive than the caesura caused by shock. Certain photographs enact a reciprocal blindness, causing the blindness of the spectator as well as the subject. The photograph's ability to cause blindness in its spectator endows both the medium and its subject with a Medusa-like power to stop the gaze and cause the subjection of its spectator. Primarily, the subject of the photograph is frozen in time, rendered object. However, the image of shock additionally transfixes its spectator with that which is not supposed to be seen. There is a Medusa effect to the snapshot of Kath that effectuates the symbolic death of her spectators. Photographs like the one in Lively's novel, or the pictures seen by Susan Sontag and Nelly Kaplan, separate spectatorship into a before/after dichotomy that denies the spectator's return to a pre-spectator state. In this manner, the shocking image destroys the naïve pre-spectator.⁸⁷ Neither Glyn nor Elaine forgets the snapshot, despite the fact that Glyn replaces the image in the cupboard at the conclusion of the novel. Both characters are irrevocably altered by their spectatorship. Photography has therefore intervened in both the present and future by giving new meaning to the past.

If, as Eduardo Cadava suggests, the technology of representation initiates its subjects into the realm of the night, does it anticipate the same for the photographer and the spectator?

⁸⁷ This concept is closely aligned with Roland Barthes' ideas on the punctum. Barthes describes the punctum as an inadvertent detail that "pricks" the spectator, causes a "satori" (*La chambre claire* 80-89; *Camera Lucida* 49-55). The punctum appears without bidding and forever alters how the spectator understands the photograph. In this sense, Barthes' description of the punctum approaches the "radical interruption through seeing" described by Hirsch, and can serve as a catalyst to what I refer to as the spectator's symbolic death.

When the photograph causes the disappearance of its three primary participants—subject, photographer, and spectator—it deconstructs traditional divisions between these participants. Jean Baudrillard notes that the disappearance of the photographic subject actually prompts the disappearance of the spectator: “l’objet n’est pas seul à disparaître, le sujet disparaît lui-aussi de l’autre côté de l’objectif. Chaque pression sur le déclencheur met fin à la présence réelle de l’objet et me fait disparaître aussi en tant que sujet, et c’est cette disparition réciproque que s’opère une transfusion des deux.”⁸⁸ For Baudrillard, the reciprocal disappearance is the result of a general fatigue felt by the spectator who seeks self-definition in the image.⁸⁹ The identity of the spectator is consequently bound to that of the subject, just as, for example, the identities of the characters in The Photograph are intrinsically joined with that of Kath’s. However, the photographic subject and the photograph are indifferent to the spectator. It does not require a spectator’s presence in the way that ekphrasis requires a reader to reconstruct the visual image through verbal description.⁹⁰ Ultimately, the photographic image appears to be about blindness, absence, and disappearance, as if there is nothing that can be seen in the photograph, nothing that can be proven as real. In the fictional photograph, this effect is only heightened. The ekphrastic endeavor teases the reader into envisioning the photographic

⁸⁸ “But the object isn’t the only thing to disappear; the subject also disappears on the other side of the lens. Every press of the shutter-release, which puts an end to the real presence of the object, also causes me to disappear as subject and it is in this reciprocal disappearance that a transfusion between the two occurs” (“Transfert Poétique de Situation” unpaginated).

⁸⁹ Baudrillard’s disappearance of the spectator is similar to Barthes’ vision of death: because the image predicts the death of the subject, it also necessarily predicts the death of the spectator. Barthes’ contemplation of the Winter Garden photograph of his mother leads him to recognition of his mother’s death, and eventually to a realization of his own mortality.

⁹⁰ W.J.T. Mitchell refers to the ekphrastic act as a kind triangular relationship between poet, subject, and reader that requires the “reconversion of the verbal representation back into the visual object in the reception of the reader” (164). Picture Theory (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

image, and yet the reality is that the photographs in fiction are always, quite literally, fictional creations: simulacra of simulacra.

V. Conclusion

Penelope Lively's novel The Photograph posits the artificial memory of photography in conflict with memory formed from experience in order to explore the nature of representation. In this novel, the representational abilities of memory and photography collide, provoking a destabilization of identity, both in the subject and the spectator. However, this collision allows the author to access a constellation of representational media: memory, photography, writing, and knowledge. The manner in which the snapshot of Kath supersedes all other memory through shock is symptomatic of current theory on photography and its inability to tolerate the photograph as a unique act of representation. However, Lively allows her characters to move beyond this point that current thinking on photography seems relatively incapable of passing: her characters show a healing after the shock of the snapshot. Glyn, Elaine, and Oliver are able to move beyond the photograph's inability to present time or the totality of a human being, to use the photograph as a fragmentary truth that adjusts and corrects misconceptions spawned by subjectivity and lack of understanding. If photography subverts memory, it also re-codes memory and allows for a reconstruction of representation that includes various, fractured perspectives, meaning the production of multiple narratives rather than subjecting truth to a single, metanarrative.

What makes The Photograph a novel worthy of analysis according to Janice Hart is Penelope Lively's ability to "think photographically."⁹¹ In other words, the photograph guides the internal and external structuring of the novel and additionally provides Lively with a means to explore the ontology of the image and production of representation. What I have endeavored to show, however, is that the ontology of the photographic image is emblematic of, and therefore inseparable from, Lively's ideas on writing, memory, knowledge, and history as kinds of representation. Moreover, representation in The Photograph becomes as much about gathering insight as it is about revealing the gaps in such visions. The ontology of the photograph lies at the heart of this endeavor. If representation must incorporate blindness, absence, and deprivation, Lively responds with a surfeit of verbal and visual techniques, specifically relying on photography. Representation in The Photograph becomes the paradox of the photograph, which is a site for confirming and confounding, contemplation and exclusion, vision and blindness.

⁹¹ Janice Hart states, "The Photograph is of further interest to an examination of the intersections between photography and literature because it demonstrates a pronounced ability on the part of a writer to think photographically: that is, to think in ways that are to do precisely with the ontology of photography and not just with image making as a whole" ("The Girl No One Knew" 115).

CHAPTER 4

Memory and Motherhood: The creative space of photography in Anne-Marie Garat's

La Chambre noire and Photos de familles

I. Introduction

The visual and verbal are two especially entwined concepts for French author Anne-Marie Garat. The author states in Photos de Familles (2004; Family Photos) that she writes in order *to see*: “*pour voir, voir ce qu’il advient de nous en représentation.*”⁹² Garat uses the darkroom as a metaphor for several stages of the writing process, particularly the internal, intellectual struggle to manifest creative composition. In her novel, La Chambre noire (1994; The Darkroom), which is the focus of this textual analysis, the darkroom represents a symbolic space for observation, introspection, and memory work.⁹³ The darkroom is manifested both externally, in the form of a small bedroom in a family residence and an actual darkroom in the protagonist’s Parisian apartment, and internally, represented by the womb. This comparison is communicated several times through the internal narrative of Milena, the protagonist of La Chambre noire, who also verbally asserts to her future husband, “Vous savez...mon ventre est une chambre noire” (185).⁹⁴ The author makes a similar

⁹² Anne-Marie Garat, Photos de familles (Paris: Seuil, 2004) 161. “To see, to see what happens to us during representation” (author’s translation).

⁹³ Anne-Marie Garat, La Chambre noire (Paris: Flammarion, 1994).

⁹⁴ “You know... my womb is also a darkroom” (author’s translation).

statement in her photo-text, Photos de familles, comparing both the film canister and the darkroom to “un ventre d’ombre primitif, caverne utérine, féminine” (160).⁹⁵ If the darkroom symbolizes a space of creative gestation and labor, photographs and writing represent the fruits of this process. Photographs mimic writing because they appear simultaneously as the expression and manifestation of the self as photographer/creator and the other as the photographed/depicted subject. Photographs in Garat’s novel, while representative of the authentic image in that they always uphold a referential truth, serve a more symbolic function than those previously analyzed in Isabel Allende’s and Penelope Lively’s novels. Contrary to the majority of literary works about photography included in this study, photographs in La Chambre noire are not limited to portraits, but depict landscapes, still-lives and abstracted city scenes. Images act as evidence in La Chambre noire, but reveal more about their photographer and spectator than they do about their inactive subjects.

Photography in La Chambre noire serves as a means to explore the creative process, the production of representation, and the relationship between the photographer or spectator and the photograph. Because photography so clearly functions as a metaphor for writing in Garat’s work, the author concurrently explores the complex interplay between the visual and verbal, photography and writing, the photographer and the author. Analysis of La Chambre noire inevitably leads to Garat’s unique photo-text, Photos de familles, a unique combination of the author’s meditations on photography and writing, as well as a host of other subjects such as memory, family, spectatorship and family. Garat assembles numerous examples of photographs that she has collected over the years, creating a kind of imaginary family photo album. The pictures function as catalysts for her various creative musings. The author explains that these anonymous photographs “m’ont instruit sur ce que je cherche en écrivant,

⁹⁵ “a womb of primitive shadows, a uterine, feminine cavern” (author's translation).

un certain rapport au mode et à sa représentation” (Photos de familles 7).⁹⁶ La Chambre noire and Photos de familles therefore prove especially integral texts to this study on literature and photography and the role of photographic representation in fiction.

La Chambre noire is predominantly divided into the two time frames and places depicted in the two collections of photographs present in this novel: the precise albumen prints of the Marechal family estate in Blois, France taken by Romain Marechal prior to the First World War, and the modern, abstracted images taken surreptitiously by the protagonist of the immigrant inhabitants of Parisian squats and brothels during the spring of 1986. The chapters follow the history of Roman and Milena, altering between early 1900s in Blois and April, 1986 in Paris, Blois, and Lisbonne. The concluding phrase of each chapter forms the title of the following chapter, effectively interweaving time and place despite chronological and spatial distance. Milena, the protagonist of La Chambre noire, is a successful photographer based in Paris. She is married to Jorge, the grand-nephew of Romain Marechal. April 1986 marks the birthday of Madeleine, Romain’s sister and Jorge’s grandmother who raised him after the Second World War. This occasion brings the extended Marechal family out to the estate, where Milena finds and begins her optic investigations into Romain’s albumen prints. The novel circuitously follows Milena’s vague probing into a family history marked by abandonment and indifference, and the premature death of twenty-year-old Romain, who presently exists only through the trace of presence established in his photographs and the memory of his sister. Romain’s photographs therefore act as time machines, moving the narrative into the past and allowing that past to be discovered and explored in the present by Milena. Garat’s novel integrates the narratives of memory when

⁹⁶ (The photos) “instructed me on what I was looking for in writing, a certain rapport with the world and its representation” (author's translation).

Madeline reminisces about her childhood to Milena as well as incorporating the direct representation of past events that depict the Marechal family history during the time that it occurred. In this manner, Garat's novel mimics the ontological structure of the photograph through its dual presentation of a moment past and the subsequent interpretation of that moment by the reminiscing or curious spectator.

Anne-Marie Garat opposes two very different kinds of photographs and photographers in La Chambre noire: Romain's perfect, turn-of-the-century albumen prints and Milena's blurred, high grain modern photographs. Whereas Romain's prints are dominated by extreme clarity, Milena's pictures are steeped in darkness and imprecision. During her current project, Milena does not inform her subjects when she photographs them. She holds her camera low, at her waist, shooting images at random without looking through the viewfinder or perfecting composition. Romain, in contrast, photographs the same perspective on the same day at the same time for several years in sequence, placing his tripod in a predetermined location each time. There are, however, several points of convergence between Milena's and Romain's photographs. On a technical level, both types of photography require relatively long exposure times. In addition, both photographers depict a particular physical reality, a space and place that evoke and undermine notions of home, quotidian existence, and family unity.

Milena and Romain's photographs are about disparities in vision, the differing abilities of perception between the eye and the camera lens, and the relationship between representation and reality. When observing Romain's photographs through a magnifying glass, Milena is struck by the extreme clarity to this form of documentation that reproduces each leaf, each needle on the trees. The precise reality depicted in the albumen print is

unnatural, even painful to experience: “L’excès de netteté est devenu insupportable aux yeux. Trop de réalité, insupportable. Douleur, effrayante, la précision extrême. Que n’épuise pas la loupe. Le verre de la loupe grossit sans donner plus de flou, de vague. L’instrument arme l’œil sans désarmer l’image” (28).⁹⁷ Arming the eye with the magnifying glass does not make it the equivalent of the camera lens, which records with too much clarity. Milena is certain that no person has ever observed the Marechal estate with such precision; she determines the camera to be the machinery of the devil, and the photograph to represent a “pact” between chemistry and light that renders all objects similar: “Diabolique invention, machinerie du diable, ce pacte de physique et de chimie de la photographie avec la lumière irradiante, absolue présence d’immatérialité qui rend tout matériel au même titre, le gravier des allées, le bois de la brouette et la frange du ciel, le plein et le vide” (29).⁹⁸ There is a violence to the photograph which enforces immobility and immateriality upon its subjects and imposes a vertiginous blindness upon its spectator. This recognition reveals the existent disparity between photographic and human vision, but also hints at the lack of correspondence between the photograph and memory. If we do not see with such precision of vision, clearly we cannot remember with photographic clarity. Memory incorporates the blur and darkness that differentiates Milena’s photographs from Romain’s, but it also includes movement: both memory of movement and the movement—or mutability—of memory.

⁹⁷ “The excess of clarity became unbearable to the eye. Too much reality, unbearable. This extreme precision is painful, frightening. The magnifying glass doesn’t diminish it. It enlarges, but without adding blur, vagueness. An instrument that arms the eye without disarming the image” (author’s translation).

⁹⁸ “Diabolic invention, the machinery of the devil, this pact between the physics and chemistry of photography and the irradiant light, an absolute presence of immateriality that standardizes all material: the gravel in the pathway, the wood of the wheelbarrow and the fringe of the sky, plenitude and emptiness” (author’s translation).

II. Memory and Meaning: The shifting space of photography

The fixity of the photograph conflicts with the mutability of meaning inspired by the image. In other words, the photograph will always and only testify to the thing it represents: the Barthesian “ça-a-été” of the photograph, which determines the authenticity and authority of the image. Similar to writing, meaning derived from the photograph does not maintain an equivalent fixed state, rendering photographic meaning a particularly complex issue, both in Garat’s novel and in general. Visible reality, the photograph’s ‘face-value,’ almost certainly instructs any initial determination of photographic meaning. Extended observation encourages meaning production from the subjects and items excluded from the insular frame of the photograph. In addition, photographic meaning alters when the object, subject or spectator are submitted to a variety of influences external to the image: the context in which it is created or viewed, the cultural codes of the subject, spectator, or photographer, and any combination of relationship formed between the subject, the photograph, the spectator, or the photographer. Photographs are ‘read’ by the spectator; meaning accumulates and is modified with time, the insertion of memory, external information, emotional response and the spectator’s acceptance or rejection of the ramifications of the scene depicted. In Penelope Lively’s novel, for example, the snapshot that initially represents Kath’s infidelity ultimately exposes her husband’s and sister’s indifference to her. Milena’s intense observation of Romain’s prints similarly leads her on a path from spectatorship focused on the content of the image to introspection of the self in relation to the image. Milena initially aims to understand the sequence of Romain’s photographic series, which prompts her to question Madeleine about the photographs. Madeleine’s digressions concerning her childhood and relationship with her siblings and mother have little to do with photography, but reveal a

complex family history scarred by war and psychological abandonment. Photographs therefore function as little more than catalysts for reminiscence, a kind of signpost that suggests a date and direction for the path of memory and comprehension. Memory therefore plays a key role in the photograph's ability to shift in meaning from one spectator to another, and from one experience of spectatorship to the next. French philosopher Henri Bergson distinguished between two different forms of memory in Matter and Memory (1908), noting that there is a memory that "repeats" the image perceived and another that "imagines."⁹⁹ Bergson conceives of this latter form of recollection as a "composite" image, formed from and blending the multiple exposures to the original subject, exposures that are never identical to the original experience but "recurs...with its own individuality" (Bergson 79). The experience of looking in La Chambre noire and Photos de familles likewise leads to multiple avenues of narrative creation based on the spectator's assessment of the image, during which the actual content of the image can be substantially altered, even suppressed by the spectator's accumulation of meaning.

The very past-ness of the photograph renders it an ideal vehicle for memory and the act of remembering indubitably influences the spectator's interpretation of the image. However, memory need not be based within the specific visual details of that image to shape the spectator's attribution of meaning. In fact, there may be a complete lack of correspondence between the subject of the photograph and the subject of memory. Nonetheless, memory will influence the determination and communication of the photographic value, which is also transferable to other spectators. Madeleine's reminiscence, for example, barely references Romain or his photography. Instead, she focuses on her close relationship with her sister and their mother's obvious preference for her son. Clearly, there

⁹⁹ Henri Bergson, Matter and Memory (1908) (New York: Zone, 1991) 82.

is little to associate Romain's still-lives directly to Madeleine's narratives; their function is largely symbolic. The photograph engenders a chain of references that leads Madeleine to her sister and away from the actual object of the photograph. For Madeleine, during this particular moment of spectatorship, Romain's photographs symbolize her sister's death and their mother's indifference. The indexical value of the photograph as a direct relationship of cause and effect does not necessarily carry over to the act of spectatorship. The image does not compose the trace of memory as it does its referent. In addition, the visual reality of the image no longer corresponds with the spectator's apprehension and assessment of the photograph. Indexical and iconic significance exist primarily between the photograph and the subject. The mutation of meaning through memory does not reside uniquely with the individual spectator; Madeleine's interpretation of the photographs also influences Milena's perception. After their conversation, Milena's photographic investigations take on a psychological dimension that affects her interpretation of the albumen prints, Romain, her husband, and herself. In the absence of her own memories, Milena incorporates those of Madeleine and reinterprets the image through a borrowed lens of meaning. Photographs in La Chambre noire thus become sites for the projection of imagination and fictionalization as well as memory and introspection, encouraging a diversity of meaning and positions of spectatorship that contrast with the immutability of the photograph. Even Romain's perfected albumen prints come to represent something very different from the landscape they depict when the act of looking shifts from the external observation of spectatorship to the introspection of memory work and narrative creation.

The establishment of photographic meaning in La Chambre noire is therefore understood as a narrative process determined by memory and language. In the realm of

Anne-Marie Garat's fiction, the visual and verbal become inseparable acts of representation, each taking on the attributes of the other media so that writing becomes a stilled process of detailed description and photographs symbolize malleable creations of fiction. Garat asserts in Photos de familles that photographs are in need of a narrator to realize the imaginary that resides within them. Milena's role in La Chambre noire is to act as narrator to Romain's photographs. As such, her character takes on a photographic dimension by bringing the past into a present context; Milena's curiosity becomes an act of preservation. Author Nancy Shawcross establishes that photographs and writing have the potential to rescue forgotten subjects from experiencing a second death of obscurity.¹⁰⁰ Shawcross arrives at this determination during her brief analysis of Maxine Hong Kingston's short story "No Name Woman" in which Kingston reveals and reverses a family conspiracy to conceal the existence of an adulterous aunt in an attempt to curtail the shame she has brought to her family.¹⁰¹ Shawcross concludes, "when neither image nor memory is preserved, a second death, a second crime is committed" (93). In the absence of photographs in a family album or conscious acts of reminiscence, "only text is left to Kingston to right the wrong" (*ibid.*). Kingston's writing prohibits her aunt's disappearance from private and public history. However, the author implies that she might now become a target for the wrath of her aunt's ghost. Kingston explains, "My aunt haunts me—her ghost is drawn to me because now, after fifty years of neglect, I alone devote pages of paper to her, though not origami'd into houses and clothes. I do not think she always means me well" (The Woman Warrior 16). The representational acts of memory, writing, and photography are not without consequences.

¹⁰⁰ Nancy Shawcross, "Image—Memory—Text," Phototextualities: Intersections of Photography and Narrative, eds. Alex Hughes and Andrea Noble (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2003) 89-102.

¹⁰¹ Maxine Hong Kingston, "No Name Woman," The Woman Warrior (New York: Vintage, 1989) 3-16.

The authors of these acts jeopardize the autonomy of the subject and the self through their voluntary involvement and inclusion in the representation. Milena's preoccupation with Romain's photographs safeguards the trace of these images and their maker, allowing the past to be re-experienced by Madeleine and reinvented for Milena. However, both Madeleine and Milena are in turn marked by this trace, just as Kingston is haunted by her aunt.

Narrative creation is the product of imaginations inspired by minimal details gleaned from an original source for both the character of Milena and the author Maxine Hong Kingston as neither woman has any direct knowledge of the image, event, or subject that they choose to describe. In both instances, the narration of the image (or the absent image, as in Kingston's story) becomes as much a narration and projection of the self as it is an attempted reconstruction of the subject depicted. Photographs in La Chambre noire are about history, revision, the multiplicity of narratives and imaginative interpretation. A single image engenders a story that produces countless other narrative acts so that the act of looking is transformed into a linguistic act. Madeleine confides to Milena that she finds family photograph albums exhausting because they produce so much memory, stating, "N'importe laquelle des photos raconte son histoire, une histoire enchaîne l'autre. Je déteste les albums de famille à cause de ça. C'est déjà fatigant de se souvenir tout seul" (La Chambre noire 108).¹⁰² Author Marita Sturken clarifies that memory does not reside in the photograph, but is a product of it:

Yet, while the photograph may be perceived as a container for memory, it is not inhabited by memory so much as it produces it; it is a mechanism through which the past can be constructed and situated in the present. Images have the

¹⁰² "Any one of these photos tells its story, and one story leads to another. I hate family photograph albums because of this. It's tiring enough to remember all alone" (author's translation).

capacity to create, interfere with, and trouble the memories we hold as individuals and as a culture.¹⁰³

The importance of Sturkin's article to this study is her emphatic determination of the malleability of photographic meaning as it shifts from private to public spaces. Sturkin's findings suggest that memory and imagination are the products of the interaction between the spectator and the photograph, rather than a unified projection from the image. As such, each act of spectatorship allows for the re-experiencing of the past portrayed by the photograph. One can conclude that numerous encounters with the image will not recreate identical experience of spectatorship. The act of looking therefore opens the image to multiple narratives, some based on memory, others inspired by imagination and personal projection.

The narratives composed by Anne-Marie Garat are constructed from the imaginary. La Chambre noire is, after all, a work of fiction, the implication being that neither the photographer nor the characters are completely real. Author Eduardo Cadava explores the changeability of actual photographs in his introduction to the work of artist Richard Ross in a collection of photographs entitled Gathering Light.¹⁰⁴ In his essay, "Gathering Night," Cadava perceives, like Sturkin and Garat, narration as a central component of sight: "Each time it is a story of what the eye can see and what it cannot—of what the camera can capture and what eludes it."¹⁰⁵ The experience of sight, of photographic spectatorship in particular, is intrinsically bound to the production of language. Cadava poetically asserts, "At every moment, we are asked to respond to a certain play of light and darkness—the light and

¹⁰³ Marita Sturkin, "The Image as Memorial: Personal Photographs in Cultural Memory" The Familial Gaze, ed. Marianne Hirsch. (Dartmouth: University Press of New England, 1999) 178.

¹⁰⁴ Richard Ross, Gathering Light: Photography of Richard Ross, by Richard Ross (University of New Mexico Press, 2000).

¹⁰⁵ Eduardo Cadava, "Gathering Night". Gathering Light: Photography of Richard Ross, Richard Ross (University of New Mexico Press, 2000) N. pag.

darkness without which the eye would have no story—and we respond to the muteness of this play by inventing stories, by relating each of these shifting images to several possible narratives” (ch. L). According to Cadava, the narratives that accompany the photograph are filled with blindness and approximation; as such, they alter from one visual experience to the next, leaving the photograph open to perpetual story-telling, “an ongoing story about light” (ch. T). Ross’s photographs, concludes Cadava, are unfinished, “permeable and open,” bearing “several memories and histories at once” (*ibid.*). Richard Ross’ photographs appear, through the lens of Cadava’s writing, to be the very essence of creativity, the projection and product of narrative fertility.

Fiction writing about photography inevitably conjoins the narrative process with the photographic image. What Garat, Sturkin, and Cadava separately establish is that the photograph is bound to language and fictionalization from the moment the eye distinguishes an emergent visual representation, prompting this particular author to question whether sight exists in the absence of language. Clearly, in the examples of literary fiction included in this dissertation, the visual does not exist beyond the realm of language; everything, even the photographs are pure text—the sole exception being Anne-Marie Garat’s photo-text Photos de familles. La Chambre noire reveals how quickly the products of language inundate the mute photograph, filling it with the narratives of memory and imagination. The surplus of words, which vary from one visual experience to the next, causes a slippage of meaning that the spectator invariably associates with the image, prompting the belief that the photograph is itself an alterable object (Cadava suggests that Ross’ photographs are “shifting images”). However, the exact precision of Romain’s perfect albumen prints in La Chambre noire distinctly illustrate that it is the spectator’s perception of the photograph that is replete with

fluctuation, blur, and moments of blindness that inspire the compensation of imaginative narrative production. Too much clarity cramps creative vision, turning the photograph into Barthes' mad image that "fills the sight by force" (La chambre claire 143; Camera Lucida 91). The protagonist of La Chambre noire concludes that such clarity destabilizes the senses and provides a vertiginous preview of death, "La netteté inouïe, aveuglante, de ces photographies ciselées jusqu'à l'obsession dans leur perfection technique, lui semble révéler un gouffre obscur" (82).¹⁰⁶ Such photography defies the spectator's presumption of control. Barthes' mad image and Romain's precise prints refuse transformation through the spectator's imposition of memory and creative response. The clarity of the mad image renders it a static, unalterable image, resistant to speculation or narrative production.

III. The Darkroom/ Dark Womb: Writing the image of the mother

Eduardo Cadava illuminates how the absence of vision encourages creative response in his essay, "Gathering Night." "Blindness," writes Cadava, "gives birth to sight." (ch. H). Cadava's conclusions stem from Walter Benjamin, particularly Benjamin's investigation of the caesura. Citing Benjamin's Passagen-Werk, Cadava explains that knowledge arrives "in a moment of simultaneous illumination and blindness" (Words of Light: Theses on the Photography of History 5). According to Cadava, photography arrests time, translates time "into something like a certain space," allowing for a "break from the present [that] enables the rereading and rewriting of history, the performance of another mode of historical understanding, one that would be the suspension of both 'history' and 'understanding'" (61, 59). Photography presents an ideal comparison for Cadava's exploration of blindness and

¹⁰⁶ "The blinding clarity of these images is unheard of, obsessively chiseled to technical perfection. It seems to reveal to her a dark abyss" (author's translation).

vision through its suggested temporary suspension of time and perception, allowing stillness and silence for speculation and creative narrative development. Whereas Cadava locates a blind field of imagination in blinding illumination, specifically in the manner in which Richard Ross' photographs are seared by blazing rays of light, author Anne-Marie Garat situates her creative space in darkness, in a complete absence of light. For Garat, luminary obscurity provides a metaphoric space for creation, which provides a state of incubation and gestation necessary for a gathering and perfecting of ideas before bringing them to light. Garat explains in Photos de familles,

Je ne sais rien des révélations, j'y collabore, j'y travaille dans l'obscurité de l'écriture. Le pouvoir argentique des mots décide dans ce travail au noir qui arrête des formes, les leste de langage, trace les lignes de partage, lignes de litige latentes. Avant d'apprendre que cette image de vigne appartenait au côté de l'envers, celui des mots, je reste longtemps dans le noir." (161)¹⁰⁷

Garat's darkroom is a symbolic space of contemplation, experimentation, growth, and learning what will be included in the finished product. It is the imagined space that allows for the "performance" of the imaginary. Cadava and Garat both locate creative potential in the photographic process. For Garat, the darkroom is the space of creativity in which she produces a finished product (her writing) that is eventually brought to light. Cadava, in contrast, locates the imaginary in the finished product of the photograph. His position in relation to the image is that of a spectator and a critic whereas Garat's is that of the artist.

The protagonist of La Chambre noire establishes similar mental and physical realms of darkness that separate her from the external world, providing a respite from the surfeit of

¹⁰⁷ "I don't know anything about revelations. I collaborate, I work in the obscurity of writing. During this work of darkness, the silver power of words decides what stops forms, gives them ballast in language, traces the lines of division, lines of latent roots. Before learning what vine-like image brings on the other side, the side of words, I remain in darkness for a long time" (author's translation).

physical and visual stimulation that induces a state of vertigo. Milena's actual darkroom is a space of tranquility in which she establishes an order and clarity that she cannot maintain elsewhere in the light. In her photography laboratory, Milena acts without the hesitation of fear that disturbs her quotidian existence "on the other side." Garat writes, "Aveugle, elle dépose de tous les repères à portée de sa main, sans aucune erreur, sans une hésitation... Ici l'ordre est méticuleux, maniaque, tolère aucune dérogation" (La Chambre noire 141).¹⁰⁸

Photographic creation is a delicate and gradual process for the photographer (and her author); Milena prefers to wait several days before developing her film, allowing for a period of incubation within the film canister. She treats her photographs and negatives as if they were living things, requiring a certain level of respect and attentive care. Milena guards her images within her private darkroom, refusing to use the services of the agency where she works or to provide her editor with any previews of an unfinished product. Milena's reactions are almost maternal. Indeed, she believes that the photographs exist inside her, watching her from within her very body: "Ces photographies me regardent," thinks Milena, "De l'intérieur de ma peau, elles me regardent, yeux clos" (La Chambre noire 139).¹⁰⁹

Anne-Marie Garat relates the darkroom to a distinctly feminine, womb-like space of fertility and gestation in both La Chambre noire and Photos de familles. The author explains that photography functions as "the most pregnant" model ("le plus prégnant") for composition and writing. "La métaphore séduit, elle a sa poésie, mais plus encore elle dit l'analogie avec l'étrangeté organique de l'engendrement, comme avec celle de l'écriture, qui font de la chambre noire un ventre de mémoire obscure où s'écrit notre histoire" (Photos de

¹⁰⁸ "Blind, she lays everything that she needs within the reach of her hand, without a single error, without hesitation... In this room, order is meticulous, manic, does not tolerate any deviation" (author's translation).

¹⁰⁹ "These photographs watch me. They watch me from within my skin, their eyes closed" (author's translation).

familles 160).¹¹⁰ If, for Garat, the darkroom is the space for creativity, her writing emerges as the finished product, like a photograph, imprinted on paper. The protagonist of La Chambre noire reinforces Garat's emphasis on the feminine status of the darkroom. Upon entering her photography laboratory, she compares the experiencing of such intense darkness with what a child experiences in its mother's womb, "On dit que dans le ventre d'une mère on ne connaît pas un noir si intense. On dit que l'enfant sait de la lumière ce que l'insomniaque sait du sommeil introuvable, un rêve négatif" (La Chambre noire 141-142).¹¹¹ The darkroom, while representing the center for creation, is also a site for infertility, filled with literary or photographic seeds that never come to fruition and are therefore never brought into the light. "On ne montre pas ses négatifs," declares Garat (Photos de familles 161).¹¹² In La Chambre noire, the protagonist becomes increasingly troubled by her own childless state, an infertility that is emphasized by her artistic productivity and her countless comparisons between the dark room and her "dark womb." At the conclusion of the novel, Milena admits to her husband that she wants to have a child with him, confiding, "je voudrais un enfant de toi. Que nous ayons ensemble une image d'enfant. Je sais que nous n'en aurons pas. Mon ventre me fait mal de rester noir" (La Chambre noire 261).¹¹³ Milena perceives the imagination of a child, the construction of an image of a child as being a precondition to conceiving the child. She fears, however, that they will not be able to conceive either.

¹¹⁰ "The metaphor seduces; it's poetic. But more than that, it speaks the an analogy with the organic strangeness of engendering which, similar to writing, makes the dark room a womb of obscure memory where our history is written" (author's translation).

¹¹¹ "They say that one knows such intense darkness in the mother's womb. They say that what the infant knows of light is like what the insomniac knows of sleep: an inversed dream" (author's translation).

¹¹² "One never shows one's negatives" (author's translation).

¹¹³ "I would like to have a child with you. That we have together the image of a child. I know that we won't have one. The continued darkness of my womb pains me" (author's translation).

Milena's sense of infertility probably stems from her troubled relationship with her husband; both of them are emotionally scarred by childhood trauma that continues to affect their adult lives. Milena and Jorge experienced mental and physical abandonment of their mothers. Milena's parents fled Estonia shortly after the Second World War, eventually emigrating to France. Milena's mother's refusal to adapt to her new environment created a large gap between mother and daughter, particularly linguistically. Jorge's mother left him with his grandmother Madeleine in order to search for her missing husband after the war. Neither she nor Jorge's father ever return. If the image of the darkroom/womb dominates Garat's exploration of creative development in this novel, we locate its antithesis in the absent figure of the mother that represents the infertility and loss that accompanies all creative acts. Without either mother, Jorge and Milena are unable to conceive—or conceive of—a child, as they are both still absorbed by the trauma of their pasts.

La Chambre noire is a book about mourning and desire for the missing mother. Her absence is the source of physical and mental impotency; imaginative reconstruction of the absent mother figure becomes the only method to recover the self. La Chambre noire is thus reminiscent of another literary and theoretical work focused on the absent mother that has greatly influenced the development of this study on photography and literature: Roland Barthes' La chambre claire. Many critics have noted how the wound of his mother's recent death affects Barthes' writing in La chambre claire. Photography and writing provide Barthes with the means to cope with her loss. He transforms her physical absence into a photographic absence for the reader of La chambre claire through his omission of the Winter Garden photograph of her, which is perceived to be the central image of this text. Author Jane Gallop, commenting on the "exemplary status" afforded the Winter Garden photograph,

determines that for both author and text “the quintessential photographed subject is the mother.”¹¹⁴ According to Gallop, the mother’s presence as a photographed (and absent) subject allows Barthes to shift from his initial status as subject in the first chapters of La chambre claire to the position of spectator and, I would add, author. Rather than providing the visual representation of his mother, Barthes writes her image, recreates her through his most fertile means of production, turning her into a textual presence. Visual theorist James Elkins suggests that the absence of the mother’s photograph from La chambre claire, “makes sense because for Barthes, the photograph exists only as a way to think about his mother.”¹¹⁵ In other words, the Winter Garden photograph is necessary in so far as it produces a creative or imaginative response in its spectator. As such, it is suggestive of Bergson’s second form of memory: the form that imagines, which is “always bent upon action, seated in the present and looking only to the future... In truth it no longer *represents* our past to us, it *acts* it” (Bergson 82). In La chambre claire, Barthes seeks the return of his mother, turning instead to the act of writing to balance her loss and the implication of his impotency through her death with the prolific fertility of his writing. As a photographer, the protagonist of La Chambre noire cannot write the image of her mother. But, as a woman, she can seek the image of the mother within herself, hoping to transform her darkroom/dark womb into a space of creation, “un ventre de mémoire obscur où s’écrit notre histoire,” a space that allows for the imaginative memory work and the rewriting of history (Photos de familles 160).¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ Jane Gallop, “Observations of a Mother” The Familial Gaze, ed. Marianne Hirsch (Dartmouth: University Press of New England, 1999) 68.

¹¹⁵ James Elkins, “What Do We Want Photography to Be? A Response to Michael Fried,” Critical Inquiry 31.4 (2005): 944.

¹¹⁶ “a womb of obscure memory where our history is written” (author's translation).

IV. Conclusion

Author Jay Prosser suggests in his article “Buddha Barthes” that the later work of Roland Barthes presents a shift in his thinking that embraced the role of the imaginary.¹¹⁷ Prosser states, Barthes’ “return to the imaginary this side of language comes to rest in the image, photography” (216). Barthes’ transition, which becomes most evident in La chambre claire, is born out of necessity and in reaction to the trauma of his mother’s death. Prosser concludes, “his return to the imaginary in photography is a wish to return to—to return—his mother” (*ibid.*). Emphasis on the imaginative space of the photograph is the only way Barthes can reanimate and re-experience the unique being who was his mother. Barthes asserts that writing cannot provide the same certainty of photography (La chambre claire 134; Camera Lucida 85). However, he is not looking for certainty because it supports his mother’s death (as well as his own); rather, he is looking for what no longer exists. Writing the image becomes a means to reinvent, and thus relive, an absent presence. For Barthes and Garat, photography functions as a seductive space of the imaginary; photographs serve as evidence of a specific space and time, and yet perform as focal points for the inscription of memory, fiction, and narrative. It is in this realization that the relationship between photography and fiction writing becomes most clear. What Garat, Barthes, Sturkin, Cadava, and even Bergson have revealed is that the production of a creative linguistic act is a natural response to the muteness of photography. As Cadava suggests, the timelessness of photography offers a situation for speculation through narrative production. The photograph is therefore determined to be a peculiar space of light and darkness that suspends the senses and generates both blindness and enlightenment. In this manner, writing the image allows the

¹¹⁷ Jay Prosser, “Buddha Barthes: What Barthes Saw in Photography (That He Didn’t in Literature),” Literature and Theology 18.2 (2004): 211-222.

visible past of the photograph to be re-experienced as an accumulation of memories as well as an imaginative projection of the future in which the trauma that scars the present is overcome.

CHAPTER 5

A Widow for One Year by John Irving: Communicating absence and loss through photography and ekphrasis

I. Introduction

The themes of loss and absence pervade John Irving's A Widow for One Year.¹¹⁸ Photographs figure predominantly throughout this novel, largely through the inclusion of family pictures of two brothers who had died prior to the commencement of the novel. The unique ontology of the photographic image unequivocally identifies it as a visual representation of a past moment and as an instant stilled from the progress of time, characteristics that allow photography to act as an ideal vehicle to propel the novel's principal themes of loss and absence. Pictures of the brothers in A Widow for One Year serve a dual function: providing the characters with visual reminders of their loss, and supplying the reader with immediate explanation of the past tragedy that defines and directs the events, characters, and structure of the novel. This dual role is primarily achieved through detailed descriptions of the images that come closer to acts of ekphrasis than any other novel included in this dissertation. Throughout Irving's novel, the main characters forge narrative structures from absence and past. They engage in repetitive, almost ritualistic recounting of several photographs of Thomas and Timothy, chronicling the events depicted and providing the details of the visual scenes. These images, although steeped in loss and absence, act uniquely

¹¹⁸ John Irving, A Widow for One Year (New York: Ballantine, 1998).

as authentic photographs, always accurately representing their referents. Photography provides the principal medium to communicate loss; however, the text quite literally embodies the representation of the many kinds of absence that mark this story and also gives verbal form to those fictional photographs.

A Widow for One Year becomes a construction created out of loss and the desire to eliminate that loss through photographs, storytelling, and literary representation. It is in this manner that John Irving's novel displays its unique ekphrastic power, not merely in its ability to represent the absent subjects of Thomas and Timothy, but through its melancholic communication of the absence that precedes the subject's conceptualization as object. In the case of the photographs, absence is presupposed by death, and ultimately by the fictionality of the images and the boys. Accordingly, the ekphrastic act of this text mirrors the effect of photography through its fixed focus on absence and the past. Photography and ekphrasis are both forms of substitution that reinforce the emptiness of a present absence. By combining these two artistic acts, John Irving prescribes and intensifies the reader's individual, subjective response to loss and absence that characterize this novel. Despite the realistic intensity of A Widow for One Year, Irving does little to conceal its fictionality, which additionally highlights the emptiness of the representational process in this unique novel.

In addition to the photographs of the brothers, there is a second collection of photographs that haunts the protagonist of this novel: photographs of several European prostitutes taken by their murderer just moments after their deaths. Ruth, who is the main character and younger sister of Thomas and Timothy, never sees these Polaroid images, but she witnesses both the murder and his photographic act. Initially, these two sets of images appear to be polar opposites; the pictures of the innocent abundant lives of youthful boys

contrast sharply with the sexual depravity of a murderer. However, all the photographic collections in A Widow for One Year are about control, appropriation, and the desire for possession. As such, the referential ability (their potential to serve as authentic photographs) of these pictures is of singular importance. The Polaroid taken of the prostitute has a disturbing precursor for Ruth: her father has a vast collection of nude portraits, which are Polaroid photographs taken of the many women with whom he had sexual relationships. In short, photography takes the form of fetish in A Widow for One Year. Irving constructs a complex parallel between the photographs of Thomas and Timothy and those of the prostitutes by using death and desire as their common denominators. Both sets of photographs serve as replacements for their absent subjects, and provide a unique portal to the past, a kind of backwards glance focused on the referents and directed at their deaths. These are the kinds of photographic portraits that Susan Sontag describes in her essay, “Melancholy Objects.”¹¹⁹ “Photographs state the innocence, the vulnerability of lives heading towards their own destruction,” claims Sontag, “and this link between photography and death haunts all photographs of people” (70). Ultimately, however, these photographs only present and frame the absence of their subjects, simultaneously framing the fictional spectators within that emotionally charged space of mourning or immorality and creating a complex *mise en abyme* with the entire novel. Irving’s novel is unique in its multifarious and thorough exploration of the photograph’s connection to death and absence both thematically and through its use of ekphrasis. As such, it provides a particularly revealing addition to this study on literature and its treatment of photography.

Published in 1998, A Widow for One Year includes several plotlines familiar to the John Irving reader: a painful childhood, an absent parent, and the early sexual initiation of a

¹¹⁹ Susan Sontag, “Melancholy Objects” in On Photography (New York: Anchor Books, 1977) 51-84.

young man. Ruth Cole is the main character; early within the narrative, Irving informs his audience, “this is Ruth’s story” (5). Ruth’s parents, friends, and two husbands are, however, essential figures within this narrative. The (absent) presence of Ruth’s older brothers and the effects of their deaths have a determining impact on these characters. Thomas and Timothy died in a car crash when they were teenagers, years before Ruth was born; and yet, even as a child, Ruth believes that she has a far better understanding of her dead brothers than of her distracted and grieving parents. Irving writes, “although the two boys had died as teenagers, before Ruth was born (before she was even conceived), Ruth felt that she knew these vanished young men far better than she knew her mother or her father” (4).

In this manner, Irving’s novel is similar to Penelope Lively’s novel, The Photograph, in that those characters absented by death and reincarnated by photography maintain a peculiar authority over the secondary characters, who conversely serve as the primary actors and spectators of these images. In both A Widow for One Year and The Photograph, photography provides a unique medium that translates the past into an influential present, so that the absent characters become the main subjects without need for action. Photography in fictional literature is usually represented through verbal description of the image. Both photography and descriptive text have a similar stilling and silencing impact on action, characters, and events. Photographs in literature can thus be understood as doubling this effect because they reproduce a stopped action and their descriptions halt the narrative progress of the novel as well. Fictional photographs may move a past event into the present, but in doing so, narrative progress and any past or present actions are temporarily suspended. In this manner, photographs in literature can only influence potential or future action, as do the photographs of the dead Cole brothers. This combination of descriptive text, photography,

and two dead brothers—each of which separately communicates stasis and silence—jointly reinforces a cessation of action equated with death. Irving’s novel does not simply represent absence and death—it reproduces them, like a photograph.

A Widow for One Year is initially set on Long Island during the late 1950s, and commences late one evening when four-year old Ruth overhears her mother, Marion Cole, engaging in sexual intercourse with Eddie O’Hare, her father’s sixteen-year old writing assistant. When Ruth sleepily walks to her parent’s bedroom to find the source of the noises that disturbed her sleep, the faces of her two dead brothers seem to peer down at her from the framed photographs that line the hallway walls. In fact, hundreds of photographs of Thomas and Timothy decorate every room of the house, serving as an omnipresent visual reminder of their former familial happiness and the tragedy that has caused Marion’s and Ted’s current marital rupture. Ruth is frightened by her mother’s and Eddie’s actions, however, she is more distressed by the physical similarity between Eddie and her dead brothers. In fact, Ruth initially believes that Eddie is the ghost of her eldest brother. This introductory scene immediately reveals the chaotic state of Ruth’s family: her parents have separated and are alternately sleeping at the main house; Marion has taken young Eddie as her lover, precisely because he resembles her sons; and Ruth’s father, Ted Cole, is also engaged in numerous extramarital affairs. Ted’s behavior, unlike Marion’s adulterous acts, is recidivistic; he routinely causes a repetitious cycle of depression and degradation for the married women he meets. Moreover, Ted had hired Eddie because of Eddie’s physical resemblance to his sons and because he believed Marion’s desire for her dead children could become sexual.

Marion disappears shortly before the summer’s end, leaving her husband, daughter, and young lover. She takes with her almost every photograph and negative of Thomas and

Timothy, leaving one image for Eddie and forgetting a second photograph that had been sent to the frame shop. The photographs accordingly appear primarily in the first section of the novel, although the effects of these absent pictures, like the dead boys, reverberate throughout the text. Eddie will not see Ruth again for thirty-two years, when he gives a prolonged, sloppy introduction at her book reading in Manhattan, New York. The novel follows similar chronological divisions, separating into three sections: Summer 1958, Fall 1990, and Fall 1995. These dates correspond to significant occurrences in Ruth's life: her mother's departure, the reconnection with Eddie (who remains Marion's devoted and heartbroken ex-lover) and her mother's return to Long Island. Ruth, Marion, and Eddie all become writers, although Ruth will be the most accomplished and acknowledged. Ted Cole is already a failed novelist but successful author of children's books at the beginning of A Widow for One Year. Ted's stories are short, frightening tales often adapted from actual fears and observations made by his own children. Marion moves to Canada after leaving her family, where she authors several popular mystery novels that are marked by her enduring grief over her sons' deaths as well as descriptions of their photographs. Eddie publishes several mediocre romances, which are thinly veiled accounts of his abiding love for Marion. Ruth's success arguably derives from her ability to write something other than a repetition of the events in her life, contrary to Ted's, Marion's, and Eddie's writing techniques. Ruth eventually does write a distinctive description of a prostitute's room in Amsterdam where she witnessed that woman's murder. While on a European book tour, Ruth began researching a novel that leads her to confer with several prostitutes. Ruth's inclusion of several precise details about the prostitute's room in her latest novel inadvertently reveals Ruth's identity to the grateful Dutch detective, Harry Hoekstra. This detective had solved the murder case shortly after the death

by using clues that Ruth anonymously written and sent to the police department. Harry falls in love with Ruth several years later, during another book tour for another novel partly based on her Amsterdam research. The novel concludes with their happy marriage and Marion's abrupt return to Long Island, her family, and Eddie.

II. The Hybrid Text

John Irving's novel A Widow for One Year is arguably one of the most structurally diverse literary works included in this dissertation. Analysis of the complexity and extent of the novel's hybrid structure is essential to understanding the development of photographic loss and absence that is transferred to the reader through an intricate ekphrastic performance. Irving creates a diverse, montage-like format through the inclusion of fictional photographs, their accompanying descriptive passages, and numerous excerpts from fictional and non-fictional sources, such as children's literature, poetry, and selections from journals and letters written by the characters. Irving also includes several sources external to this novel, for example, brief passages from a biography of Graham Greene and Adam Bede by George Eliot. John Irving's novel also forms a loose parody of 19th century sentimental novels like Adam Bede in that the varied narratives of the individual characters come to a fairly universal conclusion by finding a degree of stability and happiness through Ruth's marriage and Marion's return to her former community. The copyright credits for A Widow for One Year acknowledge Ludwig Bemelmans' Madeline's Christmas and two poems by W.B. Yeats. Irving even recycles his own, previously published material by re-imagining a short story titled "The Red and Blue Air Mattress" as the introductory chapter to a novel written by his protagonist Ruth Cole. This story was originally published in 1994 in the Munich newspaper,

Süddeutsche Zeitung.¹²⁰ A Widow for One Year is a virtual hodgepodge of texts and textual structures, not all of which are authored by Irving and many of which are attributed to his characters. As such, it provokes many questions concerning the artificiality of representation and its construction. This novel presents representations of representations for which the original is uncertain or concealed within the text's fictionality. It is a practice that bears striking resemblance to the present perception of photographic reproduction as simulacrum without an attributed author or owner. The layering of fictions causes a disruption of traditional standards for originality and authenticity in a fictional novel. However, this palimpsestic technique also creates an intense hyperreality within the text. In other words, the inclusion of multiple and varied texts enhances dimension and verisimilitude, partly by creating frames of reference that obscure the identity of the actual author.

Life and literature are no longer separate concepts when characters act as authors. In addition, the structure of authority and ownership through authorship is placed into question. The construction of narratives within narratives (some of which are "authored" by the characters), the pluralizing and fictionalizing of the author simultaneously conceals the actual author (thereby intensifying the effect of verisimilitude) and reveals the artificiality of the novel's construction. A Widow for One Year draws from the techniques of fragmentation, multiplicity of narrative, stylistic repetition and transformation. Such tendencies are not limited to the structural composition of the novel; several characters and their work embody this hybridity. Ted Cole provides an ideal example for this study, as he is both author and illustrator of children's books. His drawings practically mirror his storytelling abilities in that both are refined to the point of appearing rudimentary, yet each encourages intense emotional

¹²⁰ The author explains in the Acknowledgements that this story was "previously published—in slightly different form, and in German—in the Süddeutsche Zeitung, July 27, 1994, under the title "Die blaurote Luftmatratze."

response from his reader-spectator. Verbally, his stories are studies in minimalism, supplying only the necessary details and focusing on a single, brief event, like a snapshot. Visually, Ted includes only a select few pen and ink drawings to accompany his text. The pen and ink medium also suggests brevity of form and lack of color beyond his preferred indigo black or sepia brown. Ted's stories and drawings are about fear, loneliness, and darkness; he describes his visual and verbal arts by saying, "that darkness was his favorite color" (Irving 21). Ted Cole's drawing replicates the basic substance and techniques of his storytelling, which displays a distinct symbiosis between these sister arts integral to this novel and the author's creative process. Certainly, it is not unusual for an artist to share similar techniques among media. However, the fluency of transfer between the visual and verbal embodied by Ted Cole's artwork is of particular interest to this study because it reproduces a structural fluidity inherent to the text. His drawings add an important visual component to an already multifaceted textual composition, so that text and image become considered as transposable media.

Ted's other main occupation is drawing portraits. Ostensibly, these life drawings are to practice and hone his artistic skills for his books. In reality, Ted uses the drawings and sessions to seduce young mothers, first having the mother and child to pose together, then eventually convincing the mother to pose alone. These drawings, like the illustrations in his books, define the progress and reveal the status of the affair. A converse relationship develops between the drawing and the emotional intimacy: the more revealing and pornographic the image, the less involved Ted is with his lover. Ted Cole's drawings communicate the dominant emotional state of his model and display her internal sensibility through external representation. Sketches that are completed towards the end of a relationship reduce the

woman to a series of pornographic body parts, and somehow communicate the degree of emptiness, loneliness, and desperation that Ted's lovers frequently experience because of his increasing indifference. It is worth noting that Ted's children's stories are about very similar anxieties, which are not always alleviated with the book's conclusion. Ted never keeps these drawings, and during the summer of 1958, he requests that Eddie bring all his drawings to his current mistress, Mrs. Vaughn. Unfortunately Eddie looks at the drawings while rearranging them in the car. Eddie later confesses his voyeurism to Marion:

“In the drawings, she was somehow *more* than naked,” Eddie began. (...) “It was not *just* that she was naked,” Eddie insisted. “It was as if you could see everything that she must have submitted to. She looked like she'd been *tortured* or something.”
“I know,” Marion said again. “I'm so sorry...” (96-97)

Ted's drawings ultimately reduce Mrs. Vaughn to her pain; Eddie privately thinks that Ted's drawings “had reduced Mrs. Vaughn to a hole in her center” (91). In this description we note a startling similarity between Ted's drawings and Susan Sontag's assessment of photography. Sontag writes that knowledge acquired through photographs will be “a semblance of knowledge, a semblance of wisdom; as the act of taking pictures is a semblance of appropriation, a semblance of rape” (On Photography 24). Ted's depictions of Mrs. Vaughn are precisely the kind of rape that Sontag ascribes to photography. It must also be noted that Ted completes many of his drawings by referencing the Polaroid photographs he takes of models.

John Irving establishes a fluid montage between the visual and verbal by writing about each medium in similar terms and including characters that both perform and comment on these arts. Irving creates an additional layer to this artistic palimpsest by associating drawing, writing, and storytelling with photography. For example, the pictures of Thomas and Timothy

are always accompanied by a detailed, immutable description. Existence of the photographs without the explanation is unthinkable for the Cole family. Conversely, the hundreds of snapshots that adorn the Cole's home largely dictate memory of the boys. Indeed, these photographs are Ruth's sole knowledge of her brothers. However, photography is evoked through many other subtle parallels between the verbal and visual. Ted's children's books are printed in a monochromatic format. During the summer of 1958, Ted's ink of choice is from squid because it produces a deep brown, sepia-like tint. The term "sepia" is customarily identified with monochrome photographic prints that were produced largely during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Ted's illustrations in his children's books can also be considered photographic in their representation of a flash of action within the brief narrative, almost like a snapshot. His portraiture, on the other hand, is reminiscent of Aurora del Valle's photographs in Retrato en Sepia because of their ability to depict the emotional identity of the model.¹²¹ In addition to these artistic parallels, Mrs. Vaughn's presence in the novel is comparable to Thomas and Timothy's because all three are defined through visual art. To be more precise, the reader knows Mrs. Vaughn mostly through Eddie's voyeuristic assessment of Ted's drawings and knows the brothers solely through the photographs described by their spectators. Irving's novel, like a photograph, reproduces the perspective of the spectator, forcing the reader to mime Eddie's voyeurism or reenact the gazes of other characters.

Hybridity of form and structure allow for slippage of identity and definition, thereby facilitating the ekphrastic process; the verbal acts as the visual and the reader acts as a

¹²¹ Aurora's photographs find an actual historical precedent in the work of sentimental photographers such as Julia Margaret Cameron, a 19th century photographer who employed such techniques as soft-focus and faulty lenses to reveal what she believed were inner characteristics and to conceal less desirable external attributes. Although Aurora never intentionally manipulates the technical process of photography, she does endeavor to reveal the "soul" or "vital essence" of her subjects.

spectator, re-imagining the textual description as a visual object. Photography is intrinsically defined by hybridity, being classified as both science and art. The term itself forms a unique “doublet,” meaning both “light” and “writing.”¹²² Photography also produces a temporal hybridity by bringing an eternal past into a perpetual present. Photography supplies the main subject for A Widow for One Year, but, more importantly, it also provides a basic template for general analysis and critical interpretation of many aspects of this literary work. Critic Janice Hart concluded that in Penelope Lively’s novel The Photograph, the intersections between photography and literature displayed the author’s ability to “think photographically” meaning that Lively’s perception of photography is based in the ontology of the photograph rather than “image making”(Hart 115). The internal structures of A Widow for One Year demonstrate an integration of certain fundamental concepts unique to photographic representation. Foremost among these concepts are voyeurism and absence, two characteristics unavoidably identified with photography. Irving’s ability to recreate the experience of loss and absence through representation—or rather because of representation—undeniably speaks of photography.

III. Absence and Loss Through Representation

III i. The subject becomes object

In A Widow for One Year, Irving writes about characters who write about their own lives, transforming certain events and objects into fictional, literary constructions. The inclusion of the characters’ literary works—such as several of Ted’s children’s stories, a

¹²² See Geoffrey Batchen’s brief but enlightening discussion on the “paradoxical doubling” inherent to photography, which he notes is “a verb as much as a noun” in Burning With Desire (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1999) 100-102.

chapter from one of Marion's detective novels, or brief citations from Eddie's romance novels—effectively adds to the depth of character and their believability as authors. Writing about characters as authors also provides Irving with opportunities for self-reflexive, critical analysis and assessment of all aspects of the writing process, from the initial preoccupation with a novel's conception to its ultimate reception by critics and readers. Passages written by characters are incorporated into the novel when another character reads or references the work. In this manner, authors also act as critical readers. The multi-faceted structure of A Widow for One Year provides an ideal venue to deconstruct and explore the internal and external workings of a novel, allowing Irving-as-author to occupy both positions of writer and critic. Slippage of identity and definition is not limited to textual structure. If the reader occasionally becomes a spectator, both Irving and his characters additionally become their own audience. The characters in this novel frequently embody this technique by voluntarily sliding between first- and third-person narration when reciting a story and through writing about their lives. While this allows for multiplicity of subject positions, it also signifies the temporary loss of the original identity because of an intrinsic rift between the first- and third-subject positions. When Ted Cole recounts the evening that Thomas and Timothy died, he refers to himself in the third person and recites the events as if he were performing a monologue from one of his own children's books. Eddie realizes as he listens that, "Ted had worked on the story" and paid close attention to every detail of the accident (Irving 153). Eddie concludes that, "the principal device in Ted's telling of the tale was extremely self-conscious, even artificial, yet without it, Ted might not have been able to tell the story at all" (*ibid.*). The use of third-person narration endows Ted with absolute control over his story, prevents his emotional involvement, and limits the effects of memory. Ted's storytelling, at

least in this instance, is defined by a voluntary removal of the narrating self from its representation. During this process, a version of the self is projected outside of and away from the actual self and becomes the other, which allows the original self to remain separate from the representation, acting as author or spectator.

Characters fictionalize their lives and modify their reality through the literary process to avoid confronting painful memories and problematic situations. Ruth also uses storytelling to absent herself from an immediate danger, much like the iconic character of Shéhérazade. Ruth witnesses the murder and photographing of a prostitute while researching a novel in Amsterdam; she was hiding in the closet in the prostitute's room to watch the prostitute with a client. Irving had already linked death with photography through the pictures of Thomas and Timothy, but reveals in this passage the potential insidious and horrific nature of photographic appropriation: it appears the murderer's pleasure derives primarily from the photographic act, not the killing. However, Ruth also acts as a voyeur and appears almost like an early photographer, peeping out from concealing curtains and watching reflections of her subjects in a mirror. She calms herself and avoids revealing her presence by mentally reciting her favorite of Ted's children's stories, A Sound Like Someone Trying Not to Make a Sound. Ted had written this story during the summer of 1958, finding inspiration in one of four-year-old Ruth's nightmares. There is a distinct correlation between the details of the story and Ruth's situation in Amsterdam, particularly through the corresponding appearances between the murderer and the monster from Ted's story. Furthermore, Ruth's location in the closet is a reenactment of a phobia caused by a sentence that Ted had included in another story, The Mouse Crawling Between the Walls: "It was a sound like, in the closet, if one of Mommy's dresses came alive and it tried to climb down off the hanger" (15). Ruth's presence in the

prostitute's closet wholly embodies the titular suggestion of someone trying not to make a sound. Fictional life mimics fictional art, allowing Irving to construct a mimetic circle within the confines of the novel.

The author also establishes a parallel between Ruth and the reader (who might find echoes of A Widow for One Year in his or her own reading tendencies) by allowing Ruth to find refuge in literature. During her silent recitation of Ted's story, Ruth mentally repositions herself within the narrative, imagining herself as the main character and the subject of the illustrations, ignoring her immediate environment. Representation becomes a means to absent the self from the present or the past, as in the example of Ted Cole. Textually, several pages in this chapter are devoted entirely to the children's story and the details of the corresponding drawings; the novel returns to the prostitute's room only after Ruth has completed telling the story. The reader is given the impression that several minutes have passed during Ruth's life, but without textual reference, the reader is also removed from the story. Stories within stories block and frame the character's and the reader's experiences. In this novel, experience is about the withdrawal from experience, even for the reader. Eduardo Cadava explains in his essay, "Irreversible Ruins" that, "the work of art allows itself to be experienced only as what withdraws from experience. Its experience—and if it were different it would not be an experience at all—is an experience of the impossibility of experience."¹²³ If Irving's novel is about loss and absence, it also embodies these concepts by recreating distance and removal within and through the text, so that the characters and the reader both experience a withdrawal from experience. In other words, A Widow for One Year insists on the

¹²³ "Irreversible Ruins" Ruins in Reverse: Time and Progress in Contemporary Art, 2 May 1999. CEPA Gallery. 4 Sept. 2003. <<http://www.cepagallery.com/cepa/exhibits/EXHIBIT.19981999/ruinsinreverse/RIR.04.essay.cadava.html>> (unpaginated).

spectatorship of all readers. Ted's and Ruth's escapes into literature are not exceptionally different from the reader's own involvement with the novel.

In Mimesis and Alterity, author Michael Taussig concludes that the task of the storyteller is to move his listener bodily into alterity.¹²⁴ The reader is repositioned into the imagined space of the story or literary work, becoming a spectator and possibly a subject within this creative act, and therefore an object of the representation. The mimetic process that Taussig alludes to seems almost like hypnosis of the listener/reader, which provokes a removal of the self from the self. The secondary or removed self is then projected into the events of the story, even into the space of a specific character. The success of this removal is wholly reliant upon the affective response of the listener/reader. In A Widow for One Year, the primary method for maintaining authority over the subject and autonomy of the self is to act as author/storyteller. Ruth intentionally escapes into literature by becoming her own audience, a feat which induces silence and calm, absenting her from her present anxieties and concealing her actual presence from the murderer. Movement into Taussig's alterity anesthetizes the listener/spectator, causing the active self to become the silent, immobile other of the representation. Ruth becomes a subject in her literary and artistic imagination, which separates her physical body from her thinking self. Marion is similarly transformed by her memories of the night that her sons died and her resulting grief. She becomes non-responsive, almost comatose, because she is so transfixed by her (re)visions of their deaths. Marion's absorption into subject-hood is absolute; unlike her daughter and husband, she has no authority over her dissipation into her memories. Pictures of Thomas and Timothy follow her into her literature as well, appearing in all four of her detective novels as photographs in an

¹²⁴ See "Spacing Out" in Michael Taussig's Mimesis and Alterity (New York: Routledge, 1993), particularly page 40.

unsolved case that haunts the protagonist. The ontology of Marion's grief is photographic; her own life stops with the deaths of her sons and she has little desire to escape "the eternity of her sorrow" (Irving 29). Grief stimulates her desire to follow her sons into death, which is temporarily achieved by her passage into alterity through memory. However, the dissolution of the self is not Marion's goal, rather it is the product of the sadness that consumes her; Marion would much prefer her sons alive with her, as evidenced by the photographic collection.

Ted Cole makes the deaths of his sons into a story, which removes his conscious, emotional self from the event. Ted withdraws from the reality of his sons' deaths through the literary process, but pulls his listener/reader directly into the narrative through the techniques of anticipation and precise description. Eddie notes that, in a Ted Cole story, "you always see what you're supposed to be afraid of; you see it coming, and coming. The problem is, you never see *everything* that's coming" (Irving 156). Author John Irving, like his character Ted Cole, utilizes brief references and foreshadowing to reveal the more pertinent and tragic episodes in this novel. For example, the deaths of Thomas and Timothy are mentioned on the first page; Marion's departure, Ted's suicide, and the death of Ruth's first husband are facts revealed to the reader long before their actual chronological insertion in the narrative. The reader, like the character of Eddie, anticipates each event but is shocked by the details. These early disclosures of select, important events lodge in the reader's mind, creating a kind of pre-memory of events yet to come.¹²⁵ Reading becomes the anticipation of knowledge and

¹²⁵ Author Marianne Hirsch's explanation of postmemory defines it as an inherited memory of a collective or cultural trauma that is relayed by a first generation to a second through narrative or imagistic detailing. Hirsch explains, "Postmemory most specifically describes the relationship of children of survivors of cultural or collective trauma to the experiences of their parents, experiences that they 'remember only as the narratives and images with which they grew up, but that are so powerful, so monumental, as to constitute memories in their own right'" ("Surviving Images" 9). Postmemory is accordingly memory removed from the actual experience. In A Widow for One Year, John Irving creates for the reader what I have referred to as a "pre-memory." Pre-

explanation from external and internal sources, with the reader oscillating between the novel and her own created memories of the novel. In this manner, Irving creates the illusion of the reader's personal memory and experience, and thereby positions the reader as subject within her own literary investigations. Irving as storyteller provokes the reader's insertion into the alterity of this story, similar to his characters' deliberate disappearance into their literary creations and repetitions. Reader and character alike become the subjects of representation, much like the inactive brothers in the photographs. If A Widow for One Year causes the spectatorship of its fictional and actual readers, it also produces their status as subjects.

Judith Butler reminds readers of The Psychic Life of Power that the formation of the subject begins with acquiescence to power (2).¹²⁶ Representation constitutes a power because it establishes a secondary discourse that necessarily asserts influence over perception, and hence formation, of the initial subject. Any movement into the alterity of representation, regardless of being voluntary or involuntary, infers that the subject will be represented by and therefore subject to the unique conditions and characteristics that accompany the secondary artwork.¹²⁷ In A Widow for One Year, each participant (author, character, and reader) involved in this work of literature ultimately becomes part of, meaning a subject of, this novel. Ted's projection of the self as third person into the story of his son's deaths, or the

memory differs from memory in that there is no direct experience with the actual event; the reader does not actively participate in the fictional events described in the story. Pre-memory, like Hirsch's post-memory, is formed through narrative exposure to specific (fictional) traumatic events in the novel without the actual experience of the event. Contrary to both memory and post-memory, pre-memory cannot develop into a narrative experience through sequencing of events and details: it is exposure to an event without explanation.

¹²⁶ Judith Butler, The Psychic Life of Power (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

¹²⁷ The source for this argument derives from Allan Sekula's essay, "On the Invention of Photographic Meaning" previously mentioned in the introduction to this chapter. Sekula speaks in terms of the photograph's inclusion in a secondary artwork, providing the example of critical writing on photography. However, Sekula's argument that the appropriating artwork influences perception of its subject through an imposition of additional discourse of meaning is not limited to photography or writing, but can be applied to any object incorporated by another.

reader turning to memory of the novel for explanation of events, are previously mentioned instances where the self becomes subject of the literary representation. The status of the subject within any representation, whether literary, photographic, or of another format, necessarily includes a loss of authority and agency. Additionally, in A Widow for One Year and the other works of literature included in this dissertation, there is something particularly photographic about the subject that is formed, specifically in how the subject is prone to become an object divorced from the original self and without agency. Roland Barthes contends that photographic portraiture as a voluntary act of representation and reproduction causes a schism in ownership. Barthes writes, “Ce trouble est au fond un trouble de propriété...La Photographie transformait le sujet en objet, et même, si l’on peut dire, en objet de musée” (La chambre claire 28-29).¹²⁸ A similar rift in authority and property occurs in these works of fiction about photography. This separation not only induces the subjection of the autonomous self, but also enacts a distancing of the active self from its identity as subject, turning that subject into a passive, static object.

The series of movements that trigger the formation of the object includes the withdrawal discussed by Eduardo Cadava, the movement to alterity outlined by Michael Taussig, and the innate distance of representation explained by Samuel Weber, in his work Mass Mediauras.¹²⁹ Weber determines that the paradox of representation is based on the subject being already separated from its representation. Therefore, representation only reinforces distance and removal from the original subject (88).¹³⁰ According to Weber, who

¹²⁸ “The disturbance is ultimately one of ownership... Photography transformed subject into object, and even, one might say, into a museum object” (Camera Lucida 13).

¹²⁹ Samuel Weber, Mass Mediauras (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996).

¹³⁰ Weber writes, “where, however, what is ‘brought closer’ is itself already a reproduction—and as such, separated from itself—the closer it comes, the more distant it is” (88).

takes his cue from Walter Benjamin's essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,"¹³¹ representation pretends proximity but defends distance, proximity and distance being predetermined states. Weber concludes this to be the consequence of any reproduction. Indeed, distance between the subject and its depiction is a widely acknowledged characteristic of all simulacra. However, this assessment is specifically associated with the ontology of the photographic image, likely because the reality inscribed in the photographic image makes this effect all the more acute. Weber's deductions can also be applied to spectatorship, wherein a converse relationship develops between the representation and its object through the photograph. To clarify, the spectator's increasing desire for the photograph, which is increasingly an object of replacement, typically evolves from the decreasing accessibility of the desired referent.

Distance (between the subject and its representation, or the subject, object and spectator) and stasis (of the subject) are primary characteristics of all photographs in this novel, and because photography provides the main subject, these inherent characteristics greatly influence the general production and reception of all modes of representation in A Widow for One Year. In this manner, photography emerges as a dominant discourse, a fact which sets A Widow for One Year and the other novels included in this dissertation apart from other literary works that include reference to photographs or photography. Photography both influences and is influenced by the secondary artwork that forms and frames it. As such, it affects the very ontology of these literary representations. This revelation exposes a subtle reversal of previous assumptions about photography's lack of authority, assumptions best

¹³¹ See Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" in Illuminations, trans. Harry Zohn (Schocken Books: New York, 1968).

represented by John Tagg's claim that "photography as such has no identity."¹³² It additionally underscores the complex position of photography in fiction.

III ii. The stasis of the object

Thomas and Timothy are doubly absented by death and photography in John Irving's novel, although photography is often described as impressing a kind of premature death upon its subject. The stasis imposed on an autonomously mobile being by the fixed state of the photograph steeps that subject in the appearance of death. It follows that Thomas and Timothy are not just doubly absent—they are doubly dead. According to Roland Barthes, the symbolic death of the photographic subject is also communicated to its spectator, who sees his own eventual death inscribed in the photographic image. Barthes writes, "il y a toujours en elle ce signe impérieux de ma mort future" (*La chambre claire* 151)¹³³. What is of interest to this study is not simply how absence and loss are played out across the photographic image, but rather how the distance inscribed in the pictures of the dead brothers is replicated by the text and transmitted to both the characters and the reader, provoking similar sensations of loss and absence, which are unique in their photographic qualities. The hybridity inherent to Irving's novel allows for easy association between image and text, inducing the transfer of photographic attributes, such as absence or the state of being the object of a representation, to the text, characters, plot, and eventually the reader. This process is quite similar to the absenting and loss of identity explored in the previous section on Penelope Lively's novel. In

¹³² See John Tagg's essay, "Evidence, Truth and Order," particularly page 259.

¹³³ "Each photograph always contains this imperious sign of my future death" (*Camera Lucida* 97).

both novels, certain photographs transfer to the spectator several qualities unique to the photographic representation, such as a death-like stillness, a fixed focus on the past, and a detachment between the referent and its representation, which equates to a divorce between pre- and post-image identities for the spectator. In The Photograph, shock caused by the appearance of an old snapshot transfixes the spectator, effecting a symbolic death of their pre-image mindset. Penelope Lively arguably limits her explorations to the influence of photography over her character-spectator, contrary to John Irving, whose reader is encouraged to act as spectator as well as object within the representation. Indeed, Lively's primary consideration is the impact of secrets, with photography as the chosen medium for their revelation. Whereas Lively's characters experience a temporary crisis of memory and identity, Irving's novel focuses on the enduring state of loss and the extent of its communicability, using photographs of two dead brothers as the tangible starting point.

Context is key to understanding the disruptive impact of photographs in Lively's and Irving's novels, just as it is imperative to the establishment of meaning in Allende's Retrato en Sepia.¹³⁴ There is nothing inherently shocking about the pictures of Kath or of Thomas and Timothy, but these images are framed by the disturbing knowledge of their premature deaths. In A Widow for One Year, this particular context regularly accompanies the descriptions of the photographs, but it is especially embodied by the tragic figure of the mother. Marion Cole admits at the end of the novel that she left her family and her lover because, as she states, "grief *is* contagious" (528). Marion acts as omnipresent contextualization, a constant reminder of the absence that defines the photographs, characters, and events of this story.

¹³⁴ It is worth noting here that the denial or removal of context can prompt equally disturbing results. This idea will be explored in the following section on Shérazade by Leila Sebbar, and particularly in the third chapter of this dissertation.

Marion assumes the role of Walter Benjamin's caption, which situates the photograph within a specific context and removes it from the random state of "coincidence."¹³⁵ In this manner, character acts as text, creating another layer to this novel's complex palimpsestic communication of loss. Roland Barthes notes that photography can never transform grief into mourning because it is without movement, without future: "immobile, la Photographie reflue de la présentation à la rétention" (*La chambre claire* 140).¹³⁶ Marion parallels the photograph's inability to incorporate progression. She is, as Barthes describes the photograph, an anti-Cassandra, with eyes fixed on the past.¹³⁷ If Marion's function within the novel can be understood as mimicking a textual component, then her presence most closely resembles the explanatory passage devoid of action and filled with visual description formed from memory. In this manner, Marion is emblematic of the verbal, fictional photographs that form the foundation of this novel, but she clearly represents caption *and* photograph, text *and* image. Marion is not temporarily moved into alterity and object-hood, like her husband and daughter. Rather, the primary difference between Marion and her family is her extreme dependence on the representational abilities of her sons' photographs. Marion permanently becomes like an object, functions as an object. She disseminates the symptoms of this state of being an object to anyone who has immediate contact with her or her photographic collection. The state of the object is therefore understood as a frightening affliction of disease, grief, and symbolic or actual death.¹³⁸

¹³⁵ Walter Benjamin, "A Small History of Photography," *One-Way Street* (New York: Verso, 1997) 240-257.

¹³⁶ "Motionless, the Photograph flows back from presentation to retention" (*Camera Lucida* 90).

¹³⁷ Cf. *La chambre claire* 135; *Camera Lucida* 87.

¹³⁸ Colin McCabe succinctly summarizes this process according to Roland Barthes' perception of photography in his article "Barthes and Bazin: The Ontology of the Image" (*Writing the Image after Roland Barthes* ed. Jean-Michel Rabaté [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997]: 71-76). McCabe states, "For Barthes, the

Marion arranged the hundreds of photographs of her sons by theme rather than chronology, thwarting linear progression and denying the moment of their deaths. Photographs provide access to and control over a reality that no longer exists. The character of Marion corresponds to Barthes' anti-Cassandra, but her acts are those of an anti-Pygmalion. Marion's new goal is restoration of her progeny rather than procreation, and she therefore becomes both author and artist; motherhood becomes an act of construction and preservation rather than (pro)creation. Marion's creative impulse is limited; like a photograph, she can only reproduce what had actually existed. Her intense focus on the past renders her impotent as a present mother to Ruth. The precise arrangement of the boys' pictures preserves them forever in a labyrinthine construction, which also impedes any progression to mourning. Absence and loss are both the cause and the effect of this denial of temporality, and desire renders these images anti-funereal, insisting on the active lives of the boys. Characters are submerged within a past that is reconstructed through a photographic rhizome, which forms a kind of no-man's-land filled with signposts devoid of direction and chronology. Characters become flâneurs whose current passage within this bizarre photographic topography is marked by disassociation with the self and with time. Past becomes present and the present is ignored, as in the example of Marion's daughter Ruth, of whom there are no exhibited pictures. Photographic creations, especially when displayed, can establish identity of the self and others, as well as the relationships between the objects and people photographed, and their relationships with the people who display their representations. Marion's artistic creation is forged from a desire to reconnect with her past

realism of the photograph mummifies the subject, who is thus removed of the contingencies of action before and after the moment of the photograph" (76). In Irving's novel, and for Barthes, this mummification is not limited to the subject of the photograph. Rather, the very reality that prompts this process also catalyses a similar reaction within the spectator.

identity as a mother of two sons, a desire so extreme that she refuses the present opportunity to mother Ruth. Photographs allow the present to be exchanged for the past; they can act as camouflage or a screen, blinding the spectator to the present reality by cloaking it with the past. Present and past are not merely exchanged through these collections; the collector ontologically manipulates them so that the present takes on characteristics usually associated with the past, such as inaccessibility and obscurity.

Photographer and art critic Wright Morris surmises that photographs reveal, “fissures in time’s narrative flow,” providing a “new, subjective time that has duration but not direction, that expands and contracts but does not evolve” (11).¹³⁹ Photographic collections like Marion’s create a peculiar hybridity between past and present that establishes an enduring temporal distortion due to its prominent visual placement and permanent accessibility. Marion’s arrangement of her sons’ pictures denies the specificity of the photograph and presents the boys as an amalgamation of existence and events; their deaths are never represented visually or through voluntary memory. There is no longer anything individual about their identities; their deaths have united Thomas and Timothy in a curious twinned existence. The brothers are simultaneously every age but never aging, and always together. Representation can prompt the dissolution of the individual, whether it is the subject or its audience. Photographs of Thomas and Timothy and their thematic organization reinforce an extreme subjectivity of memory, or what W.J.T. Mitchell refers to as “negativity of memory,” meaning the necessary forgetting of selective details while remembering (201).¹⁴⁰ Marion defies temporal recognition out of a survivalist impulse. She limits her

¹³⁹ Wright Morris, *Time Pieces: Photographs, Writing, and Memory* (New York: Aperture, 1989). See specifically the essay, “The Camera Eye,” on photography’s ability to alter perception of time and reality as defined by chronological perception.

perception of past in order to deny her sons' absence from her present and future, therefore preserving their lives and her role of being their mother. Photographs provide a backwards glance, a foray into memory, but which can be precisely limited to the confines of each individual picture—the signpost without direction. Photographs are reminders of what was lost, but extreme association with these images blocks recognition of anything external to the frame of that loss. The photographs of the boys in A Widow for One Year never stimulate a general act of remembering; rather a brief, oft-repeated verbal account accompanies each photograph. This precise combination of an immutable descriptive narrative with the photograph frames and blocks memory to a limited, non-threatening moment removed from chronological progression. The Cole family is thus doubly stagnated by the effects of the descriptive text that accompanies each photograph, which inhibits temporal progression, and the influence of memory, which can act as a means for governing subjective and objective perception of time. Father and daughter escape this stasis imposed by the pictures only when the visual aids and their keeper abandon the home. The novel also progresses after Marion and the pictures are absented, jumping ahead to the second section dated thirty-two years later.

IV. The Ekphrastic Endeavor

Photography may not be the constant, principal subject in A Widow for One Year, as it was in Retrato en Sepia and The Photograph. Indeed, only brief mention is made of photography after the first section of Irving's novel. Later photographs of Ruth are described

¹⁴⁰ See W.J.T. Mitchell's insightful chapter "Narrative, Memory, and Slavery" in Picture Theory (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994). Mitchell surmises that certain details reconstruct memory too efficiently, bring it too close to the narrator and threaten him/her with the renewed trauma of the event. Avoidance of specific details delimits the memory of trauma within a specific frame of reference, much like the character Ted Cole's voluntary slip into third-person narration when reciting Thomas' and Timothy's deaths.

as failed images in which she stands stiffly, eyeing the camera with suspicion, creating a distinction between photography of the living and that of the dead. However, A Widow for One Year is initiated in much the same manner as Ruth Cole's writing career, with photographs and their absence as inspiration for the literary creative process. Death and photography are central subjects in this novel and the two main reasons why Ruth has become a writer:

That her parents had expected her to be a third son was not the reason Ruth Cole became a writer; a more likely source of her imagination was that she grew up in a house where the photographs of her dead brothers were a stronger presence than any "presence" she detected in either her mother or her father (...) And, failing to recall the actual pictures of her perished brothers to her satisfaction, Ruth began to invent all the captured moments in their short lives, which she had missed. That Thomas and Timothy were killed before she was born was another part of the reason Ruth Cole became a writer; from her earliest memory, she was forced to imagine them. (Irving 5-6)

In this passage, Irving reveals the author's dependence on imagination, visual aids, and absence. Ruth's knowledge and familiarity with her brothers are based on her imagination, which is stimulated by photographic and verbal reproductions created from absence. The pictures become synonymous with the brothers, and are endowed with the ability to embody and replace their absent bodies only after Thomas and Timothy have died. These photographs are enlarged, expensively framed, and mounted on every wall in the Cole's home after their deaths; previously the bulk of these precious negatives had lain undeveloped, discarded, stuffed away in drawers and were scratched from mishandling. Marion decides that she will leave her daughter with Ted upon her departure, but "would take her boys," meaning all the photographs and negatives (29). The reproduction typically replaces an absent subject, particularly in this novel. The value of the reproduction is wholly reliant upon the degree and permanence of the absence of the referent and the spectator's desire for replacement.

Photographs provide visual and physical confirmation of the absent subject. For Marion, photographs are all that remain of her boys. However, for her daughter Ruth, Thomas and Timothy were always absent, always and only represented by the photographs, which Marion eventually takes from her. It is perhaps more accurate to state that *absence* and photography define Ruth's career, her youth, most of her adult existence, and thus define this novel. The character of Ruth is entirely devoted to the ekphrastic endeavor, to re-imagining through literary and verbal reproduction absent objects, such as the brothers and their pictures. Photography and death are ideal ways to insist on a present absence. Death, in particular, legitimizes the desire for a specific presence and the valorization of its replacement.

The verbal and literary process is intrinsically linked to the visual in A Widow for One Year. The author is keenly aware of this liaison and clearly inscribes it into the narrative. Pictures of Thomas and Timothy "were the principal stories in Ruth's life" explains Irving (139). "The pictures *were* the stories, and vice versa. To alter the photographs, as Eddie had, was as unthinkable as changing the past" (66). The novel is self-defined as "Ruth's story," therefore the reader understands that the pictures provide its general foundation as well, so that photographs are presumed to be the stimulus for Ruth's and ultimately John Irving's authorship. These photographs of Thomas and Timothy fuse the visual and the verbal (being textual constructions accompanied by verbal descriptions) and present complex linguistic tableaux that become as memorable to the reader as they are to the characters. This novel exemplifies several techniques for establishing the visual presence of an object through extended ekphrastic representation in a fictional novel. Recurring insertion of general description for several key objects is one of the more frequent manifestations of the ekphrastic process in a novel. Such repeated description prompts the reader to imagine the

verbal narrative as the intended visual object, particularly because each additional description enhances the object through further detail. Photographs of people in fiction often reveal the personality of the sitter, therefore any information acquired from the novel about the subject often supplements the photograph. The inverse is equally true in that knowledge gleaned from pictures can be applied to situations external to the photographs. When photography is subjected to an ekphrastic approach, both the actual photograph and its referent are imagined in the mind's eye of the reader and become more realistic with each textual reappearance, regardless of whether the same image is mentioned. We therefore perceive a dual function in the ekphrastic text about photography: both the object and its subject are realized through the description of a single picture. John Irving briefly references several dozen of the hundreds of existent photographs of Thomas and Timothy. However, less than ten images are individually portrayed with extensive detail. When Eddie looks at the numerous pictures of the brothers in an old high school yearbook, the author focuses on communicating the quantity of the images rather than scrutiny of a single photograph. While none of the descriptions mentioned in this particular passage about the yearbook would qualify as an ekphrastic text, they do add to the novel's larger ekphrastic endeavor. These brief references testify to the brother's personalities and create a subtext for the longer, descriptive passages about recurring photographs. In this manner, the novel's ekphrastic thrust, through its focus on the referent, helps establish the authentic photograph.

The author of a fictional novel creates an ekphrastic text though the traditional extensive detailing of a particular object, similar to the techniques employed in ekphrastic poetry. However, the novel's length allows for the subtle manifestation of subtext that will complement the ekphrastic passage and actually decrease the author's dependence on

prolonged descriptive narrative to create an ekphrastic effect. An author might legitimize recurring references to certain objects by developing their importance to characters. Individual characters will form a unique relationship with a specific object, causing that object to appear exceptional among other, similar items and necessitating repetitive explanation of that object's particular attributes. The establishment of symbolic meaning highlights the object's importance within the text. The author may clarify a character's attachment to an object through internal monologue or meticulous detailing of interaction between character and object. In A Widow for One Year, a photograph of Marion with her sons becomes one of the few images extensively referenced. The photograph shows a radiantly happy Marion sitting in a hotel room bed with her sons' bare feet protruding from under opposite sides of the duvet. This photograph had been hung in the guest room, where Eddie stays that first summer, and quickly becomes a target for his masturbatory reveries. Eddie tapes pieces of paper over Thomas' and Timothy's feet to heighten his visual fantasy with Marion—a fantasy that will quickly come true. However, one night four-year-old Ruth spots the paper taped to the picture and is startled by its transformation. She will repeatedly ask Eddie about the disappearance of her brother's feet that summer, and even mention it again to Eddie when they meet thirty-two years later. Eddie and Ruth both obsess over this picture. Eddie fetishizes the image and then feels guilty for having frightened Ruth. This photograph is also the only image of Marion that Ruth will ever know; at the time of Marion's departure, the picture is being re-matted at the frame shop. Ruth accidentally breaks the frame and cuts her finger on the glass; the perfectly horizontal scar on her right index finger will eventually identify her prints to the Dutch detective years later. Photography defines the fetishized object in this novel because these objects are photographs, but also

because the detailed description that accompanies such objects is frequently aligned with photographic vision.¹⁴¹ Photography becomes both the object and the mode of description, uniting the visual and the verbal through fiction.

Effusive references to photographs provide only one layer to the visual strata in A Widow for One Year. Irving's writing insists on the visual by requiring spectatorship in order for both his characters and his reader to experience the full effect of the story. The account of Ruth's mental escape into A Sound Like Someone Trying Not to Make a Sound focuses as intently on describing the illustrations as representing verbatim her father's published work, as if Ruth envisions the book as a tangible object before her. Ruth's absorption into the children's story is uniformly reliant on the verbal and visual components to complete her experience with alterity. Equally so, when Ted Cole recounts the story of his sons' deaths, he insists that Eddie "see" the events in order to understand their profound impact on the Cole family. Precise detail and description enables the listener to become spectator. Ted's initial omission of the type of shoes worn by Timothy prevents Eddie's visual reconstruction of the accident and from experiencing the full horror of their deaths. Irving writes, "it was because he didn't know what kind of shoe it was that Eddie fell asleep" (161). However, the following morning, Eddie is literally paralyzed by Ted's revelation of the high-top sneaker. W.J.T. Mitchell explains that the ekphrastic text forges language into a distinctly visual mode that mimics the characteristics that define the visual, "not just vision, but stasis, shape, closure, and silent presence" (Picture Theory 154). Irving's novel additionally infuses the characters with spatial stillness precisely when they imagine the visual object as existent before them. In other words, stasis is experienced when the reader/listener becomes a spectator, for example,

¹⁴¹ Wright Morris, 13-14.

when Eddie imagines the shoe on Timothy's severed leg. A Widow for One Year can be considered a visual novel because of its reliance on visual objects like photographs, but particularly through an ekphrastic mode of writing that transcends description to attribute visual characteristics to text and textual components. Physical stasis is also one of the consequences of alterity, which derives from an extreme association with text or image.

W.J.T. Mitchell defines the general topic of ekphrasis as "the verbal representation of a visual representation" (Picture Theory 152). According to Emmanuel Hermange, ekphrasis and hypotyposis present a kind of double mimesis, or a representation of a representation.¹⁴² Verbal descriptions of photographs are doubly removed from their original objects, whose absence is twice required for the effectiveness of either representation, whether verbal or visual. In terms of the ekphrastic representation of photography, the presence of either the photograph-as-object or the photographic referent is apt to cause the failure of the ekphrastic process, just as the presence of the photographic referent redirects the focus of the spectator away from the photograph. Ekphrastic description, like photography, relies on the absence of the subject. Ekphrastic description of a photograph circumvents the actual object because photography generally leads the spectator back to the subject, rather than the object. One of the problems with photography is that one rarely considers a photograph as a unique object, especially when it depicts a person. Roland Barthes surmises that it is impossible to speak of photography in a general sense because one always refers back to an individual picture and eventually to its referent: "la Photographie... ne peut sortir de ce pur langage déictique. C'est pourquoi, autant qu'il est licite de parler d'une photo, autant il me paraissait improbable de

¹⁴² Emmanuel Hermange, "Aspects and uses of ekphrasis in relation to photograph, 1816-1860" Journal of European Studies 30 (2000): 5-18. The term "hypotosis" derives from Greek *hypotypoein*, meaning "to sketch." Hypotosis commonly refers to a graphic or realistic description that recreates the image described for the reader or listener, similar to ekphrasis. See <http://rhetoric.byu.edu/Figures/H/hypotyposis.htm> (date accessed 10 October 2007) for a detailed definition.

parler de *la Photographie*” (*La chambre claire* 16).¹⁴³ A photograph that is indistinguishable from its referent presupposes the absence of that referent in addition to the referent’s authority over the photographic representation. It must also be noted that, while a photograph may often be inevitably identified through its subject, the subject’s identity is rarely bound as tightly to the representation. The possible exception to this is when the subject no longer exists, as in the case of the Cole brothers or the character of Kath in *The Photograph*. In these novels in particular, the presence of the dead characters exists only through photography (and memory), thus identity is restricted to the photographic image. The value of the photograph, like that of the ekphrastic text, is dependent on its representational abilities and its potential to stand in for its subject.

In photography, unlike many mediums of art, arguably only a minority of photographs is considered as a discrete object separate from its referent. Wright Morris distinguishes between the picture and the image in his essay, “Photographs, Images, and Words.”¹⁴⁴ Morris suggests that the “photo-image claims, with other human-made artifacts, a self-sufficient uniqueness. Rather than a likeness, it has become a thing in itself” (57). Time is the leading component in the development of the photo-image for Morris, which suggests the photograph must be detached from the chronological moorings that secure the representation to its subject. In other words, for the picture to become “a thing in itself,” the referent must be enduringly absent. Taking Morris’ claim one step further, the photograph’s ability to become *the* thing in itself, to embody its subject completely, depends on the following factors: its

¹⁴³ “The Photograph ... cannot escape this pure deictic language. That is why, insofar as it is licit to speak of a photograph, it seemed to be just as improbably to speak of *the* Photograph” (*Camera Lucida* 5).

¹⁴⁴ Wright Morris, “Photographs, Images, and Words,” *Time Pieces: Photographs, Writing, and Memory* (New York: Aperture, 1989) 53-65.

representational ability, the spectator's desire for replacement, and the total absence of its referent. Despite Morris's differentiation between the photographic likeness and the image, it becomes clear that the value of both is founded upon the unavailability of the subject. It is in this realization of necessary exclusion of the original subject that we locate a clear resemblance between photography and ekphrasis.

Ekphrasis, like photography, is a mode of representation that presumes the absence of the subject depicted. In Picture Theory, W.J.T. Mitchell suggests that the object of ekphrastic description "can never be present, but must be conjured up as a potent absence or a fictive, figural present" in order to preserve the genre-based integrity of the ekphrastic text (158).¹⁴⁵ Mitchell devotes an entire chapter to the theoretical implications of ekphrasis and conceives of three phases of realization that accompany the ekphrastic act, which he terms ekphrastic indifference, hope, and fear. According to Mitchell, ekphrastic indifference derives from the implausibility of the ekphrastic endeavor, specifically in regards to media differentiation, meaning that words and images have fundamentally different properties and therefore evoke objects in different manners. The second phase of ekphrastic hope involves overcoming ekphrastic indifference with a realization that language is indeed capable of inspiring the imaginative visual reconstruction of an absent object. Mitchell suggests that this phase of ekphrasis is accompanied by a secondary awareness of the generality of ekphrastic possibility, "when it ceases to be a special or exceptional moment in visual or oral representation and begins to seem paradigmatic of a fundamental tendency in all linguistic expression" (153). Language is aesthetically stilled, imitating the spatial quiet of a visual representation. The distinctions between the visual and verbal are noted no longer, media-

¹⁴⁵ See Chapter 5, "Ekphrasis and the Other," in Picture Theory (151-181).

defined otherness is surmounted, and the “imagetext” is created in a moment of free exchange between the arts (154, 155). Mitchell’s term “imagetext” suggests the formation of a new, hybrid form that uniquely combines properties of both the image and the text.¹⁴⁶ However, during the transition from Mitchell’s second phase to the third, revelation in the stillness of the imagetext rapidly dissolves into a growing discomfort with purposeful blurring of media differentiation that is the very goal of ekphrasis. Ekphrastic fear arises from anxieties concerning linguistic mutation into muteness, lack of power and, in short, an impotence caused by the dangerous illusion of the ekphrastic text “that threatens to fixate the poet and the listener” (156). According to Mitchell, the entire ekphrastic process not only stimulates the disappearance of the object but also threatens the eventual disappearance of both the author and the reader through a potential transmission of the stasis and muteness of that defines the described object. “If ekphrastic hope involves... [a] free exchange and transference between visual and verbal art,” states Mitchell, “ekphrastic fear perceives this reciprocity as a dangerous promiscuity and tries to regulate the borders with firm distinctions between the senses, modes of representation, and the objects proper to each” (155). In other words, ekphrasis disrupts the boundaries between text and image and ekphrastic fear therefore determines that the boundaries between textual subject and author or reader may also be transgressed.

W.J.T. Mitchell’s discussion of ekphrastic fear indicates that the dedication of a verbal text to the recreation of a visual image can have serious social and political implications

¹⁴⁶ This composite structure seems to have the same definition problems as Wright Morris’s “image” as “a thing in itself.” Both terms cannot be identified but through their core elements: text or image. The explanatory process highlights an interesting difficulty: the use of factual concepts to describe what is essentially a subjective, imaginary concept demythologizes and thus debunks the very phenomenon it seeks to explain. Elucidation of ekphrastic hope or of Morris’s image tends to push the process back to Mitchell’s first phrase of indifference, which denies the probability of such occurrences.

because identification of the other is typically produced in direct opposition to the establishment of the speaking and seeing self (Picture Theory 161-162). The other is identified as non-verbal, a passive object which is seen by a dominant, active self—much like the Cole brothers in John Irving’s novel. It is essential to acknowledge the many characteristics that may prompt identification with otherness because, as Mitchell advises, the otherness attributed to the imagetext relationship reverberates beyond the phenomenological model (162). Returning to the text of A Widow for One Year, we understand that death, photography, and memory are possible harbingers of otherness, in part due to their common elements of absence and passivity. The characters of Thomas and Timothy are as inactive and powerless in death as when they are *unsuccessfully* reincarnated through photography or memory. Death obviously renders the brothers incapable of self-representation; the parents prolong their sons’ presence largely through the medium of photography. Pictures are identified to family and friends, the surrounding narratives repeated with identical dialogue. Thomas and Timothy have no true voice in these representations, but become the mute, passive other. These two subjects become passive objects depicted on photographic paper, despite their lively natures visible in the pictures. These photographs, regardless of what they depict, act uniquely as descriptive forces within the text, providing background information and evidence of death (especially the Polaroid pictures of the prostitutes). In this manner, the descriptive narrative about pictures typically mimics the stasis of both the photograph and death, stopping temporal progression of the narrative. The photographic evidence of the brothers’ former, full lives conversely emphasizes the unnatural state of their current stasis. Because the boys had been so alive during their short lives, they appear even deader now; their otherness is as excessive as their selfhood had been. Such extreme otherness also

threatens those who approach it too closely. Remembering the deaths of her sons transfixes Marion into a silent, still object identical to her sons: a kind of living dead woman. In short, Marion becomes the “Total-Image” that Roland Barthes describes as the result of being photographed in La chambre claire: “lorsque je me découvre sur le produit de cette opération, ce que je vois, c’est que je suis devenu Tout-Image, c’est-à-dire la Mort en personne” (31).¹⁴⁷

Roland Barthes is certainly not the only author to examine photography through the lens of death, and his vision should not be taken in isolation. However, his thorough consideration of the multifarious connections between these two subjects has undoubtedly influenced contemporary thinking on photography. Christian Metz succinctly explains that the parallels developed between photography and death stem from the shared characteristics of immobility and silence, which constitute photographic authority and act as the main symbols of death (“Photography and Fetish” 141). Susan Sontag suggests that photographs reveal the “mortality, vulnerability (and) mutability” of a person or thing (On Photography 15). “Precisely by slicing out this moment and freezing it,” writes Sontag, “all photographs testify to time’s relentless melt” (*ibid.*). The conclusions drawn by these three authors are strikingly similar: Barthes, Metz, and Sontag each situate death in the disturbing immobility of the photographic subject. Roland Barthes, however, does not limit perception of death to the photographed subject. Rather, Barthes locates at least three sites of death within the photographic process in La chambre claire. Barthes initially purposes, like Metz and Sontag, that the abnormal stillness imposed by the photograph on a self-determined, mobile subject provides a visionary glimpse of that subject’s immanent death. Barthes thus establishes equivalency between the stasis or paralysis of the photographic subject and its death. He also

¹⁴⁷ “when I discover myself in the product of this operation, what I see is that I have become Total-Image, which is to say, Death in person” (Camera Lucida 14).

determines that extreme identification with the photographed subject may potentially transfer perception of death to the spectator, allowing the photograph to symbolize the spectator's own mortality.¹⁴⁸ Barthes proposes a third conduction of death even before the photograph is taken: "la Photographie, c'est l'avènement de moi-même comme autre: une dissociation retorse de la conscience d'identité" (La chambre claire 28).¹⁴⁹ Barthes surmises that the death implied in the photographic portraiture is not necessarily imposed by the photographer (or the spectator), rather it is the self-inflicted result of posturing for the camera, "la nappe mortifère de la Pose" (La chambre claire 32).¹⁵⁰ In this moment, the subject becomes his own spectator and the specter of his future existence: the object of his own photograph and spectatorship. Or, in the terms established by Mitchell's discussion of ekphrasis, photography turns the subject and the spectator into the Other. Clearly, the identification and isolation of otherness in photography is a convoluted endeavor, particularly because it is not limited to the subject, spectator, or photographer.

Photography becomes a venue for the formation and habitation of multiple manifestations of otherness. It is in the identification of the other that we locate a convergence between Barthes' discussion on photography and W.J.T. Mitchell's elucidation of ekphrasis. The exploration of this convergence provides key insight into the general function of the photograph in fiction, and specifically into the communication of loss and absence through photography and ekphrasis in Irving's novel. Roland Barthes' theories on photography suggest that the semblance of death perceived in the photograph is an inherent

¹⁴⁸ See chapter 29 for Roland Barthes' discussion of the spectator's mortality (La chambre claire 111-113; Camera Lucida 71-73).

¹⁴⁹ "the Photograph is the advent of myself as other: a cunning disassociation of consciousness from identity" (Camera Lucida 12).

¹⁵⁰ "the mortiferous layer of the Pose" (Camera Lucida 15).

characteristic of the photographic experience, and that it is transferable to both the photographed subject, before and after the image is completed, and to the spectator. As previously stated, this identification with death is prompted by the immobility and silence imposed by the photograph. However, these characteristics of non-verbal passivity are precisely how Mitchell identifies the ekphrastic other, and are characteristics that can likewise be transferred to the subject, reader/listener, and author. Mitchell's discussion of ekphrastic fear illuminates an alternative explanation for the potential transference: the paralysis and death associated with ekphrasis and photography instead derives from an over-identification with an object external to the self, such as the text or image. The repositioning of identity collapses distinctions between the self and the other, leading to fears of impotence, or death-like stasis, which have been determined to define the other in opposition to the self. Barthes' linking of photography to death is founded in similar anxieties concerning the other, for what could be more other than the dead? The sudden awareness of death and impotence Barthes experiences when studying his mother's photograph is simultaneously a visionary glimpse of otherness projected onto the self, or "l'avènement de moi-même comme autre" (La chambre claire 28).¹⁵¹

Contemporary thinking on photography is marked by the presumption that a Barthesian photographic death is unique to the photographic act. Such deductions contribute to the photograph's evolution from Talbot's idealized "pencil of nature" to Sontag's demonized "act of aggression."¹⁵² At its worst, the photograph is now understood as an

¹⁵¹ "the Photograph is the advent of myself as other" (Camera Lucida 12). It also worth noting that the only response Barthes suggests for his lack of procreation, or the fact that his "particularity would never again universalize itself" is his writing (La chambre claire 113; Camera Lucida 72).

¹⁵² This citation is my paraphrase of Sontag's statement that "there is an aggression implicit in every use of the camera" (On Photography 7).

eternally reproducible symbol whose eradication of its original sign renders it void of reference and meaning. However, the exclusivity of photographic death is undermined by the very terms and references employed for its key arguments: Baudrillard's revelations about simulacrum, Walter Benjamin's discussion of mechanical reproduction, and even Barthes' earlier works on semiotics. The recognition of death in the photograph cannot logically be isolated to photography or the photographed subject. Rather, the disturbance between the self-other differentiation signaled by the emergence of Barthes' "Total-Image" can be identified as the result of representational experiences other than photography, such as memory, associative reading, and ekphrasis. Mitchell's articulation of the ekphrastic endeavor especially illuminates the emergence of the other within the image-text relationship and provides a model for understanding similarities between photography and other forms of representation. By returning to Irving's text, we remember that the author had established the possibility for self-other confusion from the first pages through an extreme hybridity of textual components, which allowed for the movement into alterity and otherness. The photographic referent in John Irving's novel is unmistakably established as the other. However, photography is only one venue for the apparition of the other. Irving's novel reveals that otherness can derive from any form of representation that communicates absence and loss, and that such communication extends beyond the space of the text to involve the reader/spectator and the author.

V. Conclusion

Language allows the reader "to see the object described," but language is also influenced by the object of its description (Picture Theory 152, 154). A Widow for One Year

is a novel about photographs; as an inherent textual component, photography has a distinct authority over the production and reception of the visual within the text. In this manner, text and subject mirror each other. The unique ontology of the photographic image allows it to act as a model for fictional writing, particularly writing about the past, memory, absence, loss, or death. Photography insists on the reality and presence of its referent, but always within a past moment, making it an ideal channel for the insertion and explanation of the past in a fictional novel. The photograph's claim to the real endows it with an authoritative force that provides a basis for truth and history more directly than other forms of representation, even when it is a fictional (and verbal) picture in a fictional novel. However, the historical truth perceived in the photograph is inaccessible, isolated, and unalterable. The photograph is mute beyond its initial statement of fact unless the spectator takes up its claim as a justifiable cause. Without such reaction, the photograph can become an incapacitating labyrinth for its spectator, who becomes mired in nostalgia for an irretrievable past, such as the character of Marion who embodies this novel's main themes of absence and loss.

W.J.T. Mitchell's illumination of the three phases of ekphrastic fascination gestures at the possibilities for absence and loss that preoccupy this analysis of the photograph's role in John Irving's novel A Widow for One Year. Absence of the original subject and loss of authority over the other (text/object) and the self (reader/spectator) are, according to Mitchell, inescapable consequences of the ekphrastic act. This project has endeavored to reveal similar tendencies for photography in fiction. In Irving's novel, the text becomes a site for the other, but it is a particularly visual space of stillness and death. Photography, predominantly through its distinctive association with the deaths of Thomas and Timothy and the prostitutes, plays a fundamental role in the establishment and dissemination of an otherness defined by muteness,

stasis, and absence. The otherness of photographic representation is not limited to the characters, unlike the previous novels in this section. Photographs in A Widow for One Year serve as a cautionary element, a specific warning for the reader concerning the dangers of alterity, the possible consequences of over-identification with representation, and ultimately serve as a reminder of mortality.

Chapter 6: Leïla Sebbar: Unveiling the cultural dimensions of spectatorship

I. Introduction

Visual images figure predominantly in much of French-Algerian author Leïla Sebbar's literature. This study focuses on one novel, Shérazade, 17 ans, brune, frisée, les yeux verts (1982) (Sherazade, Missing: aged 17, dark curly hair, green eyes), and one short story, "La photo d'identité" (1996) ("The Identity Photo"), due to the similarities in character, location, and general reference to and use of visual representation.¹⁵³ More specifically, both of these works reference Marc Garanger's book of photographs, Femmes Algériennes 1960 (Algerian Women, 1960), which presents a compilation of images by Garanger while he was assigned by the French military with taking identity photographs of Algerians between 1960 and 1962 during the French occupation of Algeria.¹⁵⁴ These photographs profoundly affect the protagonists of Shérazade and "La photo d'identité," their reactions to this experience of spectatorship become pivotal moments in both stories, inspiring reconnection and comprehension of an elusive social history that nonetheless defines their existences. Iconology, specifically the representation of Algerian women, in these two works of fiction becomes a primary vehicle to explore the problems of representation and spectatorship in a

¹⁵³ Leïla Sebbar, Shérazade, 17 ans, brune, frisée, les yeux verts (Paris: Stock, 1982). Leïla Sebbar, Sherazade, Missing: aged 17, dark curly hair, green eyes, trans. Dorothy S. Blair (London: Quartet Books, 1991). Leïla Sebbar, "La photo d'identité" La Jeune Fille au balcon (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1996) 59-83. English translations of Shérazade will use the Dorothy S. Blair edition; English translations of "La photo d'identité" will be my own, as no English translation has been published to date.

¹⁵⁴ Marc Garanger, Femmes Algériennes 1960 (Paris: Contrejour 1982/1989).

contemporary Parisian setting where French-Algerian rapport is still affected by the memory and cultural amnesia surrounding Orientalist history. These photographs are more than fictional tokens of the real; they are analogous representations of specific events and therefore provide Sebbar with a logical and familiar method for inserting a real past into a contemporary literary landscape. The ramifications of past politics, represented by actual visual images, are contemplated within the fictional framework of Sebbar's stories, which both isolate and are isolated from contemporary cultural tensions. The meaning of these photographs becomes a fluctuating process of interpretation that is based as much on the social context imposed by photographer, subject, and spectator, as it is on the recognizable traces of culture and politics embedded in the image. As such, the authority of the photographic referent loses its strength and the spectator accumulates the power to define and interpret the image. Representation vacillates according to the social formation of the spectator, inspiring that spectator's convergence or divergence with the image, the photographed subject, and/or the photographer.

Photographs in these two works by Leïla Sebbar are made manifest through acts of translation (image into word) and interpretation (by the fictional spectator, fictional and actual photographer, and the actual author and reader). Sebbar includes images that are undeniably permeated with a specific political and cultural dimension that is at once unique to France and Algeria, such as the Garanger identity photographs or the odalisque paintings of Delacroix and Matisse, and yet speaks to many postcolonial situations in which the authority of previous hegemonic ideologies is reconsidered. Sebbar's work therefore prompts interrogation of the influence of cultural context over the spectator's determination of meaning from the visual image. In other words, the photograph no longer uniquely represents

the photographic referent as it did in previous chapters of this dissertation. Rather, the interpretive photograph situates that referent within a larger, public or private framework that is mitigated by social and political discourse. Sebbar challenges traditional positions of power by writing from the various perspectives of minority spectators who resemble or sympathize with the position of the photographed subject. In this manner, Sebbar nudges her reader slightly closer to experiencing personal testimony from the photographed subject. These ideologically loaded images serve as a distinctive arena for the intersection and interpretation of multiple gazes, both past and present, French and Algerian, Orientalist and postcolonial. Photography, which served as a tool for the propagation of Orientalist ideology and the inadvertent pawn of the colonial explorer, brings obvious and authoritative examples of this past into present experiences of spectatorship. The multifaceted ontology of photography allows it to become a specific site for the determination and reconsideration of the minoritized Other, as well as for the politics, both past and present, that establish and undermine such determinations. In the following section, I discuss how Sebbar uses photography to establish identity while concurrently questioning traditional self/other determinations—particularly the Orientalized Other—through a triangulation of gazes in which the position of the spectator strengthens, rather than threatens, that of the subject.

Leïla Sebbar's own cultural heritage has proven essential to interpreting the irrefutable political dimension of her literary work. Sebbar was born in Algeria, the daughter of a French mother and Algerian father. Her parents both worked as teachers; they lived in Algeria until the 1962 Independence, moving to France when Leïla was seventeen years old. Sebbar states that her writing embodies this dualistic and conflicting parentage: "I write about the violence of imposed silence, of exile, of division," states Sebbar, "I write about my

father's land—colonized, mistreated, savagely deported. I write this in my mother's language. It is how I can live as daughter of my father and of my mother. It is in France that I trace my Algerian routes” (sic).¹⁵⁵ This position of cultural displacement and experience of exile is echoed by many of her literary characters, whose familial ethnic heritage frequently diverges from their public cultural environment. Sebbar’s writing is said to “share the primary preoccupations of *Beur*”¹⁵⁶ literature, including race, sexuality, multiculturalism, nationality and immigration” (830).¹⁵⁷ Similar concerns reverberate throughout both Shérazade and “La photo d'identité,” particularly through the representation of two Algerian adolescents living in the Parisian suburbs, both of which voluntarily exile themselves from family and society.

Leïla Sebbar’s Shérazade, 17 ans, brune, frisée, les yeux verts is the first novel in a trilogy concerning a young Algerian woman living in France whose name and physical description give the title to this work of fiction. The two subsequent novels, Les Carnets de Shérazade (*Sherazade’s Notebooks*) and Le Fou de Shérazade (*Mad about Sherazade*), which were published in 1985 and 1991, are currently out of print, regardless of the popularity of this particular character and Sebbar’s writing, both in France and abroad.¹⁵⁸ The protagonist

¹⁵⁵ Sarah H. Wright, “Writer talks of being pulled by two languages in childhood home,” MIT Tech Talk. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, December 5, 2001. Date accessed: August 1, 2006, <<http://web.mit.edu/newsoffice/2001/sebbar-1205.html>>

¹⁵⁶ Mary B. Vogl provides a concise history of this term *Beur* that typically indicates a person of North African origin that was either born or grew up in France: “Most scholars give the etymology of this word as *verlan* (a kind of pig-Latin slang) for ‘Arab.’ Youth of North African descent began using this term to designate themselves in the 1980’s; the French media then took it over, and certain ‘Beurs’ rejected the term since they perceived that it had become pejorative.” Picturing the Maghreb: Literature, Photography and (Re)Presentation (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Little field Publishers, Inc., 2003), 189. The English edition of Sherazade provides a very similar glossary definition of *Beur* as a “person of North African origin (Algerian, Moroccan, Tunisian), usually second-generation immigrant, born or having grown up in France. This word is... pronounced with strongly rolled R and voiced B by North Africans” (unpaginated).

¹⁵⁷ Karen Eileras, “The Colonial Gaze: Photograph, Ownership, and Feminist Resistance,” MLN 118.4 (2003): 807-840.

¹⁵⁸ Leïla Sebbar, Les Carnets de Shérazade (Paris: Stock, 1986). Leïla Sebbar, Le Fou de Shérazade (Paris: Stock, 1991).

of the Shérazade trilogy emigrated from Algeria at a young age with her family to settle in a suburb of Paris. Shérazade's fluent French, spotty knowledge of Arabic, and familiarity with the city and culture of Paris testify to her French education and upbringing. Despite this, an ill-defined longing for her country of origin overwhelms her. Similar to many of Sebbar's characters, Shérazade suffers from a general cultural malaise, vacillating between her ethnic heritage and the adopted French language, culture, and place instituted by her family's immigration. Critic Donna Wilkerson-Barker determines that "Sebbar seeks to chronicle the condition of exile, nomadism, and pluricultural identity that is constitutive of contemporary experience in global capitalism" by her representation of "the urban landscape of through the eyes and experiences of a deterritorialized if not dislocated *Beur* youth."¹⁵⁹ Shérazade, as indicated by the title, is missing at the commencement of the novel, having abandoned her home to wander aimlessly throughout Paris, squatting in an abandoned apartment with a group of equally displaced and unfocused youths of various ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Shérazade ultimately participates in an armed robbery and burglary organized by the more militant of her squat-mates.

Shérazade's family launches an incompetent search for her: no one thinks to look in the municipal libraries that she frequents. Her father eventually files a police report, consisting of the ineffective written description that forms the novel's subtitle. Shérazade's status as "missing" extends beyond her family; she is an especially enigmatic character, as unknown to her friends as she is to her reader (and author), a characteristic that continues

¹⁵⁹ Donna Wilkerson-Barker, "Photographic Memories in Leïla Sebbar's Le Chinois vert d'Afrique," Research in African Literatures 34.2 (2003): 28. Wilkerson-Barker draws these conclusions from Le chinois vert d'Afrique, another novel by Leïla Sebbar whose protagonist is a pre-teen of mixed ethnicity living in France. Wilkerson-Barker's deductions, although in reference to another novel, provide a particularly apt analysis of the protagonists of Shérazade and "La photo d'identité."

throughout the trilogy. Shérazade is a voracious reader, frequenting libraries where she meets Julien Desrosiers, a student of film and aficionado of Arab culture and art who is initially drawn to her for her resemblance to certain Orientalist paintings. Shérazade forms a casual but meaningful relationship with Julien. Regardless of Shérazade's constant traveling, their relationship endures throughout all three novels and Shérazade believes that she loves him. The conclusion of Shérazade signals another departure for the protagonist, as she embarks on a journey to Algeria, hitching a ride with her Pierrot, a love-struck squat-mate. Pierrot dies after Shérazade dares him to jump the Loire River in his car, but the car, unbeknownst to Shérazade, is packed with explosives, ammunition, and firearms. Shérazade escapes without incident, to travel around France hitching a ride with a truck driver named Gilles during the second novel, Les Carnets de Shérazade. In the third novel, Le Fou de Shérazade, the protagonist travels around the Middle East and is kidnapped. A video recording of Shérazade as a blindfolded hostage is released to France, spurring Julien's search for her. Shérazade is eventually released, returning to France to star in a film written by Julien that coincidentally takes place in the housing development where her family lives.

"La photo d'identité" appears as the second story in a collection entitled, La jeune fille au balcon.¹⁶⁰ Published in 1996, this collection is described as "un livre pour comprendre... pour éviter les clichés, pour faire renaître une mémoire."¹⁶¹ La jeune fille au balcon exclusively includes characters, images, and events that oscillate between Western and Islamic cultures, specifically French and Algerian, with each story providing multiple

¹⁶⁰ Leïla Sebbar, La Jeune Fille au balcon (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1996).

¹⁶¹ "a book for understanding... for avoiding clichés, for reviving a memory" (author's translation). This citation is taken from the unpaginated introductory passage included on the book jacket. It is worth noting that the French word *cliché* locates its English equivalent in both *stereotype* and *photographic negative*.

examples of their enduring and unavoidable association. The protagonist of “La photo d'identité,” Yacine, is of Algerian descent, living in the Parisian suburbs. Yacine resembles Shérázade through his aimless discontent with the Parisian society that envelopes him, as well as his linguistic and cultural disconnect with family and ethnic heritage. His mother, for example, laments that he does not attend courses in Arabic and that he will never be permitted to write the verses of the Koran because he is left-handed. Yacine laughs at her traditions, avoiding his Arabic classes because he dislikes the professor. A chance encounter with a photograph advertising Marc Garanger’s Les Femmes Algériennes 1960 haunts Yacine; he is perplexed by the picture of a woman who looks like his mother and by these images of a war obviously unrelated to the footage from Yugoslavia he witnesses each evening on the television. As Yacine’s infatuation with the photograph grows, he frequents the bookshop to assure himself that the picture hasn’t disappeared, encountering an older Algerian man who is equally obsessed with the Garanger image. Yacine experiences a degree of reconnection with his cultural heritage through this strange acquaintance, becoming very attentive to and protective of this man, his actions, and story. This man explains to Yacine that the woman in the photograph is his mother, who lost her sanity after the Garanger took her photograph. The man symbolically avenges his mother by tearing the photograph from one of the copies of Garanger’s book, ripping it into small pieces and burning it in the heater.

These two literary works by Leïla Sebbar are strikingly similar to Isabel Allende’s Retrato en Sepia through their consideration of collective amnesia through lack of visual and verbal documentation, as well as through their focus on history revealed through images, specifically photography. In Allende’s and Sebbar’s work, a strict avoidance of ekphrastic description and minimal linguistic detail is combined with the myriad references to visual

media. In *Shérazade*, for example, Sebbar textually recreates the spectator's linguistic—rather than visual—experience with a work of art by visually and verbally reproducing the short, linear formation of the information plaque that supplies the artist's name and dates of the work. Both Allende and Sebbar employ visual reference as a literary prop; the character's encounter with the visual only bolsters the verbal medium rather than transmitting the visual experience to the reader. This lack of verbal description indicates an unwritten reliance on the reader's ability to interpret the visual connotation within a similar—but not necessarily identical—cultural code. Although this section on Leïla Sebbar includes some of the least traditionally ekphrastic texts of this dissertation, it is arguably the most reliant on ekphrastic techniques of recreation and, more importantly, the most politically conscious of the implied hierarchy of power that exists in the representative act. Sebbar's novel and short story encourage multiple interpretations through minimalist ekphrasis rather than dictating the author's intention for the visual images through detailed description and explanation of character reaction. In this manner, Sebbar's language imitates the visual object as being mute, immediate, and subjected to multiple, individual interpretations. It is evocative of Susan Sontag's assessment of the photograph as lacking narrative and yet being open to inexhaustible interpretation.¹⁶² One can argue, however, that the reader never transforms into spectator due to the dearth of descriptive text, which limits the opportunities to impose a seer/seen hierarchy. The textual silence that enshrouds the image provides opportunity for the image and its subject to hide from and defy the spectator's gaze.

Sebbar's reliance on the reader/spectator's interpretive prowess, although technically muting the image and its subject, ultimately denies the totalizing effect of the colonial

¹⁶² Sontag writes, "Photographs, which cannot themselves explain anything, are inexhaustible invitations to deduction, speculation, and fantasy" (*On Photography* 23).

discourse (a principle theme in her literary work) by exposing its lack of universality; these images evade any single interpretation. Mary B. Vogl, author of Picturing the Maghreb, muses, “Sebbar often emphasizes the ambivalent nature of a particular representation in order to underscore the idea that it is not the image itself that is positive or negative, but rather the way it is viewed and used. Her work exhorts us against passively accepting images or voyeuristically consuming them.”¹⁶³ Visual imagery, particularly Marc Garanger’s photographs, provides Sebbar with the opportunity to reassess and reframe the Orientalist gaze within a contemporary, postcolonial consciousness that is mindful of multiple interpretations, the inherent flaws of hegemonic discourse, and hierarchies based on culturally-determined stereotypes. Sebbar’s meditations on what and how the image is seen and interpreted correspond directly to her characters. This parallel construction allows for the photographed subject’s resistance to being seen, as well as for the spectator’s refusal to participate in stereotypical perceptions in ways that have not yet been explored by any of the literary works included in this dissertation. The visual therefore becomes a model for Sebbar’s characters, who challenge cultural stereotypes through passive and active acts of resistance. This novel and short story, which are purposely vague, also resist the reader’s attempt to impose a singular analysis defined by any one cultural or political discourse.

II. Neutrality and Identity: understanding the cultural implication of photography

Photography is a particularly volatile medium because of its potential representation of real people, places, and situations. Photography in fiction can be just as explosive, despite its referential fictionality. However, contextual identification typically resides uniquely with

¹⁶³ Mary B. Vogl, Picturing the Maghreb: Literature, Photography and (Re)Presentation (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003) 144.

the fictional spectator because the fictitious nature of the photograph precludes inclusion in the reader's visual repertoire. Shérazade and "La photo d'identité" are therefore unique among the literary works analyzed in this dissertation for their reference to known, actual photographs, (meaning photographs not created for the purposes of fiction), in particular images that are especially culturally and politically charged. Sebbar's production of the real, particularly in Shérazade, extends to other existing visual, verbal, and aural works of art, such as the odalisque paintings of French artist Henri Matisse, the literature of Algerian author Assia Djebar, and the music of Egyptian singer Oum Kalthoum. Sebbar additionally recreates the city of Paris during the late 20th century as the setting for both stories, representing specific buildings, radio stations, metro stops, and political references, such as the war in Yugoslavia. Such an incantation of the real allows for a thorough contemplation of external, contemporary influences over a recognizable historical and contemporary terrain, drawing the reader deeply into the literal and figural landscape of the literature. Leïla Sebbar's use of existing objects and places manifests a specific, preexisting cultural, political, and temporal situation with photographic precision.

Shérazade and "La photo d'identité" both evoke Orientalist and post-Orientalist visual imagery in order to investigate different ways of seeing the same object or situation, and to revive contemplation of past and present French-Algerian relations. In these two stories, Sebbar actively probes the spectator's role in the perception and interpretation of the image, the impact of history and society on such acts of interpretation, and the influence of the object of the gaze over spectatorship. Sebbar's imagistic recycling establishes two spectators: the fictional spectator as character and the reader-spectator, who may or may not be familiar with the referenced visual media. Cultural, political, and historical awareness can therefore

present a greater influence over the determination of meaning than the author's (or photographer's, or artist's) intent, so that the production of meaning becomes an act of interpreting the surfeit of external and internal referentiality. Sebbar's employment of actual Orientalist images allows for cultural allusion that is both external and internal to the novel, affecting both the reader-as-spectator and the fictional spectator. Cultural and ethnic similarities or differences invariably alter the seer/seen dichotomy because the differentiation between spectator and subject, self and other becomes an issue of cultural and political formation rather than an intrinsic message within the image. Although Shérazade and "La photo d'identité" might appear to suggest initial neutrality to the image, the repeated use of Garranger's photographic collections, especially when assessed by minority spectators, underscores the improbability of situating any representation in a pre-culture position.

Author and critic Mary B. Vogl insists, as previously mentioned, on the "ambivalent nature" of Sebbar's presentation of photography and painting (Picturing the Maghreb 144). Vogl additionally determines that "in much of Sebbar's writing, visual images...offer affirmative possibilities" because they raise "the viewer's consciousness with regard to culture and history, which in turn helps them better understand their own history" (*ibid.*). This proposed analysis of Sebbar's literary work provides an excellent starting point for understanding the relevance of culture to the development of meaning from photographs, whether fictional or actual images, as well as the influence of the photographic referent and photographer over the spectator's interpretive process. Vogl's suggestion that Sebbar's recycled imagery offers identity affirmation reinforces the position that culture provides a fundamental influence over the formation and identification of the self and others. There is a danger, however, in such an exclusive focus on the neutral and "affirmative" properties of

these images because this perspective ignores or forgets the inescapable hierarchy of the text-image relationship, as well as the existent social dimension that enshrouds these very real works of art. The recurring appearance of Garanger's controversial pictures and their impact on the protagonists reinforce the fact that few images, if any, are actually neutral or appear in a culturally and politically neutral space. Sebbar's inclusion of these pictures and the odalisque paintings is not arbitrary; these images place both character and reader within a specific cultural and political context, which is reinforced by the author's incantation of an actual time and place. Arguably, all images already exist in a specific societal framework the moment they are created and perceived.

Historian Lucy Lippard discerns that certain photographs unite three specific cultural spaces: that of the subject, the photographer, and the spectator; and that these spaces converge to form relationships between the photographer and subject (formed during the past moment the image was taken), and between the spectator and photograph (formed at the present moment of viewing).¹⁶⁴ Portraiture, particularly the anthropological image of a Native American family analyzed by Lippard or the Garanger collection referenced by Sebbar, inevitably involves a degree of negotiation between the cultural and political foundation of the spectator and the fused cultural spaces of photographed subject and photographer. Identity of the self (as spectator) and the other (as photographed subject) becomes a process of construction, one hardly free from social implication. Author and anthropologist James Peacock discerns that culture is a fundamental aspect of the construction and recognition of identity, concluding that "to realize the force of culture—in defining gender, 'race,' self, or our lives—is like realizing that our minds have an

¹⁶⁴ Lucy Lippard, "Partial Recall," Illuminations: Women Writing on Photography from the 1850's to the Present, eds. Liz Heron and Val Williams (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996) 413.

unconscious, that the earth is round, or that it moves around the sun.”¹⁶⁵ Lippard likewise acknowledges, “My response is not neutral, but wholly subjective,” and possibly “overpersonalized” (415, 418). Lippard’s determination underscores the spectator’s position as interpreter of meaning and how this interpretive process is influenced by the social-psychic formation of the individual spectator, photographer, and subject. It should also be noted that Lippard jointly occupies the positions of spectator and author. In composing a text about photography, Lippard projects an additional cultural dimension: that of her envisioned reader, who will also act as a second spectator. Texts on photography are multi-faceted dimensions that supersede the triangular convergence of cultural spaces that Lippard proposes. Visual theorists Alan Sekula and Victor Burgin determine photographic meaning to derive from its association with specific discourses, such as the text or environment which envelopes the actual image at the moment of spectatorship.¹⁶⁶ Lippard’s analysis compliments Sekula’s and Burgin’s deductions through its emphasis on the continuing influence of the photographic moment over spectatorship by revealing the photograph as an intersection of the past and present social formations of the three main participants in the photographic process: photographer, subject and spectator.

The subjects of photographs in the previously analyzed works of fiction in this dissertation were typically absent—and therefore passive—through a lack of inclusion (as in Isabel Allende’s novel Retrato en Sepia) or absented by death (as in The Photograph by Penelope Lively and A Widow for One Year by John Irving). In this manner, the authors always represent the subjects through a secondary optic, such as photographs or another

¹⁶⁵ James L. Peacock, The Anthropological Lens: Harsh Light, Soft Focus, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) 62.

¹⁶⁶ See my discussion of the influence of text over image in the Introduction.

character's memory of the subject, and uniformly avoid self-representation by the subject. This format precludes the subject's confrontation with and reaction to the completed photographic image or the spectator. In contrast, Lippard's analysis of photography as a union of cultural spaces underscores the subject's (and photographer's) dynamic authority over the spectator's assessment of the image. While much theory on photography emphasizes the influential roles of photographer and spectator, minimal consideration has been devoted to the referent's active power to manipulate and control the production and reception of the photographic image. The perception of an assertive referent harkens back to Talbot's pencil of nature and the referential intractability explored earlier in this dissertation, the present variation being an emphasis on the referent's authority as a continuous and active force over the spectator's process of interpretation, regardless of temporal and spatial differentiation between the photographed subject and the spectator. It is also particularly applicable to Garanger's photographs, which are generally determined to communicate the subject's resistance to the entire photographic act.

Leïla Sebbar's novel and short story therefore brings her readers one step closer to witnessing the ability of the subject to return or direct the gaze of the spectator by evoking provocative photographs like the Garanger's Femmes Algériennes (1960). Sebbar additionally creates a kind of proxy subject through her spectator, who is more representative of the colonized, photographed other and yet occupies the position of an active, seeing self. Sebbar's spectators resemble the photographed subjects in that they all occupy similar positions of minority that have been established by similar cultural codes—despite the half-century of temporal distance between the photographic moment and that of spectatorship. Both Shérazade and “La photo d'identité” detail an interesting conflict and alignment of

gazes (or cultural spaces) that intersect across the reproductions of Garanger's photographs. The author initially represents a triangular intersection of gazes: the photographed subject, who uses her gaze to confront the imposed Orientalist gaze represented by the photographer; and lastly, the gaze of the spectator: a *Beur* youth represented by her protagonists. Sebbar's works are not simply about potential conflict caused by this triangulation of gazes, they are also address the convergence and reconciliation of distant cultural and temporal spaces. Sebbar's literature employs visual media to display the problematic position of the other; in today's multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-media world, the spectator increasingly resembles the photographed subject. In this manner, the determination of the other as an opposition to the self, and specifically the ability to enforce otherness through the construction and maintenance of a silent, still subject becomes more improbable. Sympathetic spectators therefore undermine the self/other hierarchy through their identification with the predetermined other.

Certain images, and perhaps certain photographers and spectators, create the impression of an anthropological intersubjective time, which Lippard explains as a commemoration of interaction and communication between the photographer and subject that extends to the (future) spectator ("Partial Recall" 416). This concept of intersubjective time confirms that the individual cultural spaces of the photographer and subject somehow interact with each other and with that of the future spectator, regardless of temporal, spatial, or cultural disconnect. Spectatorship therefore becomes a process of negotiation between one's own cultural determinations and those of the other participants, a negotiation which can lead to convergence or divergence between spectator, subject, and photographer. The Garanger photographs, contrary to the portrait of the Beaver family discussed by Lippard, were not

formed from a moment of reciprocal exchange and communication. These identity photographs required Islamic women to remove their veils in public and pose for portraits among foreign men. Author Carole Naggar explains the obscenity of these identity pictures in an article about Garanger: in addition to the unveiling, “there is another rape in this confrontation, and it is photography’s. In Islam, representation is forbidden. A portrait is *hasuma*, shameful” (425).¹⁶⁷ Naggar’s assessment establishes that the photographic act alone can provoke cultural conflict, regardless of Marc Garanger’s purported sympathetic treatment of his subjects. Representation, or lack thereof, is not merely an issue of technological familiarity and access, but is an extension of personal and social values. According to author Charles Martin, the (Western) spectator desires a positive and consensual relationship between the photographer and photographed subject, and that knowledge or evidence of this relationship will influence the spectator’s assessment of the image (543-544).¹⁶⁸ Martin deduces that racial or political affronts are better tolerated than a divergence of sexual preference; however, the sexuality, ethnic identity, race, and nationality of both subject and photographer all shape the spectator’s perception of the image, particularly when there exists a difference of identity or orientation (552). “Societal attitudes create and transform the ways in which various people are seen—ways which may be contrary to or independent of memory,” concludes Martin, “and notions of how cameras may be used also influence the way in which we respond to photographs” (563). Photographic meaning becomes a reflection of the spectator’s ethical foundation, which is informed by his or her cultural code.

¹⁶⁷ Carole Naggar, “The Unveiled: Algerian Women,” Illuminations: Women Writing on Photography from the 1850’s to the Present, eds. Liz Heron and Val Williams (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996): 422-426.

¹⁶⁸ Charles Martin, “Autobio-Photography: Beauty and the ‘I’ of the Beholder,” Modern Fiction Studies 40.3 (1994) 543-571. It should be noted that Martin limits his research to Western photographers, subjects, and spectators.

Charles Martin's conclusions that the spectator's recognition of difference has a greater impact over meaning formation than the establishment of convergence seems particularly informed by the Derridian notion of exteriority/interiority.¹⁶⁹ Even if the image initially exists in a culturally neutral space, the process of recognition and identification occurs through elimination and exclusion: Derrida writes, "when the other announces itself as such, it presents itself in the dissimulation of itself" (47). According to Derrida, the trace, which defines difference and marks the relationship with the other, is predominantly informed by culture and history (47-48). In the beginning of La chambre claire, Roland Barthes comments on the temptation to see photographs within a historical or sociological framework; he desires instead to avoid the reductionism associated with culture:

Face à certaines photos, je me voulais sauvage, sans culture. J'allais ainsi, n'osant réduire les photos innombrables du monde, non plus qu'étendre quelques-unes des miennes à toute la Photographie : bref, je me trouvais dans une impasse, et si, je puis dire, « scientifiquement » seul et démuni. (La chambre claire 20)¹⁷⁰

Barthes' desire to be a spectator outside of or without culture returns this discussion to Vogl's suggestion of photographic (imagistic) neutrality. Detaching the image from cultural subjectivity involves more than the image; it requires at least the acquiescence of the spectator. For the photograph in fiction to regain a similar state of objectivity, the reader, and perhaps the author, must aspire to Barthes' primitive state.

Author Nancy Shawcross expresses her reservations about Barthes' successful embodiment of the naïve spectator in Barthes on Photography (27). Shawcross notes Barthes'

¹⁶⁹ Jacques Derrida, Of Grammatology (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997). See Chapter two, "Linguistics and Grammatology," in particular Derrida's discussion on the outside and inside (27-93).

¹⁷⁰ "Looking at certain photographs, I wanted to be a primitive, without culture. So I went on, not daring to reduce the world's countless photographs, any more than to extend several of mine to Photography: in short, I found myself at an impasse and, so to speak 'scientifically' alone and disarmed" (Camera Lucida 7).

failure to examine his own position in regards to photography, a stance that she determines to be particularly influenced by the tradition of theatricality and mysticism spawned by Louis Daguerre's meditations on the medium (32). Nor is Barthes, by his own admission, a neutral photographed subject. He observes that photography does not "give" him "un corps neutre, anatomique, un corps qui ne signifie rien" (La chambre claire 27).¹⁷¹ Barthes writes, "je suis condamné par la Photographie, qui croit bien faire, à avoir toujours une mine: mon corps ne trouve jamais son degré zéro, personne ne le lui donne" (*ibid.*).¹⁷² For Barthes, photographic portraiture is a process of mortification (subject turning into object), as well as imitation and posturing: "Devant l'objectif, je suis à la fois: celui que je me crois, celui que je voudrais qu'on me croie, celui que le photographe me croit, et celui dont il sert pour exhiber son art" (La chambre claire 29).¹⁷³ Barthes determines the posing of the photographed subject to be a social game: "le jeu social" (Camera Lucida 11, La chambre claire 26). For Barthes and Derrida, the fabrication of (photographic) meaning is unavoidably defined by culture, regardless of the subject's or spectator's desires.

The character of Shérázade, like Barthes in La chambre claire, occupies the positions of both spectator and photographed object. Yacine, the young male protagonist of "La photo d'identité," acts uniquely as spectator of the Garanger pictures and other visual media, such as television footage from the war in Yugoslavia. Both protagonists are influenced by cultural associations. Yacine's initial confusion at the sight of the Garanger photographs identifies him as a consumer of visual pop culture and exposes the general cultural amnesia

¹⁷¹ "a neutral, anatomic body, a body which signifies nothing" (Camera Lucida 12).

¹⁷² "I am doomed by (well-meaning) Photography always to have an expression: my body never finds its zero degree, no one can give it to me" (Camera Lucida 12).

¹⁷³ "In front of the lens, I am at the same time: the one I think I am, the one I want others to think I am, the one the photographer thinks I am, and the one he makes use of to exhibit his art" (Camera Lucida 13).

enshrouding the French-Algerian war. Shérázade, a voracious reader of Arab literature and history, quickly contextualizes the Garanger images; she also becomes the object of such contextualization. Photography in Shérázade takes two separate forms: the non-fictional Garanger photographs and the fictional portraits of Shérázade, most of which are taken by her boyfriend Julien, who prints and displays them throughout his apartment. Shérázade is widely admired for her beauty; she is frequently propositioned on the street by unknown men, sought out as a subject for photographs at parties, and chosen by a film director to star as the heroine of a script written by Julien. Shérázade initially appeals to Julien's nostalgia for his childhood in Algeria, as well as to his artistic passions as a collector of Orientalist art because she resembles the women from his youth and the artworks. Julien, who is intrigued by her appearance, becomes even more infatuated after learning her name, titillated by the cultural implications embedded in this single word. The novel opens with a conversation between Julien and Shérázade, during which he expresses incredulity; Shérázade, in contrast to Julien, is dismissive of both the historical implications and Julien's reaction:

Vous vous appelez vraiment Shérázade ?

Oui.

Vraiment ? C'est... c'est tellement... Comment dire ? Vous savez qui était Schéhérazade ?

Oui.

Et ça ne vous fait rien ?

Non.

Vous croyez qu'on peut s'appeler Shérázade, comme ça ?

Je ne sais pas. (Shérázade 7)¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁴

Your name's really Sherazade?

Yes.

Really? It's... it's so... How can I put it? You know who Sheherazade was?

Yes.

And that doesn't mean anything to you?

No.

You think you can be called Sherazade, just like that?

No idea. (Sherazade 1)

Shérazade's unwilling participation in the French Orientalist tradition is both visual and verbal; she is doubly contextualized by her appearance and her name. The history of Shérazade's name, which solicits countless literary references, must *mean something* for Julien, whether it precludes or dictates its present usage. Contrary to Shérazade, Julien cannot escape the influence of such social and historical context, nor can he avoid imposing it on Shérazade.

Galland's French translation of Les Mille et Une Nuits [One Thousand and One Arabian Nights], published in 1803, invariably etched the name and figure of Shérazade into French cultural consciousness, irrevocably associating this iconic figure with the production of fiction as well as with erotic objectification, or in other words: both intellectual and physical pleasure. Julien, as an aficionado of French Orientalist art and literature, immediately associates Shérazade with Schéhérazade and other Orientalist icons, such as Aziyadé, the muse of French author Pierre Loti, and the odalisques in the paintings of Delacroix, Ingres, and Matisse. These cultural references both dictate and clash with Julien's attempts to know his girlfriend. He is not alone, however, in his inability to perceive Shérazade as a unique individual distinct from personal fantasies inspired by his cultural longing: Shérazade's squat-mate, Pierrot, addresses letters to her with the names of historic women revolutionaries, an Arab poetess, and an odalisque. Julien's perception of Shérazade, his associating her with literary and artistic odalisques, is undeniably marked by his cultural heritage and personal nostalgia. Julien is representative of the modern Orientalist: he is well educated, and believes himself respectful and accurate in his judgments. His appreciation for French artist Édouard Manet's painting Olympia (1863; Figure 2), which depicts a reclining, nude white woman and evokes the odalisque tradition, centers on the subject's expression

rather than her body. Similarly, his fascination with Shérázade begins with her striking green eyes, her scarf patterned with an Orientalist print, and her voracious reading. In other words, the manner in which Julien sees Shérázade parallels how he assesses visual media, specifically Orientalist art. Edward Said contends in his groundbreaking study, Orientalism, that the pervasiveness of the Orientalist discourse dominates the European West's perception of the "Orient" and itself, causing an unavoidable reproduction or acknowledgement of certain aspects of this discourse.¹⁷⁵ The brief dialogue between Julien and Shérázade (cited in the previous paragraph) immediately situates these characters within Said's omnipresent discourse: Julien maintains it, and Shérázade attempts to ignore it. Regardless of their desires, neither Julien nor Shérázade (or even Yacine) find Barthes' pre-cultural vantage point; it would seem their positions within a cultural discourse tainted by colonial history have already been decided. However, their reactions to this discourse are not necessarily pre-determined by the discourse.

¹⁷⁵ Edward W. Said, Orientalism (New York: Vintage Books, 1979). Said explains, "so authoritative a position did Orientalism have that I believe no one writing, thinking, or acting on the Orient could do so without taking account of the limitations on thought and action imposed by Orientalism. In brief, because of Orientalism the Orient was not (and is not) a free subject of thought or action. This is not to say that Orientalism unilaterally determines what can be said about the Orient, but that it is the whole network of interests inevitably brought to bear on (and therefore always involved in) and occasion when that peculiar entity 'the Orient' is in question" (3).



Figure 2: Édouard Manet, *Olympia*, 1863. Musée d'Orsay, Paris. 22 July 2007

<http://jssgallery.org/Other_Artists/Manet/Olympia.htm>

III. The Photograph as Model for Resistance

Many theorists after Edward Said have taken issue with the unmitigated power that defines his construction of Orientalist discourse. Aijaz Ahmad explains in “Orientalism and After” that Said’s formative analysis of Orientalism leaves no room for resistance (165).¹⁷⁶ It additionally assumes that no representation can be accurate or unbiased because it is distorted by our process of communication (164). In the previous section on Sebbar, I argued against the existence of a culturally neutral image, noting that iconology in *Shérazade* and “La photo d’identité” is distinctly and purposely imbued with the social context of French colonial history that necessarily colors the spectator’s assessment of the images. While Orientalism does taint representation in Sebbar’s literature, the author also allows representation to encourage resistance to previous acts of ‘misrepresentation’ created by the persistent Orientalist discourse described by Said. These two stories by Sebbar therefore expose the

¹⁷⁶ Aijaz Ahmad, “Orientalism and After,” *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory*, eds. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia University Press 1994): 162-171.

fallacy of Orientalist power: omnipresence does not necessarily translate into omnipotence. It follows that Orientalism as omnipresence is itself a questionable assertion. Rather, as Homi K. Bhabha concisely determines, “there is always, in Said, the suggestion that colonial power and discourse is possessed entirely by the colonizer, which is a historical and theoretical simplification. The terms in which Said’s Orientalism is unified—the intentionality and unidirectionality of colonial power—also unify the subject of colonial enunciation” (25).¹⁷⁷ Indeed, much of the appeal of Sebbar’s literature, particularly the Shérazade trilogy, is her characters’ incorrigible independence from the traditional trappings of culture and society, such as family, housing, employment, and education; as well as their abilities to stack the odds of “le jeu social” in their favor.

Susan Sontag speculates that the muteness of the photograph enhances its appeal: the photographed subject becomes a passive object for the imposition of the spectator’s desires. “The very muteness of what is, hypothetically comprehensible in photographs,” explains Sontag, “is what constitutes their attraction and provocativeness” (On Photography 24). However, silence can also become a site for resistance, frustrating the spectator through lack of conformity and refusing the spectator’s engagement with the photograph or its subject. The character of Shérazade, much like Kath in Penelope Lively’s novel The Photograph, is a frequent target for the gaze, whether through the multiple portrait photographs taken by her boyfriend, or the attention inspired by her beauty. Lively’s character Kath eventually employs the medium of photography to transfigure her spectator’s preconceived notions about her and their relationships with her. The snapshot of Kath, found after her death, empowers her through its communication of silence: Kath is at once beyond reproach from

¹⁷⁷ Homi K. Bhabha, “The Other Question...” Homi K. Bhabha Reconsiders the Stereotype and Colonial Discourse,” Screen, 24.6 (1983): 18-37.

her spectators and this unconventional and unexpected depiction of her shocks her spectators into a vertiginous silence, during which they are confronted by their lack of control. Kath's spectators ultimately comprehend that their myopic identification of her was based on idle spectatorship—a lack of interactive looking. Shérázade's identity is also occasionally based on misidentification, stereotypes, and reliance on previous observations. The cover image of the English edition of Shérázade, for example, depicts a young Arab woman with dark brown eyes, not the green eyes established by the novel and subtitle. Shérázade's father is similarly guilty of disinterested observation; he finds himself unable to recall his daughter's exact appearance when describing her to the police. It is not until he looks at a photograph of her that he is emotionally moved by her absence and realizes the inability of language to communicate identity. Sebbar's literature reveals that identity and identification are processes of ongoing construction, and that the belief that individuals are reducible to a single act of representation, whether visual or verbal, is a myth. Even Julien at times evades being categorized as a modern Orientalist.

Identity in these two stories by Leïla Sebbar becomes an intricate and engaging issue, one marked by culture, history, and photographic discourse. Critic Mary B. Vogl's observations that past images influence the present identity formation of Sebbar's protagonists is not without merit (Picturing the Maghreb 144). Indeed, Vogl provides a particularly apt assessment of impact of iconology in both Shérázade and "La photo d'identité." She observes that Shérázade's analysis of the odalisque paintings and Garanger photographs acts as a stepping stone to understanding and controlling her own relationships with the photographers and filmmaker who seek to represent her, and, I would add, the various men who proposition Shérázade when she wanders alone through the streets of Paris

(*ibid.*). Shérázade frequently relies on silence and absence to discourage identification and contextualization, although she also employs more active, even violent techniques. During her first conversation with Julien, Shérázade is coolly dismissive, refusing to discuss the literary implications of her name despite her marked interest in Maghrebian literature. After leaving home, Shérázade avoids contacting her family, despite the fact that she misses them and is deeply moved by her sister's radio and newspaper announcements requesting her to telephone their family. Shérázade eventually sends a cassette recording to her mother, but avoids revealing any clues about her location; "Shérázade ne disait pas où elle était, ni ce qu'elle faisait. Elle parlait comme on écrit une lettre. Le temps ni l'espace ne comptaient. Elle avait pu parler la veille, ou trois mois auparavant on ne pouvait savoir" (Shérázade 205).¹⁷⁸ Shérázade allows herself to be seen, but not to be known or owned. She silently confronts her spectators, visibly expressing her disapproval of their gaze, like the women in Garanger's photographs.

Shérázade rarely reveals personal information to Julien or her friends. Julien never meets any of her squat-mates, who are themselves uncertain of Shérázade's real name. Late one night, Shérázade does recount her evening out to Julien, telling him of how she and her girlfriends used a fake pistol to rob a photographer when he attempted to take compromising photographs of the three of them. Shérázade allows the events to serve as a cautionary tale. For Julien, photography becomes a means to perfect his relationship with a reticent and transient girlfriend; he takes great pains to print the perfect image on expensive paper, spending many hours in the photography lab. In "The Image-World," Susan Sontag explores

¹⁷⁸ "Shérázade didn't say where she was or what she was doing. She talked like one writes a letter. Neither time nor place mattered. She could have been talking the previous evening, or three months before, you couldn't tell" (Sherazade 220-221).

the artificial exoticism created by photography, noting, “Photographs have a way of imprisoning reality, understood as recalcitrant, inaccessible; of making it stand still. Or they enlarge a reality that is felt to be shrunk, hollowed out, perishable, remote. One can’t possess reality, one can possess (and be possessed by) images” (On Photography 163). Shérázade concludes her story about the photographer by ripping up all the photographs Julien has displayed throughout his apartment, telling him that there is little difference between his photographs of her and the pornographic images attempted by the photographer. Julien does nothing to stop her destruction, eventually admitting the accuracy of her judgment (Shérázade 159, Sherazade 170). Shortly before Shérázade leaves for Paris, she translates her resistance into writing by leaving Julien a note, writing a scrap of paper “je ne suis pas une odalisque” (207).¹⁷⁹ Even so, the Garanger pictures and particularly Henri Matisse’s painting L’Odalisque à la culotte rouge, (1922) (Odalisque in Red Trousers), “function as a mode of self-expression” for Shérázade.¹⁸⁰ Looking at the Garanger pictures reduces the normally stoic Shérázade to tears in front of Julien and his friend, so moved is she by the visible resistance in these images and by their resemblance to her mother. Shérázade also sends postcard reproductions of Matisse’s painting to her sister and friends upon leaving Paris, confiding on the back of one, “C’est à cause d’elle que je m’en vais” (Shérázade 252).¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁹ “I’m not an odalisque” (Sherazade 222).

¹⁸⁰ Wilkerson-Barker (35). Wilkerson-Barker observes in Sebbar’s novel, Le Chinois vert d’Afrique that the protagonist’s collection of war photographs “function[s] as a mode of self-expression” (35). Wilkerson-Barker explains that these pictures “constitute a privileged space by which to conjure up and re-member his fragmented (family) history (his physical and psychological alienation from both his grandparents and parents), providing him with not only a memorial in the historical sense, but also with an outlet by which to make sense of the trauma of the present” (*ibid.*).

¹⁸¹ “It’s on account of her that I’m going” (Sherazade 272).

Shérázade's resolute destruction of Julien's photographs is a symbolic act of resistance; she knows that he has both negatives and other prints of her, some of which he has given to his friend the film director. This scene is subtly reenacted in "La photo d'identité" when Yacine's acquaintance carefully tears the representation of his mother from a copy of Garanger's Femmes Algériennes 1960. The man, heedless of the presence of the bookshop employee, precisely folds the image into small sections, tears the page along the fold lines, and then drops the scraps into the fire. He does not touch the other copies of the book, nor does he destroy the window advertisement that also depicts his mother, which drew both him and Yacine to the bookstore. The destruction of a single copy of this image represents the death of the photographer, the return of his mother's sanity, and the completion of a vow of vengeance required by his grandmother when he was a young boy. The man explains to Yacine, "Voilà, c'est fini. J'ai tué le soldat photographe et ma mère me reconnaîtra quand j'arriverai chez elle, au village. C'est fini" ("La photo d'identité" 83).¹⁸²

The peculiar renown of Garnager's photographs is that they project multiple levels of resistance: defiance of the colonialist occupational endeavor, the Orientalist discourse, the photographer's attempt to document, identify and classify, and the spectator's ability to pretend an affirmative relationship with the photograph. Leïla Sebbar explains through the reaction of Shérázade, "Ces Algériennes avaient toutes devant l'objectif-mitrailleur, le même regard, intense, farouche, d'une sauvagerie que l'image ne saurait qu'archiver, sans jamais la maîtriser ni la dominer" (Shérázade 220).¹⁸³ These photographs therefore provide multiple

¹⁸² "There, it's finished. I've killed the photographer-soldier and my mother will recognize me when I return to her home, in the village. It's finished" (author's translation).

¹⁸³ "Theses Algerian women all faced the lens as if they were facing a machine-gun shooting at them, with the same intense, savage stare, a fierceness that the picture could only file for posterity without ever mastering or dominating" (Sherazade 238).

avenues for Sebbar's characters to resist the imposition of hegemonic constraints, culturally-based stereotypes, traditional hierarchal acts of spectatorship, and even typical literary acts of representation. Yacine and Shérazade conceal themselves from the reader, even occasionally alienate the reader through their extreme societal disconnect. Shérazade, in particular, is selfish, disinterested, and egotistical in her relationships with others. Edward Said proposes that the Orientalist discourse requires a certain degree of submission from the Orientalized subject, stating, "the Orient was Orientalized not because it was discovered to be 'Oriental' in all those ways considered commonplace by an average nineteenth-century European, but also because it *could be*—that is submitted to being—*made* Oriental" (*Orientalism* 5-6). Sebbar's characters, however, circumvent conformity to any collective consciousness, primarily because Sebbar refuses to speak for her characters, or to apologize for them, avoiding descriptive or analytical representation just as she avoids ekphrastic representation of visual images. The author allows her characters to reclaim icons of Orientalist representation through symbolic acts that reveal the Orientalist discourse to be a mythological construction. When Shérazade purchases the postcards of Matisse's L'Odalisque à la culotte rouge, the receptionist comments, "Elle est plus belle sur l'original, vous ne pensez pas?" to which Shérazade responds simply, "Non" (246).¹⁸⁴ Shérazade's response suggests, perhaps, that the original no longer matters, that beauty resides in the multiplicity of representations, which leave the image open to many uses and interpretations.

Garanger's photographs and odalisque paintings are manifested on two different levels in Shérazade and "La photo d'identité." Sebbar's recycling of actual photographs viewed by fictional spectators renders the images both non-fictional and fictional. As such,

¹⁸⁴ "She's more beautiful in the original, don't you think?" (*Sherazade* 265)

Sebbar diminishes the boundaries between truth and myth, and translates the dichotomies of non-fiction and fiction into public and private acts of spectatorship. Yacine's and Shérázade's encounters with the Garanger photographs occur in relatively public spaces: a bookshop and Julien's friend's apartment. In contrast, their responses are intensely private and personal, particularly that of the older Algerian man in "La photo d'identité." Visual theorist John Berger suggests in "Uses of Photographs" that, "the public photograph...is torn from context, and becomes a dead object, which exactly because it is dead, lends itself to arbitrary use" (60).¹⁸⁵ The only way to restore the photograph to a temporal and historical continuity, according to Berger, is to employ the techniques of private spectatorship, which allow the photograph to be read in a continuous context formed from memory (61, 55). Berger concludes, "Such a memory would encompass any image of the past, however tragic, however guilty, within its own continuity" (61). The protagonists in *Shérázade* and "La photo d'identité" translate these public images into private memories; Shérázade and the Algerian man think of their mothers, and Yacine's initial impression of his acquaintance is of the man's visible resemblance to his father. Through these acts of private spectatorship, the photographs acquire what John Berger refers to as "a living context," or Lippard's "anthropological intersubjective time," both concepts involving a sympathetic convergence between spectator and subject that incorporates individual memory as well as communal cultural consciousness (*About Looking* 61). In this manner, it is not merely the images that are replaced within a cultural and historical continuum, but the spectators as well. The protagonists' privatization of the photographs allows them to reconnect with their ethnic and familial heritage and transcend, at least momentarily, their sense of isolation and cultural exile.

¹⁸⁵ John Berger, "Uses of Photographs," *About Looking* (London: Writers and Readers, 1980) 52-67.

IV. Conclusion

Photography and other forms of iconology in Shérazade and “La photo d'identité” are used in powerful ways to establish identity and institute sympathetic spectatorship through a convergence of subject and spectator. However, these images are not free from controversy, nor do they unilaterally resist the imposition of cultural hegemony or spectatorial hierarchy. Their degree of resistance or affirmative authority relies extensively on the spectator's desire for and recognition of convergence between the self and the subject. Detection of divergence only increases the spectator's ability to impose self/other differentiation. Representation is itself a social act; it is, according to W.J.T. Mitchell, “something done to something, with something, by someone, for someone” (Picture Theory 180). Sebbar's writing, as previously noted, is especially imbued with a social and political discourse concerning past and present French-Algerian relations. Any determination of a neutral image—or a neutral spectator—therefore becomes increasingly problematic precisely because each step of the representational process (representing, being represented, and looking) is a social act informed by cultural collective consciousness. Photographer, subject and spectator—to which Sebbar adds author and reader—each carry a specific social-psychic formation that governs the translation of the image into message and meaning. In addition, a work of fiction is not a culturally neutral space, especially with Sebbar as the author. The pre-existing images in Sebbar's two stories, such as the odalisque paintings and the Garanger photographs, become doubly contextualized by their placement within her literature. However, despite the exploration of the present ramifications of an ongoing cultural and political discourse in Shérazade and “La photo d'identité,” the author's emphasis on the

symbolic and self-contained acts of resistance does not necessarily propose any solid solutions for the future integration of her characters who continue to shun and be shunned by society. This novel and short story are, akin to photography, without projection of the future. There is no enduring reconnection with the past in these two stories, a point that suggests that momentary convergence of “cultural spaces” through informed and sympathetic spectatorship is the best Sebbar has to offer.

Chapter 7: Michel Tournier's Sinister Writings on Photography

I. Introduction

French author Michel Tournier is one of the few authors included in this dissertation who have written multiple works, fiction and non-fiction, about the medium of photography.¹⁸⁶ Tournier's passion for photography is widely acknowledged, prompting at least one critic to define him as "an enthusiastic camera-addict."¹⁸⁷ In addition to a literary oeuvre steeped in iconology, particularly photography, he is also widely recognized as an amateur photographer, has hosted a television series on photography, co-published several books with well-known photographers, and helped establish an annual photography conference, "Rencontres Photographiques," in Arles, France. However, Tournier's personal investment in the medium of photography appears at times to be at odds with his fiction writing on photography, especially in the selection of literature included in this chapter. This analysis of the use of photography in the work of Michel Tournier focuses primarily on his short story, "Les Suaires de Véronique" (1978; "Veronica's Shrouds")¹⁸⁸ and two novels, Le

¹⁸⁶ Mary B. Vogl provides a thorough categorization of Michel Tournier's various photographic projects, literature and essays about photography, in Picturing the Maghreb: Literature, Photography and (Re)Presentation. See specifically her chapter on Tournier.

¹⁸⁷ David G. Bevan, "Tournier's Photographer: A Modern Bluebeard?," Modern Language Studies, 15:3, Photography and Literature (Summer 1985): 66.

¹⁸⁸ Michel Tournier, "Les Suaires de Véronique," Le coq de bruyère. (Paris : Éditions Gallimard, 1978): 151-172. "Veronica's Shrouds," The Fetishist, trans. Barbara Wright (London: Minerva, 1992) 94-108. All subsequent English translations are taken from Barbara Wright's translation.

Roi des aulnes (1970; The Ogre),¹⁸⁹ and La Goutte d'or (1986; The Golden Droplet)¹⁹⁰ for their similar explorations of the more sinister side of photography. Despite the fact that the medium of photography is not necessarily the singular or central subject in these two novels, as it is in “Les Suaires de Véronique,” its influence over the main characters, the insidious nature of the photographers, and the helpless naiveté of the photographed subjects, who are primarily young men or boys, are foundationally significant aspects of each narrative.

These three stories from Tournier’s extensive literary oeuvre about photography offer three distinct observations on the malevolent photographer. Narrative perspective shifts from narrator-as-spectator in “Les Suaires de Véronique,” to photographer-as-author in Le Roi des aulnes, to a final focus on the photographed subject in La Goutte d'or, thus tripling the reader’s view of Tournier’s photographers. In each work, Tournier depicts a formulaic type who fits precisely the superstitious fears about photographers and photography that continue to influence contemporary thinking on this topic. Referential authority is substantially diminished, usurped by an increasingly powerful and maligned photographer. The photographed subject is dominated, forced to assume submissive poses in order to conform to the desires and whims of the photographer. Photography in these three works of fiction closely mirrors Derrida’s supplement; as such, it prompts the blindness and obsession of the photographer for the photographic replacement rather than the referent. In this manner, the photographer quite literally molds the subject, transforming that subject into a specific representation. Photography in Tournier’s literature presents an inversion of the iconic *and*

¹⁸⁹ Michel Tournier, Le Roi des Aulnes. Paris : Éditions Gallimard, 1970. Michel Tournier, The Ogre, trans. Barbara Bray (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972). All subsequent English translations are taken from the Barbara Bray’s translation.

¹⁹⁰ Michel Tournier, La Goutte d'or. La Flèche : Éditions Gallimard, 1986. Michel Tournier, The Golden Droplet, trans. Barbara Wright (New York: Doubleday, 1987). All subsequent English translations are taken from Barbara Wright’s translation.

indexical values of the referent-photograph relationship explored in the previous chapters. The photographic representation is no longer bound to the referent through its establishment of resemblance. Rather, it is the referent that conforms to the image, which is in actuality a projection of the photographer's desires concerning the representation rather than the referent. In this manner, the referent becomes the trace of the image, the effect of the representation rather than its cause. The representational process catalyses the transfiguration of the referent, translating the subject into the desired object, which becomes increasingly unlike the original subject. This is no longer the intractable referent perceived in the novels by Penelope Lively and John Irving, nor is it an example of the interpreted image found in Sebbar's narratives. Tournier's photographic representations act as shrouds, or screens, blocking visual access to the very things they represent. As such, Tournier invariably raises many questions concerning the influence of the photographer, the authority of the referent, and the ontological definition of photography as a medium of (accurate) representation. Nevertheless, in many ways Tournier's use of photography in these stories is thoroughly conventional. The author's depictions conform to the worst suspicions that plague past—and present—thinking on photography, such as the identification of photography as simulacra and the ability of the photographer to act as aggressor; and confirm the more extreme fears, such as the legend of Balzac's photophobia.¹⁹¹

Legend and mythology figure predominantly in the literature of Michel Tournier. His first published work, Vendredi, ou les limbes du Pacifique, which won the Grand Prix du

¹⁹¹ Michel Tournier is often appreciated for his conventional writing style about unconventional subjects. Tournier published his first novel, Vendredi, ou les limbes du Pacifique in 1967, towards the conclusion of the Nouveau Roman literary movement, which is often defined by its abstract style, ambiguous narrative, and defiance of literary realism. Tournier's ability to employ traditional, comprehensive narrative structure, character development, and unity of plot while also revealing ambiguous layers of meaning open to multiple interpretations is arguably one of the main reasons for his general appeal.

Roman de l'Académie Française, is a reconsideration of Daniel Defoe's legendary account of Robinson Crusoe in The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe of York, Mariner (1719).¹⁹² Tournier's second novel, Le Roi des aulnes, winner of the prix Goncourt, explores the Germanic fable of the Erl-King and the mythological figure of the ogre.¹⁹³ Other literary works by Tournier provide contemporary reconsiderations of such recognizable mythic figures as Joan of Arc and the three Wise Men. In addition, the mythology surrounding the Shroud of Turin, St. Christopher, and the Orient (as perceived by the Occident) are principle themes in the three stories analyzed in this chapter. Tournier's inclusion of the myths and legends cited above typically leads to an alternative assessment of such myths through a replacement of these figures and objects in contemporary culture or mindset: Vendredi, ou les limbes du Pacifique, for example, presents an inversion of the legendary Robinson Crusoe; the character depicted by Tournier eventually eschews society in preference for the island whereas Friday leaves. However, his representation of photography, photographers, and the photographic act rarely contradict the extreme assessments of photography as a medium defined by insidious acts of appropriation. Photography, particularly the culturally based legends that permeate our collective consciousness of this medium, therefore adds an additional layer to Michel Tournier's mythic preoccupations. Nonetheless, by composing such a conspicuous representation of the

¹⁹² It seems important to note that Defoe's novel itself figures within literary legend, occasionally proposed as one of the first novels of the English language.

¹⁹³ Winifred Woodhull offers a concise and thorough explanation of the Erl-King legend, as well as the similarities between Tournier's protagonist and the figure from Goethe's poem "Der Erlkönig" (1782) in her article, "Fascist Bonding and Euphoria in Michel Tournier's The Ogre" in the New German Critique 42 (Autumn 1987): 79-112. Woodhull writes, "The Erl-King of early Germanic lore is said to play cruel tricks on children, and in Goethe's ballad by that name, the protective father who shelters his son in his arms while riding on horseback through the woods cannot keep the Erl-King from trying to seduce the boy and eventually taking him by force" ("Fascist Bonding" 99). Abel Tiffauges, protagonist of Le Roi des aulnes, mimics the mythical figure of the Erl-King, scouring the Prussian countryside on his black horse for new recruits to a German military school. The boys and their parents are both terrified of Abel and awed by the prestige of the school.

photographer as a sinister, malevolent entity, and the photographed subject as the essence of naïveté, I argue that these three examples of Tournier's literature ultimately question the validity of such myths enshrouding the photographic act by exposing the extreme fictionality of such assessments.

Author David G. Bevan suggests that there are two tendencies to photographic encounters in Tournier's literature: one of alliance between photographer, photograph, and subject—a form of homage; while the second is predominantly characterized by “voracious appropriation,” “aggression,” and “sado-masochism” (Bevan 66). It is the latter assessment that marks the three works of fiction analyzed in this chapter. In each situation, the photographer preys upon the photographed subject, and forms that subject into an idealized, fetishized object of representation. In “Les Suaires de Véronique,” an unidentified narrator recounts the relationship between a young, intellectual photographer named Véronique and her muse, Hector, who is superbly beautiful. The narrator meets this couple at the International Photography Festival in Arles when he attends an afternoon photography shoot where Véronique and several other artists photograph Hector on the beach at Camargue. Véronique expresses her disappointment to the narrator on the return trip to Arles, suggesting that Hector and the scenery were too predictable, too staged to be of any interest. When the narrator encounters Véronique and Hector the following year, he finds that the photographer has imposed upon her subject a regimented exercise routine and diet, which has reduced Hector to “ce masque creusé, tout en pommettes, en menton et en orbites, casqué de cheveux dont les boucles disciplinée semblaient vernissées.”¹⁹⁴ Véronique's goal was to render Hector more “photogenic,” explaining that she wants to produce photographs that improve upon and

¹⁹⁴ “a hollow mask, all cheekbones, chin, and sunken eyes, with a helmet of hair whose disciplined curls look as if they have been varnished” (“Veronica's Shrouds” 97).

appear more beautiful than the actual object. A few days after this second meeting, the narrator encounters Véronique in a bar and discovers that Hector has left her, explaining in a letter that Véronique's photography is more a process of stealing from him than one of "perpetual exchange." The narrator meets with Véronique a third and final time when he attends a special exposition of Véronique's photography the following year. The exposition's title supplies that of this short story: "Les Suaires de Véronique" or "Veronica's Shrouds" is shown at the Chapel of the Knights of Malta in the Réattu Museum. The photographs displayed consist of Véronique's latest experiment in "direct photography" or what the fictional author refers to as "dermography;" Véronique has imprinted Hector's image directly to linen fabric by coating the cloth and Hector in photographic chemicals and then wrapping him in the linen. Evidently, Hector has been suffering from skin diseases from Véronique's photographic procedures. The vague ending of the story and Hector's bodily absence from the conclusion suggest that Véronique's formerly indispensable muse is no longer alive, or at least no longer of use to her. This short story presents a reconsideration of the Christian legend of the Shroud of Turin; in doing so, Tournier also provokes questions concerning the role of religion and iconology, and their interaction, in contemporary French society.

The plot of Michel Tournier's Le Roi des aulnes begins with the journalistic writing of protagonist Abel Tiffauges who, having injured his right arm while working as a mechanic, begins composing a dairy of sorts during his recovery. Abel writes with his left hand, hence the name of the chapter, "Écrits sinistres d'Abel Tiffauges," or "The Sinister Writings of Abel Tiffauges." Initially Abel explores his past, specifically his childhood friendship at a boarding school with an equally disaffected and disturbed youth named Nestor. Abel develops a temporary fascination with photography, using the camera to gain

access to children, perceiving them as prey for his unarticulated pedophilic desires; he refers to the camera as the Cyclops clutched between his legs while he prowls the neighborhood for potential subjects to photograph. An accusation of rape levied by a young adolescent girl “befriended” by Abel lands him in jail, which leads him to forced enlistment in the French army, and eventual capture by the Germans. Abel grows to despise French society, believing it responsible for his incarceration and lack of success. As a result, he temporarily embraces the Nazi regime, and eventually works as an attendant at Hermann Göring’s game reserve and then at a boy’s military training school in Prussia.¹⁹⁵ It is at the Prussian school that Abel completes his transformation into the Erl-King, or the Ogre, forcibly carrying off boys from the countryside to become new recruits at the military school. Abel’s ogre-like actions are reminiscent of the predatory hunt and possessive desire explored years earlier with his camera. Such associations between photography and predatory desire are repeated in Tournier’s novel, La Goutte d’or. The author again alters the origin of the gaze in this last example, concentrating on the iconological experiences of Idriss, a young man from the Sahara who travels to France in search of his image, a photograph taken by a blonde French woman during her vacation. Idriss’ journey from a culture without images to contemporary France, which Tournier depicts as saturated in the visual, is a cultural apprenticeship marked by contrasts and dichotomies: the visual and verbal, Occident and Orient, city and desert, and possession and independence. The author plays with these conflicting elements, elevating their oppositional forces to a mythological level, but without producing any concrete resolution. The protagonist’s lack of familiarity with photography and visual imagery often places him at risk in contemporary French society: photographers and artists “steal” his

¹⁹⁵ See Winifred Woodhull’s article, “Fascist Bonding and Euphoria in Michel Tournier’s The Ogre” for a thorough and enlightening analysis of the political, specifically fascist, dimension of Tournier’s novel.

representation, occasionally causing him bodily harm; Idriss' identity photograph is that of another man, potentially jeopardizing his legal status. When questioned about the lack of correspondence between his appearance and the picture, Idriss bluntly responds that is the role of the representation to conform to him, rather than for him to conform to the picture: "ce n'est pas à moi à ressembler ma photo. C'est ma photo qui doit me ressembler, non?" (La Goutte d'or 100).¹⁹⁶ For Idriss, the photograph is both an extension of his body that necessitates its recovery as well as a separate, living entity. Idriss' uncle Mogadem warns his nephew before he leaves for France that errant photographs can incur bad luck and even death for the subject. Mogadem advises Idris, "les photos, faut les garder. Faut pas les laisser courir!" (La Goutte d'or 56).¹⁹⁷ Photography in La Goutte d'or, as in "Les Suaires de Véronique" and Le Roi des aulnes, is questionable in its ability to resemble its referent. As such, it is potentially problematic, even harmful to its subject.

II. The Photographer's Sinister Desires

In her forward to Jane M. Rabb's anthology of short stories about photography, literary critic Eugenia Parry states, "fiction writing about photographs can be sinister and strange."¹⁹⁸ Pictures are weapons, evidence, and magical, claims Parry (*ibid.*). Indeed, photography in these three stories by Michel Tournier is all of these things, primarily due to the photographer, who has little empathy for his subject, instead perceiving the referent only as part of the representational process: something to be molded, framed, and manipulated in

¹⁹⁶ "It isn't up to me to look like my photo. It's my photo that ought to look like me, isn't it?" (The Golden Droplet 88).

¹⁹⁷ "Photos, you see—you must hang on to them. Musn't let them go gallivanting!" (The Golden Droplet 46).

¹⁹⁸ Eugenia Parry, "I've Got You Now," The Short Story and Photography 1880's-1980's, ed. Jane M. Rabb, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1998) xii.

order to produce the desired representation. As Parry suggests, it is not necessarily the photograph that is sinister or strange, but how the image is used, and how the camera is used to create that image. Susan Sontag explains in her essay “In Plato’s Cave” that the camera is a weapon, but one which requires fantasy and imagination in order to function as such (On Photography 14). The camera does not kill anything, concludes Sontag, however there is “something predatory in the act of taking a picture” (*ibid.*). Sontag’s statement reinforces Parry’s position: it is neither the camera nor the photograph that is innately predatory, but the photographer’s desire for possession. The included examples of Tournier’s literature appear to confirm Sontag’s fears: the photographers in these stories, particularly the protagonist in Le Roi des aulnes, certainly prey upon their subjects and use photography as a means to fulfill their desires for possession and domination. Abel Tiffauges describes a young boy he photographs as a little faun, calling him “le faunelet,” propping him up against a wall to take his picture. The boy had just fallen, cutting his knee badly on the marble stairs; he nearly faints from shock and pain but Abel slaps the boy to keep him conscious for the photograph. Abel then shoots the boy’s picture, posing the boy as if he were prize game in a successful hunt. The camera, which Abel describes as a “marvelous organ” clutched between his legs as he drives, acts as both weapon and aide for this hunt: “Merveilleux organe, voyeur et mémorant, faucon diligent qui se jette sur sa proie pour lui voler et rapporter au maître ce qu’il y a en elle de plus profond et de plus trompeur, son apparence!” (Le Roi des aulnes 144).¹⁹⁹ Abel uses the camera as a hunter would employ his “hawk” to hunt and retrieve the prey; clearly, the camera has not literally hunted or killed Abel’s victim, but it does “steal” what Abel finds most vital to the child: his appearance. For Abel, it is the photographic act

¹⁹⁹ “It is a marvelous organ, seer and remembrancer, a tireless hawk that swoops on its prey to steal from it and bring back to its master that which is profoundest in it and most deceptive—appearance!” (The Ogre 103).

and the representational process, which equate to the glory of the hunt and the trophy kill, that they give him pleasure. Abel's use and abuse of photography precisely illustrate Parry's and Sontag's assessments of photography as something threatening, defined by aggression and possession.

Abel is drawn to the boy's wound, finding it a repetition of the Cyclops eye of his camera lens:

Provoquée sans doute par l'arête d'une des marches de marbre, la plaie est d'une netteté magnifique : une fente vermeille d'un ovale impeccable, un œil de Cyclope aux paupières ourlées, aux commissures serrées, œil crevé certes, ne laissant pas filtrer qu'un regard mort, mais saignant à peine, transsudant, comme son humeur vitrée, un filet de lymphe qui forme une lente coulée albumineuse le long mollet et jusque sur la chaussette tassée (148).²⁰⁰

Clearly, Abel sexualizes the wound, as he does his camera. Both the boy and the camera are objects of desire; the camera, however, acts as a phallic extension of Abel's body: "Je me plais ainsi équipé d'un sexe énorme, gainé de cuir, dont l'œil de Cyclope s'ouvre comme l'éclair quand je lui dis « Regarde ! » et se referme inexorablement sur ce qu'il a vu" (144).²⁰¹ Abel's description of the boy's injury is subtly feminized in contrast to the phallic projection of his camera lens. However, there is a marked confusion—or perhaps amalgamation—in Abel's attribution of male and female sex characteristics. The camera, which he caresses between his legs, is both an organ that projects itself onto and into its prey, as well as something that receives and encloses itself around the intended object; the object's essence is in turn imprinted onto the camera's "virgin film." The boy's wound is at once the

²⁰⁰ "His wound, no doubt caused by the edge of one of the marble steps, was magnificently clean and sharp: a flawlessly oval ruby slit, a Cyclops' eye with bordered lids and narrow corners, gouged indeed and blind, but scarcely bleeding—just oozing, as if with its own vitreous humor, a slow aluminous trickle of lymph that ran down the calf into the wrinkled sock" (*The Ogre* 106).

²⁰¹ "I enjoy being equipped with a huge leather, clad sex whose Cyclopean eye opens like lightning when I command it to look, and closes again inexorably on what it has seen" (*The Ogre* 103).

phallic Cyclops eye of the camera as well as a description of female genitalia, which opens itself to receive Abel's caressing hand and penetrating gaze. The boy's wound, contrary to the camera, is the bloodless, blinded eye of the Cyclops, gouged, perhaps by Odysseus' spear; but unlike Odysseus' weapon, Abel's phallic "spear" is his camera, which is of ambiguous sexuality. If Abel is unable to impose a determined male or female sexual identity upon his camera, he is equally unable to understand his own, being fixated on pre-pubescent children, particularly boys. Upon inspecting the faunlet's wound, Abel confesses that "une étrange douceur me prend aux entrailles," and after taking a successful photograph of the boy, he experiences an orgasmic response, described as "une sorte d'ivresse heureuse dont je ne suis pas maître" (148-9). Even so, Abel's pedophilic tendencies are only vague insinuations in the text, and are never manifested beyond these predatory acts of picture taking, an accusation of rape by a young girl (which Abel denies and dismisses as "myth"), and his collecting of boys as forced recruits for the military school in Prussia later in the novel. Michel Tournier asserts in Le Vent paraclet that his Tiffauges character is not an adult (at least not mentally), therefore his desire for children is, like the children themselves, a "pre-sexual" desire.²⁰² If, as the author suggests, Abel is indeed a pre-sexual being, perhaps his inability to impose a sexual identity on himself, his camera, or his subjects derives from an inability to distinguish difference, whether sexual or otherwise. Abel experiences a bestial, impulsive blindness towards his subjects that allows him only to experience, but not necessarily identify, desire.

Jacques Derrida determines during his analysis of Edgar Allan Poe's short story "The Oval Portrait" that there is a moment of blindness implicit in the representational act: the

²⁰² See Michel Tournier, Le Vent paraclet (Paris: Gallimard, 1977) 117.

artist begins to create from memory when he turns his attention from the model to the canvas, as one cannot observe two things simultaneously.²⁰³ According to Derrida, the artist's blindness proves the model's superiority over the artist, denying his gaze. I would like to suggest, however, that the artist's preoccupation with the representation and the representative process is a more likely source for his blindness. The painter in Poe's story, for example, does not perceive his wife's weakening condition, so intent is he upon creating the portrait of her. The subject is interpreted by the artist through a filter of emotion that further distorts the accuracy of the depiction and increases the subjectivity of representation. The painting ceases to act as a representation of the model and becomes instead the projection of the artist's memory and desire.²⁰⁴ Tournier's photographer-protagonists, like Poe's painter, are blind to the pain and discomfort their artistry inflicts on their subjects, so preoccupied are they by the production of an idealized representation. Only after Abel has completed his photographic exploration and documentation does he bring the poor boy to a pharmacy for medical attention, abandoning the boy and his brother on the street corner. Susan Sontag critically asserts the photographic act is one of non-intervention: the photographer documents, but does nothing to stop or alter the scene in progress (On Photography 11). The disturbing aggression of Abel's actions derives from his unwillingness to help the injured boy before he accomplishes the photograph *in addition to* his slapping the boy with all his might ("à toute volée") to keep him conscious for the picture; Abel is willing to harm the boy in order to achieve the desired picture. Abel does intervene, but not in a

²⁰³ Jacques Derrida, Memoirs of the Blind: the Self-Portrait and Other Ruins, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault & Michael Naas (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993) 36.

²⁰⁴ Photography, like painting, involves similar moments of blindness, or of looking away from the subject, particularly when the image is translated from the film to the print. Although the image is already imprinted on the photographic negative, the photographer might additionally manipulate the image to correspond to memory and/or desire.

helpful manner; he only increases and prolongs the boy's agony. Abel confesses that photography abstracts and generalizes the subjects for him; the referent is no longer a unique entity, but represents a universality, a type on which Abel projects his fantasy. He writes, "Car chaque photo élève son sujet à un degré d'abstraction qui lui confère du même coup une certaine généralité, de telle sorte qu'un enfant photographié, c'est X—mille, dix mille—enfants possédés" (*Le Roi des aulnes* 146).²⁰⁵ Photography infinitely multiplies by allowing the one to represent many, implying that this particular photographer does not distinguish, and is therefore blind to the individual characteristics of each child. Photography is about desire, possession, and the projection of fantasy for Tournier's protagonist. Indexicality, iconic value, correspondence to reality—in short, the authenticity and authority of the referent—disrupts the photographic process for Abel, who equates photographs to the production of myth through his magical darkroom manipulations. The representation blocks the photographer's perception of the subject. As a result, the actual subject must disappear (or die, as in Poe's story) to conform to the artist's articulation of desire. Arguably, Abel's fixation on his camera and photographs reveals that the subject never exists as anything other than an empty screen on which he projects his desires. Photography becomes the means of expression for Abel's desire, but it is a procedure that universalizes the subject that it idealizes. Abel's ideal subject is a universal subject that photographic process has depleted of its specificity.

The protagonist of "Les Suaires de Véronique" practices a more aggressive intervention and manipulation of her subject, in part because Hector is the sole object of her obsessive attentions. Véronique's photography ultimately has little to do with representation;

²⁰⁵ "For each photograph raises its subject to the degree of abstraction that automatically confers on it a certain generality, so that every child photographed is a thousand children possessed" (*The Ogre* 104).

she aspires to making images that improve upon reality rather than reproduce it. According to Véronique, photographs that are copies are “évidemment inférieures à l’original réel” (“Les Suaires de Véronique” 156).²⁰⁶ She inverts the traditional process of photographic representation by manipulating the subject in order to project a vision that does not correspond to reality. Hector’s reduced diet and three hours daily of exercise have rendered him “photogenic” according to Véronique. She explains that “photogenesis” is:

la faculté de produire des photos qui vont *plus loin* que l’objet réel. En termes grossiers, l’homme photogénique surprend ceux qui, le connaissant, voient ses photos pour la première fois : elles sont plus belles que lui, elles ont l’air de dévoiler une beauté qui était jusque-là demeurée cachée. Or, cette beauté, les photos ne la dévoilent pas, elles la créent. (“Les Suaires de Véronique” 156-157)²⁰⁷

Véronique’s explanation reveals a fundamental detachment between the visual reality of the subject and the photographed image. Simply put, the photograph does not represent. Rather than leading the spectator back to the actual referent, it leads away from that referent, thereby contradicting one of the fundamental concepts of photography: the intractable reality of the photograph. Author and photographer Wright Morris touches on the possibility of such an occurrence (likely aspiring to elevate photography to the status of high art) when he distinguishes between the picture and the image. Contrary to the picture, which is bound to reality and likeness, the image exceeds its referent to exist in its own right, as a separate creation (Time Pieces 57). Véronique’s aim to create transcendent images “qui vont plus loin que l’objet réel” suggests that these images are no longer a symbol for something, but have

²⁰⁶ “obviously inferior to the original” (“Veronica’s Shrouds” 96).

²⁰⁷ “implies the possibility of producing photos that *go beyond* the real object. In vulgar terms, the photogenic man surprises people who, although they know him, are seeing his photos for the first time: they are more beautiful than he is, they seem to be revealing a beauty which was preciously hidden. But such photos do not *reveal* that beauty, they create it” (Veronica’s Shrouds 96).

become things apart from their referent. Véronique's photography can thus be perceived as a sacrilegious affront to the widely held belief that photographic representation always confirms the existence of the object it depicts.

Véronique's photography becomes a complex process of enhancement and dissimulation; she literally molds her subject into the preferred "photogenic" model in order to produce a fantasized representation that simultaneously improves upon and replaces the actual subject. Representation takes precedence over the referential indexicality; Hector is only a means to an end, a necessary part of the process, like film or chemical developer. Jacques's Derrida's discussion of the supplement provides an exceptionally enlightening expansion of this analysis of Tournier's literature.²⁰⁸ According to Derrida, the supplement functions from a position of absence and void; it enhances and supplements the original while concurrently projecting the absence of that original. Derrida explains, "The supplement adds itself, it is a surplus, a plenitude enriching another plenitude, the *fullest* measure of presence. It culminates and accumulates presence... But the supplement supplements. It adds only to replace" (On Grammatology 144-145). In order to replace the original, Derrida notes that the supplement must be something other and apart from the thing it represents to separate and preserve itself from the original object's dissolution. "The supplement is *exterior*," explains Derrida, "outside of the positivity to which it is super-added, alien to that which, in order to be replaced by it, must be other than it" (145). In "Les Suaires de Véronique," the photographer's initial assessment of Hector is that he is a body in need of enhancement. This opinion is at odds with the narrator's perception of a beautiful model in harmony with the natural beach setting. The narrator is transfixed by Hector's "chair

²⁰⁸ Jacques Derrida, Of Grammatology, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997). See in particular Part 2, chapter 2 on "That Dangerous Supplement," pages 141-157.

splendide,” and describes his nudity as “superbe et généreuse”—a body worthy of the attention and appreciation received by the photographers (154).²⁰⁹ Véronique, however, sees only banality, a scene for a postcard rather than high art with intellectual merit. Her disappointment with Hector illustrates the insufficiency of the original object proposed by Derrida. Hector’s need of enhancement results in his actual dissolution under Véronique’s tutelage. She completely transforms his original body, first through mechanical manipulation of camera lenses and eventually through diet and exercise. In this manner, Hector and his representations become something entirely alien and apart from his former self and the photographs taken of him on the beach. Hector becomes a supplement to himself, transformed in order to spawn more supplements through photographic reproduction. Véronique’s goal is the creation of an autonomous supplement: a representation that forcibly absents and replaces the actual subject. Her final photographs of Hector do just that; they do not lead back to Hector at the beach, but point only to his literal corporeal dissolution.

Véronique’s photographic manipulations extend beyond her camera and darkroom techniques. She intervenes, like Abel in *Le Roi des aulnes*, imposing her desire onto the referent itself, as if Hector were an extension of the representation rather than its origin. The umbilical linking between photographed subject and the photograph previously explored in this dissertation has been reversed: photographs in Tournier’s stories give meaning and existence to the subject rather than the subject defining the representation. In addition, the photographer actively transitions the subject into object. This is not Talbot’s pencil, which

²⁰⁹ “splendid body” (“Veronica’s Shrouds” 95); “superbly curvaceous in his nudity” (“Veronica’s Shrouds” 94). It is worth noting that the description of Hector’s body is subtly reminiscent of description often applied to the female model. Hector and Véronique present a gender inversion of the roles traditionally assigned to the model-artist relationship. Véronique, like the painter in Poe’s story, dominates Hector as if he were a woman, or a child. Hector is unable to defend himself against her artistic tyranny; even the narrator refuses to help him leave this relationship.

allowed nature to imprint herself on film in an autobiographical act. Rather, it is a fictional realization of Balzac's worst fears: representation as sorcery, with the photographer using the camera as a magical weapon to steal the essence of the subject for personal pleasure or profit. The narrator of "Les Suaires de Véronique" is shocked by the later photographs of Hector, which reveal a mask and emaciated shell of his former beauty. Véronique, however, is triumphant when displaying these images, exclaiming, "Voilà, le vrai, le seul Hector! Regardez !" ("Les Suaires de Véronique" 158).²¹⁰ Hector-as-representation eclipses the actual Hector, at least in the photographer's eyes. Hector disappears from the text, as well; the narrator sees him once more, napping like an infant in a room the color of eggshells, as if, in order to transform her muse completely into her art, Véronique begins at incubation. Abel's aggressive manhandling of the wounded child, the temporary discomfort he causes the boy, his friends, and the reader (Abel's frank sexualization and domination of the boy, as well as his gruesome description of the wound, make this a difficult passage to read) pales in comparison to Véronique's literal dissolution of her subject. Abel and Véronique both focus their desires on the representation and reproduction rather than the referent or the referential fidelity of the representation. This fixation distracts Abel from the actual subject, allowing an avenue of escape for these young boys and limiting their exposure to the photographer's violent, possessive desires. Véronique's fixation feeds her obsession with a single subject; his only escape is through death. Véronique's "dermographic" photographs are contact prints made by enshrouding Hector directly with the linen. Her art ultimately removes the two objects frequently referenced when distinguishing photography from other visual media: the referent and the mechanical apparatus of the camera. The author's emphasis on his

²¹⁰ "There!... There is the true, the only Hector! Look!" ("Veronica's Shrouds" 97).

photographers' obsessive designs in turn questions the merit and validity of their photography: can photographic representations that deny their innate referentiality still be considered photographs?

Abel and Véronique's photographic techniques illustrate one of the fundamental criticisms of photography: the camera's ability to create infinite reproductions destroys the photograph's value as a unique object. As such, the photograph's lack of differentiation additionally problematizes its ability to represent a unique individual; replication transforms the singular subject into a reproducible object divorced from its identity and contextualization. Abel's photography turns the unique subject into an anonymous type, whereas Véronique's photography presents multiple reproductions of the same subject with little or no variation, likewise deconstructing the subject's status as an individual. Both photographers remove referential context from their photography, ultimately creating unnatural images—anti-images that disturb the spectator in their reversal of the representative process and destruction of the original subject. Returning to Derrida's discussion of the supplement, we understand that the unnatural quality to Véronique's and Abel's photographs is in fact an innate condition of the supplement. Derrida deduces that the supplement is fundamentally unnatural because it is never the thing it represents; it additionally spurs an unnatural desire for the replacement rather than the original object (Of Grammatology 157). The supplement's immediacy, its substitutive capacity, and its surplus of presence supplant both the actual thing and the desire for that thing. In this manner, the introduction of a single supplement and the satisfaction experienced through its immediate fulfillment of desires gives rise to an endless chain of supplements whose addictive stimulation drives us farther away from the original subject (*ibid.*). Derrida ultimately

determines that the original subject is non-existent, based on a repetitive process of desire, fantastical projection, and temporary satisfaction. Abel's pedophilic impulses and Véronique's selfish destruction of her muse taint their photographs with an "unnatural," or rather, malignant desire. However, it is their compulsive movement away from their subjects and their mis- or anti-representation of those subjects in preference for the photograph that render their photography unnatural to its established ontological definition as a representational process. Both of these photographers are perpetually drawn to the sign for its potential to receive the projection of their desires. They create photograph after photograph in order to perpetuate their fantasies, which require the absence of the actual object. In short, Tournier's photographs replicate Poe's oval portrait: representation created from memory blinded by desire for something that never existed.

III. Disappearance and Dissolution of the Subject

I endeavored to show in the previous section how the photographers in Le Roi des aulnes and "Les Suaires de Véronique" function from a position of desire. Origins of desire can be sexual, as in the example of Abel Tiffauges, or artistic, as it is for Véronique. Desire distorts the photographer's perception of the referent, causing a temporary blindness that distances the photographer from subject, which dissimulates the photograph from the referent. The photographer's desire mutates into an addictive process of possession enacted through the apparatus of the camera. As noted by Derrida, the impulse to possess the subject and/or the object leads to an infinite chain of representations. The photographer, now dependent on the immediacy and false accuracy of the representation, develops an undeniable preference for the representation that corresponds to personal fantasy rather than

referential reality. What has begun as desire transforms into possession, domination, and suppression because the success of the representation is based on its ability to supplant the actual object. Véronique's desire for a transcendent image causes her determination of the original subject as banal, and eventually unnecessary, when Hector no longer conforms to her visionary representation. Photographs that copy reality lose their fantastical quality and therefore have little value for these photographers. However, this denial of the photograph's referential value arguably extends only to the photographer-protagonists of Le Roi des aulnes and "Les Suaires de Véronique." Spectators who are not driven or blinded by similar emotional responses perceive these photographs in a vastly different manner than the artists. For example, the police confiscate Abel's photographs after the young Martine accuses him of rape. The photographs act as evidence of his pedophilic impulses during his court hearing. The narrator of "Les Suaires de Véronique" finds Véronique's portraits of Hector disturbing, so altered is the model from the "superbly curvaceous" nude seen at the beach the previous summer. Véronique is perceived as predatory and compared to a tigress that has devoured poor Hector. The narrator comprehends that Véronique's obsessive manipulation of her model has harmed him both physically and mentally, but does nothing to intervene on Hector's behalf. The author's heavy-handed depiction of his protagonists as insidious and dysfunctional is not lost on the reader, who understands their photography to be as disturbing as the characters. The fantasies of the photographers therefore do not translate to the spectators. However, the short range of their fanatical projections does not necessarily delimit the harm they impose on their subjects.

Abel and Véronique aggressively manipulate their subjects, employing mental and physical techniques of domination during the picture-taking process. As previously stated,

the photographers are initially blinded during the creative process by their fixation on a producing a specific form and format for their photographs. This obsession then institutes an extension or second stage to their blindness: a refusal to acknowledge the harm caused by their artistic preparations.²¹¹ The photographer, who temporarily acts as sole authority over the subject and unique author of the image, has now twice removed the individual subject from his consciousness. It follows that the subject has already been displaced and reality replaced by fantasy well before the photograph is taken or developed. If blindness is an inherent aspect of representation, as Derrida suggested, one possible repercussion of such blindness is an intentional or inadvertent infliction of pain. Photographic representation in these three stories by Tournier is forged from the physical discomfort of the subject, which also symbolizes dissolution of that subject's autonomous self. The presence of pain during the representational act indicates a fundamental rift between the photographer and subject, as well as the representation and the subject. Hector writes Véronique a letter clarifying his reasons for leaving her; his explanation articulates the divergence between their separate expectations for and comprehensions of the photographic process. Hector writes,

La photographie sérieuse instaure un échange perpétuel entre le modèle et le photographe. Il y a un système de vases communicants. Je vous dois beaucoup, Véronique chérie. Vous avez fait de moi un autre homme. Mais vous m'avez aussi beaucoup pris. Vingt-deux mille cent trente-neuf fois quelque chose de moi m'a été arraché pour entrer dans le piège à images, votre « petite boîte de nuit » (camera obscura), comme vous dites... J'ai maigri, durci, séché, non sous l'effet d'un quelconque régime alimentaire ou gymnastique, mais sous celui des ces prises, des prélèvements effectués chaque jour sur ma substance. ("Les Suaires de Véronique" 165-166)²¹²

²¹¹ Derrida's explanation of the supplement once again enlightens this discussion on Tournier, specifically the inability of the protagonist-photographers to see or understand the harm they cause to their subjects. Derrida writes, "One goes *from blindness to the supplement*. But the blind person cannot see, in its origin, the very thing he produces to supplement his sight. *Blindness to the supplement* is the law. And especially blindness to its concept" (*Of Grammatology* 149).

²¹² "Serious photography creates a perpetual interchange between the model and the photographer. It becomes like the system of communicating vessels. I owe you a lot, Veronica darling. You have made another man of

Hector's descriptions of these two visions of photography—exchange and theft—correspond to Tournier's differing depictions of photography in his literature.²¹³ Hector's initial determination that photography is a process of communication provides an extenuation of Idriss' belief that the photograph resembles the referent.²¹⁴ Neither subject perceives photography as innately misrepresentative or corrupt. Rather, it is the photographic act and the photographer's intent that direct the production of the image.

Pain enters the representational process through the sharp wedge of the photographer's desire, but is perpetuated by the naïveté and lack of protest from the subject: Abel's subjects are children who dare not contradict his adult authority; Hector twice submits to Véronique's obsessions, returning to her even after a temporary escape; and Idriss' youth and unfamiliarity with an image-laden culture like France leaves him little ability for rebellion. In this manner, the depiction of photographs and subjects described by Tournier differ drastically from the majority of authors included in this dissertation who emphasize the empathetic response of the photographer, a drive for referential correspondence between subject and photograph, and the subject's willing participation in or authority over the photographic process. Tournier's photographers find their literary echo in John Irving's "mole man" character in A Widow for One Year who kills prostitutes and then photographs

me. Twenty-two thousand two hundred and thirty-nine times, some part of myself has been stolen from me and put into your little image trap as you call it...I've gotten thinner, tougher, becomes desiccated, not through any diet or exercises, but because of what has been taken from me, because of the daily removal of some of my substance" ("Veronica's Shrouds 103).

²¹³ See David G. Bevan's article "Tournier's Photographer: A Modern Bluebeard?" for elucidation on the opposing types of photographic encounters in Tournier's literature as well as for insightful analysis of Hector's letter.

²¹⁴ As previously referenced, Idriss claims, "ce n'est pas à moi à ressembler ma photo. C'est ma photo qui doit me ressembler, non?" (La Goutte d'or 100). ["It isn't up to me to look like my photo. It's my photo that ought to look like me, isn't it?" (The Golden Droplet 88)].

their bodies in a life-like pose. Similar to Abel's and Véronique's muses, the subjects of the murderer's photographic attentions exist only as props in his fantasies. The photographer does not engage in a physical, sexual act with these women; he asks them to pose only to gain an advantage of surprise for his deadly attack. However, it is difficult to determine which action, the murder or the picture taking, gives this character more pleasure. His photographs undoubtedly serve as mementos of his actions and extenuations of the pleasure driven from his aggressions, contrary to Abel and Véronique, whose primary source of pleasure is the image itself.

There are three key examples of the subject in pain in this selection of Tournier's writing: the boy who cuts his knee while being photographed by Abel; Hector, who develops skin disorders and possibly dies because of his exposure to Véronique's photographic chemicals; and Idriss, the protagonist of La Goutte d'or whose exposure photography corresponds to several painful and difficult experiences, such as his best friend's death and his decision to leave his home in the Saharan oasis of Tabelbala for France. In the first two examples, the imposition of the photographer's authority prolongs or inflicts actual physical pain on the subject. In the third example, however, the photographic act and the inaccessibility of this representation cause Idriss a mental anguish and catalyze a transformation of self. The French tourist who takes Idriss' picture promises to send it to him after she returns to Paris. Idriss anxiously awaits the arrival of the photograph, temporarily making himself a spectacle and attracting much mockery from his community when he receives a postcard depicting a donkey costumed with pompons. This young protagonist had hoped the photograph would endow him with a particular social status, as it had his uncle Mogadem. Idriss would have been the second man to possess a photographic portrait in

Tabelbala. Photography embodies a peculiar dichotomy for Idriss and his Muslim Berber culture; pictures are determined to be vanity and attract the evil eye, and yet, because most of the inhabitants cannot afford photographs, pictures also indicate a level of prestige and wealth. The photograph of Idriss is characterized by a second duality, symbolizing both an extension of the self and an absence or lack in the self. The eroticization of his encounter with the blonde photographer indicates a symbolic loss of his virginal innocence and his transformation into adulthood: “Quand la Land Rover disparut en soulevant un nuage de poussière, Idriss n’était plus tout à fait le même homme” (La Goutte d’or 14).²¹⁵ Idriss later consummates his sexual transformation with a blonde prostitute upon his arrival in Marseille. The woman takes his gold bauble, “la goutte d’or,” as payment.

Idriss’ encounter with the photographer in La Goutte d’or is clearly more metaphoric and magical than the situations described in “Les Suaires de Véronique” and Le Roi des aulnes. The French tourist arrives abruptly, as if materializing out of thin air, and disappears quickly in a cloud of dust with Idriss’ photograph. Yet, the blond photographer’s actions do catalyze a dissimulation with his former, adolescent self by prompting his departure for France and initiation into an unfamiliar, image-saturated culture. In this manner, the photographic act in all three stories by Tournier marks a transformation and dissolution of the original subject. Pain is one of the primary consequences of this process, which is never voluntary in any of these three stories. Transformation is equated with passivity, submission (two characteristics often used to define the photograph), and inability to protect the autonomous self against the photographer’s destructive appropriation. Idriss’ mother laments

²¹⁵ “After the Land-Rover had disappeared, raising a cloud of dust, Idris was no longer quite the same man” (The Golden Droplet 6).

that the disappearance of the photograph denotes a fracturing of the self that may have grave consequences. She tells Idriss, “C’est un peu de toi qui est parti... Si après tu est malade, comment te soigner?” (La Goutte d’or 22).²¹⁶ Dissolution of the original self is a necessary condition of the supplement, according to Jacques Derrida.²¹⁷ Hector and Idriss must therefore perpetually be transformed or transform themselves into something “other” and “exterior” in order to maintain their participation in these cultures of representation. Hector, for example, is useful to Véronique as far as he maintains his transformative and photogenic properties. However, Hector disappears as soon as Véronique’s photographs transcend (or dissolve) the dominant presence of the original subject. Derrida notes that the supplemental chain induces movement; satisfaction with a single representation would institute a state of stasis, and the equivalent of death.²¹⁸ Véronique’s exposition signifies the termination of Hector’s participation in the chain of signifier, or rather the conclusion of Hector as supplement to himself. In La Goutte d’or, Idriss’ eventual denial of the image culture marks the termination of the novel. He spies his golden droplet in a jewelry store in Paris while working street construction. In this final scene, he drives his pneumatic drill into the pavement in front of the store, making the bauble dance as it had danced around the neck of Zett Zobeida, a beautiful woman who performed at a wedding just before Idriss left the oasis. The droplet symbolizes the opposite of representation and duplication; it is pure, inimitable form created spontaneously by nature. Idriss’ reuniting with the droplet implies his own

²¹⁶ “It’s a bit of yourself that’s gone... If after that you get ill, how shall we be able to cure you?” (The Golden Droplet 14).

²¹⁷ Derrida notes, “And the experience of which we speak is such as to reduce that absence as much as to maintain it” (Of Grammatology 152).

²¹⁸ “The supplement will always be the moving of the tongue of acting through the hands of others... This substitution always has the form of the sign. The scandal is that the sign, the images, or the representer, become forces and make ‘the world move’” (Of Grammatology 147).

withdrawal from the cycle of representation that has structured his travels to and in France, and illustrates his recognition that photography neither defines nor determines his existence.

IV. Conclusion

Le Roi des aulnes, “Les Suaires de Véronique,” and La Goutte d’or are stories that, on one hand, confirm and reinforce our worst fears about photography and photographers. Pictorial representation, specifically photography, in Michel Tournier’s literature functions on the level of pure simulacra. Photographs are false copies that do not represent reality. They are created from and for illusion, fantasy, and the projection of desire. Photography thus indicates the locus of the subject’s pain and dissolution, as well as the photographer’s obsessive acts of representation. However, it is the manner in which the image is formed and used that defines the representation as a depiction of exchange or theft. The photographer in each of these stories acts as a dominant authority over a weak or naïve subject. The camera and the referent are merely the tools used for the projection of an individual and often insidious desire. Despite this, where the reader surely detects the hand of the photographer forming these disturbing representations, it is the hand of the author that ultimately is responsible for these “sinister and strange” writings on photography. Indeed, Tournier’s readers are not likely to confuse his literary dexterity with non-fictional accounts of photography. As such, Tournier’s stories are perhaps best identified as with cautionary tales concerning the seductive draw of photographic representation and the potentially uneven distribution of power between the referent, the photographer, and the spectator.

The character of Abel Tiffauges in Le Roi des aulnes explains his delight in photography by stating, “La photographie promeut le réel au niveau du rêve, elle

métamorphose un objet réel en son propre mythe” (Le Roi des aulnes 145).²¹⁹ Michel Tournier likewise metamorphoses the medium of photography into the stuff of myth through his emphasis on the half-truths and historic phobias that form our collective consciousness on photography. Each of the photographic encounters described by Tournier between the subject and a tourist, an obsessive artist, and a latent pedophile presume the expression of potential reality. However, Tournier promotes his photographers to the level of the supernatural (the blond photographer) and the monstrous (Abel Tiffauges and Véronique). Extremism enters each narrative through the construction of contrast. Tournier emphasizes the psychological divide between the photographer-protagonist and subject in Le Roi des aulnes and “Les Suaires de Véronique” through textual depiction of the photographers’ innermost fantasies and individual assessments of photography. In La Goutte d’or, this divide is largely cultural. The construction of extreme dichotomies is a technique of myth, with which author Michel Tournier is clearly familiar. As such, he reveals, perhaps inadvertently, the fictionality of his sinister photographic projections. It is in this emphasis on the fictionality of his writing that we locate reconciliation between Michel Tournier’s personal enthusiasm for photography and his sinister literary fiction on photography.

²¹⁹ “Photography promotes reality to the plane of dream; it metamorphoses a real object into its own myth” (The Ogre 104).

CHAPTER 8

Conclusion to the Dissertation

Author Liz Wells opens her essay “Words and Pictures” by acknowledging, “One of the most difficult tasks in writing about photographs, indeed all visual arts, is to find words which in any way adequately describe the visual object. This is an issue whatever the context of the publication.”²²⁰ Wells is specifically referring to writing about actual visual images, but the problem persists, perhaps even more intensely, in writing about photographs that are textually-created and/or fictional. This project began through a gradual recognition of the unique and intricate relationship between words and images. As a student of comparative literature and a passionate devotee of photography and visual art, I recognized a subtle but thorough division between the methodologies and thinking associated with the text and the image. Historically, visual depiction has been considered inferior to the verbal arts. Photography, in particular, has become the target for critical and even disparaging assessment, appearing as it does late in the development of the visual and verbal arts and as subtle competition for both. Photography’s ability to bridge the gap between reality and representation, science and art renders it a particularly difficult medium to categorize. However, its capacity to exist in-between, to vacillate within our perception and definition renders it an especially fascinating subject, inspiring a surfeit of visual and verbal, theoretical and fictional responses. In addition, the very mutability of meaning contrasts with the

²²⁰ Liz Wells, “Words and Pictures,” The Photography Reader, ed. Liz Wells (London: Routledge, 2003) 428.

photograph's capacity to depict an absolute, unalterable depiction of reality. Photography fluctuates within its very ontology, making it a tempting, yet frustrating subject for analysis.

These realizations concerning the nature of photography and the text/image relationship during the course of this study inevitably lead to wondering whether the verbal photograph is perceived in the same manner as the visual object. This question predictably raised many more: What does it mean to write the image? How does the author synchronize the ontological conflict existent between these two distinct media? How does one perceive of a photograph that is never seen through the traditional modes of spectatorship? And ultimately, what constitutes the nature of photographic authority in fictional literature, particularly when the very nature of that authority is transformed from the visual into the verbal? What this study has shown is that most authors, whether writing about fictional photographs or actual photographs, tend to write about them in the same way. Furthermore, the function of photographs in fictional literature very often reproduces how they function in real life. In this manner, authors recreate the photograph's unique ontological status as a representation of the real within their writing regardless of the transition in genre. These authors also uniformly uphold the photograph's referential authority despite including it in a medium characterized by its separation from the real through fabrication and fictionalization.

In general, photography is defined by the spectator's inability to perceive of it as anything other than a representation of the real. Susan Sontag concludes that "Photographs have the authority of being testimony, but almost as if you have some direct contact with the thing, or as if that photograph is a piece of the thing; even though it is an image, it really is the thing."²²¹ As this study has shown, photographs in fiction, like actual photographs, can

²²¹ Susan Sontag, "Photography Within the Humanities," *The Photography Reader*, ed. Liz Wells (London: Routledge, 2003) 64.

function on the level of truth within the narrative. They stand in for their referents and stand for reality; their fictional spectators rarely question their representative veracity. The authentic photograph in fiction bears the hallmarks of reality perceived in actual photographs: they act as documents, provide irrefutable evidence about their subjects (and sometimes even their photographers and spectators), and reveal gaps in the spectator's perceptive faculties. Such prescribed functions are neither new to photography, nor to photography in literature, allowing the selection of texts in this dissertation to take part in an extensive, albeit temporarily brief, tradition of fiction writing on photography that promotes an ineradicable connection between the photograph and its referent. One finds, for example, similar evidential and essentialist characteristics attributed to the daguerreotype in Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel The House of Seven Gables. Published in 1851, it is one of the earliest examples of American literature that employs photography as an organizing agent and literary trope. In this novel, a daguerreotype proves a character innocent of murder and displays the cruelty of a man considered to be generous and caring. This comparison illustrates that despite the century and a half that separates Hawthorne from the contemporary authors included in this dissertation, thinking on photography has changed little over time, as has the photograph's influence over literature. The photograph's attachment to the real and the perception of photography as an objective science rather than a subjective art form continues to define present perception of this medium, proving its history unalterable despite so many technological advances that have increased the potential for manipulation.

The photograph's peculiar claim to the real is one of the reasons why photography continues to fascinate and frustrate us. Author Carol Squires determines, "despite our greater understanding of photography, modern attitudes toward the medium are still substantially

defined by those early polarities of wonder and contempt... consensus about its importance, function, and effect has never been achieved.”²²² Squires’ statement underscores the prevailing confusion that envelopes much of our past and present thinking on the medium, a confusion that is largely based in the recognition that photographic vision does not correspond to human vision. As such, it almost always presents a perception of reality that differs substantially from what was previously apprehended and accepted as truth. However, it is largely because of its departure from our subjective vision, in addition to the camera’s status as a mechanical apparatus, that the accuracy of photographic representation is privileged over human perception. Photographic authority relies on its stability, on the fact that the subject and perspective of the actual photograph alters little over time, unlike human perception and memory.

The photograph’s deviation from our perception of reality is often understood as dangerous, particularly because of its ability to transform the spectator’s knowledge of reality and opinions of the photographed subject. In this manner, the photograph is able to confirm and confound simultaneously, to authenticate and invalidate the reality that it depicts. The difference between these two types of vision is a common subject for fiction writing on photography; each of the literary works in this dissertation incorporates this visual discrepancy on some level of its textual production. Optic disparity functions on a literal level in Isabel Allende’s and Penelope Lively’s novels when photographs expose secrets about their subjects. Textual photographs can also indirectly reveal this same variation. For example, traumatic family history is gradually narrated through photographs in both Anne-Marie Garat’s novel La Chambre noire and John Irving’s A Widow for One Year. Finally, in

²²² Carol Squires, “Introduction,” The Critical Image: Essays on Contemporary Photography, ed. Carol Squires (Seattle: Bay Press, 1990) 7.

the literary works of Leïla Sebbar and Michel Tournier included in this analysis, the photographers are blinded by personal desire so that photographs function as blank screens for the projection of fantasies. In several texts, photographs tend to perform on a more symbolic level while maintaining the qualities that define the photograph in fiction as an authentic image. It is invariably because of its initial status as a representation of a particular reality that it can accumulate a symbolic meaning for the characters, text, author, or reader. In La Chambre noire, for example, the photograph must depict a particular place and time in order to stimulate mnemonic or imaginative narrative production. In Michel Tournier's fiction, initial recognition of the photograph's referential authority is central to the fantasy even if the original subject is eventually eclipsed by the fantasy. Indeed, referential authority of the photograph is the most serious threat to fantasy, requiring the subject's ultimate annihilation and/or the spectator's complete rupture with the reality depicted therein. The symbolic value of the photograph, while founded in its reproduction of reality, often has little in common with the reality depicted by the image. The inconsistency between photographic and human vision is as much a product of our emotional and intellectual response as it is physical.

The photographic referent becomes the most common focal point for the conflict of vision between the technology of the camera and the human eye. The incongruity between the camera lens and the eye usurps the spectator's ability to navigate between visual perception and photographic depiction of the real, and thus provokes a personal state of vertigo and blindness. Photographs give the impression of an unstable and shifting representation. This lack of stability is essentially what fascinates and frightens us about photography. Certain photographic images appear to invert the referential truth that defines photography,

prompting author Yve Lomax to question whether “the appearance of the [photographic] image marks the disappearance, the absence, of that which is essentially true or real.”²²³ The result of such perceptions is the conversion of the photograph from a site for referential authority to that of fabrication and fictionalization, making it an ideal component of literary fiction through its dualistic association with reality and fiction. Reality and fiction therefore both appear at the very center of our labyrinthine understanding of photography. The photograph’s inability to conform to the spectator’s preconceived notions of reality produces the perception of illusion and/or falsehood in its representation. Photographs add an element of truth to literary fiction, but also enable the author to sabotage that truth. Recognition of the existent disparity between photographic and human vision can cause reactions of shock, vertigo, and even pain. In many of the stories analyzed in this study, photographs trigger a reaction of pain from their subjects or spectators. They represent things that have been lost, such as a husband’s love or a beloved child. The photograph incites pain because it depicts the past and confirms that what once was no longer is. Photographs serve as reminders of the past and of the inevitable progression of time. As such, photographs in fiction can produce melancholy, mourning, and the desire for what no longer exists. Or rather, what never actually existed, given the schism in perceptive faculties.

The camera lens is a fundamentally different object from the human eye; the photograph therefore presents a very distinct kind of seeing. Understanding the intricacies of this difference and how it stimulates the production of literary fiction has been one of the results of this study. We locate the fictional narrative of literature in this space of differentiation between the vision of the camera and the eye. Photography forms the catalyst for the text in that it presents a version of reality unlike what is known by the spectator.

²²³ Eve Lomax, Writing the Image: An Adventure with Art and Theory (New York: IB Tauris, 2000) 18.

Compensation for this difference takes several forms: the spectator adjusts his own vision or memory, like Glyn in The Photograph, or conforms his memory to the event depicted in the photograph, like the Cole family in A Widow for One Year. The protagonists of Le Roi des aulnes and “Les Suaires de Véronique” produce images that correspond to their specific desires, and the protagonists in La Chambre noire and “La photo d'identité” invent new narratives for the photographs which include the history depicted. The disparity of vision therefore opens the photograph to a process of fictionalization and narrative production, wherein lies the fundamental bond between the visual and verbal, image and text, the photograph and literature.

Similar to the camera lens and the eye, the photograph in fiction is a fundamentally different object than the actual photograph, even if the author allows it to function in the same manner. Whether the author creates an imaginary photograph for the purpose of plot development or references an actual, existent photograph, writing the image necessarily imbues it with fiction. The photograph in fiction is really not a photograph at all: it is a text. Writing the photograph removes it even further from its original subject, transforms it into a representation of a representation. This threatens the referential integrity of the photograph by increasing its access to the reality it is supposed to depict. Author Christian Metz distinguishes between film and photography stating, “the very nature of what we believe is not the same in film and photography” (Metz 144). Much the same can be said of photography and fiction writing about photography. Photographs in literary fiction simply do not have the same affect on the reader as an actual photograph will have on its spectator. Clearly, there are points of convergence and differentiation. Certain works of fiction, such as Retrato en Sepia, The Photograph, and “Les Suaires de Véronique,” keep the spectator well

within the confines of the text. Other works invite the reader to act as spectator, inspiring an imaginative reconstruction of the photograph through ekphrastic description, as in A Widow for One Year, or through implied ekphrasis based on cultural consciousness, as in Shérazade and “La photo d'identité.” Fiction writing on photography establishes two kinds of spectators: one internal to the text and the other external. The author may also instigate the reader’s sympathetic connection to the spectator, photographer, or subject, thereby involving the reader in the photographic experience. However, the experience of photography as text is always one that is essentially removed from the experience represented by the text. The experience of photography in fiction thus becomes very much like the experience of actual photography in that the reader and spectator are always already removed from the event of the picture.

This dissertation began as a study about the function of photography in literature and the function of literature about photography. As such, it fits into a tradition of thinking about the interactions and implications of the text-image relationship. The photograph’s referential authority has been found to be a central component to the structural, narrative, and character development in each of the works of fiction analyzed herein. Just as the photograph is inevitably established as an authentic, visual imprint of reality, it is also inseparably bound to the verbal act of fictionalization. Indeed, the photograph in fiction is doubly determined by fiction through the perceived visual disparity of its reproduction of reality and the act of writing the image. Author Nancy M. Shawcross observes that the textual photograph, whether literal or figurative, “grounds the interpretive narrative and links fiction with reality.”²²⁴ Fiction and language are, however, intrinsic values of the photograph even before its insertion

²²⁴ Nancy M. Shawcross, Roland Barthes On Photography: The Critical Tradition in Perspective (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1996) 117.

into a narrative. We respond to the photograph's representation of reality as a static, mute state with the movement of language and imaginative narrative.²²⁵ The photograph invites reverie, presents the opportunity to re-experience and reanimate what can never actually be reproduced. This is the enchantment of photography: its ability to conjoin the conflicting, but inseparable, elements of the visual and verbal, image and text, and reality and fiction. Language and fiction are the reverse, or rather, the negative vision, of the photograph's reality and silence.

²²⁵ Eduardo Cadava writes, "we respond the muteness of this play by inventing stories, by relating each of these shifting images to several possible narratives" ("Gathering Night" ch. L).

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