Julia Margaret Cameron and Archival Creativity: Traces of Photographic Imagination from the Victorian Album to Neo-Victorian Fiction

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Abstract

The photographs and albums of Julia Margaret Cameron (1815-1879) form an originating site of archival creativity, both in their internal dynamics and for a range of textual representations. Conceptually, the archive is increasingly being explored as a creative and affective site for the production of culture and fiction, with Victorian traces featuring prominently due to their richness and profusion. Creative experiments with textual archives have met with critical attention; yet the visual archive is also embedded with fluid patterns of meaning, complicated by the flexible relation between image and text. Victorian photography in particular offers auratic and temporal qualities that can produce implicit narratives. Drawing on a recent wave of Cameron scholarship, I argue that Cameron was an archival artist, creating portraits inspired by history and literature that embed a matrix of cultural strands which demand to be interpreted affectively by the viewer. Her many photographic albums can be “read” as visual archives that present a series of imagined experiences to the viewer, question Victorian politics of identity, and contain fluid narrative potential. These archival narratives can be compared to the way in which Cameron’s photographic imagination has been translated over the last century and a half into textual narratives, in which the photographs act as material tokens of memory, conduits of female emancipation and transformative visual experiences. Her visual structures and arresting style significantly influenced her great-niece, Virginia Woolf, who was also an advocate of archival affectivity as a means to bring attention to “obscure lives”, and whose flexible approach to history adds layers to Cameron’s literary afterlife. In recent years, Cameron’s works have been evoked in neo-Victorian fiction as visual traces that open the text to new interpretations. Representations of Cameron’s photographs deconstruct the dynamics of nineteenth-century visual culture and bring “obscure lives” into the light, conduct structural and temporal experimentations in fiction through sequences of visual experiences, and present the overwhelming power of light as access to the intangible amidst a collage of fragmented materials and meanings. Cameron’s Victorian photographs and albums are radical archival artforms, and demonstrate the exponential archival creativity of the photographic trace to blur accepted borders between reality and fiction, and between the Victorian imagination and the multiple perspectives of the present.
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Declaration

Whilst registered as a candidate for the above degree, I have not been registered for any other research award. The results and conclusions embodied in this thesis are the work of the named candidate and have not been submitted for any other academic award.
List of Figures

Note on formatting of photograph titles:

In referring to Cameron’s photographs throughout this thesis, I use italics for the artist’s own image titles as found in the catalogue raisonné, Julian Cox and Colin Ford’s *Julia Margaret Cameron: The Complete Photographs*, or as given by the gallery or repository, and give any additional titles, for example those given as annotations in albums by Cameron or others, in double quotation marks. In this list, I additionally give the generally accepted title or a relevant description in square brackets, if it is not given in the original context. If no original title is known for a Cameron image, I use Cox and Ford’s description of the image in square brackets. Album titles are given in double quotation marks as listed in the catalogue raisonné, (87, 96, 502-505). In the main text, references are given for individual images mentioned in writing only, by their page number in the *Complete Photographs*.

Repository information was correct at the time of download, although items from the Royal Photographic Society Collection, previously held at the National Media Museum (now the National Science and Media Museum) have been owned from April 2017 by the Victoria and Albert Museum. This includes all images from the Herschel Album as well as individual prints.

Repository Abbreviations

BL – British Library

HRC – Harry Ransom Center

IOWCC – Isle of Wight County Council

JMCT – Julia Margaret Cameron Trust

NMM – National Media Museum

NPG – National Portrait Gallery

VAM – Victoria and Albert Museum
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Personally, I should like to thank Kate Brombley, who collaborated with me in organising a one-day postgraduate conference on “Collectors and Collecting” in June 2015, and my mother, June Smith, for listening to conference papers and always encouraging me.
Dissemination

Journal Articles


Book Chapters


Conference Papers

“The Victorian Art Album as Archive: The Construction of Memory and Identity in the Albums of Julia Margaret Cameron”. FACS Postgraduate Conference, University of Portsmouth. 14 May 2014.

“Julia Margaret Cameron and the ‘Magical Value’ of the Trace”. Julia Margaret Cameron Bicentenary Conference, University of Portsmouth. 4 July 2015.


Introduction
Archival Creativity

“I have been fired to fresh Zeal and am endeavouring to send you a worthy sun-poem in answer”
Julia Margaret Cameron, 10 Oct 1874.

“She was seeking some more permanent expression of her abundant energies in literature”
Virginia Woolf, “Julia Margaret Cameron”, 4.

“She grabbed a piece of paper and made a note for more photographic subjects featuring those only constant and reliable resources: Mary Ann, a pool of light, a lily and a cheesecloth shift.”

Figure 1. (clockwise from top left) Julia Margaret Cameron, *The Angel at the Sepulchre* (1869-70); *A Study* (1865-66); *After the Manner of Perugino* (1865); *Lilies* (1869).

When, in 1874, Julia Margaret Cameron received a sonnet dedicated to her by Charles Tennyson Turner, in which Alfred Tennyson’s brother declares that “The sun obeys thy gestures and allows / thy guiding hand, where’er thou hast a mind” (line 5-6, “Sonnet”, 5), it was perhaps characteristic that she replied with the promise of a “sun-poem” of her own: a photograph that would convey the intangible through
the process of fixing light on paper. This intermedial dialogue is typical of Cameron’s both intensely literary and determinedly material photography. Her works are sites of boundary crossings, in which art blends with the textual and cultural until visual poetry and poetic vision could be deemed as equivalents, creating hybrid works which form dialogues with cultural history and with the works of her contemporaries in literature and art. This blend of material and literary priorities, results in an affective, malleable, narrative-making sensibility that engages in a creative form of archival practice.

Photography, for Cameron, really was “writing with light”. She began her artistic career in literature in 1847, aged twenty-two, with the published translation of Leonora, a German narrative poem by Gottfried Bürger, and continued writing voraciously throughout her life, including volumes of effusive letters, many of which are lost (Olsen, 2). At one level, her work curates an abstract cultural archive, since her extensive reading of classic and modern literature blended and fed into her art as illustrations, influences and intertexts. At another level she curated a material archive, assembling her photographs in tangible and multiple forms in bound albums specifically tailored for her recipients to read and experience. When her great-niece, Virginia Woolf wrote that Cameron sought “some more permanent expression of her abundant energies in literature” (“Julia Margaret Cameron”, 4) she was referring to Cameron’s early literary efforts, but Woolf’s comment could also be applied to Julia Margaret’s whole oeuvre which forms a “permanent expression” of and commentary on, her own literary experiences, in material form, addressed to posterity.

Unsurprisingly, given the richness of her literary treatment of photography, there have been numerous examples of fictional writing inspired by Cameron, both during her lifetime and since her death. Yet, the complex literary and material qualities of Cameron’s work have been relatively unacknowledged elements in these texts. Instead, these literary evocations, of which Tennyson Turner’s sonnet can be considered as an early example, are like her artistic reputation itself, often attributed to her eccentricities, friendship with famous artists and poets, and the large numbers of subsequent writers and memoirists in her family circle. This assessment belies the affective, narrative and archival qualities of Cameron’s work which not only act as a shaping influence in portraying the artist in fiction but are also embryonically related to modern and postmodern literary techniques.
Indeed, this double-edged archival quality is already apparent in Tennyson Turner’s sonnet, which Cameron appended to her illustrated edition of Alfred Tennyson’s *Idylls of the King* in 1875. In the sonnet, Tennyson Turner eulogises Cameron’s work as an expression of a shared historical imagination, purporting that “Thou hast brought / Into thy picture, all our fancy sought / In that old time with skilful art and wise” (lines 2-4, “Sonnet”, 5), thus lauding her role as an archival artist.

Interestingly, by including this sonnet in her illustrated edition of the *Idylls*, writing it out by hand, Cameron self-consciously styles herself as both interpreter of literature and the object of literary interpretation within the same volume. This continuous movement of creative recycling, involving the fluid intermission between word and image, exemplifies the concerns of this thesis.

It is my particular contention that the literary qualities of photography are integrally bound with a form of archival materiality. Cameron’s choice to render expressions of affective literary experience in the new image-fixing medium of photography, then only about thirty years old and still rapidly developing, meant that her work necessarily intertwined with ideas of materiality, transience and permanence that it shares with concepts of the archive. Cameron enthusiastically embraced the material aspect of her work as part of the authenticity and self-conscious making of her literary images, considered the production of photographs as a metaphysical and even spiritual process, and experimented with their placement in different contexts and formats. These archival qualities provide an integral linkage to fictions that mediate her work in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. These texts employ techniques of historical materiality, intermediality and collage to evoke her photographs as significant objects within their narratives as well as to re-stage her creative processes.

One such example is *Tennyson’s Gift* (1996), Lynne Truss’s comic novel on the wider Freshwater Circle of which Cameron was a pivotal figure, in which the author affectionately satirises the photographer’s apparently scattergun creative techniques. Truss styles Cameron as an obsessive celebrity-collector, who, when she cannot obtain access to her heroes makes do with the “only constant and reliable resources: Mary Ann, a pool of light, a lily and a cheesecloth shift” (40), a joke clearly based on the numerous extant works containing these elements, some of which are shown in Figure 1. Whilst Truss appears to treat this formula as ludicrous and stages the
similarity of the resultant photographs as evidence of lack of the artist’s inspiration in default of obtaining superior masculine models (40), she also obliquely suggests an experimental variability of composition using a limited range of objects to produce different meanings. Cameron did employ remarkably similar images to represent contrastingly different ideas, using her titles to construct the meaning in an interactive relation between text and image. The real images of lilies and Marys are made to perform various roles including the illustration of biblical characters in *The Angel at the Sepulchre* and *The Annunciation*, a symbolic purity in *Lilies*, aesthetic technique in *A Study*, and an emulation of artistic forebears in *After the Manner of Perugino*.

Truss’s mockery of Cameron’s multiplicity in her list of ever-more desperate titles, ending with “The Angel at the Sepulchre Saying Move Along Now Please, There’s Nothing To See”, ostensibly produces a joke about the relative limits of inspiration and the appearance of domestic banality of which Cameron’s photographs are often accused. Yet it also obliquely stresses Cameron’s re-organisation of material elements and spaces to achieve multiple meanings without ever fixing on a definitive interpretation. In this comic passage, Truss, in a tangential manner, sets up Cameron as a purveyor of archival creativity, a quality that I argue infuses her photographic legacy.

**The Archive, Photography and Literature**

This thesis opens up a new approach to Cameron’s photography and its literary afterlives by assessing all these works through the viewfinder of the archive. In the following chapters, I consider literary and photographic creation and reception both in relation to affective experiences¹ generated by archival objects and through the filter of archival processes. It is my view that both Julia Margaret Cameron’s photography and post-Victorian fictions that draw on her work can be considered

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¹ In this thesis, I utilise the concept of “affect” alongside that of “imagination”, although I am aware that the definition of these terms in literary theory is subtly different, affect being a more implicit and indefinable quality compared to the more intentional connotations of imagination. I follow the definition of affect by Gregg and Seigworth as “visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally other than conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion, - that can serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension that can likewise suspend us (as if in neutral) across a barely registering accretion of force-relations, or that can even leave us overwhelmed by the world’s apparent intractability” (1).
“archival”, for not only do these forms draw on cultural and photographic archives, but they compose an archive themselves in which curatorial processes are performed. The concept of “the archive” is often associated, within Victorian studies, with assessments of categorisation, inflexibility and the coding of normative social reality. It is evoked as a trope that deleges the limits of thinking and the regulation of identity. To date, archives within a Victorian context have been most prominently associated with Thomas Richards’ study of the ideology of the British Empire as a vast attempt to produce a containing archive. This argument has also been raised by Nancy Armstrong in conjunction with nineteenth-century photographic vision, which she regards as a paragon of the indexical archive – conditioning both photographs and archives as forms of disembodied authoritative vision that mutually produce and make possible each other (16), a concept that she also applies to Cameron’s photographs (112). Joan M. Schwartz has also argued that photography and the institutional archive have a “shared paradigmatic origins” in certain “nineteenth-century epistemological assumptions” (64). In this study, it is my intention to suggest turning these figurations of both photography and the archive as restrictive knowledge encoders inside-out, by casting these two apparently indexical forms into relief as sites of flexibility, creative practice and surrealism. For, if the archive has the potential to restrict forms of knowledge, it also calls into question the opposite, the capacity to disrupt expected orders, and if it insists on a certain form of reality as self-evident, it provokes speculation on transformations and subversions of that reality. Moreover, definitions of the archive as restrictive assume a foundational sense of the archive that is both documentary and official. Whilst this is illuminating in questioning the prerogatives of the archives of governments, empires, and institutions, what happens when these origins differ, and the archive is crossed with or composed of creative cultural materials and/or techniques? Might even the same will to assign value, arrange and preserve produce vastly different dynamics?

When viewed creatively, the idea of the archive and its workings can be seen as a blueprint or a springboard for reassessments of literary and photographic processes. Moreover, employing the concept of the archive allows visual art and literature to be analysed in relation to a singular matrix of ideas, not obliterating but certainly lessening the gulf between the forms. This creative approach is also not without foundation in criticism. Various wellsprings backdate it, notably the work of Walter
Benjamin on the materials of history. Indeed, Benjamin and Virginia Woolf have particularly considered that the imaginative recasting of traces can liberate the archive from its potentially oppressive nature.

Although most famous for his deconstruction of the aura of objects, Benjamin in his essay “Unpacking My Library”, considers that the activity of book collecting in which “ownership is the most intimate relationship that one can have to objects” (Illuminations, 69), can, in fact, have an integral power to generate new narratives because “to a true collector the acquisition of an old book is its rebirth” (63). The childlike tendency to tell stories about objects and put unrelated scraps together is re-animated in the book collector as the wish “to renew the old world – that is the collector’s deepest desire when he is driven to acquire things” (63). The power behind this renewal is driven by a “relationship to objects which does not emphasise their functional utilitarian value – that is their usefulness – but studies and loves them as the scene, the stage, of their fate” (62). Old books are figured as the stage of the past, a means by which the individual’s imagination recreates what is long dead “for inside him there are spirits, or at least little genii” which induce a “profound enchantment” (69, 62) that in turn, creates for the collector of old books the illusion of being able to “see through them into the distant past as though inspired” (62) and thus allows them to become an “interpreter of fate” (62). The books therefore contain the fate of the past transfigured into words, to be reconstituted in the minds of the present, with growing critique on a work of art becoming, what Benjamin suggests elsewhere, is its ever renewable “funeral pyre” (qtd. in Arendt, 11). Yet even in regards to the “funeral pyre”, he emphasises the difference between analysing the “wood and ashes” of material evidence and considering the “enigma of the flame itself: the enigma of being alive” (11).

Similarly, Hermione Lee notes that Virginia Woolf’s experiments with archival traces of literary and historical figures demonstrate the idea that “the imagination can have historical authority” (15), a connection also made by Angeliki Spiropoulou who goes as far as to argue that Benjamin and Woolf shared a “revolutionary nostalgia” or a “belief in the power of active remembrance as a ritual summoning and invocation of the traditions of the oppressed in a violent constellation with the political present” (6). These ideas of Woolf and Benjamin concur with Derrida’s more recent conception that “every archive … is at once institutive and conservative.
Revolutionary and traditional” (7). Victorian traces can be conceived as operating in culture under such a doubled role, emanating both the talismanic value of being a material piece of the nineteenth century, and containing within their eclecticism and constellations with the present the possibility of reshaping the history which they embody, via new formations and fictions.

More recently under the “archival turn” in historiography, understandings of the materiality and composition of history have been reinvigorated. Although this often takes the form of a critique of the archive as an authenticating index, such destabilisation of the archive as evidence also opens up new creative space to both question the fictive construction of archival systems and for the archive itself to take on a new potentially liberating character. This influence has spread to understandings of the archive’s relation to literature and art and to a concept of “archive fiction”.

This confluence has involved the increasing revelation that concepts of the archive are already embedded within the history of literature. Louise Craven, in her re-evaluative collection *What Are Archives?*, argues that “[r]ecords and archives are intertwined through the narratives of modern English and European literature like a golden thread” and contends that further investigations of this crossover need to take place (13). The archive’s relation to visual arts is also an incredibly productive meeting point for “[t]he visual arts in particular have become a site of rich convergence for [archival] questions and developments” and are “increasingly engaged […] in creative approaches to ‘archiving’ and the use of the archive as a site of creative practice” (Breakell, 1). This approach has also recently been underlined by Kathy Michelle Carbone who especially focuses on archives as “affectively charged objects” which act as a channel for contemporary artists’ remapping of social and political ideologies (100). It is my contention in this thesis that creative archival practices and ideas are not solely apparent in contemporary works but can be traced back to practices of Victorian photography.

The relation between archives and literature is a conglomerate, unbounded subject that is difficult to synthesise because it has been addressed from particularly diverse and apparently mutually exclusive vantage points, whose positions are chiefly dependent on the placement of the “archive” as a concept in a range of shades from near-total abstraction to absolute materiality. The specific representation of archival research processes within a text is surveyed at length by Suzanne Keen in *Romances*
of the Archive in British Fiction. This material approach can be related to the citing of archives and documents within literature as symptomatic of literary processes and historical formulations, as analysed in the diverse work of Jonathan Boulter on archives and mourning in contemporary fiction, Laura Savu on author biofictions, and Margaret Scanlan on historical traces in fiction.

Intersecting with these studies, an understanding of the archive’s relation to fiction has been developed latently within various critical theories over the last half-century. Many writers have emphasised how the archive exists as an ever-present but shadowy pool of thought which is constantly dredged by the imagination and selection of the present. This double character of the archive as oppression and as renewal runs as a faultline through its theorisations. Within historiography, the mapping of how archives function with the organisations of history texts in fictional modes is explored by Michel de Certeau in The Writing of History. Cultural memory studies has also addressed both archives and fictions as part of its wider project of considering the filtering of memory through material forms. The materiality of cultural memory and its relation to the literary are pivotal in the work of Aleida Assmann, whilst the idea of sites of memory or lieu de memoire, advanced by Pierre Nora, has particular resonance in archival fictions. The influence of Jacques Derrida’s Archive Fever and Michel Foucault’s Archaeology of Knowledge, also have a crucial influence on understandings of the operations of the archive in fiction. These texts have influenced much writing on the phenomenon of archives, including as a counterpoint in the writings of Carolyn Steedman, whose influential book Dust argues for an understanding of the affective and literary influences on history and archives. Recently, Julian Wolfreys’ work on memory and loss in culture has addressed the archival role of literature itself as a collator of life, arguing that “[t]he text acts an archive of the traces of experience” (65).

Critical theorisations of writers’ archives as groundwork for practical treatment are also concerned with identifying the borders between the objective and subjective, although these remain relatively isolated in the mainstream discourse of the “archival turn”. The poet and librarian Philip Larkin’s definitions of the “magical” and “meaningful” value of archives (99) is perhaps one of the better known assessments of archives’ doubled role as imaginational and informational, and archivists such as Jamie Andrews, Catherine Hobbs, Jennifer Douglas and Heather McNeil have more
recently debated the subjective dynamics of literary archives as a move towards increasing understanding of these collections and their creators and enlivening their potential as academic and creative resources.

In the literary field, several special editions of journals and edited collections have specifically contemplated formulations or meeting places of archives and fiction. In Ben Hutchinson and Shane Weller’s 2011 special edition of *Comparative Critical Studies*, the editors’ introduction and Max Saunders’ article, “Archive Fiction” address the double-sided imaginative and empirical characters of archival history and the literary potentialities of this emerging genre. Meanwhile, there is an increasing focus on archives’ imaginative potential in crossover edited collections from literary critics and archivists such as *Refiguring the Archive* (2002), *Archive Stories* (2005) and *The Boundaries of the Literary Archive: Reclamation and Representation* (2013) which look to break down these borders between theory and materiality, practice and ideology. These collections and journals also include more abstract investigations of how intangible ideas of “archive” create proliferation in literary texts and contain a “phantasmatic” potential to reassess the world (Raulff, 164); ideas that can be found in the work of Paul Voss and Marta Werner, Max Saunders, Ulrich Raulff, and Sarah Nuttall. This intersecting group of theories on archives makes up the foundational framework of my study, although due to the fluidity of archives as a subject and a concept, a comprehensive mapping of archival theories is near impossible. This gathering of theories is joined by overlapping concepts and disciplines relating to my research content, most notably photographic theory and criticism and neo-Victorian studies. As will be demonstrated in the following chapters, these fields, like many critical disciplines following the “archival turn”, are areas in which the notion of an archive is also highly significant.

What is curious about these widely differing studies of archives and literature is that they are linked by their insistence on the affectivity of the archive, to which are attributed both its liberating and repressive qualities, in both social and literary senses. Sarah Nuttall summarises this effect by arguing that “a constitutive dimension of the archival object is that it lends itself to becoming the tool of the imagination” (295). Thus the archive, as a fluidly affective object and “tool of the imagination”, is necessarily transformed by being supplanted into different contexts and being subject to various appropriations. De Certeau analyses the affectivity of
archival sources in texts as productive of psychoanalytic power, diffused through the way the archival fragments are knit into the structure of the writing, for:

what is cited is fragmented, used over again and patched together in a text. Therein it is altered. Yet in this position where it keeps nothing of its own, it remains capable, as in a dream, of bringing forth something uncanny: the surreptitious and altering power of the repressed (251).

The quoted archive thus becomes a dream-like, uncanny presence which points towards unacknowledged or “repressed” concepts embedded within history and culture. The role of the archive here is one of subversion.

This sense of mysterious revelation is emphasised to a completely different purpose by Keen, who concludes that “[r]omances of the archive [...] insist that sufficient traces of the past remain for the imaginative rediscovery of the truth” (229). Keen argues that not only do magical-realist novels credit archival texts with peculiar powers (132), but archival affectivity also enters the realist research novel which relies on “the felt connections created and sustained through archival research, which brings into uncanny proximity the questers and the historical subjects they pursue” (182). Rather than painting the archive as a hotbed of subversion, Keen regards this uncanny quality as reverting back to an “ancient kind of storytelling”, in which the protagonist’s encounter with the archive leads to “an improved character – tested, rebuked and strengthened in the style of the romantic quest” (11). She regards literary depictions of the archive as employing a history that is “highly romanticised, even mythical” and which “intersects with, but which cannot be fully accounted for, by postmodernism” (34) and in fact “often run[s] counter” to postmodern ideas (35).

On the other hand, Nuttall regards the archive as the wellspring of postmodern possibility, arguing that the archive “exists via the orders of death (excision, limitation) and of life (fecundity, imagination)” (299). She embarks on a passionate defence of imagination in the archive in a postmodern era, writing that “[w]here all we have are constructs – or images – imagination, according to this logic, must be reduced to an outdated mirage of modernity. Yet imagination exists in excess of ‘construction’. ‘Constructing’ is imagining only its positivist sense” (298). Proposing a non-positivist imagination that exceeds “reasoning”, Nuttall rather suggests the idea that imagination might be a means of exploding the meanings of
the archive, rather than limiting them. Max Saunders goes even further in celebrating the subversive power of imagination, arguing that novels of the archive such as Byatt’s *Possession* “propose[…] a more dynamic, dialectical relation between archive and truth: a relation mediated by the imagination and by fictions” (173).

Taken in all its various guises, the archive, that apparently most inflexible site of absolute truth, is again and again credited within arts and literature with affective, dynamic and temporally blurring qualities. These qualities are explored within the following three chapters in relation to the archival dynamics of Cameron’s photography and its afterlife in fiction over a period of a century and a half. Using a case study of archival creativity relating to a particular set of images enables me to track the proliferation and transformation of the photographs and their appropriations in cultural memory, and to trace the power of experimental visual narratives back to nineteenth-century origins.

Photography makes an exciting subject for a study of archival creativity for it shares the archive’s unresolved identity crisis. Both photography and the archive forever lie between the evidential and the surreal, between fact and fiction, and between the disembodied and the material. We can see reflections of this split in the classic works of Susan Sontag on the oddly surreal quality of vernacular images (52), and in Roland Barthes’ thinking on the contrasting messages of the “studium”, the notional subject of a photograph, and the “punctum”, a piercing, potentially subversive detail apparent to the imagination of the spectator (*Camera Lucida*, 28), qualities which can be mapped onto the archive’s twin characters of documentary record and site of imaginative possibility. These contradicting attributes of photography as art and science were particularly fluid and uncertain in photography’s nineteenth-century early years and in my view, no Victorian photographer crosses and blurs these boundaries like Cameron.

In this way, the archive both frames the choice of Cameron as a case study, and forms an informing paradigm for a re-evaluation of Cameron. Each chapter focuses on a different archival quality – imagination, structure or temporality – and concentrates on three interlinked periods – the mid-Victorian literary and visual world of Cameron, Virginia Woolf’s early twentieth century, and neo-Victorian fiction from the late twentieth century to the present. I outline the reasoning behind
these focuses separately below, although it will be seen that they all inform and map onto each other.

Prior to introducing these subjects, I wish to make a note regarding my interrelated study of time periods, in which I read each through its forerunners and descendants. This may counter accepted practices in literary studies, but it is beneficial to this study as it reflects the genres and mediums that are under discussion. The archive is embedded within the past and its context, but is arranged and accessed in the present, and in a conceptual sense, according to Derrida, is chiefly related to the “question of the future itself” (36). Neo-Victorian Studies is a necessarily cross-temporal discipline which is driven by the analysis of the motivations and logistics of transposing nineteenth-century subject matter and literary tropes into an inevitably present-day understanding of the world, the past, and of literature. Photography is of course, a temporal art, and its paradoxical relation to the past and future have been well-documented, notably by Roland Barthes in Camera Lucida and within the work of Walter Benjamin. More recently, Daniel A. Novak has also called attention to the temporal distortions in Victorian photography (84). Cultural memory unites all these disciplines, being a theory that could be defined as an investigation of the permutations of temporal blurring with, through and in cultural forms. Most importantly, Cameron herself treated the past and present as constant intertexts to be mapped on to each other and blurred for effect at every opportunity, a trait shared by her great-niece, Virginia Woolf. To neglect the intertemporal quality of the works studied would therefore be to deny their power and intricate aesthetic workings. Studying them together allows us to trace the history and cultural legacy of concepts embedded in Victorian art photography.

The Photographs and Albums of Julia Margaret Cameron

Julia Margaret Cameron (1815-1879) was one of the most prolific nineteenth-century photographers and highly experimental and daring in her style, compositions and testing of the capacities of the camera. Influenced by Renaissance painting and the symbolic paintings of G.F. Watts, her mentor, she famously used variable focus and blurring to produce mystical and allusive effects, which attracted no small amount of censure in her own time, but which have become her defining feature and give her
images a startlingly modern quality compared to conventional Victorian photographs. These qualities can be seen, for example, in her striking portrait of an Italian model as Iago (Figure 2). Her subjects were almost invariably people drawn from all classes who to her eye exhibited qualities of beauty or genius, but the real matter of her images is often more abstract – she considered her camera a “living thing” (“Annals”, 10) and intended to capture ideas and ideals, feelings and qualities through her models and subjects in order to “electrify” her audience “with delight and startle the world” (qtd. in Weiss, 21). Although all her photographs are imbued with this affective, haptic quality, her works were divided in her own mind into pure portraits, and literary, mythical and historical illustrations which she referred to as “fancy pictures”. A highly ambitious artist, besides frequently exhibiting and submitting her works for prizes, Cameron produced over twenty-five intricately arranged albums of images for herself, family, friends and mentors.

Cameron’s work, always well-known but sometimes dismissed as nostalgic and naïve, was championed with qualifications in the mid twentieth-century by the collector Helmut Gernsheim which led to a resurgence in her popular reputation. It has since been further re-assessed within the last twenty years as proto-feminist in
tendency, particularly following Lindsay Smith’s influential study, *The Politics of Focus* (1998), which reinvigorated Cameron studies with new considerations of her compositional and ideological complexity. Several book-length studies of Cameron have appeared in recent years, including Victoria Olsen’s 2003 biography *From Life*, which forms a general reference for Cameron’s life in this study. Jeff Rosen’s *Julia Margaret Cameron’s ‘Fancy Subjects’* (2016) shares some ground with this thesis in that it addresses the links between Cameron’s allegories and the changing ideologies of Victorian culture. However Rosen’s book differs from my work as it is chiefly historical in focus, being concerned with Cameron’s relation within the contemporary context of Empire, to which Rosen recruits her as an ambivalent advocate. My work rather follows expanded ideas on the literary and archival capacities of nineteenth-century photography, which have been refreshed by Novak’s call to rediscover a “Victorian theory of photography” in which photography is itself “a form of literary narrative” (65). These re-evaluations of Cameron and Victorian photography have opened new theoretical potentials that allow Cameron’s work to be treated as representationally complex and socially subversive. Although Novak suggests a move away from applications of twentieth-century theory to Victorian images as dismissive of early photography’s narrative potential (68), it is notable that Cameron can now be re-considered more seriously in relation to the still-influential photographic ideas of Susan Sontag and Roland Barthes and the conceptualisations that have followed them. I believe that Cameron’s photographs and albums can be excitingly reassessed in regards to their affective materiality, their relationship to narrative and their potential for creating fluid structures of ideas as a series of objects. My work expands the parameters of Cameron’s works beyond their role in nineteenth-century visual culture by arguing that they have something fascinating to relate to us about the relationship between image and narrative in general. Breaking these boundaries, I treat her work as both the source and object of theory and ideas, following Novak’s argument that “Victorian photographic discourse and practice offer alternative theories” (65). In this multi-temporal thesis, as well as considering contemporary understandings of photography in approaching Cameron, I also consider Cameron’s aesthetic practices as relevant to post-Victorian literature in turn.
Cameron’s literary qualities can be most richly observed in her albums, which bear an obvious yet oblique relation to narrative through their status as ordered books. The creative arrangement and choice of subjects in these albums, the interplay of themes and subjects, and their strange hybrid character, being both personal and public, art objects and memory containers, are, in my view, some of the most innovative aspects of Cameron’s work. In the course of my study, I will be showing how the albums have been prescient of experimental movements in literature but also display untapped potential for fluid narrative connections. Cameron’s albums have been considered as hybrid works before, by Joanne Lukitsh (see “The Thackeray Album”) and Victoria Olsen, chiefly within their own historical context. In this thesis, I develop this line of thought by reading the albums anew through the viewfinders of the archive and its relation to fiction, cultural memory and recent explorations of the creativity embedded within the photographic album itself.

As a general principle, the album and the archive can be obviously linked through their status as ordered collections of objects intended to capture information for posterity. Seen through reassessments of the archive as a place of infinite creativity, the photograph album can be transformed into a matrix of meaning-making. This capacity is further enriched in Cameron’s photograph albums as her images bear subtle meanings that convey multiple dynamics simultaneously; they are hymns to cultural and literary heritage, commentaries on the complexities of her own life and those she knew, studies of the development of ideas in Victorian Britain, and perhaps most seriously, attempts to convey states of being and ways of understanding the world through a series of visions connected by affective materiality.

This thesis therefore includes study of a representative sample of Cameron’s photographs and albums that demonstrate these dynamics. The first chapter is mainly concerned with images of striking power taken from throughout Cameron’s oeuvre which I assess as filters of an archival imagination whose mixed meanings of cultural memory and social memory, fiction and reality, are only fully crystallised in the mind of the viewer. I direct attention to the equality of Cameron’s treatment of her subjects, drawing parallels between this layered mythologisation in her photographs of men and women. The second chapter focuses on album construction and includes the study of four albums of photographs in miniature form – the “Nellie Mundy Album” and the “Albert Louis Cotton Album”, held by Isle of Wight County
Council and the Julia Margaret Cameron Trust respectively; and the “Hardinge Hay Cameron Album” and the “Julia Hay Norman Miniature Album” held at the time of research by the National Media Museum in Bradford. I attempt to show how these albums can be “read” as narrative forms and point out their specific thematic concerns, and the means by which they construct aesthetic, ideological and familial patterns. I interlink this with the study of two of Cameron’s scrapbook albums, the “Julia Hay Norman Album” and the “SN” album, also held at the time of research by the National Media Museum, in which the artist mixed images of family by other artistic and commercial photographers. I treat these albums as proto-forms where Cameron experimented with generational patterning, temporal blurring and began to consider the creative potential of image arrangement. Finally, the third chapter focuses on subtleties of time and memory in Cameron’s famous full-size show albums, through analyses of “Life-Sized Heads” in the “Herschel Album”, again held at the National Media Museum, and in the “Thackeray Album” held at the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas in Austin, to study which I received a Dissertation Fellowship funded by the Creekmore and Adele Fath Charitable Foundation and the University of Texas at Austin Office of Graduate Studies. Analysing these striking allegorical portraits through their literary sources and use of strong darkness and light, I attempt to suggest how they singularly and in dialogue propose new ways of understanding and being in time, and present a range of unresolved possibilities held in tension in the space of the album.

Woolfian Intertexts

Any study of Cameron’s literary legacy will be necessarily bound up with the work of her great-niece, Virginia Woolf, in terms of both direct references to the older artist and more subtle photographic thematics. In fact, the evocation of Cameron photographs in Woolf’s writing provided the initial binary for the question that first intrigued me in this study – what are the dynamics of imagination at play when a displaced historical image or object is portrayed in a later text? In addition to these specific references to Cameron, Woolf’s literary and visual mediation of the past, her emphasis on matrilineal heritage, and her affective approach to materiality are analysed in the following chapters as influenced by Cameron and as applicable in
turn to Cameron’s work and to neo-Victorian photography texts. However, rather than forming the central point of the thesis, I invoke Woolf chiefly as an intertext or a vector between time periods, linking the Victorian and the postmodern. Woolf’s work thus becomes a confluence point for the study as well as a subject. I demonstrate how her creative archival style relates to Cameron’s own, and explore how this style is further developed in contemporary fiction writing on Victorian photography. In fact, minor characters in neo-Victorian texts on Cameron are often proxy versions of Woolf, voicing these concerns and ideas.

Woolf’s influence is both overt and subtle, as will become apparent. For example, it can quickly be perceived that the satirical qualities of Tennyson’s Gift, in which Truss depicts Cameron as consumed with a thwarted and obsessive love for Alfred Tennyson, follows Virginia Woolf’s mockery of her great-aunt and her artistic friends in her 1935 play, Freshwater. This play, like Tennyson’s Gift, also treats Cameron’s techniques with a mockery that belies their appreciation of her artistic endeavour. Truss’s portrait of Cameron’s overflowing creative impulses which are captured in a series of endless images, can be seen to emanate in part from Freshwater, in which Cameron effusively demands “Another picture! A better picture! Poetry in the person of Alfred Tennyson adoring the Muse” (11). Woolf’s influence on Truss can be observed in her doubled, comic attitude to Cameron, mocking her whilst simultaneously calling attention to her obsessive desire to express an unattainable artistic vision.

Woolf and her work form a semi-visible intertext in most Cameronian fictions, for in addition to being the daughter of Cameron’s most famous model, Julia Jackson, it is Woolf who was the major literary interpreter of Cameron’s works in the early twentieth century. Not only did Woolf write the comic play based on Cameron, Tennyson and Watts that was staged for and by family and friends, she also produced essays on Julia and her sisters, published of a volume of her works with Roger Fry, discusses her works in her second novel, Night and Day (1919) and disseminated Cameron photographs to friends as well as decorated the Stephens’ first independent house in Bloomsbury with images of Cameron’s great Victorians (Lee, 205). Photography was also a highly important activity for Woolf from childhood (Lee, 33) and she produced many of her own photograph albums as well as including photographs in her novels and non-fiction works. Woolf is thus
integrally attached to the Cameron story or what Olsen calls “Cameron lore” (194), and the above works form an intertextual commentary throughout the thesis.

Pertinently and perhaps not incidentally, Woolf is also one of the most interesting articulators of affective encounters with the archive and, more famously, of the wider confluence between the material and the imaginary, or “granite and rainbow” (Selected Essays, 100). Her essays on the subjects of biography, history and materiality thus form a fascinating linkage within this study, and are applied backwards to analyse Cameron’s archival creativity, and forwards to consider archival creativity in historical fictions that bear marks of structural and imaginative influence from both Woolf and her great-aunt.

Cameron’s influence on Woolf has been extensively articulated by Marion Dell, who expands the field beyond Woolf’s direct references to Cameron by her subtle consideration of Cameron’s influence on Woolf’s treatment of light and vision and the presentation of characters, notably identifying this in the texture of suspended moments within To the Lighthouse (Dell, 128). Dell goes as far as to argue that it is “through a discourse of photography that Woolf articulates her ambivalent relationship with the past” (180). My study intersects with these ideas, considering the representation of photography and artists in Woolf’s writing as illustrating Cameron’s influence on her great-niece. I also consider Cameron and Woolf’s mutual friend and another subject of Dell, Anne Thackeray Ritchie, as a translator of Cameron’s photographic art into text in her short novel “From an Island”. Yet my study differs in focus from Dell’s examination of these relationships, as my central focus is on a developing theme of archival creativity initiated by Cameron’s visual materiality which meets fruition in a variety of later writers, not solely in Woolf. I integrate an investigation of Cameron’s subtle expressions of light and materiality with Woolf’s treatment of material archives, and am as much interested in the application of Woolf’s critical ideas to Cameron’s work and neo-Victorian fiction, as the reverse. I focus on Cameron as my main subject, yet also read the two intermedial artists cross-wise, considering Cameron as a literary artist and Woolf as visual and archival writer.
Neo-Victorian Fiction

Neo-Victorian writing of the last twenty years has played out the dynamics of Victorian photography on a contemporary textual field. To generalise, the neo-Victorian genre aims in practice and in theory, to reassess and reformulate the Victorian period under new cultural circumstances (as defined in studies by Christian Gutleben, Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewelyn, Cora Kaplan and Kate Mitchell), and, with variable success and differing levels of self-consciousness, to recreate the Victorian past as an authentic experience (as defined by Louisa Hadley).

Interestingly, neo-Victorian treatments of photography tend to differ in emphasis from treatments in adjacent and precursory literary fields. Whilst representations of photography in modern genre-fiction often harbour an indexical or revelatory quality, particularly within crime and mystery fiction (Keen, 171-2), and photographic technique has repeatedly been linked with the categorising quality of nineteenth-century realism (as discussed by Nancy Armstrong and Jennifer Green-Lewis), neo-Victorian photographic fiction employs a more evaluative, ambivalent, and even non-realistic discourse. Owen Clayton has described the neo-Victorian photographic sub-genre as representing “a kind of sameness-through-difference” which “provides a useful vehicle to discuss questions of sexuality, gender and memory – issues that are in many ways constitutive of the neo-Victorian imaginary” (169). Whilst such questions are undoubtedly integral to neo-Victorian photographic

 Whilst the term neo-Victorian refers to texts from about 1990 onwards that often but not always employ postmodernism, in this thesis, I also use the term “post-Victorian” as an overarching term for literary works that reflect on Victorian culture from the early twentieth century onwards. This broader term can be used to refer to the continuing literary impact of Cameron’s works since they were produced, and, in this instance, covers both Modernist writers and works of the last twenty years. Indeed, Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewelyn have pertinently argued that neo-Victorianism did not come out of a void but has a long twentieth-century shadow, for

 While the last twenty years have seen a growth in the literary and cultural phenomenon now termed neo-Victorianism, it is necessary to remember that the birth of the genre in its broadest definition was itself almost simultaneous with the end of Queen Victoria’s reign in 1901” (8).

However, such comprehensive groupings are necessarily blurry, which has both advantages and disadvantages. To clarify matters, when referring to texts dating from 1990 onwards, I use the term “neo-Victorian” to indicate a more specific genre.
fiction, it is my view that the transformational role of the camera in such texts, suggests something more complex than a cultural “sameness”. Rather than employing a realist approach to the photographic in fiction, I am more interested in the role of photography in these texts to conjure states of altered reality and to provoke creative forms of materiality and narrative.

This treatment of photography as altered reality is conjured through representations of heightened visual experience, a feature which is becoming synonymous with neo-Victorian writing. Often betokening contemporary culture’s re-fabrication of a Victorian visual luridity, this visual feast is frequently invoked in more popular neo-Victorian works, such as the novels of Essie Fox, who depicts Cameronian photography alongside versions of the paintings of J. W. Waterhouse in her novel *Elijah’s Mermaid* (2012). At a more complex level, neo-Victorian fiction displays a peculiarly prominent relationship between vision and the object, often devoting a large proportion of text to descriptions of the alien particularity of historical objects; a trope that can be traced both to a heightened version of nineteenth-century realism, the influence of modernist treatments of incidental objects, and to a fascination with the aura of Victorian traces in present-day culture.

Similarly, mainstream Victorian studies is currently particularly preoccupied with affective objects in nineteenth-century realist texts as indicators of historical social conditions and practices. This is notably led by the work of Elaine Freedgood in *The Ideas in Things*, in which she argues that advantages can be gained from reading objects literally rather than metaphorically for “Victorian thing culture […] has left for us a rich archive of stories about things” which have been “preserved unsuspected” in nineteenth-century fiction (1). Freedgood thus reads the novel as a form of historical document. In contrast, neo-Victorian critique cannot employ the same tokens of literalism, as within the neo-Victorian genre, historical materiality is played out in a doubled time-stream, where objects denoting nineteenth-century social practices have been obviously selected as indicators of a reality that no longer exists to be verified. Neo-Victorian critique on materiality is thus more often concerned with the operation of themes of nostalgia, ghostliness, appropriation and consumer culture (see for example, Boehm-Schnitker and Gruss, 1). However, in my approach to materiality, I am less concerned with an investigation of objects in historical context, a commentary on the consumerisation of history, or even a set of
indexical clues, but with conveying indeterminate modes of being and organising narrative within the body of the text. As part of this process, the archive must pass through a translation into narrative that fundamentally changes that archive and, intentionally or not, places it under a new formulation.

This study posits that this self-conscious re-construction of the visual archive in neo-Victorian literature reflects the experimental constructions and narrative distortions of the Victorian camera. To explore this, I treat literary techniques as analogous to the techniques of the camera, positioning both as modifiers of culturally-inherited material. This can be demonstrated in parallel: in Cameron’s work, Victorian cultural *texts* – the subjects of history, myth, literature and biography – are refracted through the latest technologies of the *image*. Within neo-Victorian fiction, the nineteenth-century *image* is refracted through the lens of twentieth and twenty-first century *literary* techniques and through contemporary perspectives on the Victorian age. To do this, I take a position on intermediality that suggests that word and image are symbiotically related, or “different forms of the same thing” as J. Hillis Miller writes (75), rather than David Summers’ model of “linguistic imperialism” (234) in which he claims that certain visual objects cannot be explicated by text due to the inarticulate nature of their haptic presence in the “realm of the space of human action” (248). Rather, I follow more recent approaches to affectivity in which these responses can, in some measure, be articulated in a critical text, or even a literary text.

In his brief consideration of the representation of Victorian photography in contemporary literature, Owen Clayton notes that many neo-Victorian photography fictions “seem most concerned with the 1860s and 1870s”, a fact that he attributes to this being “the period during which photography embedded itself within a wider cultural milieu” which “spread especially among the middle classes” (169). Yet, additional to these sociological factors, the period 1860-1880 was also when art photography came into its own, early pictorialist artists gained public popularity, and photography went through perhaps the most literary and illustrative phase of its early history under artists such as Oscar Rejlander, David Wilkie Wynfield, Clementina Hawarden, Lewis Carroll and Henry Peach Robinson. It was a period when the bounds of the camera’s early potential were being seriously tested and photography’s
status as art or science was constantly in question. It also almost exactly approximates to the career-period of Julia Margaret Cameron.

In my view, these developments in art and vision and their symbiotic relation to literature do far more to explain the interest of neo-Victorian writers in 1860s and 70s photography than the social currency of the image might do. It is, in fact, notable, that whilst the period saw a mania for carte-de-visite collecting and a massive increase in public access to vernacular photography, neo-Victorian photography fictions relating to this period are chiefly interested in non-realist art photography, spiritualism,3 altered states of vision, and idiosyncratic technique as a metaphor for writing fiction. In Clayton’s representative list of eight neo-Victorian novels that feature photography (169), two relate to Cameron, one to Lewis Carroll, one to both Cameron and Carroll, another features photography’s elevation to High Art, and two more include photographic models. Rather than addressing the sociological impact of nineteenth-century photography from the perspective of the consumer, contemporary novels seem far more drawn to “portraits of the artist” and even “portraits of art”. This trend might be explained by the potential for self-reflexive commentary on creativity that is enabled by the inclusion of artist figures in novels, and by the lure of the paradoxical and “infinite” relation between text and image that is invoked by writing about photography as visual experiment (Louvel, “From Intersemiotic”, 25). Perhaps this is why the innovative work of Cameron, a female artist who stated at the outset of her career that “[m]y aspirations are to ennoble Photography and to secure for it the character and uses of High Art” (qtd. in Weiss, 5), is a favourite subject for neo-Victorian writers.

The neo-Victorian texts featured in this thesis all specifically or obliquely evoke Cameron and her work: Helen Humphreys’ Afterimage (2000); David Rocklin’s The Luminist (2011); Adam Thorpe’s Ulverton (1992); Michelle Lovric’s The True and Splendid History of the Harristown Sisters (2014) and Gail Jones’ Sixty Lights

3 Neo-Victorian writing on spiritualist photography is another subset of this sub-genre, which has up to this date, received more critical attention than links to art photography, notably in Rosario Arias’s insightful article on the subject, in which she considers spirit photography as a metaphor of liminal haunting suggesting the reappearance of the Victorian dead within contemporary fiction (“(Spirit) Photography”, 104).
In selecting these texts, I did not confine myself to the genre of biographical fiction or even to texts that specifically claim Cameron as an influence, as the purpose of this study is not to assess fictional treatments of a specific history, but rather to trace a more nuanced and multifarious influence that can be observed through depiction of photographic practices and ideologies, narrative structures, aesthetic motifs and treatments, and adapted uses of Cameron’s language-style and personal characteristics. In some cases, Cameron is the named inspiration in novels which rework aspects of her story and evoke particular Cameron images. In others, Cameron is only implicitly or latently suggested, yet the qualities and techniques of her work inform the aesthetics of the whole, lying beneath the surface of the text. My purpose is to investigate some of the many literary fruitions of Cameronian style even when these might not be specifically intended to reference her work, as one might, for example, trace the impact of any major Victorian writer on neo-Victorian writing, even when the author is not particularly credited. In that sense, I treat both Cameron’s works and her influence on literature as an open subject, for, in the words of Novak, “the future of the image remains perpetually open – open to a future of writing and rewriting, telling and retelling” (88).

Chapter Outline

To demonstrate the creative operation of the archive in photography and fiction, and as part of my intention to consider time periods tangentially, the project is organised according to three archival qualities that roughly correspond to literary and photographic paradigms. Progressing from studies of the photographic trace’s relation to imagination, to the dynamics of structures of photographic objects to the relation of photographic objects to time, my intention is for each succeeding chapter

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4 Due to lack of space, I do not discuss all examples of Cameron-related fiction, partly because Cameron’s influence on literature, augmented through Woolf, cannot be definitively documented. It should be noted that I do not give sustained attention to Lynne Truss’s Tennyson’s Gift, although it explicitly contains Cameron as a character. This is chiefly because of its lack of interest in patterns of the archive, which make it unsuitable for this study. Moreover, as a specifically biofictional parody of the Freshwater Circle, its evocation of Cameron lies on the surface of the text rather than within its substance, and generally relates to her eccentric character rather than her art.
to build on the last to create an increasingly complex portrait of the fictional capacities and legacies of Cameron’s visual traces, rather than treating them thematically by subject or separately by time period.

In the following chapters, these three capacities of the photograph as visual document and as a literary subject are discussed in correspondence with archival processes that form the theoretical backbone of the study. In terms of theory, the first chapter explores the process of experiencing the photograph as an archival object through the imagination, addressing the tangible and intangible qualities that can be “read” into such an image, and the question of the variable influence of that object’s “aura”. The second chapter is concerned with the arrangement and formation of photographic objects as an exercise in assigning and modifying meaning and the subsequent flexibility inherent in a reading of the resultant quasi-narrative structures. The third chapter is a study of photographs and photographic archives as repositories of different forms of time, and is concerned with how photographic objects produce temporal and memorial effects, and with the manipulation of photographic temporalities when preserved in new contexts. In all three chapters, I treat literary texts and photograph albums as forms of archive that display, manipulate and miniaturise all these processes in the form of a textual and/or visual microcosm, styling such forms as fluidly subversive pseudo-archives.

The first chapter initially introduces a concept of archival imagination informed by a variety of critical disciplines in which I propose that affective approaches to archival materials can be productive of meaning(s) beyond the evidential that can flourish in new temporal contexts. This approach has some precedent in recent photographic theory. A movement led by Elizabeth Edwards has rejuvenated the treatment of photographs as material objects, although her work chiefly focuses on their social currency. Edwards and Janice Hart have argued that “photographs are both images and physical objects that exist in time and space and thus in social and cultural experience” (1), a statement that is foundational for my emphasis on the present-day perception of Victorian visual material as surviving archives as well as on photographs in their original context. For Edwards and Hart, this concentration on materiality is not merely concerned with evidence, but is also imbricated with the elusive, the tangential, the experiential. In this school of thought, photographs can be
integrated into the wider realm of reading and perceiving objects. For Luisa Calé and Patrizia Di Bello

[the experience of looking – whether reading texts or enjoying pictures – is never just visual, but it is also tactile, kinaesthetic, fully embodied, and affected by the material properties of the objects we do our looking and reading with. Meanings, memories and fantasies are engendered, transformed, inflected, given both cultural and emotional values (5).

I propose to follow this approach, by considering how “reading” Victorian photographs inevitably involves the conjuring of “meanings, memories and fantasies”, which develop as the photograph moves into different ideological contexts and develops an archival character. I emphasise that these changing perceptions are grounded in Victorian visual haptics, which lie at the heart of my assessment of Cameron’s “fully embodied” works. In the first chapter, I explore how Cameron uses the radical materiality of photography in combination with imaginative subject matter to conduct a productive crossover between the real and the ideal, which seeks to redefine the construction of identity in both the past and the present, in fiction and in her own life. I treat her images as expressions of archival desire that are self-consciously designed to “engender[…], transform[…] and inflect[…]”, “[m]eanings, memories and fantasies” (5) through carefully layered allusions and references. I then take Woolf’s articulation of archival feeling and resurrection in her essay “The Lives of the Obscure”, as a starting point to map the concept of archival imagination onto two novels that rewrite Cameron’s photography and life from the perspective of cultural outsiders, Helen Humphreys’ Afterimage and David Rocklin’s The Luminist. I explore how these examples of neo-Victorianism seek to ground and preserve the material particularity of photographic images by devoting textual space to their power as sources of archival aura. These novels’ fictional photographs suggest an intensified experience of material objects whilst simultaneously evaporating that materiality by evoking it within the text, a place where the image has a ghostly quality because it can only be conjured by the representation of affective experience. We might think here of Julian Wolfreys’ claim that “that which is spectral is only ever perceived indirectly by the traces it has left” (Victorian Hauntings, 3), in this case, the visual traces themselves are also evoked as intermedial phantoms that stand for a further buried history. Cameron’s
consciously material explorations of the soul of both individuals and cultural texts interestingly bisect this contradiction between the material and the spectral in neo-Victorian works. In this sense, chapter one is as much concerned with the particularity of the material as with its inverse, the realm of the intangible.

In my second chapter, I concentrate on the creative structures that can be produced by multiple photographs and the relationship that these visual structures have with narrative, through a detailed study of Cameron’s photograph albums. Starting from a consideration of the creative potentials of archival orders and their role in the shaping of history, with particular reference to Michel de Certeau’s ideas of the “laminated text” (94) which re-organises historical material, I trace the ways in which the ordering of archives have been and can be transferred to fictions in all forms. I apply these ideas to what may be considered as the centre of my thesis, the idiosyncratic, personal and public photograph albums of Julia Margaret Cameron.

Photograph albums have also met with significant reassessment as material and artistic forms in recent years; and in my second chapter, I am particularly influenced by Martha Langford and Maggie Humm. Langford argues that albums are the latent site of potential narrative meaning, since if “[a] close reading of a photograph is like a stone dropped in a pond, with its every-expanding inclusions, occlusions, and allusions” then “[a] book of photographs layers surface upon surface of real and virtual intersections” (Suspected Conversations, 4). Humm connects the construction of modernist women’s albums with wider principles of modernism, arguing that “any album’s sequencing of photographs creates meaning out of random events” in a way that reflects the modernist techniques of “selection, montage and tableau” (Virginia Woolf’s Photography, 9). Langford, and more recently, Patrizia Di Bello, consider such mosaic creativity, associated with modernist and postmodernist movements, to be endemic in Victorian albums made by women. Langford writes that “[t]he album seems to have awoken dormant forces” (Suspected Conversations, 5) and in this sense, I write in the understanding that Cameron’s albums are expressive not merely of Victorian photographic narrativity but of the birth of a new form of creativity that has far-reaching consequences for art and literature.

In this second chapter, I look in detail at the transformational narratives embedded within Cameron’s miniature albums and their attempts to eulogise the individual and
venture modes of aesthetic patterning that cross established social boundaries. I also apply models of narrative and collage to Cameron’s relatively unassessed scrapbook albums whose arrangement of family pictures demonstrates early experimentalism with the potential of photography as a narrative medium. I draw out parallels between these familial and aesthetic arrangements and similar matriarchal aesthetics that have been detected in Virginia Woolf’s Monk’s House Albums, drawing strongly on the innovative work of Maggie Humm on the visual significations in these twentieth-century albums. This investigation of “telling stories” with photographs and archives, culminates in a study of two novels that employ Cameronian imagery as conductors of haptic and imaginative experiences that condition identity. In this I look at two very different novels that discuss Victorian photography, the first of which, Adam Thorpe’s Ulverton, is a structurally experimental novel that employs the concept of the photographic book as part of its exploration of material traces as sites of memory. The second, Michelle Lovric’s The True and Splendid History of the Harristown Sisters, is written in a more popular mode, yet is a visually rich neo-Victorian novel about the relationship between artforms, advertising and identity. I demonstrate that, however different in style, both texts are centrally concerned with weaving together stories from the Victorian photographic archive; employing an archival imagination to connect submerged material structures. In creating narratives of Victorian art photography, I also find that the novels obliquely access ideas that resemble Cameron’s own artistic concerns but which are shot through with contemporary critique. Through progressive structures of images, the texts invoke debates on the value of cultural romanticisation when it is printed onto the real and express spiria concern with the damages such idealistic vision enacts on identity.

My third chapter is concerned with creative temporality in photographic archives. Influenced by an expansive field of criticism on the relationship between the photograph, the archive and time; and between fiction and time, I return to my interest in the intangibles of materiality by focusing on the varied experiences of affective time that are evoked by the photographic gaze. Employing the trope of the mirror, a motif intricately connected with the photograph, I identify temporal modes enmeshed in “life-size” illustrative portraits included within Cameron’s large-scale “Herschel” and “Thackeray” albums. I find that temporal meaning in these literary
photographs derives from Cameron’s distinctive blurred and *chiaroscuro* aesthetics in combination with associations of cultural memory. Taking inspiration from the writings of Aleida Assmann on the “translation” of cultural forms in an archive, I argue that the memorial qualities intrinsic to photography are extended and deepened in Cameron’s photography, by cultural, literary and historical fragments that are combined and “translated” into new visual meanings.

I equate these operations with the temporal workings of the photographic in two Cameronian texts – Anne Thackeray Ritchie’s short story “From an Island”, which was published in Cameron’s lifetime, and Gail Jones’ 2004 neo-Victorian novel, *Sixty Lights*. I demonstrate, with reference to Mark Currie’s ideas on textual time, how these novels of similar subject matter but very different contexts, work like Cameron’s photograph albums, producing collections of variable temporalities via a series of visual encounters. I am also interested in how the authors produce representations of the “blurred” and patchwork nature of memory, distorting the borders between memory and the photographic archive and expressing memory as an archival structure. As part of this investigation, I turn particularly in my third chapter towards pictorial criticism which explores how image may be not just translated into text but become part of the fabric of narrative movement. Ekphrasis or pictures represented in words, can, according to Liliane Louvel, structure and create distortions in the temporal flow of the text (*Poetics of the Iconotext*, 109). The operations of the intermedial in a novel therefore intersect with that of archival imagination, further complicating the way that photographs construct the text. I explore the way that when pictorial writing situates multiple photographic experiences in narrative, the text can become a creatively arranged archive of visual memories.

I also demonstrate how these disparate fictions tie abstractions of time not merely to the experience of the observer, but to the physical processes and materiality of Victorian photography, whose operations are constantly drawn to resemble the craft of writing. For “From an Island” and *Sixty Lights* are deeply concerned with archival questions that can also be detected in the work of Cameron – they ruminate on how the placement of an image adds to its emotional weight and meaning and how the physical fixing of an experience of light can suggest conceptions of time and memory.
It is light that eventually synthesises the various meanings of my third chapter, being the representative medium of time in all photographic work. I argue that in Cameron’s work particularly, the relation between time and light is deeply connected to an aesthetics of blurring. To this end, I blend ideas of Eduardo Cadava and Lindsay Smith on light and focus as sources of an aesthetic meaning that is also figured as a curiously literary, textual meaning. Such a literary treatment of light also necessarily invokes its inverse, the meaning of darkness – indeed, Cadava writes of “the transit between light and darkness that we might also call writing” (xvii). In my final chapter I move towards piecing together a picture of the ontological operations of light and darkness in Cameron’s photography and the role of light and darkness in the search for meaning in Jones’ Sixty Lights.

This thesis is then, intended to break new ground by combining a study of the Cameron’s practices with theoretical concerns about the relationship between material history and its afterlife, and between image, text and narrative. This is a relatively new area for Cameron studies which have heretofore mostly been concerned with the artist in her own context or at most as an influence on Woolf. The parameters of a single artist study are expanded as I attempt a wide-ranging portrait of Cameron’s material and imaginative presence in history to-date, giving weight to the present manifestations of her work as much as to its original production. This form takes into account the way in which Victorian artists are really perceived in the present, a present which in any case can never be detached from any historical study, by looking down the long telescope of posthumous reputation to measure cultural presence and influence. I explore how the successive phases of Cameron’s literary afterlife are linked through the continuing presence of archives and the imaginative practices that they engender.

This novel approach to a visual artist also allows me to explore conceptual arguments, as well as a historical study, for, in this thesis, I undertake a tracing of rays of transformative light within the darkness of the archival space; where light is an archival creativity in image or text that focuses, blurs, elevates, breaks apart, brings elements closer in space or time and distances them, and which fragments and links identities, narratives and images. In the following chapters, I attempt to show how such an archival creativity, perhaps endemic to historical fictions, is expressed in Victorian and post-Victorian attempts to harness light by writing through, onto
and with, a specific body of photographs. Julia Margaret Cameron’s attempts to capture and write feeling into photographic traces – her archival imagination – thus becomes the fuel for a study of a creative perpetual motion of archives which continues to flourish in texts and images.
Chapter One

Archival Imagination

Archival culture experienced a boom in the Victorian age, almost certainly integral to the early history and conceptualisation of photography. Just as visuality and technologies of the visual were saturating all areas of life from the quotidian to the realm of high art, the nineteenth-century saw the inauguration of many systems and institutions for the gathering and holding of information. Interrelated to these material trends, a wider self-consciousness about the nineteenth-century’s place in history also motivated memorialisation of the self and the world on an unprecedented scale. Many of the results of this cultural matrix were created for purposes of evidence – and indeed, much has been written on the nineteenth-century desire for categorisation – yet the role, representation and value of Victorian traces themselves, especially photographic traces, within nineteenth-century social and cultural life and retrospectively, within post-Victorian culture, has been tied repeatedly to imagination.

In this chapter, I study the works of Julia Margaret Cameron to show how she employed imagination in conjunction with materiality as a means by which to represent past cultures in dialogue with her own present and to create productive overlaps between the real and the ideal. I then demonstrate that a similar auratic sense of history intertwined with modernity is perpetuated in representations of Cameron’s photographic archive in the twentieth-century and beyond. In this way, I find that an archival imagination, with its combination of materiality and spectrality so popular with twentieth and twenty-first century artists and writers, has origins in Victorian visual culture.

In this model of archival contact, the viewer of a material trace experiences an obscure approximation of access to the abstract qualities of the past, through and of the “aura” of the material or image in question. Although Benjamin argued that mechanical reproduction destroyed a genuine aura, he was also fascinated by how an original photograph maintains a curious connection to its referent (“A Short History”, 20), so that it exudes what Marlene A. Briggs refers to as “mystifications

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3 See, for example, Thomas Richards’ *The Imperial Archive* (1993), Nancy Armstrong’s *Fiction in the Age of Photography* (1999), and John Tagg’s *The Burden of Representation* (1988).
of the false aura, or halo” (122). Approaching traces via such an archival imagination is of course, as Briggs notes, necessarily unreliable, and yet also distinctly flexible, as “affect, imagination and invention [are pivotal] in the ongoing afterlife of visual media” (115); imperceptibly accommodating shifts in ideology, taste and worldview. Certainly, what is perceived today in an archival record is not necessarily, and probably not, what the original viewers perceived, even if the goal is the extraction of factual information. Whilst undetected, these shifts in perception may lead to erroneous interpretations of events. Yet, when the shifts are made visible, an archival imagination highlights our mutable understanding of history and can be used to map contemporary thought against mentalities of the past. An investigation into the imaginative dimension of the archive makes visible the affect history casts over us and analyses it.

As well as being evident in postmodernist writings, an archival imagination could arguably be seen in the widespread artistic manipulation of multiple histories in the Victorian period. The Pre-Raphaelites’ poetic and historical focus could be seen as a visual archive of cultural history that attempted to depict “what might have been the actual facts of the scene”, to quote Ruskin’s defence of the Pre-Raphaelites (Cook and Wedderburn, Vol. 12, 322), yet was inflected with poetic sources. This dichotomy of past and present, reality and subjectivity, became particularly apparent, as art developed under the influence of photographic accuracy, as Diane Waggoner emphasises (“Uncompromising Truth”, 3). Viewers were also increasingly encouraged to engage with visual art with a sense of historical connectivity that equated different eras; Kate Nichols has recently explored how art depicting religious history evoked imagined experiences and memories that actualised present day concerns for Victorian viewers (“Diana or Christ?”, para. 23).

Victorian photography can in fact be considered as a particularly striking medium of archival imagination, perhaps because the photographic impulse has an integrally archival nature, as Karen Cross and Julia Peck have explored in a special journal edition of Photographies on the subject. Jennifer Green-Lewis asserts that “[t]he Victorians are visually real to us because they have a documentary assertiveness unavailable to persons living before the age of the camera” which means that such persons acquire “the pathos and appeal of photography itself” (“At Home”, 31). Whilst this accounts for the particularly striking visual-material connections that the
present world experiences in relation to Victorians in comparison to previous eras, Green-Lewis identifies this photographic connectivity as emblematic of a false idea of realism, authenticity and identity formation, which we should have outgrown in the postmodern age (30). She conversely criticises Cameron and Lewis Carroll for being purveyors of a “deliberate inauthenticity” that amounts to “another kind of reality” where the “subject” is “not the thing itself but the theatrically created suggestion of something other” (*Framing the Victorians*, 61). It may be argued that if realism is not considered as the primary aim of such readings, but the connection to the “real” remains an ingredient in the realisation of “another kind of reality”, then a new appreciation of the material-temporal connections that they induce can be developed, as hauntings of cultural memory which inspire new readings.

Julia Margaret Cameron’s photographs contain such an intensity of archival creativity, of history translated through imagination into the present. In her works, the mythology that shaped British identity overlaps with the passing concerns of the present. In this chapter, I first develop an informed concept of archival imagination through considering its theoretical precedents and manifestations in present day literary and archival theory. Following this, I undertake a close study of several Cameron images that blend the identities of the distant and recent past with those of her Victorian present, enacting a transformative effect on the subjects using an archival imagination. I then trace this dynamic, informed by Woolf’s archival musings in “The Lives of the Obscure”, through to a study of twentieth and twenty-first century literary representations of Cameron’s photographic archive. These texts comprise Virginia Woolf’s second novel, *Night and Day*, and two neo-Victorian novels, *Afterimage* by Helen Humphreys (2000) and *The Luminist* by David Rocklin (2011).

**The “Magical” Quality of Traces**

The association of traces with imaginative experiences in researcher experience and as represented in culture, can be associated with a number of theories and approaches with tangential relations to literary studies, which can be applied to both the representation of traces within literature and to the peculiar dynamics of the photographic. Whilst mostly writing from the perspective of the twentieth century
onwards, which may suggest a certain presentism, this selection can be interestingly applied to the Victorian materiality that preceded it. Philip Larkin’s well-known speech to the SCONUL conference (Society of College, National and University Libraries) in 1979, attempts to separate affect from the informational aspect of literary papers for practical purposes by dividing them into “meaningful” and “magical” values, which have been taken as a blueprint for literary records since this time. He stated of the latter:

The magical value is the older and more universal: this is the paper he wrote on, these are the words as he wrote them, emerging for the first time in this particular miraculous combination (99).

In this definition, Larkin satirises the poetic creativity of which he is a presumed exponent, in phrases like “miraculous combination”, suggesting the potential shallowness of “magical value” as a true measure of worth, favouring the “meaningful value” which can be loosely tied with the notion of evidence that archive discourse usually evokes.

However, Larkin is far from dismissive of the imagination, admitting that a manuscript “is bound to have magical value, if it is worth keeping at all” (100), and criticising those who would “be inclined to be patronizing about this Shelley-plain, Thomas-coloured factor” (99). Yet, although Larkin suggests that it is a “potent element in all collecting”, there is a sense that he is acknowledging an overwhelming and implicit understanding that “magical value” is beyond the usual serious interest of the academic, who instead solely favours the “knowledge and understanding of the writer’s life and work” that is embodied in the “meaningful” (99). Commentators on the imaginative power of real archives from all disciplines have had to defend themselves from the label of Romantic irrelevancy that attaches itself to the psychological experience of the archive, even apologising for their apparent interest in it. Lisa Stead has recently criticised the vagaries of fascination with “magical value” by suggesting

pinning down precisely what ‘magical value’ is can tend to remain elusive in the rhetoric of those who work with and within archives. Archivists’, scholars’, collectors’ and authors’ repeated emphasis on Larkin’s praise for ‘magical
value’ threatens to substitute critical insight into exactly what that value means (7).

Larkin’s definition has become so ubiquitous that it appears in the opening panel of the British Library’s permanent exhibition of “treasures”. Recently, the “Sir John Ritblat Treasures Gallery” has been the subject of a recent paean by former Poet Laureate Andrew Motion, in which he describes “magical value” as “the gut amazement of thinking” that the writer “made something immortal out of nothing” (180). For Motion, the power of the gallery’s manuscripts lies, less than in facilitating a forensic understanding of how texts were composed, than in a contradictory emanation of both a “sense of intimacy” and a “bewitching otherness” to the viewer, a powerful mixture of the “sublime and the everyday” (186).

If such “magical value” represents an anomalous excess that threatens to overtake boundaries of academic decorum, it is permitted to flourish within fictional representations. The auratic qualities of traces in historical context can yield a complexity that hosts a dialogue between “magical” and “meaningful” responses and investigates the subtle effects of the “magical” on the perception of the past. The peculiar crux of realism and surrealism embodied in the photograph’s mediated representation of the visible world (Sontag, 52) especially maps on to “magical” and “meaningful”, enabling fictions to variously blur and dissect realities and representations using the motif of the photographic trace. One might remedy the situation diagnosed by Stead, by pointing to the literary uses that the perceived “magical value” of photography is put to in neo-Victorian novels, where it is employed as a fluid means to unlock multiple interpretations and experiences of history.

As well as being linked to curatorial practices, an archival imagination has a deeper anthropological root in the cultural history of the object. Krzysztof Pomian considers collections and relics as operating as a conduit between “visible” and “invisible” worlds, in a model drawn from study of ancient civilisations; terms which can be compared to the theoretical poles of both Larkin’s “older and more universal” “magical value” (99) and Derrida’s “spectral” archives (84). For Pomian, relics in ancient cultures symbolised a “role of guaranteeing communication between the two worlds into which the universe is cleft” (172) which he characterises as “this world
and the next, the sacred and the secular” (171). These signs of the sacred world were placed at the very heart of the secular world, [being] symbols of the distant, the hidden, the absent. In other words, they acted as a go-between between those who gazed upon them and the invisible from whence they came (171).

This reminds us that the archive, whilst containing informational value, also functions to embody a need for the “invisible” or “sacred” presence in the “secular” world in general (Pomian, 171), gathering to itself a heightened aura that may be at odds with its original informational content.

Yet, by utilising the acknowledged “magical” status of objects, it can be subverted in shared cultural understanding without being entirely erased. An archival imagination, in its endlessly reinvigorated forms, is rooted in such ambivalence about history and its relics, which it both exploits and subverts.

Carolyn Steedman has extensively analysed the power of the archive on the historical imagination by critically exploring the motivations of historians:

This is the dream, or the romance of social history: to enter a place where the past has its being, where ink on parchment can be made to speak, where the historian can bring to life those who exist only between the lines of state papers and legal documents (“After the Archive”, 325).

Steedman exposes how dreams of the textual resurrection of the dead by the power of the historian’s imagination underlie even the most evidence-centric of pursuits, the collation of reliable source, for “the object […] has been altered by the very search for it, by its time and duration” and is “a creation of the search itself and the time the search took” (Dust, 77). She compares the narrativization of the trace to the writing of the Victorian novel and the experience of living. Yet, Dust maintains an ambivalent approach to the value of this imagination - the phenomenon is sited entirely in the historian or researcher’s mind rather than in the archive material which “just sits there, until it is read and used and narrativized” (68). Steedman seeks to demystify “archive fever”, Derrida’s phrase for an imperative and even destructive desire to return and hold onto the origins of the trace (19, 94), as a research process.
often involving onerous hours of practical difficulty (“Something She Called a Fever”, 8).

Other accounts stress the materiality of the archive as instrumental in its imaginative affectivity, such as Maria Tamboukou’s discussion of researching the papers of Gwen John in the Rodin archive in Paris in which her experience of researching materials in the houses in which the events being researched happened blurred her perception of the boundaries between the present and the past, producing a sensation of “heterotemporality” (“Archive Pleasures”, para. 41). Tamboukou argues that the researcher perceives the records through a filter of imaginative identification, selecting the material that is caught, in an appropriately Woolfian phrase, by the “lighthouse’s rotating searchlight” of their particular hypothesis (para. 18) resulting in a subjective “matrix” of connections between the archival subject and the researcher (para. 38). Living in these “multiple temporalities” of history and the present does not simply lead to a misleadingly subjective account of history but can lead to an invigorated re-communication of that history, as long as the subjectivity of such an account is acknowledged.

The concept of “archival imagination” then, could be defined as the application of lateral imaginative thinking to, and already embedded latently within, material traces from the past. This process brings archives into connections with ideas and texts from cultural memory, the particular milieu of the researcher and the social and cultural fabric of the present day; as well as producing a force or auratic halo which can initiate new ideas and fictional narratives. It is a mode of thinking that is less concerned with concepts of the pure construction of power, but more with the cultural mapping and allusions surrounding an archival (or photographic) trace, both as originally embedded and realised retrospectively, as well as its material circumstances of production. Such readings of archival objects can be visual, literary or tactile in nature. These readings open up a space for the sense of the passing of time, disparate connections and changing social contexts that such items evoke in the present day, as filtered through the cultural layers and constructions that interpose between the record and the contemporary world, which may be termed “cultural memory”. Thus an archival imagination is linked to a metahistorical dynamic that lends itself to textual explication, but perhaps underlines affective connection more than the dystopian deconstruction often associated with metahistorical fiction.
Through this balance of materiality and imaginative layering inspired by cultural memory, archival traces act as generators of narrative in literary and visual productions. In a work of archival imagination, affective histories are held up against the material reality of the archival context or the contemporary moment, creating new fictional space in the shifts between multiple versions of history and between the past and the present. An archival imagination plays on this doubling; it acknowledges the material and the authentic whilst reaching into the affective.

**Archival Imagination in Julia Margaret Cameron’s Photography**

Julia Margaret Cameron’s photography has long been associated with the historicism of the Pre-Raphaelite movement, particularly since she knew and corresponded with many of its protagonists; she had a mutually influential relationship with William Holman Hunt and Dante Gabriel Rossetti, (Lukitsh, “Like a Lionardo”) as well as a greater communion with the symbolism of G.F. Watts (Weiss, 38-39). Drawing from similar historical and literary themes but working through the apparent immediacy and the experimental effects of the camera, Julia Margaret Cameron’s visions highlight the contradictory elements of the personal, the fictional and the historical in ways that break open the surface of Victorian historical painting. Her works combine realism and romance, and the temporalities of both her own present and the multiple histories of myth and fact.

Cameron’s images constitute a shifting and subjective archive of her personal family and friends, and famous cultural figures of her time, whilst simultaneously performing an archive of her own reading, literary fantasies and historical heroes and heroines. All this is filtered through an aesthetic sensibility involving the manipulation of light, *chiaroscuro* and radical cropping techniques. This combination of modern technical advances and seeming indulgence in dream-like histories is often seen as regressive on the part of Cameron and the Pre-Raphaelite artists with whom she was loosely associated, but may in fact be the opposite of regression, as Elizabeth Prettejohn comments:

> Pre-Raphaelite primitivism need not be seen as an antiquarian or historicist ‘revival’, nor as a reactionary reversion to the styles of the past. Instead it brought the primitive into shocking friction with the illusionistic sophistication
and technical refinement ordinarily expected of painting in the modernised and industrialised world of Victorian England (19).

Although Prettejohn is not referring to Cameron here, these comments seem even more apt in relation to photography than the painters to whom she is primarily talking about. The retreat into history in Cameron’s works can appear to be an evasion of the industrial present and ideological eruption of mid-Victorian Britain but this belies its engagement with the art of photography as a radical new way of seeing both the present and the past. If Victorian culture was fixated on resurrecting the past in art, in Cameron’s works, this effect is amplified, and the classical, medieval and Renaissance worlds, both historical and mythical, are brought into stark contrast with photographic reality, producing a human, lived history, if not a somewhat contradictory one. In this way, her art forms a temporally disparate archive that is best read affectively, through making connections on the level of cultural memory.6

Cameron’s work sits at the juncture between romance and realism, the question which forms the pivot of Victorian culture, and terms used by Green-Lewis to denote the literary trends that can be mapped out in Victorian photography as a body. Green-Lewis places Cameron in the “romance” bracket, as one of the photographers whose works unfairly give Victorian photography the reputation of irrelevant nostalgia:

Cameron’s photographs, famous for their deliberate poor focus and typically Pre-Raphaelite themes, make no pretence at realism in their attempt to render what Ruskin identified in The Stones of Venice as “that inner part of the man, or rather that entire and only being of the man, of which cornea and retina, fingers and hands, pencils and colours, are all the more servants and instruments; that manhood which is light in itself” (Framing the Victorians, 82).

Cameron’s espousal of Ruskin’s philosophy of inner truth may, in fact, be taken as evidence of her work’s ambiguous relation with the real, since her images can be  

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6 In this I am informed by Mieke Bal’s pioneering precedent in open intertextual interpretations of visual art, demonstrated in her approach to reading painting through signs, texts, gestures and cultural memory in Reading ’Rembrandt’ and other texts.
said to attempt to encompass the divide between the Romantic and the real that Ruskin also sought to bridge. Ruskin famously wrote that “to see clearly, is poetry, prophecy and religion - all in one” (Cook and Wedderburn, Vol. 5, 333), arguing that visual “realism” must also be invested with the “inner” poetic truth that, for him, was endemic in the world. Mere technical copying was dangerous for “[t]he picture which is looked to for an interpretation of nature is invaluable, but the picture which is taken as a substitute for nature had better be burned” (Cook and Wedderburn, Vol. 3, 12). Hilary Fraser has drawn attention to the almost paradoxical nature of Ruskin’s visual theory, arguing that for him, “[t]he artistic imagination bridges the gap between perception and creativity, between the forms of nature and the forms of art” (Beauty and Belief, 127). For Ruskin, the interpretation must not presume to substitute the purity of truth, but which must nevertheless be alluded to or represented within the interpretation. Although, according to Lindsay Smith, Ruskin “reject[ed] [photography’s] utilisation to probe other worlds” (Victorian Photography, 67) and later expressed particular contempt for Cameron’s style, accusing it of composing “stage attitudes” of nature (qtd. in Cox, 75), her works may be seen to operate within the realm of Ruskin’s dichotomous principles of representation for painted art, being neither documentary substitutes of the world nor denials of its material verity. Instead Cameron bypasses Ruskin’s exclusion of photography as an art and follows his central advice for artists, employing the observable elements of the world to suggest an “other” intangible truth to be perceived by the viewer.

Diane Waggoner has connected this technique to Victorian questions of subjective vision, arguing that Cameron “aimed to convey the concrete visual facts as well as the animation of human perception” (“From the Life”, 100). Cameron’s images specifically seek to overlay fantasy images onto real people with results that are sometimes all the more fascinating for their apparent failure to seamlessly trace subjects onto each other. A dissonance is produced between what Roland Barthes might call the “studium” of the intended allegorical meaning of the image and the “punctum” of its (perhaps) unintentional details of realism (Camera Lucida, 28), in the idiosyncratic glances and attitudes of the models. Unlike Ruskin’s dream of a unified vision in Modern Painters, Cameron leaves gaps between her subject and her material; between the Romantic and the real. It is this visual uncertainty between
past and present, and subject and object, which mean that the images’ gathered archive of latent allusions and memories remain unstable and open to the imagination of the viewer.

Figure 3. Julia Margaret Cameron, *Pomona* (1872); Lewis Carroll, *Alice Liddell as ‘The Beggar Maid’* (1858).

A complicated example of this archival dissonance can be found in Cameron’s image *Pomona*, whose sitter is an adult Alice Liddell, Lewis Carroll’s famous child muse (Fig. 3). Cameron had some prior acquaintance with Carroll as a fellow photographer and would have been aware of Alice’s literary fame when the photograph was taken in 1872, after the publication and phenomenal success of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* in 1865. It is hard for the modern viewer, and perhaps even the Victorian viewer, to fail to privilege concentrating on the enigmatic figure of the most famous little girl in literature above the allusion to the Greek goddess of abundance. The model’s direct stare and frank posture seem to the post-Alice audience, to protest her own autonomy, in the face of being consistently written over in images and in texts, ironically within the parameters of further non-autonomous representation. The notion of Pomona recedes in relation to the relative scarcity of images of an adult Alice Liddell. The idealised title subject is displaced and subsumed by the apparently realism of the “punctum”; Alice’s slightly narrow-eyed
stare and the forthright hand on her hip. This binary cut between fiction and the real, is of course, more mutually constitutive than it first appears. Not only is the magnetism of Alice obviously generated by fictional sources, it is contained within further representational layers in this image. In fact, considering Cameron’s celebrity-savvy nature, she may have been very well-aware of the possibility of cultural mapping in her arrangement of this picture. Cameron’s awareness of Alice’s fame may be interpreted in particularly embodied way, since there is a distinct mirroring between the poses in *Pomona* and Lewis Carroll’s famous *Alice Liddell as ‘The Beggar Maid’* (Fig. 3). Both images portray one hand on the hip and the other as an almost identically mirrored cupped palm, as well as re-creating the stare, flat background and open V-necked, draped dress of the original. Cameron was known to have viewed Carroll’s photographs when he visited Freshwater (Olsen, 156) and may have been directly influenced by this image in conjunction with Alice’s fame as a “literary character”.

Simon Schama has also recently noted this apparently deliberate restaging, and reads it as a “recording” of Alice’s “self-possession” and assertive “womanliness” in defiance of Carroll’s mythologizing of the child Alice (213). This mirroring also stands as an example of Cameron’s employment of an archival imagination in drawing on Carroll’s photograph and novel, whilst creating a new trace with multiple meanings drawn directly on to his “canvas”: Alice. The pose that appears to be an expression of Alice’s adult individuality turns out to be a re-creation of her strange childhood, as both startlingly modern and dignified. I concur with Schama that Cameron suggests *The Beggar Maid*’s supplicant pose can be recast as a form of autonomy for Alice – in the 1872 image she directly faces the camera and surveys the audience with authority as a goddess, not as a subject of provocative poverty. Taking this further, I argue that rather being merely a “recording” by Cameron, the “real” in this image is thus an artful construct, and the photograph is deeply embedded with crossed layers of fictionality. It is also an intriguing possibility, unconsidered by Schama, that this pose was initiated by Alice herself, and incorporated into Cameron’s vision, which opens fascinating questions about Alice’s possible owning, absorption and performance of her own legacy as a “character”. Indeed, the magnetism of the begging open hand in *Pomona*, which may be considered as akin to Bal’s “speaking hands” or “internal focalizers” (187, 159) lies
in the uncertainty of whether Alice endorses this history, actively parodies it, or performs it at Cameron’s request. The image invites and participates in the inescapable biographical speculation, which without further evidence, must remain part of the mystery that surrounds Alice in cultural memory. In this way, Cameron’s archival vision seeks to re-define traces of both real and mythical persons that I will be exploring in the textual web of cultural references in neo-Victorian archive fictions later in this chapter. The archive in this instance is a composite of fictions, being a record not merely of the moment of material presence, which perhaps is amongst the least important aspects of the image, but of the surreal presence of the original little girl who could never grow up, Alice as fictional Alice, Alice as the Greek goddess of fruitfulness, Pomona, Alice as a pose influenced by Gainsborough images (P. Roberts, 60), Alice against the “lush background” of Rossetti’s *Bocca Baciata* (Waggoner, “Uncompromising Truth”, 13), Alice as an updated mirror of Carroll’s photograph. Yet all these ideas are expressed in the stark new realism afforded by the invention of photography. Such images gain a power of fascination by being apparent contradictions. Carol Mavor notes this appeal in Cameron’s Madonna images by suggesting:

The images, which are often quite literally blurred, move metaphorically between categories smearing the lines between sexual and not-sexual, male and female, earthly and heavenly. They move like an apparition, leaving the viewer perplexed about what has been seen. … Because she is photographed, however, this altered Madonna appears more real than mythical. Unlike most apparitions, Cameron’s Madonnas are fixed on photographic plates (47).

Mavor’s impression of Cameron’s Madonna pictures, could also be applied to the body of Cameron’s work. In this aesthetic, the persons “captured” by the camera, belong simultaneously to Pomian’s “invisible” and “visible” worlds. They become “apparitions” of their public characters and the literary allusions pasted onto them, yet they are contradictorily embodied in the moment of image-capture by means of a radically realist technology little over twenty years old. The images assert Sontag’s assertion that death “haunts all photographs of people” (70), on two levels: that centred on the sitter who conventionally symbolises both life and death perpetually frozen, and that of the historical and mythological characters which emanate from
the “death” of the archive. The historical layering in Cameron’s images make them living, contradictory archives.

In Cameron’s albums, which I will discuss more fully in the succeeding chapter, she gathered images to form abstract narratives that comprise arcades of cultural history, literary reference and a mythology of family. Focusing on single images, but referencing the patterning of the albums, in this section I explore how Cameron creates an open bridge between distant histories and fictions and present day identities, which can be accessed through an archival imagination. Following Charlotte Boyce’s persuasive argument that “[a]t once real and ideal, her portraits promised both to actualise and transcendentalise their illustrious referents” (109), I explore how Cameron’s posing and aesthetic treatment of models, and the placement of the photographs in albums enact transformations of both the real and the ideal, which embed latent social, cultural and gender narratives.

Cameron’s portraits which have traditionally met with the most critical praise are those of the “great men”, which typically include a roster of Sir John Herschel, Thomas Carlyle, Alfred Lord Tennyson and George Frederick Watts and which comprise opening sections of several albums from the miniature “Nelly Mundy Album” to the presentation “Herschel Album”. These images are often favoured, not only for their subjects, but because of their more palatable realism, yet they can be construed as just as much imbued with romanticism as Cameron’s “sentimental” women. A consideration of the layering of this romanticism reveals the aesthetic similarities in these two oft-divided categories of images. The strong light cast on the head of Herschel, for example, in the image that appears on the first and fourteenth pages of the eponymous “Herschel Album” and on page 6 of the “Nelly Mundy Album” (Fig. 4), with his hair a glowing halo suggesting the surge of eccentric genius against the darkened background, emphasises the head and thus the centrality of mental prowess to the character of the subject (as explored in P. Roberts, 54). This connection between an idiosyncratic visual treatment of the sitter and their personality, so apparently absent in the conventional Victorian carte photograph of this date, is what usually distinguishes Cameron’s work in the opinion of her critics.

Yet, if this implied connection between wildness and genius in Cameron’s male portraits may be extended into Cameron’s portraits of women, the presentation of the
Romantic heroine in her work may be redrawn. In these images, hair, besides being used aesthetically as a “structural element” as Lindsay Smith has argued (*Politics of Focus*, 49), can be symbolic of transcendent beauty or even genius, albeit in relation to the character rather than the sitter. The image of Mary Hillier as *Sappho* that appears on page 11 of the “Nelly Mundy Album” (Fig. 4), employs a broad sweep of hair drawn back from the clear profile of the face, also emphasising the subject’s head and mental powers. Here too, the strong lighting on the facial features can be connected with genius, this time of a classical female poet. At first, the fictionality of the image’s title would seem to separate *Sappho* from *Herschel*, a division possibly underlined by the less sober, spangled costume that Hillier wears. Yet, *Herschel* also participates in a fictional milieu; the subject wears a faux-medieval cap and cloak, placing him inside a historical referent. Like Mary Hillier, in this photograph, Herschel is not entirely himself. The borders of identity have shifted, since a nineteenth-century experimental scientist both does and does not occupy a medieval space, and a real servant stands for a legendary poet. In both cases Romanticism is employed, and the equality of the images’ placement with the “Nelly Mundy Album” blurs the borders between fictionalised history and reality. Further muddying a viewer’s perception of the real and fiction as an underlying referent, this image of *Sappho* follows on from an almost identical but reversed image of Hillier as
Adriana ("Nelly Mundy Album, 10), emphasising the continuity of the model’s identity over the arbitrary nature of the characters, who are only brought into being by the labels. Cameron’s labels can be seen as partially constructing the images and the associations that are to be drawn from them, although she may have intended each one to integrally represent a different subject in her inner vision. This blurring between “fictional” and “factual” images suggests that even in an apparently reverentially truthful image such as that of Herschel, fictionality is inherent. Indeed, Rosen has recently pertinent commented that, in Cameron’s exhibitions which contained both portraits and allegories, “the evident artificiality of each form stained the other” (213).

These fluid borders suggest that categorisations that even Cameron placed on her images are not absolute; rather, all the images are encompassed within the historic or archival imagination. The hierarchy assumed by many critics is partly based on Cameron’s own diagnosis of separation, comprising “Portraits”, “Fancy Subjects” and “Madonna portraits” (Cox and Ford, Introduction, 2) which mostly consist of allusive images of women. This hierarchy also may be based on a latent tendency in twentieth century critics to praise the “great men” of Victorian art, over the supposedly ordinary lives of women (Olsen, 3).

Transformed Identities: Reading Cameron’s Archive with Virginia Woolf

As previously articulated, recent critical opinion has turned towards a comprehensive re-evaluation of Cameron’s female images as led by Lindsay Smith, Sylvia Wolf and Joanne Lukitsh. Pam Roberts has argued that Cameron’s female images have as much power as the male, since they are allowed to be themselves and illustrate their independence, strength and sensuousness through the camera lens, it is obvious that Cameron did not surround herself with ‘yes’ women. It is difficult to see any signs of submission when they face the camera with a challenging eye that verges on the equivocal. (67)

Prior to this late twentieth-century revival, Virginia Woolf’s writing speaks of an earlier appreciation for Cameron’s female images as both potentially subversive, and
as specifically “Victorian” relics. Although her 1926 publication on Cameron with Roger Fry, *Victorian Photographs of Famous Men and Fair Women*, maintains a distinction between male and female images both in the title of the book and its arrangement of photographs, Woolf’s treatment of Cameron’s female images in her novels might be compared to Pam Roberts’ “challenging” assessment above. Indeed, Natasha Aleksuik has attributed Cameron’s “challeng[ing of] gender and class stereotypes” as a form of “visual irony” that relates to Woolf’s biographical techniques (125). In her fictionalised Cameron album in *Night and Day*, Woolf emphasises the eccentric female portraits in the exposition of her character Mrs Hilbery, the protagonist’s mother, a woman of the late-Victorian generation based on Anne Thackeray Ritchie, whom Woolf knew as “Aunt Anny”. Mrs Hilbery in turning the pages of the album remembers the scenes at “Melbury House” from her youth:

‘And that’s Queenie Colquhoun’, she went on, turning the pages, ‘who took her coffin out with her to Jamaica, packed with lovely shawls and bonnets, because you couldn’t get coffins in Jamaica, and she had a horror of dying there (as she did), and being devoured by the white ants. And there’s Sabine, the loveliest of them all; ah! it was like a star rising when she came into the room. And that's Miriam, in her coachman’s cloak, with all the little capes on, and she wore great top-boots underneath. You young people may say you’re unconventional, but you’re nothing compared with her.’ (*Night and Day*, 95).

Woolf makes several Cameron references here, not only to albums and theatrical dress, but also to taking coffins to Jamaica - Cameron famously took a coffin with her on her final trip to Ceylon (Olsen, 244), a fact that Woolf found particularly ridiculous and also parodies in her play about Cameron and Tennyson’s circle, *Freshwater*. “Melbury House” is an allusion to Little Holland House, the artistic and literary salon presided over by Cameron’s sister, Sara Prinsep, another of the famous seven Pattle sisters, which was located in Melbury Road, Kensington (Lee, 86). Such passages suggest that Woolf would have spent time looking at the albums in her youth – the real “Aunt Anny” owned an album given to her by Cameron, and the “Mia Album” was presented to Woolf’s grandmother. The long shadow of material relics is one of the main themes of her second novel and Woolf frames her
description of the photographs through their hypnotic effects on her protagonist, Katharine:

The faces of these men and women shone forth wonderfully after the hubbub of living faces, and seemed, as her mother had said, to wear a marvellous dignity and calm, as if they had ruled their kingdoms justly and deserved great love. Some were of almost incredible beauty, others were ugly enough in a forcible way, but none were dull or bored or insignificant. [...] Once more Katharine felt the serene air all around her, and seemed far off to hear to the solemn beating of the sea upon the shore. But she knew she must join the present onto this past (95).

Here, the dangerous “magic” of the family archive induces a kind of trance-like state for the young people of the post-Victorian generation, equivalent to the abstracting beating of the sea, Woolf’s iconic image, which could allude here to both Freshwater Bay, Cameron’s home from 1860, as well as to the Stephens’ summer home at St Ives. To escape disappearing into the shadows of history, Katharine must extract herself by “joining” on a new present of her own making, rather than just starkly breaking from the past as modernism classically demanded. Marion Dell concurs with this perspective, arguing that in Night and Day, for Woolf “there is no caesura; but an evolution in which her Victorian realist roots are integrated into her twentieth-century modernist maturity” (24) and even suggests that the novel’s title refers to a polarity of light and darkness akin to the photographic palette (26). Katharine’s intention or rejection of connecting the material magic of the past with the present, describes the central concern of Night and Day as a novel.

Yet, despite the obvious identity of this “portfolio containing old photographs” (94) as one of her great-aunt’s albums, Woolf angles the content of the images to reflect a particularly transgressive female identity, which is hinted at in Cameron’s Pomona and Sappho. Almost all of the persons Mrs Hilbery identifies are women, and radical, opinionated, characterful women, although it is clear from Mrs Hilbery’s reminiscence that their force lies in their personality rather than their actions - “they did more than we do, I sometimes think. They were, and that’s better than doing” (94, original emphasis)
Woolf identifies the fictional sitters “Queenie Colquhoun”, “Sabine” and “Miriam” as being depicted under their own identities. Sabine is drawn as the serene yet powerful subject of male attention – she is “like a star rising”, and is suggestive of Woolf’s image of her mother, Julia Jackson, as a young woman, “She is of course ‘a vision’ as they used to say; and there she stands, silent, with her plate of strawberries and cream” (*Moments of Being*, 98). In the novel Sabine presages the difficulties Katharine faces in being a thinking, rather than a decorative woman. Miriam, meanwhile, goes beyond most Cameron models’ temporary adoption of characters and assumes a character in her real life. It is apparent that Miriam wears the “coachman’s cloak” and the “great top-boots” habitually, so may be taken to suggest the young Ellen Terry, who, according to Woolf, was often dressed as a boy in her youth (*Moments of Being*, 98), although not in her portraits by Cameron. This selection and rewriting of Cameron’s women portraits prefigures Woolf’s interest in cross-dressing in characters such as eighteenth-century adventures of her Orlando, who having become a woman, dresses up as a man in order to live a free life in London (*Orlando*, 149).

If Cameron’s “famous men” and “fair women” are both acknowledged as powerful Romantic constructions and forceful characters in Woolf’s writing, a direct comparison between the male “genius” and the female “eccentric” comes to the fore, a category which often subsumed talented Victorian women whose behaviour was seen to outweigh their abilities. Cameron herself is often characterised as “eccentric” in accounts of family and friends, and especially in Woolf’s biographical sketches of her, yet as an invisible presence constructing the “great men” of nineteenth-century high culture, Cameron herself is the “great woman” through whose artistry they appear to the world and to posterity. As Charlotte Boyce notes, “the gendered vision of celebrity suggested by her ‘gallery of great men’ is destabilised by her own active pursuit of personal renown” (98).

Woolf thus refigures the family legacy of Cameron’s images to rewrite a version which emphasises the lively and eccentric characters of the female subjects over the “great men”, who in the twentieth century dominated critical approval. This is borne out in *Night and Day*, where the character of Ralph Denham confidently asserts that “I hate great men. The worship of greatness in the nineteenth century seems to me to explain the worthlessness of that generation” (12). The novel does not entirely
espouse this view, but rather constitutes an ambivalent reworking of Woolf’s Victorian literary heritage, in which the legacy of sentimentalism found in “relics” like Mrs Hilbery’s albums and in the room “like a chapel in a cathedral” holding significant objects belonging to Katherine’s poet grandfather, are valued but must be distanced from modern life (8-9). Yet, in Woolf’s body of works as a whole, the imaginative power of Cameron’s photographs continue to exert a trance-like effect, as Marion Dell has extensively argued. I would add here that Woolf’s running theme of emancipation through adopting historical characters and costumes, observable in Orlando, Between the Acts and in the acting of Freshwater the play, could arguably have been influenced by study of Cameron’s “Fancy Subjects”.

Julie Sanders has suggested that the source of Between the Acts’ tableaux scenes can be found in Cameron’s “theatralised photographic tableaux” which are themselves influenced by Pre-Raphaelite art, citing this as an example of multiple layers of adaptation (152). Some of Miss La Trobe’s musings on costumes seem to be even taken from Cameron’s portraits. For example, her internal remark that “[s]wathed in conventions, they couldn’t see as she could, that a dish cloth wound round a head in the open looked much richer than real silk” (80), not only recalls Cameron’s series of portraits entitled A Study of the Cenci (1870) (Cox and Ford, Complete Photographs, 246-247) with its draped fabric wound round the head of the model, it also invokes the accusations of many of Cameron’s critics that her theatrical choice of everyday objects as props was ridiculous. Woolf often takes this view of Cameron’s art herself, yet in this passage she seems to embody the seriousness with which Cameron used such items and her determination to defy criticism. The scenes also suggest the re-creation of Cameron’s real amateur theatricals, which were staged in a specially built “Thatched House Theatre” in the gardens of Dimbola and used actors from her family and visiting cultural figures to stage fanciful productions that were probably symbiotic with her photographic interests (Ford, 32). This chain of historical appropriations, windows within windows, mirrors the multi-historic subject matter that individually concern Pre-Raphaelite art, Cameron’s photographs and Woolf’s novels as particular historically-conscious projects.

Cameron’s historically inflected images form a material archive that, like all archives, has an ongoing afterlife that exerts influence as a real presence beyond its origins, and which can be considered as embodying the sum of a long history rather
than pinpointing a single genesis moment. Rosario Arias has similarly recently emphasised the significance of this ongoing affective power for neo-Victorian literature, arguing that “the passage, the tracing of Victorian traces results in a persistent yet continuous movement between the present and the Victorian past (“Traces and Vestiges”, 113) which is actualised “through the apprehension of the bodily senses” (122). Yet, it is important to emphasise that this continuity of visibility does not produce a simple return and often involves change and adaptation. Arias rather considers it as a “revisitation” that both challenges and continues postmodernist tendencies in fiction (113, 111). When particularly crossed through the imagination of Woolf, Cameron’s archive evokes a cultural space where women can temporarily take on radical identities and forceful personalities from literature and history, and are allowed to visually “compete” with the idealisation of male genius. This proto-feminism latent in Cameron’s images of women appealed to Woolf as a writer who could inscribe in the ambiguous space between gender stereotype and subversion, as it would go on to appeal to neo-Victorian writers in the twenty-first century.

It can be seen that the “magical value” or imaginative cadence of these archives, a quality producing an affective impression on the viewer or reader in dialogue with later temporal contexts, rather than the transference of visual information, is that which holds transfigurative power. I contend that this power is not merely decorative or superfluous, but is in fact, the very quality by which radical change may be effected. It is the shifting potentialities of an archival imagination in new contexts which are able to generate such new ideas, although this can, of course, risk contradicting the original context.7 In this case, some of Cameron’s female models resented her domineering personality, hated being photographed and were often far from being “emancipated” by the experience, and it is important to note this (Olsen, 169, 297), but what is presented and retrospectively imagined in the photographs has had a power in the twentieth and twenty-first century imagination despite the circumstances of creation, in Woolf’s writing and especially after the Cameron

7 Freedom of interpretation is still a contested subject in relation to biofiction, which as we shall see, significantly intersects with archival fiction as a genre. Biofiction rather bestrides the imperatives of fiction and history writing and thus some critics remain ambivalent about the legitimacy of rewriting both lives and archives. See Kohlke, “Neo-Victorian Biofiction and the Special-Spectral Case of Barbara Chase-Riboud’s Hottentot Venus”.


revival spearheaded by Gernsheim in the 1940s. It is this ambivalence between imagination and evidence that gives these “dream-like” images of women a contradictory power.

Whilst the aesthetic power of Cameron’s “fictional” images can impress without knowledge of literary and social context, their impact is complicated by the relation between her named characters and the sitters, who were of widely varied classes and achievements. The photographic mapping of fiction onto fact variously produces sensations of poignancy, elevation and the bathetic. Through her capturing of working-class models in particular, and their transformation into figures from literature and myth, Cameron may be said to suggest in an undeveloped way Virginia Woolf’s call for the consideration of “obscure lives” from history, particularly her desire that women’s lives should be recorded and celebrated. Charlotte Boyce has also pointed out the “affinities that emerge between Woolf’s biographical project and Cameron’s aesthetic ideology” (125), and this, for me, has a particular resonance in terms of writing the “obscure” both into and out of the archive.

Woolf demanded attention for the seldom viewed or unwritten archives of the marginalised which take on a hypnotic viscerality in “The Lives of the Obscure”:

The obscure sleep on the walls, slouching against each other as if they were too drowsy to stand upright. Their backs are flaking off; their titles are vanished. Why disturb their sleep? Why reopen those peaceful graves, the librarian seems to ask, peering over his spectacles, and resenting the duty, which indeed has become laborious, of retrieving from among those nameless tombstones Nos. 1763, 1080, and 606 (The Common Reader, 146).

In this telling passage, the individual’s body becomes synonymous with their material productions, which then are physically exhumed by the researcher. This theme of the physical, of resurrection, has long belonged to the macabre appeal of the archive. Rosario Arias observes that the traces of the past are kept alive in literature through “the apprehension of the bodily senses” (“Traces and Vestiges”, 122): the traces are produced by the bodies of the creators, which meet the bodies of the researchers. Investigation of traces of the obscure may be here synonymous with grave-robbery, but Woolf emphasises the necessity of such a disinterment, describing with relish the pleasures of unearthing these textualised graves:
For one likes romantically to feel oneself a deliverer advancing with lights across the waste of years to the rescue of some stranded ghost – a Mrs. Pilkington, a Rev. Henry Elman, a Mrs. Ann Gilbert – waiting, appealing, forgotten in the growing gloom. Possibly they hear one coming. They shuffle, they preen, they bridle. Old secrets well up to their lips. The divine relief of communication will soon be theirs (Selected Essays, 146-147).

Here, ghosts are waiting in the archives to be resurrected by the salvation of the researcher, a dynamic that had previously been employed by both nineteenth-century historians and novelists as a means of underscoring authenticity (Fraser, The Victorians and Renaissance Italy, 38, 182), but which after Woolf, would be taken up by many archival fictions in the ensuing century as a foil for creative reinterpretation. Woolf’s employs an archival imagination over straight evidence – the reading of “obscure lives” will not so much provide social evidence of the past but rather provide a means by which the forgotten of the past will be able to speak into the present out of the “growing gloom” by a “divine” process (147). The “deliverer” must translate these lives into the present through the power of imagination, as Woolf demonstrates in her many essays on historical women – as collected in The Common Reader and Books and Portraits among other texts. This modernist project is, as Alexandra Harris points out, more than nostalgia, for “what can be read as a sign of retreat can also, perhaps, be read as an expression of responsibility – towards places, people and histories too valuable and too vulnerable to go missing from art” (13-14).

Cameron seeks to capture a pantheon of heroines from her own literary and historical archive for a form of “divine” posterity which might be considered as analogous to Woolf’s revival of historical characters in her essays. Yet she also captures and transforms the “obscure” persons of her own present in achieving this goal, effectively writing them into the archive. As well as looking to photograph any local people, holidaymakers or visiting celebrities that caught her eye, Cameron deliberately chose maids who could also serve as models for her photography. These models were initially selected for their looks but their personal characters were also eulogised by their employer’s work. She was the first to acknowledge these working-class girls as contributors to her art, writing of Mary Hillier:
The very unusual attributes of her character and complexion of her mind, if I may so call it, deserve mention in due time, and are the wonder of those whose life is blended with ours as intimate friends of the house (‘Annals’, 11).

Whilst expansive statements like these may be deceptive, as Mary Hillier reportedly later stated that posing as a model was an onerous duty (Olsen, 169), although she did later name two of her daughters Adeline and Julia (Ford, Cameron Collection, 125) it does suggest that Cameron viewed herself as permeating class boundaries and encouraging female participation in the arts. Yet, as much as they may be considered artistic collaborators, perhaps it was only through adopting culturally-established characters that the models were able to make themselves visible and be inscribed into the archive. For, despite some of them being officially considered “adopted daughters”, they were often treated as maids by the Cameron household (Olsen, 191). Even in the domestic sphere, their fictional identities bled into reality through the use of nicknames that Cameron gave her maids. Mary Hillier was often known as “Madonna Mary” after becoming the muse for Cameron’s Madonna pictures (Olsen, 168) in images such as La Madonna Riposata (see Fig. 5). Mary Ryan was contrastingly known as the “Beggar-maid” (Olsen, 193) which mixed her identity as an impoverished Irish immigrant with a reference to Tennyson’s poem The Beggar...
Maid in which a monarch, King Cophetua, falls in love with his servant. This was a reference that was to become a self-fulfilling prophecy when Ryan was pursued by the upper-middle class Henry Cotton (Olsen, 193), after he reportedly fell in love with her via one of Cameron’s photographs, Prospero and Miranda (Fig. 5). The couple married and Cotton was knighted in the early twentieth century. In this way, Mary Ryan provides an interesting foil for Alice Liddell, an upper-middle class girl who performed as the “beggar-maid” and carried the reputation of being a real literary heroine, Ryan instead emerging from abject poverty to gain the parodic appellation of “beggar-maid” and to perform both as a series of literary heroines and eventually as a “Lady”. Cameron also later posed Cotton as King Cophetua in her photographic illustrations for Idylls of the King (Cox and Ford, Complete Photographs, 479) and created a photograph album dedicated to the couple’s son, which is discussed in detail in my second chapter.

Cameron strongly encouraged the match and according to Olsen, took it as evidence of her power to orchestrate art into life, for “Cameron seems to have eagerly endorsed the idea that her photography had created a reality instead of merely reflecting one” (194-195). Cameron’s deliberate use of Mary Ryan’s pre-existing “Beggar-maid” label to make a convenient King Cophetua out of Henry Cotton, demonstrates her desire to foreground the blurring of boundaries between fact and fiction not only in art, but also on the level of identity itself. In this way, Cameron may be said not only to record “lives of the obscure” as part of her art but to seek to transform them into her own Romantic patterns. “The divine relief of communication” that the obscure may experience according to Woolf (The Common Reader, 147), is in Cameron’s case, comparable to a kind of ventriloquist’s act, whereby the model’s lives were subsumed into a narrative that “elevated” them in both class and artistic terms, but in which they were also written into the archive of art history as poetic elements in Cameron’s idealist vision. It could even be conceived that Ryan’s role as an innocent Miranda on the Isle of Wight subject to visits from an upper-class Ferdinand/King Cophetua, casts Cameron as a facilitating Prospero figure bringing them together through the “magic” of illusory images for purposes serving her own genius.

In her orchestration of the stories about her, Cameron created an archive of both images and lives which contained multiple layers of fiction-as-reality. She imbued
the real lives of “obscure” figures with an aura of the fantastic, and inversely the ludicrous, that colours them in the eyes of posterity. This idealisation may be both seen as a supposed elevation of otherwise “lost” figures, and as potentially casting a shadow over the less dream-like reality of the models’ lives as maids and the role of their own intentions in events. Olsen argues that Cameron “practiced a kind of doublethink” in the blurring of “the real and the pretend” that was favoured by the Victorians, rejected by the modernists and is only now coming to be appreciated as a “complexity of art” (242). By representing aspects of real life as idealised myth and fixing them in a material form, Cameron used an archival imagination to “prove” both her powers, and justify the oft contested blurring of fiction and fact.

“Obscure Lives” and Archival Imagination in Neo-Victorian Photographic Fiction

Whilst Cameron was eager to create illusions of a collective Romantic life for posterity, which were sustained and magnified by memoirs of family and friends into the early twentieth century (Boyce, 122), contemporary writers have often responded by attempting to puncture the surface of dream-like eccentricity in life at Freshwater or at least of the surface value of Cameron’s portraits. Critics such as Carol Mavor (47) and Mary Price (99-101) have seen dissent in the eyes of Cameron’s models as an assertion of an alternative identity, partially hidden behind the characters of Madonnas, goddesses and allegories. The vagaries of these transformations, and the unspoken or marginalised experiences of Mary Ryan and Mary Hillier, as well as the colonial subjects of Cameron’s later work in Sri Lanka, have produced a seam of reinterpretation tapped into by writers of two neo-Victorian archive fictions that use Cameron and her servants/collaborators as muses: *Afterimage* by Helen Humphreys (2000) and *The Luminist* by David Rocklin (2011).

The rescue of such “obscure lives” can be seen as an attempt to redeem flaws in the canon of art history, expressed in Walter Benjamin’s difficulties with “cultural treasures” in “Theses on the Philosophy of History”, in which he was filled with “horror” by the notion that “[t]hey owe their existence not only to the effects of great minds and talents that have created them, but also to the anonymous toil of their contemporaries” (*Illuminations*, 248). The texts discussed below each seek to acknowledge and elaborate on the “anonymous toil” that goes into the creation of
“cultural treasures”, and thus attempt a double project, to reclaim the impact of marginalised lives as well as the validity of the “treasures” themselves. In this model of revisionist writing, the treasures, when considered as the product of a fully-participant multi-class and multi-cultural society can be reinstated as legitimate artefacts of cultural memory.

Yet when rewriting the “treasures” of Cameron’s photographs in the twenty-first century, writers face the further internal reflexivity that Cameron was in turn obsessed with the “cultural treasures” of art and literary history as she saw them, particularly Renaissance art, Romantic poetry and British mythology, and likewise wanted to interpret them in her own way, in dialogue with her nineteenth-century present. Cameron was also unusually concerned with posterity and the future into which she would send her works, and had a consciousness of the ironies of time’s judgments, musing in a letter to her friend Jane Senior about the uncertainties of her sons’ lives:

What will come to pass I know no more than those unborn creatures of the year 2000 who perhaps are already surveying with pity the world as it now is – just as two hundred years ago had we seen our ancestors contending with difficulties of getting from London to York in 4 days we should have pitied them (qtd in Ford, “Geniuses, Poets and Painters”, 12).

Here Cameron envisions the future as already happening, already reconditioning the Victorian present as she reconstructs the past, and seems with uncanny precision to anticipate fictions such as Afterimage, first published in 2000. As she envisions history as suggesting a series of simultaneous places accessible by a transcendent vision, she also sees it as fluid, writing of “the stream of time” as “swollen with all sorts of accessory floods and rivulets & drippings from all sources” (12) with herself as part of a continuous flow. The novels discussed in the remainder of this chapter, however, far from “surveying” her “with pity” as she feared, accomplish something much more complicated, in line with her own conscious temporal patterning.

Filtering the Cameron story through feminist and postcolonial perspectives, the two novels featured in this chapter create an aesthetic that uses Cameron’s material traces to blend the “obscure” real lives of her models and servants and the fictionality inherent in the photographs. This blending is effected by the magical quality
attributed to the images which produce a psychological effect on the characters beyond the merely evidential. This magical quality is also dependent on an evocation of the emerging medium of photography itself as a transformative technology that radically changed the visual and cultural perception of the world. These affective readings are also particularly aligned to the authors’ aims, selected by what Tamboukou calls the “lighthouse’s rotating searchlight” (para. 18, “Archive Pleasures”) of their particular interests in the archive. Through drawing on Cameron’s images, writers Helen Humphreys and David Rocklin use an archival imagination as a means by which to address the injustices of the past and allow the “obscure” to be rewritten into the history of Victorian creativity.

Keen, in her wide-ranging analysis of *Romances of the Archive*, suggests that the purpose of photography in contemporary archival fictions is usually purely evidential:

> Reaching into the image for evidence of a vanished person or way of life inspires close scrutiny of photographs in many research narratives, which are relatively rarely troubled with photography theory’s nuanced disavowal of the photograph’s evident realism (184).

Keen bases this observation on research narratives with a doubled time frame, in which the search for the truth of history is paramount. Her position is echoed by Liliane Louvel, who argues that photography’s archival character means that it most often “plays the role of irrefutable evidence” in the text even though it is “first and foremost the trace of light”, and interestingly suggests that art photography is rarely the subject of fiction (*Poetics*, 151, 114). However, by concentrating on the *creation* of artistic photographic images in context, Humphreys and Rocklin subvert the evidential trend in fictional representations of photography, portraying it as an embodied art form which produces an alternative archive infused with feeling and memory.

Like the other examples of neo-Victorian fiction in this thesis, both *Afterimage* and *The Luminist* use the rich vein of Victorian aesthetics to stage critical musings on visual representation that chime with twentieth century theories on the photograph. Additionally, whilst these two novels are entirely set in the past, their evocation of real material traces that can be accessed in the present, their concern with matters of
posterity and “fixing” time, and their privileging of the materiality and embodiment
of photographs give them a distinct archival character. Afterimage and The Luminist
do, however, differ from the other archival fictions addressed in this thesis as they
specifically attempt to portray quasi-biofictional versions of Julia Margaret
Cameron’s life, adapting details of her life story and re-aligning them from the
perspective of “obscure” outsiders. These novels thus mix overtones of Woolf’s
revisionary biographical project with Cameron’s concern with fixing the intangible.

Tracing the Heroine: Helen Humphrey’s Afterimage

Helen Humphreys’ 2000 novel Afterimage employs a Julia Margaret Cameron figure
in the aristocratically-descended Isabelle Dashell and a central maid-model in the
figure of Annie Phelan. Annie is cited by Humphreys as being based on Mary
Hillier, but is also evidently somewhat indebted to Mary Ryan in terms of her
impoverished Irish ancestry (“Author’s Note”, 249). The plot structure concerns
Annie’s experiences of becoming a muse for Isabelle’s photography, and the
chapters are named for a number of carefully selected heroines and allegorical
figures that Humphreys appears to have chosen from Cameron’s back catalogue for
their potential as subjects of feminist debate: Guinevere, Ophelia, Sappho, the
Madonna, Grace and Humility.

Kate Mitchell discusses Afterimage at length in her History and Cultural Memory in
Neo-Victorian Fiction, in which she insightfully considers photographs as sources of
evocative memory in both Humphreys’ novel and Gail Jones’ Sixty Lights, the latter
being considered in my third chapter. However, although she briefly mentions that
Isabelle is “loosely based” on Julia Margaret Cameron (149), Mitchell is not
concerned with links between the novel’s events and its source material, leaving
space for a reassessment of the novel along biofictional and archival lines. My
concern is rather to draw links between neo-Victorian fiction and its material
touching-points in order to dissect the complexities of its cultural mapping.
Interestingly, Mitchell claims Afterimage demonstrates the capacity of photography
and other traces to “restore the past, to offer a means of return” (149). Mitchell is
referring here to “Isabelle’s pursuit of photography as a memorial of her own vision”
(151) but this assessment could be equally applied to Humphreys’ restoration of
Cameron and her models which offers a “means of return” through literature via the archive.

Over the course of Humphreys’ narrative, Annie increasingly comes to participate in Isabelle’s creative process as she embodies and critiques a series of characters. In a step further on from Cameron’s admission of “the very unusual attributes of [Mary Hillier’s] character and complexion of mind” (Annals, 11), Annie is given creative authority as both a shaper of images and a critic of Isabelle’s visions, providing an undercutting commentary on the artist’s choices and use of myths.

An early chapter on the portrayal of Ophelia, the first character that Annie models, provides a characteristic example of her role in the novel. Annie questions Isabelle on being sold a version of Ophelia as a strong independent character, wondering:

“But how strong am I if I drown myself?” asks Annie. “If I drown myself at the first hint of trouble?” (63).

Isabelle’s response to this question is interesting in that it comments not just on the validity of the Victorians’ “nostalgic” use of history, but on the contemporary use of Victorian history which is embodied in the novel itself:

“They are tragedies, but they are also the stories we have, the ones available to us. And I like to work with stories that people know” (63).

Humphreys also “works” with such stories of cultural memory, manipulating and reshaping them into a new archive-led structure. The recurrent commentary on the creation and purposes of art that is produced by inventing a questioning dialogue between artist and model ties Afterimage to structures at work within Between the Acts with its insertion of the comments of the audience and observers “between the acts” of the Cameronian tableaux. Afterimage could arguably be titled “Between the Photographs” as Annie, through her questioning of the standard roles of Victorian heroines that are being drawn on to her and through her by photography, is in some sense a Virginia Woolf figure as well as a Mary Hillier figure in the text. This is played out in the “real-time” re-creation of photographic process; in which Humphreys details Annie’s musings at the moment of photo capture:

Annie trails her hand in the stream, playing scales of watery notes with her fingers. She is glad that Isabelle has decided to let Ophelia live. Ophelia
wouldn’t want to drown herself on such a fine sunny day, Annie is sure of that. No matter how much she loved Hamlet. And really, wouldn’t Ophelia have thoughts and feelings that had nothing to do with Hamlet at all? (64)

With shades of Woolf’s refashioning of historical figures such as Shakespeare’s sister (A Room of One’s Own, 43), this passage demonstrates the difficulty of questioning the dynamics of “stories that people know” (Humphreys, 63) in cultural memory, particularly the inevitability of the role of the femme fatale, not least in the way that this passage reads a little against the grain of even contemporary expectations. One may object that if Ophelia does not drown then the meaning of the tragedy is compromised, yet in this passage, Humphreys is rather questioning cultural memory as a process, rather than Shakespeare’s drama per se, namely the cultural weight that had attached to Ophelia by the nineteenth century. Kimberley Rhodes argues that Ophelia’s place in Victorian visual iconography hinged on a contrast between the propagation of a silent stereotype “on which patriarchy can inscribe and project its desires” (4) and a symbol of autonomy and transgression for female artists who subverted these emblematic tropes (7). Humphreys emphasises this undercutting commentary by placing it not in the voice of her relatively privileged artist figure, but in the mouth of a relatively uncredited “obscure” woman, a servant who Woolf treated as parodic in Freshwater. Humphreys offers an ambivalent comment on the potential value of the cultural archive to generate new narratives, to consider the validity of using “the stories that people know” (63) as a means to invigorate and question their themes and pre-occupations.

Humphreys evidently draws her Ophelia from a dialogue between Millais’ famous Ophelia of 1852 and Cameron’s lesser known Ophelia of 1874 (Fig. 6). Cameron produced four Ophelia images but this is the most confrontational; Rhodes describes it as “the most disturbing [photograph] in Cameron’s oeuvre” (142). Posing the model Emily Peacock, Cameron presents Shakespeare’s heroine as occupying the entire frame, directing a troubled stare at the camera, one hand enmeshed in her unruly hair, almost as if to pull it out. Rhodes suggests this betokens an accepted trope of madness in Victorian culture (142), yet the startling modernity of the image also suggests a moment of questioning and appeal, which Rhodes attributes to its performativity (128). The whole suggests an anguished subjectivity and unresolved tension between alternatives in contrast to the disturbingly serene effect achieved in
Millais’s work, which famously spends its attention on the foliage and flora of the riverbank. Reference to nature in Cameron’s image is confined to the dry leaves strewn over Ophelia’s dress, which, like Shakespeare’s “weedy trophies” (*Hamlet*, IV.7.174) are symbolic of her own distress, rather than the ironically indifferent exuberance of the natural in Millais’s painting. The tension between the ideas in these artworks, between an outsider’s observation of the exquisite beauty of a tragic fate and an attempt at an empathetic portrayal of a personal crisis describes the representational debates on Ophelia in *Afterimage* and Annie’s persuasion of Isabelle that the photograph be staged as a moment of indecision.

![Image of Millais and Cameron's Ophelia](image_url)

*Figure 6. Julia Margaret Cameron, *Ophelia* (1874); John Everett Millais, *Ophelia* (1851-1852).*

The audience are presented with the making of several photographs, which they do not themselves directly witness as objects, but which have been “dug up” from the archive, brought into the light, as Woolf recommends in “The Lives of the Obscure” and which the reader “views” through a prism of words, of prolonged exposure to the cultural significances of a single moment. The readers are invited to perceive a real archival image from the inside, as an immersive experience, building up a series of such archival experiences which then colour their understanding of the novel’s progress.
The sense of imagining oneself into a photograph through an extended moment is also evoked in two pivotal episodes of Humphreys’ novel which involve the construction of two Madonna portraits, one mortal and one divine. For the “mortal” portrait, Annie is asked to adopt several poses in front of the rain-streaked glass of a window. This melancholic Victorian pose creates both a technologically anachronistic allusion to biblical history, as well as connoting the glass plate of the photographic negative that Annie is being drawn on to:

Long exposures. The Madonna leaning her head on the glass. On her knees, praying before the watery veil. Each pose adds an understanding to the overall concept of goodness and virtue, all that the Madonna represents and that Annie personifies, as if each pose were a word in a sentence and the sentence, when revealed, would explain all the sorrow of life to Isabelle (Afterimage, 187).

Humphreys interestingly uses a textual metaphor to describe a montage of photographic images in the internalisation of Isabelle’s mind, culminating towards a central meaning. This passage highlights the importance of the dialogue between ordered images and the structures of meaning such ordering creates, comparable to the orders of words in a sentence. In this, Isabelle closely resembles the thought processes of Cameron since these structures can also be traced in Cameron’s albums, as will be demonstrated in the following chapter. The visual “sentence” implied here also suggest the novel’s structure, in which each one of the photographic ekphrases “adds an understanding to the overall concept”, and forms a “sentence” (187) of images that will eventually reveal a textual portrait of Isabelle and Annie’s visual ambitions and notionally, a commentary on Cameron and her works. Indeed, as will be expanded in the course of this thesis, novelistic representations of photographic collections, or of a body of any art materials, tend to address the question of visual representation as deeply intertwined with that of narrative creation, staging the static artwork within the frame of time.

The image inspiring Humphrey’s descriptions of “Madonna (Mortal)” is more visible to the reader, for Mary Mother appears on Afterimage’s book jacket in its paperback form (see Fig. 7), and Cameron’s title which emphasises the human role of Mary seems to be reflected in Humphreys’ appellation of “Mortal”. Yet it is evident that the ekphrasis does not quite match Cameron’s image, so once again the
textual construction of the altered versions of the photographs allows them to be subtly set off from their originals, thus occupying a space which Liliane Louvel refers to as the “pictorial third” (“From Intersemiotic”, 27).

Figure 7. Julia Margaret Cameron, *Mary Mother* (1867).

In *Afterimage*, the Madonna images become a repository for emotional saturation by Isabelle, since she hopes they would “explain all the sorrow of life” (187) that has been building up throughout the text in a pattern of referents about her unhappy relationship with her cartographer husband, the remembrance of a succession of stillborn children, her failure to attract critical approval from her Tennysonian neighbour, Robert Hill, as well as the memory of her love for a female childhood friend, Grace. These links, which operate as faint, yet melancholic echoes of aspects of Cameron’s real life, are used here to suggest Isabelle Dashell’s emotional connection with her photographs. Similarly, Cameron’s Madonna images have been said to express both her love for her family and her fear of their loss (Olsen, 171) – she was often separated for months or years from her husband and sons by their visits to the family plantations in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka). *Mary Mother* stages Mary Hillier with downcast eyes that look beyond the frame at something beyond and separated from herself, just as Annie gazes down out of the rainy window, towards the understanding on the other side of the “watery veil” (187). Cameron’s title
implies a child who is missing from the photograph and crystallises the contemplative figure as meditating on an absence or loss, an attitude that is sanctified by the glowing lines of light that form her profile and draperies. Humphreys uses Cameron’s emotive investment in her images and channels this into Isabelle’s frantic need to capture the idea of sorrow. This again shows how addressing the circumstances of photographic creation in fiction enables the described images to become fixtures of abstract emotions embedded in the plot.

For much of the novel, Annie is the unwilling canvas of art – the passage on the elegiac capturing of “Madonna” is immediately undercut by Annie’s experience of posing in which “the air is damp and stirs the cold about so that it coats everything inside the studio” so she “burrows deeper into the folds of the cloak, into humility” (187). Yet as the novel progresses she is able to inspire and formulate the images herself, even posing and photographing Isabelle in a photograph as “Sappho” in an emotionally charged scene in which she seems to discover Cameron’s trademark style of variable blurring: “Isabelle’s hair, at the edge of the frame, is fuzzy and indistinct. It’s the eyes that Annie wants, the directness of them” (95). By the end of the text she has owned her part in the creation of images and personification of characters, and detached her displaced identity from Isabelle’s construction. Yet she also experiences a form of transformation, declaring “‘I am the work of art’” (223). Annie demands the right that Cameron never gave Mary Hillier, to be photographed as herself, and achieves a synergy between perspectives that has been unthinkable for the rest of the narrative:

Perhaps, for once, for the first time, the photograph of the moment will be the same to her and Isabelle. They will see the identical thing. It will not simply be persuasion. It will not be one person describing or one person believing that story (245).

The dichotomous visions of artist and subject here appear to close to a singular viewpoint, but just as ekphrasis can never accurately reproduce an artwork in textual form, Humphreys seems to hint at the impossibility of mutual vision, for the model/artist relationship is never entirely resolved in the text. Humphreys leaves the emotional outcome of the plot inconclusive, as Isabelle appears to deliberately withhold information about Annie’s estranged Irish brother’s attempt to contact her.
(245), although Annie is herself planning to return to Ireland to look for her family. Annie realises she is still a model, subject to the photographer’s control over her life and her image, who has refused to treat her as an emotional equal: “Isabelle Dashell has looked so hard at Annie Phelan and has never once seen her at all” (246).

Yet at the same time, by foregrounding Annie’s experiences and insisting on the validity of her artistic contribution, even if it is unacknowledged by Isabelle, Humphreys addresses one of the unresolved questions in Cameron’s photographs that continues to intrigue; that of the performing experiences of the models. To refer to Barthes’ terms on photography, in Afterimage, the “studium” and “punctum” of the images, or the purported subject of the image and the potentially unintended detail that fixes the gaze (Camera Lucida, 28), can merge once the “anonymous toil” that goes into “cultural treasures” is recognised (Benjamin, Illuminations, 248). This synergy of outer and inner meanings performs a kind of retrospective liberation for models such as Annie and her inspiration, Mary Hillier, from their secondary place in the history of art, through the fictional re-creation of Cameron’s visual archive. Allowing imagination into the archive permits revolutionary re-drawings to take place and “obscure lives” to be celebrated, even if they never received such adulation in their original context. As Ulrich Raulff suggests, ‘the archive is a space of productive disquiet and creative recurrence of the already written, the already thought. In its materiality, in its spatial existence, in its surprising constellation […] there lies great potential’ (166). Whilst Humphreys’ impression of Cameron is staged as an integral resurrection of her vision, it also seeks to print that vision on life beyond the material trace, transforming the lives that it touches. The novel is replete with different material forms, maps, books, images, which Kate Mitchell compares as mediums of memory (149), but by concentrating on portraying photographs from the inside as projected visions or performed embodiments, Humphreys ascribes a magic to the archived moment itself, rather than the photograph as material object, even she draws from real images. In the following novel, far more weight is expended on the material as well as the momentary, on posterity as well as living experience.
Reinventing Photography in the Margins: David Rocklin’s *The Luminist*

David Rocklin’s *The Luminist* (2011) addresses the issue of “obscure lives” in Cameron’s work from a different perspective, that of the colonial subject who is usually seen as objectified by a colonising Western gaze. Rocklin, an American author who first encountered Cameron’s images at an exhibition at the Getty Museum (“Acknowledgements”, vii), repositions the colonial subject as the perpetrator of the gaze, rather than its objectified subject, by making his Ceylonese figure, Eligius Shourie, instrumental to both the art of his employer, Cameron-figure Catherine Colebrook, and to the invention of photography itself. Eligius takes the collaborative role that Annie occupies in *Afterimage*, although there is also a more practical fellow servant named Mary in the text, standing biographically for Mary Hillier. The overarching dynamics of the two novels’ plots are, however, remarkably similar as both Annie and Isabelle, and Eligius and Catherine, desire to produce the ultimate *trace*, a photograph that reflects both imagination and reality. Rocklin supports this plot framework by adopting a hyper-visual photographic prose for the internal narratives of both Catherine and Eligius, which aims to capture the surreal properties of the visual moment. This appears to be a direct attempt at a textual version of Cameron’s hyperbolic aesthetics, although it also, perhaps organically, suggests a motion towards Woolf’s light-sensitive prose and interest in the surrealism of mundane objects. As Woolf’s writing arguably suggests a textualisation of Cameron’s visual style (Dell, 180), this resemblance may be intentional or constitute a form of unintended mutual influence. As in *Afterimage*, representing the creation of a trace provides the means by which to both deconstruct it and re-establish it as a source of new narratives.

Cameron makes a fruitful subject for a postcolonial as well as a feminist and class-driven neo-Victorian narrative, as she spent large parts of her life in India and Ceylon, now Sri Lanka. She was born in India in 1815, and after being educated with relatives in France, spent large parts of her youth and early married life on the subcontinent as a colonial society hostess, and after her career in Freshwater, moved in 1875 to her husband’s estate, Dimbola in Ceylon, where she died in 1879. In the last four years of her life she took a limited number of images of Ceylonese people,

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8 See, for example “The Mark on the Wall” (*Complete Shorter Fiction*) for Woolf’s deep interest in the spectacular capabilities of incidental observations.
which are usually said to take up an ethnographic “documentary” style of presentation (see Figs.7-8, and Olsen, 253), unusual for Cameron, and which can be seen as implied sources for Rocklin’s novel. The character of Eligius is arguably emblematic of the Ceylonese servants and photographic subjects Cameron would have encountered. The novel blends these invisible references to her Ceylonese work which underpin the story, with specific considerations of the more recognisably radical images of her main body of work.

However, as the novel suggests, the division between Cameron’s images in England and Sri Lanka may not be as definitive as has been previously assumed. Recently, Kanchanakesi Warnapala has questioned the categorisation of Cameron’s later works as simply “ethnographic”, a style in which the colonial “gaze” exploits the bodies of the colonised, particularly those of women as “exotic objects” for the “pleasure of the [male] spectator” (2). Warnapala admits that the photographs do display some tropes of the ethnographic image such as the exposure of “native” flesh (11) but also suggests that Cameron’s position as a born Anglo-Indian, not truly “British”, and a professional woman, means that as an outsider, her images “disrupt” the colonial gaze. Warnapala even argues that Cameron has an affective, and even identifying relationship with her Ceylonese models (14), a position that may be extrapolated from relationships with their British counterparts. Considering a series of portraits of the same woman, Warnapala identifies that for Cameron “the Sri Lankan woman is not an ethnological exhibit but is an individual who has caught Cameron’s avid interest” (14), whose evident desire for self-representation “becomes emblematic of Cameron’s own desire for such a site of expression” (16).

The persuasiveness of this argument is certainly debatable, considering Anne McClintock’s work on the uneasy position between marginalisation and complicity that women in the British Empire occupied (6) and the superior attitudes of the Camerons to the inhabitants of Ceylon, of which they were the largest private landowner (Rosen, 277, 269). Jeff Rosen reads the Sri Lanka images as potentially obscuring the models’ identities and producing a primitive view of the subjects (269, 276). Yet, if we see Cameron as a complex individual, we could consider that she also had apparently contradictory attitudes about her working-class models in Britain, whom she in some senses considered beneath her, yet lauded their personalities and worked with them to create transcendent artworks. Warnapala may
then have some legitimacy in making the same argument of her Sri Lankan works, without claiming that Cameron was innocent of racial and colonial prejudices, but rather occupied a position of ambiguity combining a deep interest in her adopted home and its people with active assumptions about the validity of British rule. Rosen concedes that many of the Ceylonese images express an “ambivalence” which “destabilize[s] the narrative myths they supposedly represent” (290).

Rocklin could be said to dramatise Warnapala’s reading of Cameron’s Ceylon photographs as a communion of outsiders, depicting a mutual struggle for expression in a male disenfranchised colonised figure and an ambitious female outsider. He draws a narrative of dawning understanding between photographer and servant, coloniser and colonised, through the development of the fictional protagonists’ aesthetic collaboration and technical discovery, crucially expressed through an archival materiality. This re-writing of photographic history could be seen as conforming to the neo-Victorian trend of reclaiming disenfranchised roles in Western history in an anachronistically idealist way that mutes real suffering and divisions. However, Rocklin’s Catherine Colebrook is not idealised, but like Cameron, occupies an ambiguous position, initially displaying a dismissive attitude to her servants and an authoritative preoccupation with her own concerns, whilst Eligius struggles silently with unrest and deprivation in his home village. A subplot concerning Catherine’s husband’s unwitting role in the passing of restrictive laws that limit the Ceylonese people, also underlines the complicity of the colonisers and has links to the role of Julia Margaret’s husband, Charles Cameron, in ambiguous legal reforms in India that were intended to benefit the people but whose aims Olsen describes as “Anglocentric” and “at once humanitarian and imperialist” (60), although the fictional Charles Colebrook is depicted as a victim of deception in his legal work. The novel combines a depiction of differences with a greater emphasis on drawing links between divided but marginalised figures, drawn as individuals, not as “types”.

The most striking manipulation of history in The Luminist, is not its treatment of colonial dynamics, but rather its blatant employment of both anachronism and alternative history. Rocklin not only relocates Cameron’s early photographic career to 1830s Ceylon instead of an 1860s Isle of Wight, but actually depicts Catherine and Eligius as the inventors of the fixed photographic process, taking his inspiration
from Cameron’s early correspondence with Sir John Herschel, in which he sent her “the first specimens of Talbotype” (Cameron, qtd. in Olsen, 48) that utilised his earlier invention of the fixative “hypo” (Olsen, 46). Rocklin thus shifts this pivotal innovation from the white male inventors and artists, William Fox Talbot and Louis Daguerre to the “edges” of the nineteenth-century world. Rocklin creates a re-aligned matrix between the high ideals of Victorian aesthetics, the conflicts and hypocrisies of the Empire, and the development of new technologies that signal the birth of modernity. The portrayal of a quest to fix traces combined with the use of Cameron’s idealist vision, centres the text on a fascination with the “magical” process of recording the world, expressed through the employment of a mystic prose.

Eligius, the “obscure” life that Rocklin’s text attempts to “rescue”, is the mouthpiece for this material imagination, and is given an internal monologue that draws parallels between Victorian visual culture and an impression of Ceylonese vision. When Eligius accompanies the Colebrook family to a new church at the Galle Face, a real Victorian church still standing in modern day Colombo, his experience of light filtered through the nineteenth-century stained-glass windows blends with that of his Ceylonese experiences:

The memsa’ab and her children sat with Ault in one of the rearmost rows. They’d turned in their places and were looking at him as if they’d never laid eyes on him before. Their bodies were aflame with the midday sun streaming through a stained glass fresco that filled the rear wall. It was of a woman. Her robes were held aloft by serving children. A ring of white light glowed above her head. The baby in her arms wanted it; its chubby hand sought it, perhaps to teethe on it the way Gita chewed on the charms adorning his mother’s mourning sari. That the babe had its own light seemed not to matter. The sun carried the woman to every corner of the church. Her colors bled across the faces of the faithful. Her garment, indigo where the light streamed through, lay over Ewen. Her skin became the gold in Julia’s hair (The Luminist, 106-107).

In this passage, Eligius’ imaginative vision transforms the stained-glass window into one of Cameron’s Madonna portraits, complete with “ring of white light” and unruly children. The surreal transference of a deified Cameron image onto the faces and
bodies of the audience exemplifies the novel’s mode of using the power of visual media to colour perceptions of identity and social environment. Significantly, this experience of illuminated people powers the imagination of Eligius, an outsider to Western culture who views the scene with photographic distance. The family look at him impersonally “as if they’d never laid eyes on him before” (107), both excluding him and enabling him to adopt a surreal vision in which the aura of Victorian objects figuratively “bleeds” onto the lives of the Western characters. Eligius also compares the stained-glass depiction of Jesus to his sister Gita, generating a cross-cultural connection between Victorian religious transcendence and the narrator’s ordinary experiences and persons, which also characterises Cameron’s work with its elusive doubled identities, both mortal and divine.

Utilising the perspective of a character alien to the nineteenth-century British culture to which he is exposed through the spread of Empire, allows Rocklin to re-construct the Victorian aesthetic from the outside. Traces are refigured, allowing them to be re-born in the imagination of a colonised subject, who himself becomes a source and an appropriator of the nineteenth-century Pre-Raphaelite imagination. Gabriele Rippl has written on the role of ekphrasis in postcolonial Indian texts featuring Indian artworks as “open[ing] up ethical dimensions by delineating counter models to traditional historiography and critically evaluating processes of religious and ethnic othering” (128). Although written by an American, a similar process could be said to work in Rocklin’s bicultural ekphrases, which offer “counter models” of Cameron’s art and the history of photography, and a postcolonial reconditioning of the colonisers’ imported aesthetics, which seeks to blend elements of both cultures. Imagination and the imprinting of ideas then becomes the source of Eligius’ emancipation and a way to occupy a third space between joining a rebellion and collusion with the British “colonials”. Instead of photography alienating the subject using an “ethnographic” style, as many of Cameron’s Ceylonese photographs would initially appear to do, in The Luminist, Victorian aesthetics and Christian iconography from Cameron’s main body of work are employed as a medium of cultural crossover.

Rocklin blends this repurposing of the Isle of Wight photographs with influences from Cameron’s late colonial work, rearranging the archive to reflect the concerns of the novel. The Ceylonese characters appear to be derived from Cameron’s images in
a manner consistent with Warnapala’s reading of an empathetic relationship between Cameron and her subjects. For example, the figure of the crouching mother and child in Cameron’s fifth untitled Ceylonese photograph (Fig. 8) could be seen as an

![Figure 8. Julia Margaret Cameron, [Group, Ceylon] (c.1875-1879); The Five Wise Virgins (1864).](image)

inspiration for Eligius’ mother Sudarma and her starving child, Gita, for whose support Eligius is working at the Colebrooks’ house. The indistinct circle of men who frame the mother and child in the same image could be said to correspond to the group of village revolutionaries that test Eligius’ loyalties and eventually attack his employers’ home, named, as in its real-life source, Dimbola. Cameron’s portrayal of these men, cropped closely and photographed from below so that they tower over the crouched figures of the woman with her child, are traceable in Rocklin’s portrayal of Sudarma’s marginalised position in the village, in which she questions the actions of the men with whom she nevertheless has an ambiguous “pitiable loyalty” (254). It appears that Rocklin reads this image as sympathetic to the female figure due to the postures of the subjects, as does Warnapala (15). The centralised figure of the mother and child may also be paralleled with the construction of one of Cameron’s Madonna images with their awkwardly and realistically posed children. The composition of this image could also be said to bear a resemblance to the Pre-Raphaelite aesthetic forms Cameron employed in England, cropped so that the
figures’ heads touch the top of the frame, such as appears in *The Five Wise Virgins* (Fig. 8). The application of these carefully composed details may also bear testimony to the worthiness of the subjects in Cameron’s eyes.

Cameron’s *A Group of Kalutura Peasants* (Fig. 9) can also be considered a base from which the Ceylonese plot is derived, particularly as Rocklin makes Eligius’ home “village” Kalutura. This town was the home of the Camerons’ son Hardinge, at which the couple spent time in during their years in Ceylon (Herbert, para. 20). The upturned chins and defiant expressions of the younger man and girl in the photograph suggest the self-determined attitudes of the Ceylonese characters whilst the arc of dappled sunlight projected onto the wall behind them evokes the lacing of light that Eligius detects in daily life. Photographs from Cameron’s archive dictate the composition of *The Luminist’s* plot and characters in a way that is matched by Rocklin’s use of a complex cross-hatching of name transferral derived from Cameron’s biography, residences, friends and collaborators and reassigned to new characters and locations, which provokes the historically-informed reader to unscramble the source material.
The Luminist particularly addresses the invention of photography, further placing the process of image creation in the realm of the miraculous, in a way that might be loosely aligned with Larkin’s “magical value” (99) with its breathless excitement of marks being made on paper by historical figures. Rocklin defamiliarises this technology by withholding mention of the word “photography” until the eighteenth chapter of the novel (223). Instead, experiences of ethereal light and other material representations hint at the potential of photographic technology as a “magical” medium. This depiction of light is offset by established artistic forms. Paintings are represented as fixed, unimaginative and patriarchal, insufficient to capture light and life as photography does; the painter in the novel, George Wynfield, is set up as an unimaginative rival to Eligius.

Figure 10. Julia Margaret Cameron, My Niece Julia full face (1867).

A crucial episode in the novel centres on an attempt to capture the elusive passing moment in the form of an image of Julia Colebrook, Catherine’s daughter. Although Julia was also the name of Cameron’s only daughter, the character is evidently meant to resemble Julia Prinsep Jackson, Cameron’s niece, muse and the mother of Virginia Woolf. Julia Colebrook’s striking beauty entrances Eligius, she sits for portraits by George Wynfield and she displays both a forthright attitude and curious leanings towards traditional values. This matches Julia Jackson’s famous beauty and modelling for Burne Jones, her conservative principles, devotion to her duties as
wife and nurse, and her strong-willed nature and sense of humour, “sociable, yet severe; very amusing; but very serious” as described by Woolf in “A Sketch of the Past” (Moments of Being, 101). This parallel is cemented by the appearance of Cameron’s photograph My Niece Julia on the novel’s cover (Fig. 10). Rocklin additionally makes Julia a writer, in an apparent allusion to Woolf herself.

Catherine and Eligius’s attempt to photograph Julia is expressed through the novel’s hyperreal descriptions of light in combination with reference to the original trace, so that this one-hundred-and-fifty year old photograph is re-animated by an archival imagination:

Julia sat in the chair, wrapped in a brocade shawl. Her head tilted up, a girl of great privilege and station.

He arranged the glass around her. Sunlight sparkled from one pane to the next, bathing her in gold.

[…] Slipping under, she captured Julia through the lens. The light made baubles of her daughter’s eyes.

Julia let her shawl slip from her shoulders. Her lips parted. Her gaze wandered from the eye of the camera to Eligius.

Great swathes of daylight passed as they waited; so many breaths passed before she pulled the plate from the camera and bathed it, and prayed that they would make the glass live this time.

It came in tides of shape and shadow. Julia’s folded hands, her arms, the soft lace of her dress, her thin neck and her hair cascading over her shoulders, unfastened to catch the wind. Her face came and stayed, longer and more vividly than ever before (Rocklin, 166-167).

The washed out image created by directing strong light onto Julia Colebrook, suggests not only the 1867 image My Niece Julia full face but also the 1864 image Julia Jackson by Cameron (Figs. 10 and 11) with its “folded hands” and “soft lace”. The latter image is also interesting in that it constitutes one of Cameron’s earliest successful photographs and is both ethereally blurred and shows traces of flaws in the application of chemicals, perhaps reflected in Catherine’s failure to “fix” her own
image of Julia, which quickly “wash[es] away” (167). Interestingly, Cameron has
drawn an overlaying pattern of medieval tracery over the 1864 photograph, testifying
to both the quality of holiness that she believed Julia Jackson possessed and her
sense that the photograph is a malleable composition that can be improved by
additional details.

The description of the wet collodion process is heavily anachronistic, as the novel
makes clear in three inserts that the action is firmly set in the 1830s by fictional
archival references (19, 171, 241) printed over nineteenth-century maps of Ceylon.
Fiction is visibly imprinted onto history in these inserts just as wet collodion
techniques are mapped onto this earlier period, suspending the linear chronology of
the archive, and fusing several areas of history into a simultaneous moment through
an almost ironic form of condensed materiality.

Julia Colebrook is also a Woolfian writer figure, blending aspects of mother and
daughter within an 1830s context, in a further compression of temporality. This Julia
is also concerned with archival imagination; with deriving original work from her
mother Catherine’s traces, just as Woolf reshapes and embeds Cameron’s art in her
own work. Eligius finds Julia deliberately washing her mother’s photographic papers
in order to write over them “‘[t]o lend character […] [u]ntil I can lend character with
my own hand’” (138). Julia disapproves of her mother as she is “not what an
English-bred woman is supposed to be”, but acknowledges “I know there’s
something of her in me”, admitting “[s]he may yet matter despite it all. What a thing,
for a woman to matter, eh?” (138-139). This curious splicing of the conservative
values of Julia Jackson and Woolf’s interests in a feminist history creates a displaced
generational composite which is mirrored in the material traces Julia Colebrook will
literally write over to produce her own work. Materially, this picks up on Cameron’s
early practice of drawing over her prints with added artistic details to embellish
them, as seen in the stained glass window traced in the right of the frame in *Julia
Jackson* (Fig. 11). Figuratively, it strongly recalls Woolf’s obsessive rewriting of her
family history, including her creative meditations on Cameron and her parents’ lives.
Julia’s actions also gesture towards Rocklin’s own rewriting project, in which the
material archive is drawn over by new ekphrastic impressions.
By evoking the ghost of Julia as a rebellious teenager, Rocklin both utilises and subverts her image as seen by the Bloomsbury generation, attempting to give voice to the factual and fictional Julias’ experiences as young women in relation to an older generation of Victorian artists. Yet he also draws on Julia Jackson’s power to haunt her daughters through the ethereal descriptions of her photographic image. Julia Jackson (1864) was also a favourite Cameron image of Julia’s other daughter, Vanessa Bell, who subsequently use it as the basis for a painting (Fig. 11). As with Julia’s role in the novel, this painted portrait tells of an attempt to envisage a woman by artists of both older and younger generations, leaving her enigmatically elusive.

Figure 11. Julia Margaret Cameron, Julia Jackson (1864); Vanessa Bell, The Red Dress (1929).

In creating these echoes, Rocklin blurs fiction and fact to create new histories, but also suggests the potential of the archive to incite the fictionalisation of history. If it may be argued that “‘archive fiction’ can help us […] by alerting us to the constructedness and even the necessary fictionality entailed in any experience of the archive”, according to Hutchinson and Weller (144), The Luminist’s overt use of alternative history and its knowing references to posterity establish it as fiction that cannot be mistaken for fact. Instead the novel creates an amalgam of real sources that attempts to reinvent history along postcolonial trajectories, but in doing so it retains a slippery quality and a surrealism that pushes at the limits of the believable in a way that leaves it open to criticism.
Ironically, however, the novel is desperately concerned with the failure to “fix” images and truthful history. After Julia’s image is “taken”, Catherine and her husband Charles watch it fade:

Together they gazed at the dripping frame, the remains of their eldest child washing away. Everything around them stilled; the cold world he lived in, and the world that she knew, made of lost children and the lights that illuminated the way back to them (167).

This image functions in a similar way to Afterimage’s Madonna portrait that will “explain all the sorrow of life to Isabelle” (187). Like Humphreys’ novel, The Luminist is interested in tensions between the fleeting photographic moment and an archival permanence, in the simultaneous usefulness and futility of grasping onto the ghosts of the dead, and the way that these memories end up transformed in the act of recording. Catherine is initially motivated by her desire to capture an image of her stillborn son, Hardy, which memorialising and idealising instinct, “her desire to lay open time” (205), transposes into an obsessive need for permanence in which “[she] will never again accept the loss of a child to the distant regions of memory” (171). Eventually this desire leads her to capturing the idealised inner selves of the colonial population of Colombo, and to archive them in the form of an album, forming, like Cameron, a catalogue of inner truths, rather than outward memories. Rather than using the historical idea of the idea of the albums being part of Cameron’s desire for self-promotion, Rocklin makes the more modest Catherine take advice from Sir John Holland:

Make a collection of these portraits, Catherine. An album. Important men, perhaps will make the appropriate impression in London or Paris. If others see how posterity favors them, there will be a line of society members from the door to the gate (227).

Rocklin hints at the transformative aspects of posterity that Cameron’s photographs confer on their sitters, which he identifies as having a power to transmit the identities of the subjects, and the photographer herself, across time, yet in a strangely altered state, as we find in the photographs of Mary Hillier and Mary Ryan.
The process of photography is invented, in the text’s alternative history, chiefly through imagination, rather than chemical processes. Chance moments of interaction with material objects are augmented by imaginative perception. A glass bauble that Julia Colebrook gives to Eligius as a keepsake of their clandestine friendship becomes symbolic of the nature of photography itself. In a decisive moment, the bauble becomes the accidental subject of a photographic imprint. On being told to fetch materials, Eligius, “[o]n the walk back, […] saw something on the top page [of a sheaf of prototype chemically treated paper]. A shadow that didn’t move when he removed the quill and bauble” (114). Showing this unexpected trace to Catherine Colebrook, she comments on it in a manner reminiscent of Cameron’s hyperbolic style: “You have been touched. It may not be a moment that the world will ever know of, but you are different now than you were even a moment ago” (115). In this Cameronian re-invention of photography as epiphany, such traces are presented as more than simple prints of the world, but as talismanic objects which perform some mysterious marking on those who create them as well as the people and objects they record.

Eligius becomes imprinted with photography even as he exerts poetic and practical influence that perhaps outweighs that of Catherine’s talents. It is Eligius who inspires the sitter, takes part in the photographic process, suggests improvements and articulates the baffling impact of photography as a new way of seeing, saying: “It is like a dream to see a face come out of nothing. I do not understand it” (177). In this way, traces of the material produce the mental connections that allow Eligius to participate in the creative process and the invention of photography. Such traces are presented as more than simple prints of the world but as something integrally magical, coming not from scientific discovery but from “nothing”. This language of breathless discovery is throughout the novel in an unironic way that verges on reaching saturation point, but also suggests that it is a combination of photography and the language of imagination itself that performs some mysterious marking on the characters’ identities.

Rocklin may also be referring, in his attention on photographic discovery, to early nineteenth-century artist Anna Atkins, who produced cyanotypes of ferns and was, like Cameron, a friend and correspondent of Sir John Herschel, with whom she discussed the invention of photography and was the first to use photographs as
illustrations in a book (Schaaf), further complicating the references to traces and the merging of historical persons that the novel employs.

The connection sparked by the glass bauble eventually leads to a creative interdependence between Catherine and Eligius. As Catherine’s career develops:

She expressed awe at his ability to visualize the light’s path. Even he was a little mystified by it. It had always been a part of him, a part he hoped would never fade. If anything, working with her had honed his abilities even further. He felt important in his role. She could not conjure images without him, and told him so (220).

The plot trajectory thus mirrors the affirmation of Annie Phelan’s role as a model at the end of *Afterimage*. In this case, however, Eligius is not only the model but a photographer himself. Unlike Annie, instead of considering leaving his employer for a potential reconciliation with family, he must leave his mother and sister in order to pursue a liberating career in photography. At the novel’s close, Catherine has moved to Freshwater to escape Ceylonese rebellion, and Rocklin segues into Cameron’s real history as Catherine photographs Tennyson: “a great man burned in glass and light” (320). Catherine is interrupted from fixing a nineteenth-century “great man” by the revising influence of the “lives of the obscure” in the form of a letter from Eligius. This trace inspires a sudden vision of Ceylon in which “[s]he gave in to the onrush of moments. The liturgic breathing wind through its jungle. The painterly light. Dimbola” (320-321).

The letter promises the immediate arrival of Eligius, who, transformed by the imprint of photography, has become an outcast in Ceylon: “I’ve had too many faces on my hands to remember them all. My own kind thinks of me as a monster. Maybe I am, but one with the power to burn dreams onto the world” (321, original in italics). Eligius thus admits that attempting to straddle the worlds of colonisers and colonised has made him a “monster”, noting that “I am not of Ceylon any more” (321). Both *Afterimage* and *The Luminist* pose the liberation of the “obscure” to become self-determined artists as far from neat and essentially unresolved. Eligius faces a similar problematic liminality to that of Annie Phelan, who belongs neither in Ireland nor England, to servant nor upper-class. This interestingly reflects the difficulties envisioned for Marys Hillier and Ryan by upper-class observers of the Cameron
household (Olsen, 191), although Hillier married locally and Ryan was transposed into the gentry.

With his letter, Eligius encloses his own photograph which combines Victorian technology and Ceylonese experience to form the novel’s climactic vision. This image underscores the central concern of the plot, evoking the potential of a visual magic to speak between disparate places, times and persons:

> There were candles all around him, and behind him. There was the cloudless night sky, and there were more stars than lay atop the sea at the holiday he once spoke of, when burning lights made a celestial map of the black waters. This was the moment he’d kept safe, until he found the way to send it across the oceans and years to her (321).

The vision of an “obscure” life fills the mind of the Victorian artist at the novel’s close, rather than an image produced by Catherine, the novel’s biofictional centre. Although this vision does not resemble any of Cameron’s pictures, and references Eligius’ memories of Ceylon, it still remains inflected with her auratic sensibility. It also is an impossible image, as night photography would not be really viable until the 1880s. This may well be a chronological mistake, but it could be considered as part of the novel’s surreal alternative history of photography as Romantic artform which separates it from a standard historical timeline even as it is drawn from archival sources. References to tangible records are also used to underpin the fantasy in Rocklin’s narrative, destabilising accepted history. Unlike Afterimage, which in the end suggests that unfixed moments are sweeter, claiming of life in its closing words: “It is the falling moment. Unrecorded” (248), in The Luminist, it is the materiality of traces that connects the protagonists, as tokens of a shared surrealist vision.

Whilst Humphreys’ novel creatively meditates on a succession of Cameron images as a means to work through issues of liminal identity and the iconology of the heroine in Western culture, it ultimately favours the superiority of unmediated experience, which is not constrained by the photographic framing of culture. The Luminist’s conclusion and general aesthetic rather suggests that traces are revelatory

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9 See Flint, “More Rapid than the Lightning’s Flash”.
of the surreal nature of everyday life, providing windows onto a universal Ruskinian inner vision which permits communication between viewers in different spatialities and temporalities, and between cultural greats and “obscure” lives which support them. Yet the two novels suggest a similar basic pattern, which is treated with differing levels of irony. In both the hyperbolic visions of *The Luminist* and the critical reshapings of *Afterimage*, an archival imagination is at work in attempts to reconcile the history of Western art to its overlooked participants, whether these be real individuals or as metaphorical substitutes for the influence of a whole culture. Crucially, such reshapings are made possible by the evocation of visual material traces, in which the implicit roles of the “obscure” come into focus. Each novel’s subtle references to Woolf suggest that archival connections can be made between Victorian and post-Victorian generations, using the affectivity of the archive to fuel cultural critique or even outright anachronism. These narratives of archival imagination come from the borders of fiction and reality, where Cameron’s photography derives its power, and where history can be rewritten.

**Cameron’s Archival Imagination: The Creative Fact**

In this first chapter, I have traced a strand of archival imagination through the flowering of Cameron’s hybrid realist and Romantic photography in the mid-nineteenth century, to Woolf’s appropriations of Cameron’s photographs as visionary trance, to the treatments of photographic imagination in two contemporary archive novels. Archives in these texts are not characterised as evidence but as mediums of imagination that produce psychological connections rooted in materiality and symbolism which cast a productive mood of “magical value” over the reader (Larkin, 99). In the latter two novels, archives are the very means by which change may be effected and the “lives of the obscure”, previously cut out on racial and gender lines, can be rewritten into history by asserting their own creative visions. Julia Margaret Cameron employs such an archival imagination, gathering together allusions and imprints of both fiction and reality in her own “traces”, in which she conveys powerful aesthetic experiences in material form and which attempt to transform and equalise her models on both a visual and spiritual level.
Using only a few props and titles, she invites the viewer to complete the images by “reading” emotion and cultural references in gestures, glances, frames and blurrings.

These spaces that Cameron leaves for her viewers between real and Romantic, subject and treatment, act as an invitation to imaginative re-creation in the texts of the ensuing century and a half. Unlike neo-Victorian novels which utilise the photographic as the epitome of Victorian evidence and rationalism, those that address Cameron’s work communicate chiefly through the aura of the imagination. In such fictions, this imagination is always tied to the materiality and longevity of her work. The materiality of Cameron’s archive has a hallucinatory effect in Woolf’s encounters with Victorian albums, and the reproductions of Cameron’s photographic process in Humphreys’ and Rocklin’s novels induce magical and quasi-spiritual experiences. Cameron’s archive carries its emotive immediacy into the contexts of other eras where its embryonic gestures towards radical sympathy are magnified. It is these visionary encounters with the material that enables the liberation of models, servants and subjects in Cameron-themed archive fictions, rather than an understanding generated from a revelation of facts. Archival imagination is used by these novels to create shared visions in an attempt to render a form of visual democracy suggested by Cameron’s photographs. Yet reflecting the unresolved tensions in Cameron’s hybrid works, the novels varyingly perform a critique of this idealism, whether of the portrayal of Victorian female iconology in Afterimage or of the possibility of “seeing the identical thing” (Humphreys, 245) and belonging simultaneously in two worlds in both neo-Victorian texts. Like Cameron’s literary photographs, the texts are all densely layered with the cultural archive. This can be demonstrated both at the level of influences from Cameron’s life and works, and the mapping of Woolfian afterlives and also in terms of the tone, structure and lexis of whole narratives, so that the archival vision moves beyond a focus on particular objects and pervades whole texts.

Each layer of this cultural archive includes the appropriation of motifs from varied periods of history. Cameron accesses the ambiguities of cultural history in order to produce a “revolutionary and traditional” body of traces, to borrow Derrida’s ideological concept of the archive (7). Mixing classical and medieval lore with Victorian cultural history, she articulates a history with blurred borders, like that of the neo-Victorian writers who appropriate her. This layered history is allowed to
bleed into the present in a material form, creating a destabilising effect like that of Tamboukou’s “multiple temporalities” (“Archive Pleasures”, para. 47). In Cameron’s photographs and their fictional rewritings, imagination blends the present and the past, so that the affectivity of material objects produces blurrings and overlappings, connections and disconnections between time periods. Photographic traces, traditionally supposed to underpin history’s stability, thus become the means of destabilising linearity, releasing the potential for creating multiple impressionistic echoes and linking disparate groups via shared perceptions.

Such an archival imagination thus has great power in standing in between the realms of the material and the ephemeral and intuitive, of re-igniting the “magical value” of the cultural archive, translating into the idiom of present day consciousness and filtering it through a wider demographic. In this way, archive fictions may seem to rewrite or “correct” original contexts of photographs, for it is inevitable that the “punctum” of an image will shift according to each new environment it enters (Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 28). Yet, as I have shown, the potential explored by the archival fictions in this chapter already lies waiting to be developed in Cameron’s original images, with their hints of visual equality, their auratic materiality suggestive of traffic between “visible” and “invisible” worlds (Pomian, 172), and within the stories of Cameron’s muses and subjects. Narratives which apply imagination to the Victorian archive explore a rich potential already implicit in the era’s material traces with their fascination with the representation of imagination, employing that which Woolf calls “the creative fact; the fertile fact; the fact that suggests and engenders” (*Selected Essays*, 122). In this way, the perpetrator of an archival imagination attempts, like Woolf’s “deliverer advancing with lights across the waste of years” (*The Common Reader*, 146), to open up the potential of history by re-imagining material traces. This fertile narrative potential can be further increased, as we shall see in the next chapter, when images are perceived, not in isolation, but in dialogue with others, in collections, albums and novels.
Like unread sentences, Cameron’s single photographs are archival traces that hold integral possibility for imaginative connection and reiteration; they come into new fruition when the latent elements of reality and romance contained within them are perceived in new contexts. Crucially, these photographs are most frequently perceived in dialogue with others, whether in a book, gallery, an album, or, as we have seen, even within the structures of a novel that discusses multiple artworks. The unread sentences of the single trace thus develop into narrative structures, exponentially complicating the thematics and affective understanding generated by singular photographs. It is these creative structures and the implicit narratives that are produced by them that form the theme of this chapter.
This structural dynamic forms another tie connecting the photographic trace to archival material. The concept of the archive is traditionally one based on structure in its very nature, with categorical walls separating one element and group from another. Meaning is generated by the relationship of the elements to each other. Archival orders are meant to be integral to the material, and supposedly latently inherent in the body of the archive. The archival catalogue then becomes a frame for the more idiosyncratic perambulations of the viewer or researcher. The viewer is then able to construct the pre-ordered traces at will to produce a compelling secondary narrative. Yet, the first act of ordering is in itself a creative choice, a production of ur-narrative that can be read in many different ways (see Douglas and McNeil, Ketelaaer). What is kept, what is thrown away, how information is presented, how the self represents the self – all these are factors that condition the original structure of an archive, and also of a photograph album. In this chapter, archival structures are analysed as creative narratives, both in original arrangements in albums, and in interpretations of images in combination.

This model of reading the archive as narrative may seem antithetical to visual materials, in which meaning was traditionally viewed as either indeterminate or overdeterminate in comparison to text, and possibly as untranslatable to a textual medium. I hope to show that it is this very ambiguity and layering in Cameron’s photographs that increases the proliferation of readings that can be generated from her albums and within the placement of her images in a text. In this regard, precedent for reading the image as narrative can be found in several disciplines that intersect with this study. Lindsay Smith emphasised that taken as a metaphor “the photograph, with its emphasis upon selection and fragmentation, focusses questions of representation and mediation and opens them up to discussion” (Victorian Photography, 4). An increasing body of material on the dynamics of photograph albums has appeared in recent years; in particular, Martha Langford has articulated ideas of “speaking the album” in regards to vernacular photographs for which the context has been lost. For Langford, the dialogical nature of albums is best explored under an oral, rather than literary framework (“Speaking the Album”, 224). Yet her critique underlines the value of reading photographic arrangements in which “we become conscious of the compiler as a highly specialised curator of photographs and

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10 See Hillis Miller, Illustration and Summers, “Real Metaphor” for discussion of these debates.
photographic experiences – we look at a composite version of her life that she has arranged to create certain effects and contain certain messages” (237) which must be read or “translated” subtly as the viewer is “reactivating a suspended conversation” (Suspended Conversations, 19, 20). In pictorial writing, Liliane Louvel and other French critics have led the way, in suggesting that visual material may “punctuate” a text, imbuing it with “rhythm” (Poetics, 177) that shapes the narrative meaning of the novel, so that in reading the novel becomes “a picture gallery which constructs its reader […] inscribing a temporality in-between the fixity of paintings, and reconstituting a plot” (172). Meanwhile, Mieke Bal has articulated a complex means of reading paintings as imbued with the remembered gestures of cultural memory in Reading ‘Rembrandt’ and other works. Tying these parallel interests in structure together, the archive as a central paradigm allows us to explore the workings and development of creative ordering in several different interrelating mediums that focus on the same themes. Hanging behind this lies the spirit of modernist collage, an anarchy of found materials in which traces may open dialogue with each other, to create meanings potentially destabilising to accepted formulas.

It is my view that the spirit of such collages can be extended back to Victorian albums and forward to neo-Victorian writings. Alexandra Harris has written extensively about how British modernism sought to incorporate and rearrange elements of history in a movement both Romantic and radical. Through a chronological progression, I attempt to show how Cameron’s miniature and scrapbook albums act as an early form of visual narration through an arrangement of pre-existing images, which convey affective and implicit narratives and suggest flexible composite identities. I then consider Virginia Woolf’s Monk’s House Albums as performing a dialogue of image arrangement with their Victorian predecessors that could be seen to form a blueprint for modernist themes of construction in Woolf’s fiction. Finally, I analyse the visual workings of two diverse post-Victorian texts, Ulverton by Adam Thorpe and The True and Splendid History of the Harristown Sisters by Michelle Lovric. The former is truly an archival novel that weaves the ekphrasis of Cameronian photographs into a highly-structured web composed of the material remnants of an English village; the latter is a spectacular fiction that constitutes a parade of Victorian visual traces including art photography as markers in the development of its central character.
The results of such archival rearrangements or visual collages are dichotomously both destabilising and revelatory of pre-existent meaning, as Derrida reminds us (7). Original material is altered by both physical re-structuring and literary re-arrangement; it is organised into patterns alien to its nature, it is made to mean things, to have significance that might not be evident in its “natural” state. In my approach, I do not consider this appropriation and resetting to preclude either gaining insight from the recontextualised material or creating new patterns that reveal the emergence of latent meaning.

Despite taking this positivist approach to rearranging the archive, it must be noted that the narrative-making power of archives can have socially damaging effects when harnessed by systems of power, as argued by Richards in relation to the British Empire in *The Imperial Archive*, and by Derrida, in relation to all social structures, in *Archive Fever*. Antoinette Burton emphasises, even when endorsing narratives of the archive, that such “stories – in whatever narrative form – embed as many secrets and distortions as archives themselves” (20). Acknowledging this, I take a different approach to Julia Margaret Cameron’s albums, Virginia Woolf’s albums and novels, and post-Victorian novels by Thorpe and Lovric, by focusing on the way that photographs and art objects can be placed together to create new meanings and subtleties. This necessarily involves an ontological refocus in which both photograph albums and novels which feature multiple artworks are treated as archival “narratives”, so that visual traces and pictorial references are equated as elements in the construction of a fiction. All these archive “fictions” function as creative reconstructions of visual material, spilling the archive’s meaning making potential into a tangled web of possibilities.

**Narrative Potential in the Archive**

Underlying ideas on the creative potential in archival structures, is a foundational concept that the “archive” as a form is conducive to the creation of subjective narrative. In *The Writing of History*, Michel de Certeau calls for the recognition that historical discourse is based on organising principles similar to fiction writing. Regarding the “collector” as both symbolic of historians and archivists as well as a traditional collector, he argues that:
the collector becomes an agent in the concatenation of the history to be made (or remade) according to new intellectual and social relevances. Hence the collection, as it topples the instruments of work, redistributes things, redefines elements of knowledge, and inaugurates a place for a new beginning […] that will make an entirely different history possible. (73-74).

De Certeau argues that the construction of the collection as a flexible narrative “redistributes” discourses in newly relevant patterns. History in the form of a series of objects is never fixed and can always be remade if the elements are newly aligned and manipulated. The archive cannot therefore be a stable entity – like any other selection of objects it is liable to flexibility and re-reading, it is the means of building and re-building history.

These arguments can also be applied to fiction writers, staging the writer as collector, redefining elements by his or her choice of contextualisation and ordering. The novelist as “collector” of archival fragments is able to produce a work that “redistributes things” in a very literal sense, thus leading to the “inaugurat[ion of] a place for a new beginning” (74).

It may be countered that such redistribution of direct quotations from the pre-existing “sacred” canonical texts of Victorian literature “do not further the argument but […] embellish the textual appearance, to enhance the formal presentation” (Gutleben, 17, 20). Gutleben maintains that using such canonical texts, chiefly for epigraphs, provide “aura and prestige” for the author (18). However, by creating fictionalised archives within the body of their texts, contemporary writers can utilise the cachet of quotation to generate momentum towards structural experimentation with the archive, which moves beyond the endorsement of the “sacred” and acts as a commentary on previous texts. Arguably, in the last few decades, experimentation with archival sources has already reached a zenith in both literary and popular forms, so that, as in de Certeau’s formulation of history, an archival creativity is structurally and conceptually complicating the fabric of literature. This is rooted in a long history; indeed, Virginia Woolf is an acknowledged pioneer of the fiction/history crossover and is an instrumental figure for many archive fiction writers.

De Certeau also considers the way archives contribute to the construction of narrative, arguing that:
We admit as historiographical discourse that can “include” its other – chronicle, archive, document – in other words, discourse that is organized in a laminated text in which one continuous half is based on another disseminated half. The former is allowed to state what the latter is unknowingly signifying (my emphasis, 94).

To transpose this into fiction, archives form the invisible or partially visible “other” which a continuous or glossing narrative both draws energy from and defines itself against, organising the material vestiges of the past with the authority of a “laminated text”.

This process of accumulation which de Certeau diagnoses in history writing can also be applied to archive fiction. Archive fictions, whether visual or textual, might be considered nominally as performing a re-ordering and glossing of archival material, dispersing and commenting on it. Archive novels are therefore “laminated texts” in which the “continuous” narrative “is allowed to state what [the archive] is unknowingly signifying” (94) and may thus be considered as a form of “historiographical discourse”. De Certeau calls this “textual recomposition” which is formed by a combination of the “semanticization of raw data” with a “selection” (92-94).

This transformation of original material into new forms is further emphasised when the archival material is visual rather than textual. Photographic traces embody a different kind of information to text, ostensibly more referential yet just as fluidly interpretable. It is my central argument in this chapter that bringing multiple images into a formation or collection creates latent narratives expressed in the relationships between the photographs, making the collection equivalent to an archive. If the translation of the visual to the textual can lead to the release of “a surplus of energy”, which “opens up the eye of the text” as Louvel writes (Poetics, 124), then the creation of a web of photographs and art objects with their own contextual relations can generate further dialogic energy, combining the “subversive potential” of a photograph album (Di Bello, 156) with the affective disruption of narrative produced by pictorial writing.

For narratives which perform a selection of photographs in the medium of text, de Certeau’s laminating process can be considered a visual recomposition. The
The directness of archival quotation is ameliorated since the “quoted” image must be made anew due to the change of medium, establishing the quotation of artworks as a fundamentally creative act. The original photographs are re-ordered and translated, in the enchanted sense, into something other than themselves.

The treatment of the archive as narrative-generating has more recently been advocated by historian Arlette Farge, in *The Allure of the Archive*. Farge writes in loose agreement with de Certeau’s formulation of historical writing from traces, suggesting that historical research itself effects a transformation as “a new object is created, a new form of knowledge takes shape, and a new “archive” emerges” (62). She sees this in terms of narration, not only in the final product but in its very process for “[a]s you work, you are taking the preexisting forms and readjusting them in different ways to make possible a different narration of reality” (62-63).

Although Farge regards fictions based on the archive as merely products of “personal imagination” tempting one to “free oneself from the constraints of discipline” (76-77), ironically, her ideas on archival subjectivity are very applicable to the complexities in fictions of the archive, which are themselves an attempt to produce “a different narration of reality” (63).

The ordering and structuring of archival elements in a fictional text or a photograph album is linked to the process of making meaning out of cultural history. By appropriating historical materiality, these archive fictions draw attention to the construction of narrative, for purposes of cultural critique or the underlining of affectivity. Such principles of experimental order and visual translation are at work in two further novels, Adam Thorpe’s *Ulverton* (1992) and Michele Lovric’s *The True and Splendid History of the Harristown Sisters* (2014). This play-off between imagination and archival structure can also be traced in the photograph albums of Virginia Woolf. Yet, for all their modernist and contemporary currency, these projects all reflect Cameron’s own translations between text and vision, and the narratives she made from her images, creating “a different narration of reality” (Farge, 63) in her visual recompositions. In each case, the boundaries of narrative and quotation are disrupted by the fluidity of images. I argue that this challenges the assumptions of cultural history, and constitutes a deconstruction of the historical text.
The Album as Archive: Creative Ordering in Julia Margaret Cameron’s Photographic Albums

In this section, I consider Julia Margaret Cameron’s albums as forms of archival fiction, which perform an act of narrative-making through creative structural arrangements. Cameron’s published volumes of illustrations for Tennyson’s *Idylls of the King* may seem to be the obvious focus for the study of image-narratives in her work, with their photographs displayed alongside poetic fragments selected idiosyncratically by Cameron from the wider text, and implicating a redrawing of Tennyson’s narrative. Cameron’s relationship to Tennyson and her manipulation of his work has already been widely discussed, for example in articles by Mancoff and Yamashiro. What interests me more are the implied narratives of images in the albums, where images often have no specified connection between each other or to a baseline text. The scope of their interpretation is left relatively open as items in an archive, without a unifying central narrative. Rather than the neatly ordered elements in an illustrated poem, the potential for radical messages are arguably much more profound in an album format. As Patrizia Di Bello notes in *Women’s Albums and Photography in Victorian England*, women’s albums demonstrate “an engagement with the modern, and a subversive potential as rich as those to be found in recognised works of modern art” (156). This effect is amplified as Cameron’s art photography albums form an archive of cultural fragments, rather than nodes of ordinary life, thus, in de Certeau’s words, they “redistribute[…]” cultural memory, “inaugurating a place for a new beginning” (74).

Joanne Lukitsh has gone some way to articulate Cameron’s albums from an art historical perspective, arguing that “the album format was […] a format Cameron and her sisters were capable of using for their own interests” (“The Thackeray Album”, 44), including “a display of artistry” (45) and “the specific interest of each recipient (51). She notes waves of image placement in the albums and the use of repeated images, producing contexts in which Cameron made “individualized readings of her photographs available to her friends and circle” (56). For Lukitsh the potential alterations made to albums make them problematic as Cameron’s work for there is “no corroborating evidence of the activities of Cameron […] on this matter” (56). I want to take these arguments further, arguing that flexibility and inter-generational manipulations in the albums as we perceive them, underlines the
creative potential of Cameron’s images and her initial arrangements. Reading the albums from a more affective and literary perspective, in the context of Victorian album making and as archives with a long cultural history, I contend that they can be understood as implicit flexible narratives linked by archival imagination.

Julia Margaret Cameron’s albums were produced in a context in which the form of the photograph album was flexible and unfixed, bearing relation to scrapbooks, artist’s sketchbooks, celebrity memento collecting, family memorialisation and to both high and low artforms. Whilst the rhetoric of the age began to enshrine photography as a documentary medium, album practitioners were creatively manipulating images of their friends and relations to produce miniaturised “new” realities. Yet such fantasies were not separated from the cultural currents of the age. Di Bello states that women’s albums of the period can be said to participate in the “elaboration and codification of the meaning of photography” in which they are prescient of “avant-garde collages” in the early twentieth century (2). Taking this argument further, I propose that Cameron’s albums, which draw on this popular fashion, are a precedent of the impulse for collage and structural experiment in literary narrative in the modernist and postmodernist eras, particularly within post-Victorian texts.

In the albums, a complex ordering of “public” images for private consumption blends the concepts of the family album and the exhibition catalogue. Cameron’s miniature and scrapbook albums best demonstrate this narrative tendency. I analyse a representative sample including the “Nellie Mundy Album” and the “Albert Louis Cotton Album”, miniature albums currently held by the Julia Margaret Cameron Trust; and the miniature “Julia Hay Norman Album” and “Hardinge Hay Cameron Album”, and two scrapbook albums, the “Julia Norman Album” and “SN Album” all held at the time of research by the National Media Museum in Bradford. Whilst the miniature albums are almost entirely composed of Cameron’s own photographs, the latter scrapbook albums contain collected family photographs compiled previous to Cameron’s career and presented to relatives, who further manipulated and added to them.

As will be demonstrated, the attribution of sole authorship to Cameron in relation to some of the albums is problematic. However, the uncertainty of these attributions
further stresses that these albums demonstrate the potential of narrative images to be utilised in different contexts and orders to create new meanings. As Di Bello suggests, Victorian women’s albums contain a fundamental structural “ambiguity” of “cuts and repairs, fragments and makes whole again” which “destabilise[s]” continuous narrative (3). This is the potential energy that makes them prescient of experimental narrative forms.

I propose that Cameron’s albums constitute a kind of archive in which family, friends and cultural icons are memorialised in transfigured form. Cameron’s mixture in the albums of portraits of famous literary figures, family friends, members of her own extended family and servants who doubled as models, many of whom are portrayed as mythical or literary characters, results in a blending of identities that elevates the subjects to a kind of hyperreality.

Emphasising the importance of “speaking” an album to articulate its lost narrative patterns in her discussion of family albums, Martha Langford argues that “[a] photograph album is a repository of memory. A photograph album is an instrument of social performance.” (“Speaking the Album”, 223). This construction of memory also lends itself to a fictional interpretation, whereby “some photographic theorists have argued that the construction of alternative realities is the personal album’s main function.” (223). Whilst Langford here refers to a latent tendency in vernacular albums, I expand this theory to suggest that Cameron’s albums very deliberately construct an “alternative reality” that floats between the categories of “real” and “unreal” but never fully commits to either.

Cameron constructs the identity of both her sitters and herself through the production of physical objects which aim to achieve permanence through evocative memory. Rather than being merely a documentary record of those that mean most to her, Cameron’s albums also function as a catalogue of her talents and a symbol of her artistic vision. Extending the ontological boundaries of Cameron criticism, I argue that the miniature albums go further than being a “gallery” and perform versions of loose-structured narrative, fuelled by dialogue between images, which blend impressions of fiction and the real.
Cameron’s Miniature Albums: Re-structuring Reality

Although, in her albums, Cameron loosely demarcates the sections comprising famous male subjects and family and friends of both genders, there are no specific dividing lines. Previous interpretations of the albums have tended to focus on the categorisation of separate groups of images that Cameron drew up herself for exhibitions, the “Portraits”, “Fancy Subjects” and “Madonna groups” (Cox and Ford, Introduction, 2), but I would like to propose that meaning is also generated in the albums through the blurred relationships between these image sets. One layer of this blurring occurs on the level of literary associations. An example in the “Nellie Mundy Album” is the siting of an image of the poet, Sir Henry Taylor as King David between images of Mary Ryan in medieval dress, and Cyllena Wilson, another of Cameron’s “adopted daughters” posing as “Rosalba” (Fig. 13), the self-sacrificing heroine of Taylor’s play The Virgin Widow (Cox and Ford, Complete Photographs, 526).

Despite this literary interplay, the altered identities of the sitters in this case make no distinction as to their intellectual achievements – what is more important here are their physical appearances, since Taylor, the author of the work which Cyllena Wilson embodies, is himself sited within a biblical narrative and equally embodies a character within a controlled fictional framework. Yet references to the real are never far away, since many of the female sitters are labelled under their own names by Cameron instead of, or in addition to, their character identities, keeping the sense of performativity to the fore and drawing the viewer’s attention to the act of posing or impersonating the figures. This again sets male figures posing as characters, such as Henry Taylor, on an equal visual footing with the female models.

Philippa Wright, in her assessment of Cameron’s small-format photography, concurs with this idea of visual equality in arguing that “[t]he sequencing and subtle juxtapositions … [in the albums] … suggest that Cameron considered all her photographs to enjoy equal status” (88). Additionally to the best presentation of her work, I would argue that Cameron’s choice of ordering also sought to map the heightened aesthetic of the images onto reality as well as within the apparently contained world of the album. Taking this view, the construction of an altered reality allows Cameron to elevate the subjects to a symbolic equality through the
suspension of Victorian hierarchies. In “realist” Victorian photography, these were often underlined by performances of class difference denoted by dress codes and poses, confining the sitter to an identity symbiotic with their “station”, the photograph operating as what John Tagg refers to as an “inscription of social identity” (36-37). Instead, Cameron’s suspension of class structures in her images was said, by her at least, to influence the real life of the participants (“Annals”, 10).

Figure 13. Julia Margaret Cameron. “Mary Ryan” [Detail from The Minstrel Group] “Nelly Mundy Album”, 16; “King David, Study for Henry Taylor”, “Nelly Mundy Album”, 17; and “Rosalba”, “Nelly Mundy Album”, 18 (c.1870-1874).

The “Albert Louis Cotton Album” reflects this in its focus on images of Mary Ryan. As discussed in my first chapter, Mary was an Irish ‘beggar-girl’ whom Cameron adopted as a daughter/servant and later model, who subsequently married Henry Cotton on the strength of one of Cameron’s photographs (Olsen, 190-1). Referred to as Mary Ryan in the “Nellie Mundy Album”, Cameron’s former model becomes “Lady Cotton” in this latter album, which was named for Albert Louis, the couple’s fourth child. Henry Cotton was knighted in 1902, so it is evident that this labelling was not Cameron’s work but that of later owners. However, it is evident that Mary’s altered identity in the album as multiple idealised figures such as The Wild Flower and a medieval minstrel (Fig. 14) is intended by the compiler to become synonymous with her real identity, allowing her to transgress class boundaries through the medium of Cameron’s elevating art. These characters, drawn from
medieval lore and biblical narratives, also inform each other through their inclusion within the album’s covers, suggesting Mary Ryan’s place as part of a pantheon of “great women” that Cameron draws together, using both servant and society models. The “Albert Louis Cotton Album’s” range of female characterisations epitomises the way that the archiving of Mary Ryan/Lady Cotton’s new identity consolidates her position as a legitimate member of the upper class, justified by her potential to be elevated to high art by Cameron. This re-inscribing of identity is particularly transgressive considering Cameron’s awareness and inscription of Mary Ryan’s origin as a “beggar”.

Figure 14. Julia Margaret Cameron, [Mary Ryan as The Wild Flower], “Albert Louis Cotton Album”, 26; “Mary (Lady Cotton) July 1867”, [Detail from The Minstrel Group], “Albert Louis Cotton Album”, 14 (c.1870-1874).

This identity transfer constitutes a promotion of the power of Cameron’s art and its role in shaping the Cotton family, as the album is an archive of the artist’s achievements in manipulating both visual images and the social interactions of the participants. Olsen draws attention to the way in which the marriage of Mary Ryan and Henry Cotton “justified Cameron’s faith in the transformative powers of photography” (211). Even if Albert Louis or another owner later labelled and rearranged the albums’ images, the potential re-organisation of Cameron’s images of his parents’ youth demonstrates the fluidity of narrative to which her images lend
themselves, and the importance of order and context to create a new “archive” from previously-created photographic building blocks. Indeed, the later labelling of “Lady Cotton” implies that the family corroborated in Cameron’s art-brought-to-life narrative to some extent, and used the album as a means of reminiscence relating to the social trajectory and transformation of their mother. For example, alongside the photograph usually entitled “King Ahasuerus and Queen Esther in Apocrypha”, an unknown inscriber, possibly Albert Cotton himself, has jokily written: “The sceptre was a poker!” (Fig. 15). This demonstrates the “Albert Louis Cotton Album”’s subversion of the allusions intended in the original images in favour of a more humorous yet prosaic family narrative, where the album becomes an evocative memory object designed for oral recitation, as in Langford’s formulation.

Figure 15. Julia Margaret Cameron, “Sir Henry Taylor and Mary Cotton” [King Ahasuerus and Queen Esther in Apocrypha], “Albert Louis Cotton Album”, 32 (c.1870-1874).

Many of the images Cameron uses are those which would have frequently appeared in exhibitions of her work such as portraits of Alfred, Lord Tennyson and Sir John Herschel. The use of these images in succession suggests a kind of “greatest hits” montage, underlining Cameron’s claim to reputation as the photographer of great men. Yet although the photographs of “great men” are grouped together in both albums, they introduce the “Nellie Mundy Album” as if they are to lay down
Cameron’s claims to genius before an exploration of what she called “fancy subjects” for the rest of the album. Significantly, considering Nellie Mundy’s husband Charles was a friend of the Poet Laureate (Hinton, 37), Tennyson’s image begins the album. Despite the albums’ similar roster of images, the “Albert Louis Cotton Album” reflects its focus on family ties and social connectivity, whereas the “Nellie Mundy Album” privileges literary connections and visuality. The “Albert Louis Cotton’s” family focus is underlined by the fact that there are two montages in the Cotton album of Cameron’s Madonna groups. These conglomerations depict pensive and aesthetically idealised mother figures with small children (see Fig. 16), thus reflecting the album’s status as a family archive for the Cottons, even when the images do not include the protagonists but merely allude to the idea of a perfect and aesthetically pleasing young family, using both “servants” and “ladies” as models. Cameron thus uses her range of images as building blocks to create meaning. This particular grouping might reflect Cameron’s expressed rose-tinted view of the Ryan-Cotton match as “a marriage of bliss with children worthy of being photographed” (“Annals”, 10).

Another example of blending between reality and fantasy occurs in the “Hardinge Hay Cameron Album”, produced in 1869. In this album, two strands of narrative are discernible on opposing pages from the start. On one side, “great men” images form
a succession of worthies whereby Sir John Herschel, violinist Joseph Joachim, Tennyson, Taylor, and Watts appear in close succession. Images of Charles Darwin are also particularly prevalent within this album, perhaps due to the particular interests of the recipient, one of Cameron’s “better” behaved sons who at the time of receiving the album, managed the family estates in Ceylon. On the left side, opposite the latter pictures are images of May Prinsep, Lionel Tennyson, Mary Hillier and Freddie Gould. These more fictionalised images of children and women seem to both destabilise and complement the adult male “greats”. The groupings of some of the images suggest the representation of an artist/muse relationship, in which the women and children form the “ideas” of the hallowed male figures. For example, on consecutive double-pages, images of Freddie Gould as Cupid face that of Watts, the painter of allegories (Fig. 17). This particular pairing would seem to confirm the deliberation of Cameron’s image selection. Similarly, an image of Julia Jackson opposite a montage of Madonna figures seems peculiarly apposite, the multiple figures functioning as attributes of the unifying figure of Julia, or rather, muses for the inspiration of her character (“Hardinge Hay Cameron Album”, 29-30), an effect also diagnosed by Lukitsh in relation to the “Mia Album” (“The Thackeray Album”, 53).

Figure 17. Julia Margaret Cameron, Freddie Gould as Cupid, [Love in Idleness], “Hardinge Hay Cameron Album”, 11 (1869); “G. F. Watts”, “Hardinge Hay Cameron Album”, 12 (1869).
It may be suggested that due to the fluid nature of Cameron’s albums and potential changes to image orders, narrative meaning should never be read into facing pages. Certainly, differing schemas of photographs were often placed in runs of verso or recto pages at different periods by Cameron and others according to Lukitsh (“The Thackeray Album”, 44). Cameron notes on the inside cover of the “Hardinge Hay Cameron Album” that the album originally contained “115 Little Photos” and that “others will be sent to fill up the blanks”, raising the possibility that Hardinge may have had a hand in the ordering of a second wave of images. However there are only 107 photographs or places where photographs have been clearly removed in the current album, with evidence of a small number of pages being cut out or left blank. It might therefore be cautiously assumed that the second wave of photographs was never added and that the current run constitutes Cameron’s original order with minor changes. Yet, I wish to stress that even if Hardinge did rearrange the images, they still present cultural patterns and demonstrate the narrative making potential of Cameron’s photographs by others, and the flexibility of a photographic archive to perform multiple stories.

Considering this album’s intention as a gift for a son working abroad – it is specifically inscribed “From his mother” by Cameron – there are remarkably few family portraits, none of the immediate Cameron family, and extended family members appear mainly as allusive figures. This rather suggests that Cameron intended to conjure up images representing the literary atmosphere of Freshwater, a fictional reality, and arguably, a succession of inspirational male figures that would encourage her son, working on the other side of the world. This destabilises the notion set out by Olsen that Cameron’s “family albums” and “professional albums” were produced on different lines; the former for women and the latter for accomplished men (143). Olsen identifies that the “Thackeray Album” crossed this boundary but it can be seen that the “Hardinge Hay Cameron album” does too – here is a family album concerned more with artistic effect and interwoven allusion than obvious filial remembrances. The album does appear to contain more public than private images, although it remains possible that non-family images might have contained private significance for Hardinge, especially as he would have been acquainted with the majority of the models. Whatever the significance of the image choices, it is clear that this maternal memento from the other side of the world does
not attempt to be a real record of events at “home”, but is a trans-imperial arrangement of illusions which alludes to layers of shared memory.

In these examples, it can be perceived that the “altered reality” at work in Cameron’s albums can be adapted for different purposes whilst still reflecting the double aesthetic of family album and artistic catalogue. The construction of narrative in the arrangement of images ties Cameron’s work to the literary in a structural way as well as in her subject matter. The albums demonstrate the manipulation of created elements into meaningful orders in a way that can be compared to the formation of realist novels in which character narratives are intricately stitched together, as individuals are varyingly brought into contrast or parallel with other characters. Complicating this, Cameron’s works suggest a non-realist composite identity, whereby the self is reflected differently in many mirrors. Thus Cameron’s albums reflect both Victorian modes of artistically constructed truth and prefigure the postmodern text of composite forms reflecting fractured multiple identities. The overtly composite structure of the photograph album might be considered as an integral part of this cross-temporal linkage. The deliberate composition evident in Cameron’s albums mean that they are not simply art-objects. Their meaning is formed from a specific ordering, as is the case with the traditional archive with its focus on arrangement and context. Moreover, the potential fluidity of the authorship of image arrangement here, demonstrates the creative mutability of the albums as an ever-shifting archive, which develops in material form to reflect alterations and accumulations of meaning in the images.

The album’s status as a miniaturised exhibition space as well as an archival record also tells us something about Cameron’s self-presentation. The albums ensure that family memory and the exaltation of the sitter’s “normal” identity are indelibly connected with Cameron’s own artistic skill and public career. Although she is apparently invisible in these three albums save for a single photographic copy of a painted portrait by G.F. Watts in the two Dimbola albums, the albums form a way of writing herself into the memory of a vast web of social associations which included many of the cultural leading lights of the day. By cutting through the outer rind of public appearance and into the deeply affective realm of the personal, Cameron makes a useful linkage of her public career with those of the “great men” whom she knew in a private capacity. This effect can also be seen throughout her oeuvre, in
which portraits of national cultural figures are segued into sequences of Cameron family members and servants, naturalising the blur between public and private life, and promoting the elevated cultural status of the family for whom she was constantly concerned. For example, in the “Nellie Mundy Album”, images of Tennyson and Cameron children are intercut in a way that associates the status of the two families in this album made for the wife of Alfred Tennyson’s close friend (Hinton, 37).

Cameron’s constructions and orders present an archive of transformed identity, playing out the uncanny sense of division in her single images, as identified in the first chapter, on a composite level that further complicates the surrealism of her work. Her images in dialogue do not primarily suggest undeniable physical emanations of individual lost moments as Roland Barthes argued in Camera Lucida (76-78), but collectively produce a composition encoded with new narratives for the reader to decipher, more in the manner of Barthes’ thinking on textual works (for example, S/Z). These visual narratives are not of a realist nature, but form the projection of Cameron’s artistic identity onto her social surroundings through the visual and material composition of the identities of the subjects. These miniature albums then have the potential to be manipulated into ever-renewable composite narratives by later dual owners and curators in their afterlife as flexible archives.

Pre-Career and Scrapbook Albums: Experiments with Form

Some of the most fascinating albums associated with Cameron, are not those composed of her own images, but those which she compiled from the work of others, and which were contributed to by extended family over succeeding generations. Lukitsh finds evidence in these albums of Cameron’s early experiments with photographic practices including printing from negatives (“Before 1864”), and Olsen considers them as containing potential collaborations with Rejlander (138), but I am interested in them as examples of early experiments with photographic narrative formation, in the mode identified by Langford and Di Bello, as discussed above. The National Media Museum holds two such albums, one of which is dedicated to Cameron’s daughter, Julia Hay Norman, known as Juley, and originally produced in 1862, when Cameron was on the brink of her photography career. Lukitsh considers that Juley’s famous gift of a camera to her mother was inspired by her receipt of this
album of predominately studio portraits ("Before 1864", 101). It contains images clearly designed by Cameron to specifically appeal to Juley, including, of particular interest, an image of Juley as a child spliced against that of her own daughter, Charlotte Norman (Fig. 18).

Figure 18. Julia Margaret Cameron and unknown photographers, composite image entitled “Charlotte and Julia Hay Norman”; and the same image surrounded by Norman family members, “Julia Hay Norman Album”, 4 (1862-c.1891).

The choice to cut the two images together, rather than compare them alongside each other, produces a sense of simultaneously concurrent time. Charlotte and Julia are dressed in a remarkably similar manner, posed against chairs placed in the same position and Julia even appears to lean towards Charlotte. Cameron has labelled this composite image “Mother and Child – Both From Life”, which creates a curious disconnection between the images, forcing the viewer to look at a child who is simultaneously a mother. Yet, the caption also prefigures the use of Cameron’s trademark phrase and concern with the importance of authentic images, prior to her photographic career. Even at this early stage, Cameron’s mode of unrealistic realism may already be detected – the use of this favourite phrase is already somewhat obtuse given that the joined images produce an impossible situation that could never
have taken place in reality. The creation of this blended image is symptomatic of Cameron’s growing perception that photography is not merely a means of preserving the past “from life”, but also a method of manipulating and mapping the past on to the present, to produce a mixture of reality and fictionality in which she saw no contradiction. At this stage, Cameron achieves an effect which suggests permanent memorialisation of her offspring in a desirably infantine state, the status of the Cameron family, and a personalised gift to her daughter. She also experiments with the narrativity that photographs are capable of and that painted portraiture cannot so easily achieve, by drawing links between temporally disparate images and putting them in dialogue. All these are features that can be traced in her later albums.

The ambiguous temporality of this double image is further highlighted by the fact that it is surrounded on the page by numerous other later images of the Norman family (Fig. 18). Whilst the arrangement initially appears to be devised as a piece, simple scrutiny reveals that some of the other images were placed much later. The images of Julia and Charles Norman as adults, placed by Cameron above the double child image are dated concurrent to the album’s creation in 1862, and suggest the page originally consisted of a kind of family tree layout emphasising genealogical descent. Juley herself died in 1873, and the images of the Norman children surrounding them, dated 1873 in Cameron’s hand, may have been added before or after Juley’s death. In the latter case, it is possible that in an attempt to laud and memorialise the lost daughter, the central image of Juley/Charlotte is made the aural focus of a gallery of studio portraits of immediate family members. Similarly, the opposite page, presumably originally containing only a large-print portrait of Charles Norman dated 1858, becomes surrounded by portraits of the children in 1868 and 1872. The labelling and similar oval shapes make it likely that these later images were added at the same time as the other images of the Norman children, i.e. in 1873 or after. If it is the case that this arrangement indicates posthumous memorialisation of Juley, these pages would suggest that the death of her daughter provoked a form of visual mourning in Cameron. Although mourning through photography was extremely prevalent in Victorian Britain – Cameron herself produced a series of post-mortem photographs of her adopted daughter and great-niece, Adeline Grace Clogstoun (Cox and Ford, Complete Photographs, 398-399) – there is something transformative in Cameron’s practice of creating combinations of
images to produce a new cross-temporal reality, rather than fixing a more final image of a loved one, that mirrors her unconventional portraiture. If Juley could not live on, the album dedicated to her by her mother could cement her place as the centre of a praiseworthy family and the double image originally created to amusingly draw the daughter’s attention to a family resemblance, becomes the focus of her memorialisation and a symbol of her continuing presence in her mirror-image, the person of her own daughter. Even if the images were added prior to Juley’s death, the album may have taken on such themes in posthumous readings. This addition of family portraits by Cameron also reveals that despite Cameron’s photographic career being in full swing, she still used “vernacular” studio photography by others, perhaps at the request of Juley. Whatever the motivation, the use Cameron put these studio portraits was not just to record her family’s likenesses, but also to form expressive structuralisations and modifications of existing photographic meaning, a practice concurrent with her main body of work.

Figure 19. Julia Margaret Cameron, “Julia Hay Norman Album”, 5-6 (1862-c.1891).

This featured image of Charlotte Norman becomes a recurring motif in the album, and is set repeatedly against ancestors and descendants by Cameron and by later members of the Norman family. In this way, the Pattle past is connected to the Norman future in a mixed-media matrilineal collage. Like Woolf, for Cameron, “we think back through our mothers if we are women” (A Room, 69), an observation that
may have been influenced by the presence of such family albums in Woolf’s early life and by Cameron’s creation of a maternal web of association. For example, pages 5 to 6 of the “Julia Hay Norman Album”, contain a montage of Norman family members (Fig. 19), headed by the same image of Charlotte Norman on the chair and ovoid images of other Norman siblings surrounding the children’s nurse. On the right hand side, Cameron has placed a photographic copy of a painted portrait depicting her own mother, Adeline Pattle, née De L’Etang. Following straight on from the blended portrait of Juley and Charlotte, the implication of a line of female descent between Adeline, Cameron, Juley and Charlotte is unmistakable.

Figure 20. Julia Margaret Cameron, detail from “Julia Hay Norman Album”, 14 (1862-c.1891); Oscar Gustave Rejlander, “Julia Jackson” in Julia Margaret Cameron, “Julia Hay Norman Album”, 26 (1862-c.1891).

In other cases the female line is strengthened by its connection to male genius. In one telling page (Fig. 20), the recurring image of Charlotte Norman is placed above that of her mother Julia Hay Norman “as a child in Calcutta”, below which are two miniature oval portraits of Tennyson and Henry Taylor. It is curious that these two literary “lions” should embellish the images of two generations of female children, although it is quite possible that these two miniature portraits merely fitted well into
the space available. With a retrospective eye, it almost appears from the construction of images that the sleeping Julia Norman is dreaming of her future daughter and the literary greats that she will shortly meet on her return to England, who will offer blessing and literary prestige to the Cameron family. Interestingly, Olsen reports that Henry Taylor was particularly fond of Juley and extemporised on her “original” qualities (105), making the inclusion of his image representative of a mutual friendship between mother and daughter. Whatever the specific intention, it can be considered as a confirmation of high status in this family album that studio portraits of children are placed alongside commercial mementos of the greatest men of the day. Di Bello refers to the inclusion of portraits of the famous in family montages in other Victorian women’s personal photograph albums as a fantasy activity, and notes that even using “photographic images that were no longer exclusive” on an album page does not prevent them from becoming “exclusive again because of its arrangement and decoration” (126). The commercially reproducible carte-de-visite that probably formed the originals for Tennyson and Taylor’s portraits here, are made exclusive again in the arrangement of images due to the Cameron family’s privileged friendship with the subjects.

This album then can be understood partly as a multi-generational validation project, by which the complex and close-knit ties of a vastly extended family are displayed as an interlocking dialogue of images that form a wide-reaching cultural map. Yet this map is carefully orchestrated to convey certain themes, enshrining female linear descent whilst punctuating it with the association of male genius, somewhat obscuring Cameron’s own career. In this way, Cameron’s selection of images resembles definitions of the writer’s manipulation of the archive, taking the “preexisting forms” of studio photographers and “readjusting them in different ways to make possible a different narration of reality” (Farge, 63).

Connections are also drawn to the fate of the album’s heroes and heroines, as well as to their past – Oscar Rejlander’s photograph of Julia Jackson in the “Julia Norman Album” lies above a later handwritten note giving her full history including mention of her famous daughter (Fig. 20), dating the album’s manipulation as taking place at least post 1920s. It is clear then that this album was clearly a continuing project for its recipients, by which Cameron’s initial play with ordering took on new forms of meaning as the identities of the sitters’ accumulated cultural capital.
A Dialogue Between Albums: Modernist Appropriations of Structure

The magnetism that Julia Jackson’s portrait came to attract in the “Julia Norman Album” runs in parallel to the significance that Jackson’s images acquire in the photograph albums of her daughter Virginia Woolf. There are five “Monk’s House Albums” currently held in the Harvard Theatre Collection at Harvard College Library, which have been recently digitised. Critical analysis of the albums and of Virginia Woolf’s interest in photography demonstrate a number of thematic and aesthetic connections with Cameron’s work. Hermione Lee points out the inheritance of photography as an interest for the Stephen family, and notes that the Stephen children were frequently occupied by producing as well as viewing photographs from a young age (31-33). The young Stephens were familiar with Cameron’s images of their mother, which they later hung in their first independent home (Lee, 205), and it is highly likely, in a family overtly concerned with cultural heritage, that they would have seen examples of her albums, vernacular and artistic. Maggie Humm, who has made a detailed study of the Stephen sisters’ photography, draws explicit links between Cameron and Woolf as photographers and as artists:

Woolf’s introduction [to Victorian Photographs of Famous Men and Fair Women] makes Cameron into a convex mirror of Virginia herself. Both Cameron and Woolf knew Ceylon …; both gave generously to family and friends, and both were profuse and productive artists. Both carefully posed sitters in particular locations (Virginia’s favorite comfy chair, Cameron’s garden bowers). Both utilized chiaroscuro, the play of light and shadow (Modernist Women, 64).

Humm notes that the “Bell and Woolf albums descend in a direct line from those of their great-aunt”, and draws attention to similarities in theme, aesthetics and interest (23), but significantly she differentiates Woolf from Cameron as employing particularly modernist image structuring techniques, arguing that

Woolf’s devotion to sequential and associative poses differs from Cameron’s singular portraits. In Lacanian terms, Woolf’s continual photographic repetitions would suggest the “return” of a visual event that took place outside her contemporary frames (“Virginia Woolf’s Photography” 235).
Intriguingly, Humm discusses Woolf’s albums as “photographic constructions”, in which “the past haunts the present, rather than […] precedes the present” (236, 232) and argues that the albums demonstrate the principle of “significant form” present in her fiction (220). Humm’s description of “visual patterns” in literature and photograph albums is particularly telling:

> In Woolf’s fiction a visual image is frequently more truth telling than a linear narrative. The albums likewise are composed in visual patterns rather than chronologically. The albums are crucial artefacts, encapsulating and emblematizing Woolf’s responses to the arts and to her life and friendships (220).

Strikingly, Humm’s analysis of Woolf’s techniques in this passage could be equally applied to the archival narrative-generating practices I have already independently identified in Cameron’s albums. Humm’s analysis of Cameron’s output as a series of sealed “singular portraits” evokes no ironic disparity between objects or ideas. On the contrary, as has been demonstrated, in her albums, Cameron deals very much in “visual patterns” that create implied narrative.

This raises the exciting possibility that Cameron’s structural interplay of images of history and family was a significant influence on Woolf’s own photographic arrangements, and by extension, in a latent manner, on Woolf’s fiction itself. I argue that Cameron’s intricate mode of image narrative, redolent of Victorian creativity with fiction and truth is tangentially adapted and developed by Woolf under the banner of modernist “significant form”. Thus Victorian photograph albums become an ingredient for the structural revolution of narrative in some of the most significant works in twentieth-century fiction.

Material similarities between the albums can be demonstrated by the recurrent use of images of Julia Jackson/Duckworth/Stephen as focal points. As Humm points out, “Monk’s House Album 3” begins with another image of Woolf’s mother facing the photographer (Fig. 21). This image, dated 1863-1865 by the album’s curators (Lyons and Harris, n.p.) is likely to be also by Rejlander as it appears to come from the same session as the one found on page 26 of the “Julia Norman” scrapbook album (Fig. 20), the same dress being worn. The meaning of these similar portraits has subtly
changed – whilst in Cameron’s album, Julia Jackson represents the youthfulness and beauty of her favourite and the promise of the future, in Woolf’s it is an admission that all things that follow are haunted by Julia and the social world of Victorian high culture which she represents. Humm calls the repetition of Julia’s image a “matrixial encounter with the dead” (243), a phrase that might also be considered in relation to Julia Margaret Cameron’s repeated inclusion in her scrapbook album of images of her own mother, Adeline de L’Etang, who died in 1845, almost twenty years before the album’s creation (see Fig. 19). Curiously, images of Adeline have a similar otherness to the rest of the “Julia Norman Album”, as Julia Stephen’s have in the Monk’s House Albums because, being photographs of paintings, they distance Adeline from the impression of modernity induced by the photographic content, as Julia Stephen is othered in “Monk’s House Album 3” by her Victorian dress and serious formal pose. From their positioning within the albums, dialogic with images of their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, the mother images are ostensibly intended in both cases to connect with the present, but their inclusion in the albums results in a kind of haunting effect, with the lost mothers belonging to other mythologised social worlds, namely the French aristocracy and Freshwater, that hang over but cannot permeate the social worlds of the albums’ presents, respectively, Freshwater and Bloomsbury.

“Monk’s House Album 1” also offers some fascinating parallels to the historicity and inheritance in Cameron’s miniature albums. This first album arguably interweaves thematically and structurally with Cameron’s portrayal of “great men”. The inclusion of “great men” images in many of Cameron’s albums appears at one level to cast a literary legitimisation over her project. However, as we have seen, Cameron’s placement of adjacent images also suggests a latent tendency to
deconstruct the validity of the great men she appears to emulate. Comparison with the Monk’s House Albums suggests a similarly ambivalent ironisation of “great men” as pieces of a structural and aesthetic puzzle.

“Monk’s House Album 1” interestingly shares a common format with the “Julia Hay Norman Miniature Album” held at the National Media Museum, whereby there is a space for a quartet of miniature images per page. Whilst this appears to be a pre-produced framework, Woolf and Cameron use it in remarkably similar ways. For example, an arrangement of four images, including two images of Thoby Stephen opposite that of Sir Leslie above one image of the father and son together (Fig. 22) emphasises intellectual inheritance and mourning as do many image repetitions in Cameron’s scrapbook albums.

Figure 22. Virginia Woolf, “L. Stephen” and “J.T.S.”, in “Monk’s House Album 1”, 64 (1866-1938); Julia Margaret Cameron, “Robert Browning” and “Ch: Darwin”, “Julia Hay Norman Miniature Album”, 7 (1869).

In structure, the two identical images of Thoby directly facing the viewer, printed with varying tonalities and tilted at slightly different angles, place visual emphasis on the younger man over Leslie Stephen’s more evasive gaze. The standard format page is turned into an aesthetic arrangement akin to a modernist collage of
significant shapes, in which those shapes carry the additional charge of symbolising the departed. Similarly the “Julia Hay Norman Miniature Album” often repeats almost identical images in close proximity as if to produce a visual arrangement, combining structure with implicit meaning. Page seven (Fig. 22) includes two identical but differently sized images of the poet Robert Browning, cloaked and glancing to the page’s right above two similar images of Charles Darwin turned towards the left. The balance of glances creates another pleasing visual parallel. The firm emphasis on identity created by the repetitious insistence on a particular subject, leads the viewer to concentrate on the significance embedded between the subjects. Potentially, a comment on the radical nature of the arts and sciences may be suggested by links between the destabilising nature of Darwin and Browning’s cultural contributions, bearing in mind their questioning of moral, sexual and religious mores, of which Cameron would have been familiar. The two men convey a parallel of radical achievement in different mediums, as Woolf’s page suggests the contrast of intellects in different generations, set at a slight angle from each other. In both these examples, form is essential to meaning.

Intricate generational patterning can also be observed in the “Julia Hay Norman Miniature Album”, where the initial greats are interspersed with an increasing presence of female figures, as seen in Figure 23. These images connect in terms of generational and aesthetic linkage. The youthful portrait of Cameron by Watts links relationally to her own images of, vertically, niece Julia Jackson and horizontally, the adopted daughter of Julia Margaret’s sister, May Prinsep, as Christabel. The presence of Cameron’s portrait on this page undercuts any assumptions of naturalisation in the portraits, rather emphasising their construction. Meanwhile, the images of Julia Jackson and May Prinsep are balanced aesthetically across the diagonal of the page, their loose flowing hair hanging on either side of their highlighted faces. The facing page containing two chiaroscuro images of Carlyle, the advocate of the male hero, that visually mirror the portrayal of Julia Jackson, who also forcefully emerges from a space of unearthly darkness. Carlyle is also portrayed under a portrait of Mary Hillier as Sappho, piquantly juxtaposing the masculinist writer with an early precedent of female genius, who is in an additional irony, embodied by a domestic servant. Cameron presides over the generations and the artistic content, but all the figures are models, bestriding past and present, fact
and fiction, photographer and subject. The cross-hatch of structural narratives in this collage of women both ironises male greatness and suggests that there are different ways of being great.

![Image](image-url)

Figure 23. Julia Margaret Cameron, “Julia Hay Norman Miniature Album”, 23-24 (1869).

Meanwhile, in “Monk’s House Album 1” a web of structural associations is also played out, reflecting the difficult and varied heritage of the Stephen family. Humm argues that “the Victorian photographs have no apparent patterns (similarities are not grouped, nor are there obvious themes)” (231), yet it could be suggested that certain significant images are loosely grouped together. Early on in “Monk’s House Album 1”, nineteenth-century images of Woolf’s sisters, Stella and Laura can be found close to those of Leslie Stephen and William Thackeray in a constellation of difficult and absent fathers and lost daughters (Lyons, n.p.). As in Cameron’s scrapbook albums, they capture a world in which the dead may exist side-by-side with the living, promising a return to the illustrious past, a world eternally before and thus surpassing death. After this deeply formal and historical world, the return towards informal garden images at the end of “Monk’s House Album 1” has the quality of a release, reflecting the marked change between the Stephens’ pre-1904 existence and their liberated youth and perhaps also the wider cultural break between nineteenth
and twentieth-century modes of living. Yet the earlier images still loom, bearing the
twin qualities of pathos and threat.

It can be suggested that this disconnected effect is intended by both Cameron and
Woolf to produce a structurally fragmented narrative which brings different
generations into dialogue. The psychological power of repetitive images creates
narrative patterning in all the albums, whether the repeated subjects are Julia
Stephen, Adeline De L’Etang, or Charlotte Norman, famous poets Victorian or
modernist, or aesthetic constructions of multiple image on a page. The interpretative
potential of these patterns lies in their being necessarily unfinished since no text
serves to cement them. The ambiguity of this visual arrangement acts as a germ for
the textual creativity, liberated from linear sequence, which would be one of the
hallmarks of modernist fiction. Images of the past in both the Cameron and Woolf
Albums are structured as key notes to the action of the present, like recurring chords,
in a way that will be redolent of repeated images in Woolf’s fiction, with its focus on
heightened “moments of being”. Marion Dell comments on this jointure, arguing that
Cameron’s albums express a “bricolage: an assemblage of cultural, economic and
aesthetic fragments” that obliquely precede modernist fiction in their “insistence on
new angles of vision” and “pattern making” of repeated images (93, 99, 180). More
than this visual patterning, I argue that the albums as creative archives demonstrate
the way in which an image as a psychologically and imaginatively auratic “relic” can
be instrumental to narrative construction, for the archival image “by triggering off a
reverie, structures the work by representing its aura, a sort of creative horizon”
(Louvel, “From Intersemiotic”, 17). We might classically consider the auratic power
of objects in Woolf’s shorter fiction to be in this vein, especially “The Mark on the
Wall” with its concern with creating narrative succession through affective
possibilities, “sink[ing] deeper and deeper, away from the surface, with its hard
separate facts” (Complete Shorter Fiction, 79).

Narrativity, mythologised memory and aesthetic patterning are strikingly concurrent
techniques in both the albums of Cameron and Woolf, suggesting that Cameron’s
material output forms a kind of structural and thematic groundwork for Woolf’s
visual projects, both in photography and fiction. It suggests that Woolf also has a
kind of structural indebtedness to Cameron and the conglomerations of the Victorian
collection, in addition to her manipulation of Cameron’s vision and eccentricities.
Each set of albums acts as a creatively arranged archive or a “laminated text” (de Certeau, 94) which “redistributes things, redefines elements of knowledge, and inaugurates a place for a new beginning”, (73-74), using the past to provide the foundation of artistic space for new generations and new texts. In this way, Woolf lays the experimental groundwork for creativity with visual and photographic archives as structure in English fiction.

Creative Structures in Victorian Archive Fiction

This unpinning of the archival structure of Victorian photography can be tied to a growing body of neo-Victorian novels that open up new perspectives on cultural history, generated by the visual archive. Sue Breakell highlights the impact of archives in the visual art world in a recent issue of Archives and Records by discussing the

archive’s potential not only for the stories it tells by itself – increasingly a complex and multi-layered potentiality, involving the reading of gaps and silences, but also for the enabling of other, multiple stories through its interaction with the viewer or reader and their consequent re-interpretation, re-iteration or re-presentation (2).

Potentiality lies, not just within the archival form itself but crucially within the interpretative powers of the reader. Breakell here addresses visual art and her statement could be retrospectively applied to Cameron’s albums as forms which demand the reading of “gaps and silences”.

Yet, textual evocations of the archive also produce structures and require reader interaction, or archival imagination, to be completed. The use of archives in contemporary fiction is generally divided between what author Ulrich Raulff has called “the way of the chronicle and the diary” or “the way of the index and the slip box” (166). This definition separates fictions which feature archival material in the form of continuous coherent narratives such as diaries, which are likely to endorse an evidential and positivist approach, from those which espouse a more experimental, deconstructive technique which has more in common with the apparent
randomisation produced by dipping into archival indexes (or even photograph albums).

The links between the re-ordering of the archive and imaginative overflow are considered by a growing number of writers in collections exploring the nature of the archive from an interdisciplinary viewpoint, following the “archival turn”. Sarah Nuttall argues that “the archive constantly moves between these two orders – excision and excess: between that which limits and that which is limitless” (283, my emphasis). This flexibility is seen by Nuttall as intrinsically literary. She argues for a blending between concepts of literature and the archive which dovetails with my own approach, considering that they share a “fecundity” and “instability” (283).

Whilst the principles of Nuttall’s argument are pertinent to my discussion of archival fiction, she is primarily concerned by literature’s effect on the archive rather than the archive’s effect on literature. Nuttall’s underlying argument regarding the shifting border between the archive and literary text, is, however, one that opens up possibilities for reading both the Victorian photograph albums and the neo-Victorian archive novels discussed within this chapter.

According to Nuttall, the archive’s relation to literature is one of inherent tension between constriction and potential. She argues that the archive itself “is a composition” in the sense that “[i]t has been composed, by someone, from certain objects and not others” (295), hence excision. On the other hand, the very particularity of these nodal points or embedded archival “objects” within the text, opens up the potential for excess, being the imaginative “fecundity” generated by archival objects (295) as discussed in the previous chapter. Between these two interrelated modes lies a powerful “paradox” (295): a capacity not only for the generation of narratives within the structure of the archive, as Nuttall diagnoses, but also within the literary text. Nuttall considers this polarity as akin to that between “death” and “life” and further relates it to the relations between the excision of a constructionist worldview in which all elements of life are conditioned by pre-determined social ordering and the excess of a worldview in which imagination has the capacity to overwhelm the orders and boundaries of society and of “reason” (298-299). Nuttall’s argument seeks, not to sidestep arguments of political ideology and deconstruction, but to consider imagination as a form of power that defies reason
and social order, and which thus in fiction and in the archive is able to move through boundaries present in Victorian, and also contemporary society.

In an article in the same collection, Ronald Suresh Roberts claims that novelists themselves are a conduit for the archival drive of wider society, translating “fragments” into literary output via an imaginative “transmutation” that defies factuality and maps the effect of the archive onto “inward being” (304, 311), thus connecting the concrete and the subjective. Yet Roberts’ view of the archive is one of a “cemetery” enlivened by the writer, and not something with intrinsic creative capacity (302). Moreover, he views the concept of the archive in a somewhat Foucauldian manner, in which it is not so much a physical collection of items but the traces of thought that are possible within a certain society. Although Roberts’ argument has similar qualities to Nuttall’s article, I would argue that the aesthetics at work in neo-Victorian archive novels lie somewhere in between these angles, in that they employ both the creative re-ordering of the material archive and writerly “transmutation” of this archive into an imaginative overflow beyond oppressive societal structures.

The relation of this dichotomy of imagination and structure to the long shadow of Derrida’s Archive Fever is addressed by several critics; some with approval and others as a counterpoint that suggests its concerns are somewhat obtuse to creative archival fiction. Roberts expresses surprise that for the “supposed savant of playfulness, the archive embodies a responsibility” and instead posits that “[a]rtistic and other creativity within the archivate inoculates us against the naïve idea of an archival finality” (313). Whilst Derrida’s text may not necessarily endorse the idea of archival finality, since for him the archive concerns the nebulous “question of the future itself, […] of a promise and a responsibility for tomorrow” (36), it stresses the institutional barriers archival structures place between people and their history rather than a historical creativity.

I am more inclined to an approach in which re-structuring of the archive is a means of creative abundance. Given the premise that history itself is not disassociated from fictionality, archival fiction particularly seeks to lay bare the interplay of imaginative subjectivity and the ordering of material facts through making visible how structure
and imagination are interwoven. In post-Victorian archival fiction, this can be the means of defying accepted structures through a kind of creative overflow.

 Whilst scrutinising the flaws of the past, this metahistorical genre borrows from the Victorian imagination and the modernist project in offering the interweaving of structure and imagination as a means of insight, optimism and knowledge-formation. This is also a project that concurs with recent re-evaluations of the complexities of Victorian art theory. For example, it reflects Novak’s argument that the Victorian understanding of truth and composition should be applied to our understanding of nineteenth-century photography (65). Arguably, the purpose of archival fictions reflects this dualism, being not merely to break down forms of established truth and replace them with a void of unknowability, but to uncover patterns of historical affectivity through a weighing of visual traces that, though they may not offer definitive answers, offer a multiplication of perspectives in the present and open the way for new forms of vision. Victorian traces form an archive that is already selectively constructed and ordered (“excision”), but whose elements exude affective and unpredictable significances (“excess”) (Nuttall, 295).

 The combined potential, or “excess”, of both visual and textual meditations on the archives are met in fiction which addresses the Victorian photographic archive. This results in multimedia halls of mirrors through which new narratives are continually invoked through the potential generated by structures of visual and textual archives. In these fictions, an affective approach endlessly regenerates the archive’s rigid construction by “replenishing it with things that we were not there at the beginning” (299).

 Structures in archive fiction have met with critical attention from pictorial angles such as Louvel’s concept of the “rhythm” of images which forms a “visual grid” that conditions the text (Poetics, 177). More prevalently in neo-Victorian fiction, the structure of traces is addressed from postmodernist viewpoints, in which archival materials of a predominately textual nature are arranged to convey a sense of contingency and doubt in “historiographic metafictions” (Hutcheon, 63-68). Kym Brindle, in her study of letters and diaries in neo-Victorian texts argues that these “novelists stress that material traces of the past are fragmentary, incomplete and contradictory” (4) but also underlines that such traces can be re-organised “to suit
prescriptive agendas” or “borrow[…] and reorganise[…] materials to suit revisionary narratives” (141). Similarly, John J. Su argues that A.S. Byatt’s Possession is a form of “collection” in novel form that works “as a process of selecting, acquiring, and organizing material objects” which can “facilitate a critical rethinking of current social norms or identities” (687). This selection process typically develops either the deconstruction of meaning or the recovery of a “lost totality” (687). As Linda Hutcheon writes “[i]n postmodern fiction, there is a contradictory turning to the archive and yet a contesting of its authority” (77).

Echoing de Certeau, Hutcheon compares the historian’s reading of “fragmentary documents” through “fill[ing] in the gaps and creat[ing] ordering structures” (83) to the use of “collage form” in novels (84), which make the reader a “collaborator” in creating the story (85). However, despite using a visual metaphor, and extensively discussing the subversive role of photography in fiction as the revealer of illusions, she argues that the flexibility of interpretation in fragmentary novels is made possible by the textual nature of the archive (77). Indeed, the majority of analyses of archival (de)construction in fiction have concentrated on textual traces. Structures of visual archives in neo-Victorian texts have, on the other hand, been relatively ignored, critics preferring to concentrate on singular visual motifs, the relation between the visual and the material as “transmitters” of Victorian culture to contemporary lives (Boehm-Schnitker and Gruss, 1), or on the dynamics of power and evidence in the case of photography. Yet, arguably visual structures in fiction are capable of conveying more subtle and fluid messages than textual archives due to the variables of affective impression and intermedial transfer. The following texts suggest routes by which, perhaps, the structuring of a visual archive in a neo-Victorian text might take a more ambivalent and implicit path between totality and deconstruction.

Creative Ordering, Ekphrasis, and the Persistence of Meaning: Adam Thorpe’s Ulverton

Adam Thorpe’s 1992 work Ulverton is a novel overtly concerned with archival traces in its very structure. The text is broken up into twelve temporally distinct but interlocking sections each purporting to form a trace relating to the history of
Ulverton, a fictional village somewhere in southern England. The text as a whole embraces a personal experience of the archive in multiple forms of record from oral history narrative to documentary transcript, stretching from 1650 to 1988. The fictional traces are not produced to provide an authoritative solution to a textual mystery, but to connect with readers and each other on an affective and imaginative level, creating an interiorised folk history, albeit one that contains no easy solutions. Ingrid Gunby has aptly considered the novel as an expression of Walter Benjamin’s notion of “constellations” in which “the disjunctions and tensions of particular constellations of past and present, contained in the material fragments of the past … explode the experience of history” (61). I would go further to argue that Benjamin’s ideas of fragmentary narration are particularly applicable to all forms of photographic narrative, due to the “tensions” inherent in their necessarily disjointed structures.

Thorpe himself makes photography a part of his matrix of fragments in a central chapter entitled “Shutter – 1859”. The chapter’s protagonist is an ambitious female photographer, evidently connected to Julia Margaret Cameron by her similarly idealising and excessive forms of narration and frequent cultural references, delivered by Thorpe with an undercutting twist. The photographs described are formed from an amalgam of implicit influences and combine Cameron’s style with influence from early picturesque landscape photography (as discussed by Seiberling, 46-47).

The chapter is subdivided into “Plates” being descriptions in an implied book of photographs, perhaps not unlike Fox Talbot’s early photography book Pencil of Nature - “the beauty of nature’s pen” is referred to (Thorpe, 191) - but which we later realise never made it to publication. Some “Plates” are given Cameronian emblematic titles such as “Peasant Woman (Or Fortitude)” (192) but the “Plates” are more than descriptions, they are also accounts of the act of image creation, as found in the novels discussed in Chapter 1. The image-making commentary blends into musings on ideas and life of the photographer, yet all is contained within the tight sequence of ordered objects. In this way, we can consider reading the chapter in the same way as Langford suggests of the photograph album, as a series of “speaking” images that reveal an implicit narrative – to adapt Langford’s words “we look at a
composite version of her life that [the author] has arranged to create certain effects and contain certain messages” (“Speaking the Album”, 237).

The content of the photographs in “Shutter” initially appear to differ specifically from Cameron’s works. The commentary declares “I am not given to the artificial posing so beloved of my contemporaries in the field of both plate and canvas” (180), but the photographer possesses many of the same principles and techniques as her real-life forebear. She has a dedication to truth, defending the surrealist blurrings in images because they reflect real movement: “[w]hy otherwise is there that hazy penumbra about the girl’s hand, caught in the act of wiping away collected moisture from the summer heat?” (180). There are many similarities in visual technique, as in a word-picture entitled “Across the Downs”, where the “chiaroscuro” effect is “quite deliberate, for the road shines with greater contrast, its curving nature sinuous as the scales of a serpent” but in which other chance light effects are “a happy accident” (186), reminiscent of Cameron’s admission that her “out-of-focus pictures were a fluke” (“Annals”, 9). Significantly, the fictional photographer shares Cameron’s metaphysical aims, believing that she has captured images that “become[…] the entranced glimpse of a better world, where mystery is gilded” (191), suggesting Cameron’s declaration that “the photograph thus taken has been almost the embodiment of a prayer” (“Annals”, 12). Photography is in both cases a heavenly ordained pursuit which materialises the spiritual in the transformation of light into object.

There are also practical analogies, as Thorpe’s photographer suffers difficulties with money and the world of commercial portraiture in a manner that seems a direct parody of Cameron: “I confess that, for my living, and to keep in servants, I crowd my studio with the good and the great of our fustian country – magistrates, doctors, barristers, professors, divines, and so forth” (192). Thus the Ulverton photographer is a kind of anti-Cameron, one for whom famous sitters are not immortals to be reverenced but a resented means of survival that supports the capture of the rural poor and their world, allowing her to “clamp the head of one who would otherwise remain in a fog of other’s memories” (192). Thorpe’s photographer is thus both an emanation and the antithesis of Cameron, an amalgam created to reflect the themes of the novel as a whole: truth, representation, class, and imagination.
Structural links can be discerned between Cameron and Thorpe’s archival projects. Thorpe creates individual ekphrastic images which nevertheless form a kind of narrative, not unlike the implied and flexible narrative in Cameron’s albums. For example, the image of “The Blacksmith’s Shop” is followed by “After the Harvest” and “Drawing the Water” (188, 189, 191) in a sequence that ostensibly seeks to survey the village, but actually serves to mythologise it, transforming Ulverton and its people into “a memory of happier, golden times” (189). The sequence of photographs ends up saying as much about its creator as its subject it is meant to capture for posterity. Cameron’s insistent portrait of Freshwater Bay in her albums as a world of inspired artists and romantic peasants similarly pasted over realities of financial difficulty and class difference. For example, in the “SN Album” presented to Sibella Norman, an image of “Irish and Isle of Wight Peasants” (Fig. 24) depicts the Cameron servants in a carefully arranged group amidst relaxed images of the Cameron and Norman families on surrounding pages. In all the albums, working-class models portraying mythical figures are blended into the ecstatic narrative of a literary fantasy world (see for example, Figure 23, where Mary Hillier as Sappho shares page space with Carlyle). The desire to believe in the order of an idealised world haunts both Cameron’s albums and the Ulverton photographer’s sequence of word-images.

Figure 24. Julia Margaret Cameron (attrib.), “Irish and Isle of Wight Peasants”, “SN Album”, 42 (1859).
In each, an arrangement of images serves to make up a portrait of the artist. The word-images in “Shutter” portray rural life as nostalgically rustic and full of beatific meaning, but also draw a portrait of a woman who remains indelibly outside looking in, and whose Cameronian confidential tone addresses eventually, not a crowd of applauding onlookers or friends, but empty air.

The chapter as a whole also functions as a narrative object amongst the other “records” or chapters of the novel. Yet the power of the whole structured novel lies in its disconnection. Thorpe’s “Plates” begin with “Plate XXV”, with another twenty-four plates merely implied as traces in the dark. Such archival “gaps and silences” (Breakell, 2) within the catalogue of ekphrases presented in the chapter, must be deciphered by the reader. These gaps may be filled with the energy of pictorial writing, which has long been identified as an integrally split phenomenon.

W.J.T. Mitchell has referred to ekphrasis as “stationed between two othernesses” that mean “something special and magical is required of language” (164,158) whilst Louvel suggests that “the two media remain irreducible; but, they have been brought as close as possible, their friction being creative”, and it is this displacement that produces a “limitless or unprejudiced invention ready to experiment beyond boundaries” (“From Intersemiotic”, 25). This energy of spaces is also generated in the gaps of an archival structure, and a parallel can be drawn here between the space linking image and text in pictorial writing and between material objects in an archive. Each requires reader or viewer input to realise, but also contains implicit and even paradoxical linkages that are already embedded within the structure.

The implicit narrative of photographs here is distinctly allusive, surreal and expressed through aesthetic still moments, rather than actions and events. The apparent impossibility of a narrativity of pictorial images is countered by Louvel, who argues that the reading of iconotexts actually takes up textual time, if not plot time, and is still part of the unravelling of understanding that forms the process of the text (Poetics, 81). Yet, granting this, the conglomerate structures of archival narratives mean that they simultaneously suggest both continuity and fragmentation.

In Ulverton, Thorpe employs Ruskinian philosophies to produce a series of ekphrases in which the photographer attempts to “read” the natural and human environment as a continuous surface over several images, but which is ironically
undercut by the fragmentation of her chosen medium. She styles her own project as a duty of the camera owner to reveal integral meanings in nature:

Herein is the principal task, then, of the new art of the lens: for what other purpose must we serve but the bettering of humankind, in the bringing to its attention that miraculous system that has its being all about us but that we too easily take for granted (184).

Passages like this make it evident that “Shutter” functions as a comment on Victorian realism in literature and its symbolisation of the observable world. The direct and prescriptive address to readers here contains shades of George Eliot as well as Julia Margaret Cameron, who, not incidentally, were mutual admirers and correspondents (Olsen, 205-206). By bringing these two advocates of Victorian universalism together, and translating Eliot’s style into a Cameronian photographic catalogue, naturalised literary realism can be unmasked as an artificial series of objects, its smooth surface broken into archival fragments.

This concurrent search for meaning in visual observation and romanticisation of working-class models are borne out in this early, particularly Cameronian passage:

Imagine my pleasure, then, when faint murmurings came to me on the towpath, and on creeping forward what should I have seen to my astonishment, but the oldest and loveliest of all scenes – two lovers on a boat, in the first and most innocent bloom of love: that first courtship which Shakespeare and all our immortal poets have, at their most exquisite and poignant, immortalised for the world to cherish. May I add my own small reed upon the altar, with this picture, which has as its protagonists not the Illyrian lords and ladies but the rustics of Arden (181).

This parodic overflow bears evident similarity to sections from “Annals of My Glasshouse” describing the marriage of Mary Ryan and Henry Cotton such as:

entirely out of the Prospero and Miranda picture sprung a marriage which has, I hope, cemented the welfare and well-being of a real King Cophetua who, in the Miranda, saw the prize which has proved the jewel in the monarch’s crown … producing one of the prettiest idylls of real life that can be conceived (Cameron, 10).
Thorpe’s rendition recalls Cameron’s ecstatically haphazard Shakespearean allusions but subtly undercuts her unclouded idealisation. His female photographer, unlike Cameron’s public claim to have brought together her models in a “marriage of bliss”, sedulously sneaks up on a couple by hiding her camera under a black crinoline (Thorpe, 181), that symbolic cage of Victorian restraint. Thorpe’s narrator is an insecure outsider who determinedly attempts to romanticise her models by creating “immortalised” traces to be placed on the “altar” of art (181).

Thorpe satirises the incongruous mixture of Romanticism and realism that has often been amongst the strongest critical accusations against Victorian photography, an argument delineated by Green-Lewis in *Framing the Victorians* as bearing relation to similar dichotomies in nineteenth-century literature. “Shutter” effusively begins with “Plate XXV - A River Scene”:

> Here once more the transient poetry of nature is most eloquently caught, and I am emboldened to suggest that no brush, wielded by whatever genius, could fashion the rushing water about the rocks with so fine a hand as my humble lens (179).

The image is both “transient” and permanently “caught”, “poetry” and referentially authentic, superior to “genius” and yet “humble”. It performs similar paradoxes to Cameron’s photography, which she claimed to be both “From Life” on all her prints, and also “immortal” art (Olsen, 189). It also bears resemblance to the insistence in “Annals of My Glass House” that her photographs “cannot be surpassed” (10) and that she was “immediately crowned […] with laurels” (9), whilst emphasising the humility of her studio in “a glazed fowl house” (9), her initial lack of knowledge of photographic technique (9), and her repeated crediting of the value of her photographs to the beauty and genius of her sitters (9-12). Thorpe both plays with the subtleties of these dichotomies and appears to satirise their apparent ridiculousness. This tension between concepts of the real and the invented image is repeatedly worked into the “plates”. The photographer insists that “I have once again rendered the facts visibly and honestly, and improved nothing” and opines that “the lens, with its unavailing sincerity, and its unjudging eye, captures [images] upon the plate with a fidelity of draughtsmanship that the great Leonardo might have envied” (184). Thorpe underlines here the simultaneous claims to the indexical, the selective
and the artistic that haunts both the narrator and early photographic discourse in
general, as Green-Lewis has delineated (Framing the Victorians, 45). The narrator’s
desire to both emulate and outdo Renaissance artists particularly echoes Cameron’s
claims that her images were variously “Raphaelesque” (“Annals”, 10) and “after the
manner of a Leonardo” (Cox and Ford, Complete Photographs, 255). Thorpe points
here towards the ironies in Victorian photography’s conflation of a commitment to
realism with a desire for association with high art.

The narrator eventually admits her “rustics of Arden” are really “two of the
labouring class, whose vessel is a craft belonging to the butcher and renowned for its
leaking qualities” (181). This image in “Shutter” is then segued into Thorpe’s
archival patchwork. The following chapter, set in 1887 and written in a dialect
stream-of-consciousness, recounts the boat episode as one of outright voyeurism in
the eyes of a rambling poacher, who “cotched her one time a-bogglin on old Janey
Pocock makin sweet wi’ that Mary Stroude’s bro … in a boat they was aye aye”
(214). Tangentially suggesting criticism of Victorian artistic photography as staged
and ludicrous by later generations, the project of high-minded romanticisation
retrospectively becomes ancient village gossip, spied on by a middle-class spinster,
who is herself spotted. The hope of a visionary trace here is exposed as a form of
working-class exploitation.

The succession of images reveal that the photographer of “Shutter” eventually
travels to Egypt to photograph of the excavation of a tomb where she meets an
archaeologist, Stephen Quiller, but is forced to return due to illness. The chapter ends
in Ulverton with an ekphrastic self-portrait. The narrator tells us in an offhand
manner that Stephen has died, and asks “what does the pale woman (myself!) seated
in the wicker Bath-chair before the hedge? Is she alive at all – or is she some waxy
idol, the Daemon of the proceedings?” (201). Here through the frame of her own
narration, we witness the photographer’s collapse into one of the dehumanised and
romanticised objects of her study. It appears that attempts to synthesise realism and
Romanticism are false, and rebound on those who would attempt it. The grand
scheme of the photographer told implicitly through the arrangement of images
merely ends with her own transformation into the “Daemon of the proceedings”, a
figure whose meddling with new, potentially dangerous technologies to steal traces
from the village is proclaimed unnatural, devious even, in a manner analogous to the grave-robbing of the Egyptian tomb.

The traces that the photographer hopes will “be found millenniums hence (as is quite possible)” (201) reappear in the next chapter of this tightly woven novel, though not in the mode of idealised preservation the creator might expect. The following chapter’s speaker, Mr Perry, tells his unnamed addressee, “I were going to show thee them glass jiggamies wi’ the shadders on ‘em I telled thee as on as I found in old Miss Peep-Hole’s attic” and explains how he found her dying, “a bag o’ bones” and calling for “Stephen” whilst “them pages o’ writing blowed all over the lawn” (213). The fragments designed for posterity meet an ignoble and dispersed end whilst what is remembered is the body, dilapidated by physical and mental weakness. It is perhaps not insignificant that some of the photographer’s last words are reported as “a minut be a blur too long too long a minut be a blur” (213). The fear of a blur marring the photographic record seems to be equated to the blur of mental decay; both “archives” which are treated contemptuously by posterity. “Miss Peep-Hole” dies in misunderstood ramblings about how “the universe were a ripple on a lake an life were a spuddling o’ the river of time” (213); thus her vaulting Victorian imagination is made ludicrous in the frame of the “real” life of the country.

Yet the glass photographic plates, stolen by Perry and used to augment the growth of his cabbages as a kind of makeshift cold frame, come back to haunt him in unintended ways. He “seed faces in they jiggamies now an agin old Lizzie Pyke … old dame Trason … though she were a while dead by then” (214). Although these “hauntins” eventually wear out and “after thretty year” he “don’t see no faces now please God” (215), the photographic archive collated by the “Daemon” ends up bringing about a genuine haunting experience, as reinterpreted by a new viewer. This “archive”, produces an uncanny “excess” of cultural memory, in Nuttall’s formulation (295). The photographic plates deteriorate as evidence of the poetry of the country but become objects of affective magic themselves, aided by their glassy slippery form. Yet this slippery archive too, fades away. It seems like the hope of the stable trace is futile.

The hope of creating permanent traces that imprint an order onto the mess of reality is strongly ironised throughout Thorpe’s text. In the “Afterword” that follows the
text, he claims to have written the novel in order to demonstrate that “what we take as a pattern, as linkage, as significant connection is really just haphazard, the operation of chance … and that one of the wonders of being human is our ability to impose or draw out meaning or even beauty from the essentially diffident mass of existence” (405). Whilst this statement initially appears ambivalent in regards to the Victorian photographer of 1859 and her grand vision of integral meaning, in some ways, Thorpe’s intentions seem to mirror hers. The Ulverton photographer, like Julia Margaret Cameron herself, is aware of the break between social reality and idealised romanticisation, but that does not stop her from pursuing the goal of uncovering deeper meaning hidden beyond the appearance of indifference in the world around her. “Miss Peep-Hole” compares a “Tomb Entrance” in Egypt to a “stone burial chamber upon the English downs” suggesting:

in such co-incidences of appearance, a long sea-voyage apart, may lie a secret web of knowledge, that once ascertained and drawn out, could provide a key to all mysteries – and make of the past a well wherein our own thirst might be slaked, and our petty confusions buried (Ulverton, 198).

Despite the allusion here to Casaubon’s failed and ultimately meaningless “Key to All Mythologies” project in Middlemarch, there is something about this satirised Romantic statement that strikes a chord with Thorpe’s own project. The “secret web of knowledge”, contained within his twelve archival fragments adds up to a kind of fabricated “well” of the past where the thirst of the reader can be “slaked”, though not through the means of a satisfactory linear history. Thorpe’s history rather deliberately blurs such expected orders; this is explicitly voiced by a later character, Violet Nightingale, who acts as a kind of archival assistant for the village’s history, and expresses concerns about “fuzzy edges”, asking what may be the novel’s central question: “[w]here does one section end and the next begin?” (291, 286).

In a landmark article on archival creativity, art critic Hal Foster identifies a similar approach to Thorpe, in the work of contemporary artists, arguing that:

[such art] assumes anomic fragmentation as a condition not only to represent but to work through, and proposes new orders of affective association, however partial and provisional, to this end, even as it also registers the difficulty, at times, the absurdity, of doing so (21).
In Ulverton, it is the very gaps, misdirections and fictionalisations of the “archive” that are “work[ed] through” to enable the reader to perceive something approximating to the genuine texture of history, through the novel’s map of an imagined, temporally-disjointed world, however absurd that may seem to mainstream postmodern sensibilities and even to the author himself. A position of meaninglessness becomes the foundation for the discovery of meaning.

The Victorian photographer in this novel therefore becomes an analogy for the novelist, piecing together scraps and fragments at third hand, to create a hitherto unknown narrative which is accessed and reinterpreted by succeeding generations. The archival patterns presents a variety of meditations on identity and history that are never resolved, but pose a deepening unanswered (or unanswerable?) question about the relationship between fiction, history and the self. Thorpe’s fragmented novel project arguably aims at a similar end to that which Julia Straub suggests that the Victorians sought in photography, a “means to lay bare hidden truths by penetrating the wall of appearances, synthesising the unconnected” (163). In Ulverton, “Beauty” is drawn out from the “diffident mass of existence”, and Thorpe, in his “Afterword”, finally concludes that the novel attempts to “provide … an entry to a world where connections are deeper and more mysterious than those we find in fiction, at least in a fiction that aims to imitate “real” life” (412).

A Textual Journey Through a Visual Maze: Michelle Lovric’s The True and Splendid History of the Harristown Sisters

Victorian photography plays an emblematic and subtly structural role in Michelle Lovric’s 2014 neo-Victorian novel The True and Splendid History of the Harristown Sisters, a more traditional linear narrative that is strongly invested in the indulgent visuality and materiality of this genre. The novel concerns the seven Irish Swiney sisters whose astonishingly plentiful hair effects their rise from rural poverty to singing and visual sensations in the 1860s and 70s. This conceit is, according to Lovric’s accompanying “Historical Notes”, loosely based on the story of the seven American and similarly hirsute Sutherland sisters who became stars in the late nineteenth century (457-459). Lovric’s novel relocates the action to a Pre-Raphaelitism-saturated Europe and is strongly influenced by Galia Ofek’s
Representations of Hair in Victorian Culture, from which many of its visual examples and central arguments are taken and adapted into fiction.

The complicated primary melodrama concerns the sisters’ origins in poverty, volatile relationships and career rise and fall, but underlying and supporting this surface, the text is deeply concerned with visual representation, the synthesising nature of Victorian historical imagination, and the manipulation of identity. This visual secondary narrative forms the matter of this study. Although, as in Ulverton, Cameron is never specifically mentioned, affective encounters with Cameron-style photography come to play a pivotal role in the negotiation of the above themes. The novel also, perhaps incidentally, resembles the Mary Ryan episode in Cameron’s biography, as it concerns young Irish women taken from the aftermath of Famine, to be transformed into muses for high art.

The visual archive in this text is blended into the narrative in a manner reminiscent of de Certeau’s “laminated text in which one continuous half is based on another disseminated half” and could be considered as a kind of “historiographic discourse” composed of a “textual recomposition” (94) of original Victorian visual sources. In de Certeau’s terms, the “continuous half” of the re-aligned narrative is here “allowed to state what [Victorian art] is unknowingly signifying” (94) according to Lovric, this being the normalisation of stereotyped femininity, especially working-class femininity. In my view, the novel presents the reader with a dazzling array of ekphrases which must be “read” against each other in order to assess their narrative symbolisation and the “value” of their medium. This leads us back once again to the idea of visual “rhythm” in the text, and the “beats” in this context can be compared to a series of dissonant and chiming notes, running under the surface of the narrative to create a foundational “visual grid” (Louvel, Poetics, 177). Lovric also employs a structure by which, within the novel, the character of the artist is inextricably connected to the authenticity of their chosen medium. This is not merely a simple reproduction of assumptions about the Romantic connection between the artist and the artwork, but a calculated personification of the representational qualities of Victorian artistic traces. Kate Mitchell notes a similar “intertwin[ing]” of the “intellectual and the sensate” in Byatt’s Possession where “the hermeneutic search becomes knotted to love” (114). In Lovric’s novel, the search for authentic traces is
mapped onto a relational narrative which allows debates about the qualities of the trace to be writ large.

The novel is narrated by the middle Swiney sister, Manticory, who experiences a series of affective encounters with Victorian visual traces in various mediums during the course of the narrative; these come to represent stages in her negotiation of representation and self-identity. Hair itself is portrayed as the most helplessly symbolic of material traces, which entraps its owner in a maze of deceptive representations. Lovric metahistorically explores hair-obsession and exploitation in the masculine Victorian art tradition, and also opens space for feminist reinterpretations of the symbolic representation of hair. Aptly for the Pre-Raphaelite context, Manticory herself has copious red hair.

The heroine of Lovric’s novel finds herself repeatedly transformed by other imaginations, but like Annie Phelan of Afterimage and the Ulverton photographer, she is also actively involved in transforming others, bisecting model and artist roles. Thematic parallels with Cameron’s transformative images are present from the start, as the sisters rise from poverty to become a touring theatrical act, for whom Manticory writes songs and theatrical sketches. These are a skilful blend between the novels, myths, and histories she is immersed in and the sisters’ volatile relationships. Manticory is aware of her transformative role in rearranging cultural memory, significantly comparing herself to a spider:

knit[ting] together diverse entities […] Such miscegenations does a writer also create, as I did, first by writing the humble Swiney sisters into myth and legend for our stage shows, weaving a wild tribe of Irish starvelings into Lady Godivas that were not real ladies (Lovric, 157).

Through writing disparate elements, images and characters into her present circumstances, Manticory is an internal viewfinder who overtly occupies a synthesising archival role, realigning the traces of cultural history for the consumption of her audience. She possesses a fluid historical imagination comparable to Cameron’s weaving of fact and fiction, Irish maids and great ladies in her albums, and appropriating similar “heroines” that express national, powerful and sacred qualities including Lady Godiva, Lizzie Siddal, Medusa, and Mary Magdalene (1, 181, 179, 25).
This passage on “miscegenations” of the past and present reflects Lovric’s intention to arrange and rewrite Victorian visual traces in a way that emphasises contrast and dissonance, just as Cameron’s albums, knitted from “diverse entities” raise questions about the representation of cultural history. Lovric presents us with a web-like “archive” of images, which enact their impact by creating bridges between the past and present, the narrative of the novel and Victorian culture. She adapts the theme of weaving hair into narrative from Ofek, who argues that hair constitutes a “narrative thread in itself” in Victorian novels which forms “important but covert sub-narratives”, exposing “alternative forms of power and ways to communicate and understand feminine experiences” (30). Lovric’s Manticory is an embodiment of Ofek’s arguments, becoming an Arachne figure descended from a long line of female storytellers, craftily employing the matter of hair for her own ends (31). However, as well as referring to the idea of narrative “strands” of hair, this image of the dialogic web recurs in archival texts and critical analyses of “piecing things together” (Saunders, 173), and again is akin to Walter Benjamin’s theory of “constellations” in “Theses on the Philosophy of History” (Illuminations, 255). Like the photographer in Ulverton and her “new web of knowledge” Manticory’s knitted web reveals new connections by perceiving history through the imagination, or “open[ing] the eye of the text” to visual revelations (Louvel, Poetics, 124).

Yet, Lovric emphasises that this transformative imagination is forced to work under conditions of masculine vision. The Swiney sisters and their act are quickly appropriated by the venal commercial interests of men intent on exploiting the Victorian obsession with longhaired temptresses, which Ofek identifies as a fetishistic myth, in which hair is symbolic of the liminal boundaries of the body, representing a problematic excess that needs to be contained (17). The sisters first encounter photography as a tool which uses their images to promote pharmaceutical products and are duly disillusioned about its representation of themselves. One sister is photographed in a “newspaper advertisement that cleverly alluded to Mr Rossetti’s Lady Lilith without being so derivative as to get us into trouble” and also as “an ensorcelling lady cannibal … at the same time, communicating our scalp food’s healthful properties to our customers” (Lovric, 179). These parodic translations of Pre-Raphaelitism into photographs obliquely suggest Cameron’s work, yet they reverse the qualities of liberating fictionality in her images, by portraying famous
female deceivers advertising spurious hair products in a medium suggestive of referential truth but which mimics the artifice of painting.

The representations that Manticory finds most disturbing are the most referential; seven life sized dolls, each modelled on multiple photographs of one of the sisters. In her mind, these symbolise the replacement of the self with a disembodied double so that, just as in the commercial photographs, “the idea of me was presently to be put for sale” (119-121). Manticory’s forensic “visual negotiations” of the dolls, which she describes as resembling a living death, replicating her exactly but with “a cavity where her brain should be” (123), continue the novel’s emphasis on actively viewing and assessing artworks of all kinds. In this text, the idea of the self becomes dispersed in a diverse visual archive, and it is the job of the protagonist to sift through this archive and identify the meaningful trace that best fulfils an acceptable idea of the self, rather than one which most accurately represents her indexical appearance. As is apparent in Cameron’s albums, which feature multiple portraits of single characters and sitters, Lovric presents an archive of facets of the self, to be posed and assessed against each other. The critical tone of the novel’s early ekphrases also supports Louvel’s notion that description may be used to make arguments relating to the events of the text, embodying a “veritable discursivity of the image, whereby the image turns into an image-narrative” (Poetics, 106).

Another encounter with this archive occurs when an oil painting is mooted to the sisters as a promotional tool by their disingenuous manager and supposed poet, Tristan. When they question its value in relation to the cheaper medium of photography they are told:

“Art, by virtue of its engagement with the soul, confers respectability, reality and luxury, whereas photography is considered by many to be a cheap, shallow record or a mere meretricious tool” (186).

Yet this categorisation of painting as a transcendent art form is immediately undercut by the admission that Tristan thinks “an oil painting more conducive to profitable negotiations than the commercial kind of photograph” (186-187). This statement from the unreliable Tristan creates ambivalence about painting as a representational trace. Even so, Manticory finds herself being taken in by the deceptive appearance of the genuine in painting when she meets the elusive artist, Alexander Sardou, and
finds herself transformed into “the speaking heart” of the painting, whose description calls to mind the “pillar” portrait of the Brontë sisters as well as Cameron’s group images in its arrangement and pattern of glances, although Manticory must admit that it is “the most commercial of portraits” (194). The value of artistic representation seems momentarily confirmed when Alexander Sardou and Manticory begin an affair, and she perceives him as possessing an authenticity lacking in the novel’s other male characters.

Lovric emphasises how the overwhelming imprint of cultural types found in these artworks can segue into lives of women, to both their benefit and detriment, following Ofek’s argument that women were variously objectified by the hair cult, were complicit in it, and also manipulated it to their own ends (30-31, 196). In this way the novel works in a dichotomous way to Cameron’s attempt to ennoble her models and characters in a typically neo-Victorian move to cut to the ugly underside of Victorian culture. Nevertheless Lovric works to achieve a similar effect, transforming the “obscure” woman into a series of ambiguous “heroines”, as Annie is transformed in *Afterimage*. The archive thus functions as a series of open doors, in which the self can be explored through references to cultural history. Here we might consider Nuttall’s observation about the literary potential in the “instability” of the archive – the archive, like the self, is unstable in meaning, and difficult to interpret as a whole – by passing the self through the visual archive, Lovric and Cameron express Victorian femininity as a disparate arrangement of facets.

Eventually *The Harristown Sisters*’ kaleidoscopic portfolio of Victorian visual media meets its zenith in a foray into artistic photography through Venetian photographer Saverio Bon. Saverio bears a number of striking resemblances to Julia Margaret Cameron in his techniques and in the aesthetic atmosphere he induces. He refers to himself as a “priest” able to “marry [sitters] to Venice for ever, in an image” (235), reminiscent of Cameron’s favourite “Priestess of the Sun” persona (Olsen, 227), and his introduction of the sisters to Venice takes place in a dense and enigmatic mist which “began to coat everything with an uncertainty that seemed thrillingly spiritual, as if a thousand delicate lamps were uttering ectoplasm. The water seemed to smoke and boil beneath us” (233). This atmospheric description is analogous with Cameron’s blurred and religious effects. Signor Bon’s carefully arranged photographs which complement the construction of their Venetian locations recall
Cameron’s deliberately structured perspectives. For example, the sisters pose on the “monumental first-floor balconies” of a palace and “let [their] hair down, side saddle, as it were, so it streamed off the parapets like medieval pennants” and drape their hair out of windows of a bell tower so that “there were seven Venetian-Irish Rapunzels with their hair hanging down one tower in one multicoloured rope” (237).

![Image: Julia Margaret Cameron, The Five Foolish Virgins (1864); The Rosebud Garden of Girls (1868).

Figure 25. Julia Margaret Cameron, *The Five Foolish Virgins* (1864); *The Rosebud Garden of Girls* (1868).

Such images recall Cameron’s own structural uses of hair in allusive group images such as *The Rosebud Garden of Girls, The Kiss of Peace* and *The Five Foolish Virgins* (Cox and Ford, *Complete Photographs*, 456, 458, 162, see Fig. 25). Unlike previous, exploitative attempts to portray the sisters, Bon is less concerned with exploiting hair’s seductive quality but with “telling stories with our hair” (237), making it a medium for new narratives. Bon’s mission statement also evokes Lovric’s whole narrative project, in its meander from potent image to image. Again, this maps onto a conception of archive fiction, whereby pre-existing material substances, in this case hair, are used to structure, reconstitute and drive a narrative. Manticory enthuses that

he understood the feel of things, of the sensations to be gleaned at the conjunctures of stone and water and hair. He was sensitive to the potency of
the imagery he created, and he was afire with the possibility of creation. For
him, our hair had its own things to declare – and they were nuanced, natural,
thought-provoking things – not just something hot and vulgar, staged to strike
primal fear or envy, rousing all those passions only to sell something else (237-
238).

Bon’s commitment to narrative and aesthetic effect determine the superiority of his
art form to commercial “selling” and his “sensitive” and respectful character
simultaneously marks him out as superior to the commercial aspirations of the
novel’s other male “artists”. Bon’s transformations are sympathetic, tactile and
sculptural, not leering and categorising. He occupies a Cameronian position in
relation to the garish and exaggerated Rossetti aesthetic employed in Lovric’s
depiction of commercial photography and painting. Like Cameron, his mode of
representation is “natural”, eschewing the affectation and artificiality of pose found
in vernacular studio photography, but at the same time the very process is imbued
with the sense of magic and transformation that Cameron attempted to invoke with
her “immortal art” that would turn Irish “beggar maid” Mary Ryan into a heroine.
Manticory recalls that “[h]e fired magnesium at us endlessly, until my eyes were
aflame with stars and dust” (238).

In many ways, the “feminine” approach of Lovric’s Signor Bon recalls Lindsay
Smith’s gendered duality of Victorian photographers in *The Politics of Focus.*
According to Smith, Cameron “demobilis[es] the whole mechanism of fetishism in
the field of vision”, by articulating a peculiarly feminine “aesthetic of focus” (32, 26)
which captures the model on their own terms as a subjective and undefined being,
rather than a sharply-focused and captured specimen. Similarly, Lovric’s Bon,
instead of pinning his models in the frame as detached objects in a “masculine”
mode, reminiscent of the shaming commercial photography the Swiney sisters
encounter, employs a more “feminine” focus which allows the sisters to become
aestheticised individuals transformed by patterns of light. Pertinently, Smith also
identifies Cameron’s technique of “transform[ing] the metaphorical connotations of
hair into a newly realised structural element” (49), a quality supremely realised in

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11 Evidently, Lovric’s Bon, unlike Cameron, employs magnesium ribbon or powder to illuminate his
images, not readily available until the 1880s (Flint, “More Rapid Than the Lightning’s Flash”, 326)
although his aesthetic is remarkably similar.
photographs such as *The Angel at the Tomb* (Fig. 26). This is also apparent in Lovric’s fictional photographs, where the focus is not on the sitter’s hair as site of “primal fear or envy”, but on a composition told through the hair as visual mass which conveys “nuanced, natural, thought-provoking things” (238). Telling stories through copious amounts of hair also brings us back to the idea of “knitting together” the fabric of narrative (157) (Ofek, 30) with individual strands composed into an abundant mass of plots. In my view, the abundance of the sisters’ hair stands for more than the “sexual instability” Ofek identifies in Victorian texts (77) but also expresses qualities of decadence associated with neo-Victorianism, also found in the novel’s overwhelming array of allusions to Victorian visual traces, and the emphasis on heavily Gothic melodrama in the plot – the murders, reconciliations, secrets, and affairs. Hair stands for the richness of the cultural archive, is a symbol of proliferation for both vision and text, and as in Cameron’s photographs, is the abundant matter through which the cultural archive is reinterpreted and rearranged.

![Figure 26. Julia Margaret Cameron, *The Angel at the Tomb* (1869).](image)

Manticory becomes increasingly drawn to Signor Bon and his “sensitive” aesthetic of light but suffers a painful break with the aesthetically dubious Alexander. She
realises eventually that Alexander sees her as “less than a lady. I was a thing with hair. And the excesses of hair that made me a thing” (Lovric, 379). In Victorian visual traces, Lovric suggests, the passive female muse returns again and again to being a “thing”.

Conversely, in contemporary novels on Victorian art, female characters such as *Afterimage*’s Annie Phelan, as we have seen, often assert themselves by actively participating in the creation of traces themselves. Manticory first finds consolation in assisting Signor Bon in his studio or “laboratorio” where, in a phrase reminiscent of Thorpe’s images in the glasshouse “he turned the spectral images on his glass plates into living faces” (374). Signor Bon’s art, resembles Cameron’s as Lovric combines a critique on contortions and exploitations of gender in Victorian art with an emphasis on the spectral pull of the image. Manticory finds that “[m]y old hatred and distrust of photography withered and died” and she “considered his [Bon’s] profession a storytelling one like my own” (372). Photography is here explicitly acknowledged as analogous to the web of Manticory’s theatrical fabrications and to narrative itself, casting it as an implicit bridge between visual and textual relations. Photography, therefore, becomes a fitting medium to redeem the heroine’s imagination from an abyss of death and disappointment. This culmination of the visual “rhythm” (Louvel, Poetics, 177) remains deeply tied to the emotional plot. Personal affection itself becomes expressed in terms of photographic metaphor; Saverio confesses that he would like Manticory to “inhabit the frame of my vision like a permanent stain on the lens” (371). In Lovric’s vision, once the female protagonist is acknowledged as a creator of narrative herself, the traces that she inspires and creates can be owned and exonerated as haunting and collaborative works.

After a series of melodramatic and murderous events in the central narrative, which are disturbingly aided by the heroine’s storytelling powers, Manticory finally finds her aesthetic redemption in photography and Saverio. The imagination is redirected into a new course allowing for female assertion and participation, and the bewildering hall of representative mirrors and enticing traces is resolved by Cameronian narrative photography and the power of rewriting culture. Instances of pictoriality form nodal points in this narrative, which is organised externally by Lovric and internally by Manticory’s technique of “knitting together diverse entities”
into a creatively ordered archive of traces, which can be read as an implied secondary narrative in the novel. This other narrative with its dialogue between Victorian visual forms and the mapping of gendered identity can be compared to the fluid connections and progressive suggestions evoked between Cameron’s album images. Lovric pursues a textual journey through the visual archive to a revelatory conclusion, which is deftly twinned to the resolution of the romantic plot, or as Saunders describes archive fiction, “piercing together stories and dramas out of glimpses of lives in texts and images, in order to discover a human secret” (173).

Creative Archival Structure and the Return of Meaning

In this chapter, concurrent attempts to “read” Julia Margaret Cameron’s photograph albums and to “see” visual patterns in post-Victorian photographic novels have demonstrated that varied forms of narrative can be generated through creative structures of Victorian photographs, at both overt and implicit levels. In each of these forms, utilising the imaginative connections between elements creates a new fluid structure which can never be pinned down to a single reading but exists simultaneously in multiple layers and ambivalent combinations. Each text, including the albums, may be treated as an archival odyssey in which the imagination of the viewer or reader must negotiate narrative connections between images that produce implicit pictorial “rhythm[s]” (Louvel, Poetics, 177).

On a wider scale, such creativity is particularly inherent in the structures of any archive, which has the capacity to be re-organised into “sequences of different representations of reality” as Arlette Farge describes, meaning that “[t]he archive always preserves an infinite number of relations to reality” (30). This flexibility in the archive lends itself to fictional expressions of the many hidden, potential and alternative realities generated by arrangements of traces. Photography, as an easily manipulated material form that has a certain relation with the real but nevertheless retains the inscrutability of meaning embedded in all visual forms, is in many ways the ideal medium for structuring implicit narratives. The pertinent question may be, then, if photographs can be arranged, materially or ekphrastically to create “archival fictions” in both textual and visual forms, producing something like a dialogue of “intervisuality”, what is the nature of the fictions that are being transmitted by such
restructuring? In this chapter I have traced a particular sequence, or rather, an implicit flow of developing ideas within visual and literary culture from Cameron’s albums, to Woolf’s albums and fictions to contemporary photographic fiction.

Focusing on structure, my study of Julia Margaret Cameron’s albums demonstrates that her photographs were sequenced and re-sequenced by the artist and by succeeding generations to achieve new “representations of reality” (30). The inherent flexibility in the private scrapbook album as a space of female expression is adapted by Cameron into a semi-public album form that supports a surreal narrative, constructed from images that bear aesthetic, literary and familial, especially matrilineal, patterns. In the albums the division into categories of “Portraits”, “Madonna groups” and “Fancy Subjects” (Cox and Ford, Introduction, 2) usually perceived in Cameron’s images are blended. These patterns convey visual mourning and memorialising, the transcending of class boundaries, and re-gendered histories replete with “great” heroines that compete with male heroes. Categorical boundaries are crossed in Cameron’s compositions which suspend all “characters” within a web of fictional representation, in which diverse social and intellectual figures are aesthetically and even thematically balanced and contrasted on the page, fostering submerged, shifting narratives that reflect the progression, multiplicity and dissolution of cultural identity. Structures of meaning are also performed through the transference of ideological allusions to adjacent portraits, and references to the recipients’ current context and shared interests. All or few of themes may have been intended, as they remain at the level of the implicit, yet the ambiguity of these readings in many ways constitutes the strength of the visual sequence. Although distinctly feminist interpretations of the ordering can be made, within the diverse range of Cameron’s albums, many overlapping and even contradictory thematic and ontological strands are produced from the arrangements of a given set of traces that depend on the viewer’s perception to actualise into visual “narrative”.

Borders of time are crossed; between the ancient world and the present, between death and life, between the painted world and the photographed, and the perception of reality is acknowledged as something imbued with fiction. Yet this does not serve to reduce reality to mere fabrication, since the patterns in the albums are always tied to the bohemian social world of Freshwater a perceived through the vision of Cameron. Albums are addressed and compiled for specific social purposes and
persons, and labelling moves freely between allusion and reality and is further adapted by later owners of the albums, who also participate in their meaning. However, on a deeper level, this blended meeting of temporalities, the fiction and the real, is deeply tied to Victorian art theory and conceptions of the world, neither constituting a contradiction nor a denial; art being rather the ground on which imagination and truth meet, contiguous with Novak’s suggestion that Victorian photography constitutes a “literature of its own” (65).

Similarly, as much as the archive holds the capacity to “transform everything into fantasy”, as Farge notes (31), it always bears a compelling, if implicit, relation to the real. For perhaps, anticipating modernist dictums, the albums express the complexities of reality and memory by releasing them from a chronologically linear series of events, instead conveying the variations of real experience through a Woolfian selection of unruly elements that are imbued with multiple meanings in their relations to each other, such as those fictional traces that constitute the history of Ulverton, which circulate around the possibility of a central meaning.

If in Cameron’s albums the boundaries of time are no barrier to the creation of fictional meaning, this is a principle further evolved in Virginia Woolf’s photograph albums and photographic novels. Aesthetic and social patternning in these works takes on the quality of psychical charge also apparent in Cameron’s earlier scrapbook albums. In the archival arrangements of the Monk’s House Albums, Cameron’s photographic narratives meet the modernist “significant form” diagnosed by Humm (“Virginia Woolf’s Photography”, 220), in a process that collects and connects photographic images as nodal elements in a narrative. Woolf uses the implicit relations of the album-archive to form her own surreal narrative, which performs matrilineal patterns and exposes the contradictions which are inherent in the nature of biography, as well as those between photography and fiction. These patchwork archives of contradictory photographic elements can be seen as an implicit blueprint for Woolf’s ongoing fictional concern with narratives generated from, and assisted by, images and visual memories.

Finally, a mixture of ideas directly and indirectly inherited from Cameron and Woolf are apparent in the archival structures embedded in neo-Victorian fictions on photography. In these novels, the Victorian photograph is translated into text,
releasing its potential narrative energy. The images thus become referents whose implicit relation to other image referents in the text must be generated by the reader, if they are to discern meaning from the archival structure of the text. Contemporary neo-Victorian writers seem to be particularly drawn to Julia Margaret Cameron’s photographic style and philosophies in equating the visual with narrative. Cameron’s images carry within them literary references suggesting reference to ongoing hidden narratives and embody an intriguing matrix of the real and the unreal, natural and artificial, the historical and the present. Her High Victorian aesthetics can be pulled apart in a literary form to adapt and expose their workings, over the course of a text.

Neo-Victorian texts featuring references to multiple photographs and artworks can be perceived as creative archives that are (in)formed by the deliberate selection of original and adapted traces which enter an implicit dialogue with each other, just like documents in an archival structure, or images in an album. The archival structures are sometimes very explicit, making up the external bones of the novel itself in *Ulverton*, where the relations between photographic ekphrases express an implied never-to-be pinned down narrative, the resolution of which is only glimpsed later in Thorpe’s other archival segments. The central question of Thorpe’s patterns and re-emergences asks what can survive as meaningful when the connections between things are so unstable, implicit and subjective. There is scope here for further work to be undertaken addressing the increasing body of novels that creatively implicate or mimic archival frameworks, beyond those which address Victorian photography, which could consider in more detail the implications of the archive on narrative meaning, but space does not allow for this expanded discussion within the current project.

In other cases, such as *The True and Splendid History of the Harristown Sisters*, the novel blends and incorporates its other, the photographic archive, so that the objects are suspended in the body of the text as in a solution. Lovric’s novel works as a catalogue of Victorian visual traces, translated into ekphrases, twisted through fiction, and shot through with feminist critique. Through this, artforms and traces on every level are exposed as those which exploit the female subject as another object to appropriated and pasted over with fiction and history. Yet as in Cameron’s albums and the themes of *Ulverton*, the purpose of creating a collection is to discover meaning through comparison of traces. The protagonist’s bewildering journey
through a virtual gallery is one that is ultimately a search for fulfilment and creative authority. Contemporary portrayals of Victorian photography here circuitously return to the grand search for meaning, but are now (re-)informed by knowledge of photography’s potential deceptiveness and fictive qualities.

These novels, like Cameron’s albums, both seek to reground female creativity and authority within history, and each plays with and re-orders the supposed patriarchal archive of art history, intellectual history, and authority to do so, yet this creativity is about more than the re-negotiation of a gendered history. The neo-Victorian texts are about a vindication of the imagination, and varyingly embody the search for new meanings within the postmodern crisis of meaninglessness, as the reader is presented with a dazzling array of visual and textual traces that reflect the deceptiveness and multiplicity of modern twenty-first century life. The art of archival collage, so lauded as the prerogative of modernist art and literature, not only stretches forward into the twenty-first century art practices that are explored by Foster and Breakell, it continues to live and be replenished within contemporary literature. It may be argued that the experimental structure in neo-historical literature is now perhaps a relatively expected element of the medium, continuous with the postmodern tradition, yet the potentialities of visual rather than textual structures remain open to innovation. The study of the Victorian photograph album suggests that these creative visual structures are embedded in much older forms whose organising principles, inherited and mediated by the image montages of Virginia Woolf, find their way obliquely into contemporary fiction. Victorian photographic montage is revealed in Julia Margaret Cameron’s albums to be the birthplace of a continuing legacy of experimentation in archival narrative.
Chapter Three

Blurred Temporalities

Figure 27. Julia Margaret Cameron, [Julia Jackson], “Thackeray Album”, 5 (1864-c.1875); Julia Margaret Cameron, Daisy (1864).

“What is aura? A peculiar web of space and time: the unique manifestation of distance, however near it may be” (Benjamin, “A Short History of Photography”, 20).

If photographic archives play creatively with space, then they perform complex dances with time. The relation of the photograph to time is a subject that has obsessed commentators since the beginnings of its theorisation, unlike its relation to space, which has only recently received major attention in photography’s materialist turn. It is in the intersection of these planes, however, that photograph’s complexity and imaginative quality ultimately lies, in “a peculiar web of space and time”, as Benjamin notes above. This “manifestation of distance” consists not merely in the impression of separation from the past but also includes its opposite – a sense of drawing closer to history. Julia Margaret Cameron’s images particularly articulate photography’s strange relationship between temporal alienation and identification in their physical composition, but also further disturb this by introducing a variety of
temporal filters into the subject matter, fictional, mythical and historical, even depicting the Greek Goddess of Memory, *Mnemosyne*, which Batchen identifies as a suggestion by Cameron that “photography itself is an art of memory” (8). This temporal complexity is then manifested in the “space” of her albums, whereby such different materialisations of time are allowed to enter a dialogue with each other. Such complexity is linked in this chapter to nineteenth-century and neo-Victorian fictions that play with temporality in relation to Victorian photography and which reference Cameron’s work: Anne Thackeray Ritchie’s “From an Island” (1877) and Gail Jones’ *Sixty Lights* (2004).

Images and artworks of all kinds perform manipulations of time and temporal structures in fiction. Liliane Louvel has written about how the image “contributes to create an effect of suspense when it modifies the treatment of time in the narrative, producing an effect of deceleration, a freeze frame in keeping with the rhetorical function of the description, which is to be the *amplificatio* of the text” (*Poetics*, 109). In the following discussion, photography is particularly pertinent as a freeze frame device that calls the narrative flow to halt at a concentrated moment that has an amplified impact like a powerful chord. Yet as well as the formal manipulation of time elements, photographs are also deeply involved with more fluid perceptions of time. Photography is being increasingly articulated through the criterion of memory, particularly through the medium of cultural memory studies and its concentration on the experiential impact of relics from the past and their resurgence in contemporary cultural forms, which makes it an especially apt discipline for this study. The concepts of the archive and memory are very closely intertwined. Karen Cross and Julia Peck have recently noted “[m]emory itself is often characterized as an archive: a storehouse of things, meanings and images” (“Editorial”, 127). If so, the material archive can also be seen as a form of memory in things, meanings, and pertinently, images. Pierre Nora writes, in his seminal essay on “lieux de memoire” or auratic sites of memory, that “[m]odern memory, is above all archival. It relies entirely on the materiality of the trace, the immediacy of recording, the visibility of the image” (13). Nora is here lamenting the hardening of memory into that which is an object seen from the outside, but if the archive is in turn flooded with memory, its supposed rigidity can be broken down and blurred. In this way, both memory and the archive can be considered as simultaneously tangible and intangible, material or fictional,
making this intersection particularly relevant to a study of links between photographic traces and literature. Cultural memory, in particular, recognises that archival objects have resonance beyond the particular times and contexts of their initial use, and is of especial relevance to photographs with their insistent reach into the future as well as the past.

It has been suggested that “the nexus of photography, archive and memory is yet to be fully explored” (Cross and Peck, “Editorial”, 127). This is a claim that this chapter seeks to address, but with the crucial addition of fiction to the nexus. It has been the argument of this thesis that fiction enters into the study of both photography and the archive, and in this chapter, I make the claim also for memory. Memory in relation to the photograph has often been associated with the fixing of historical power structures which have been the major preoccupation of much late twentieth-century photography criticism, including that of John Tagg and Victor Burgin, until it seems difficult to believe that the photographic archive cannot “involve anything other than the negative operations of power” (Cross and Peck, “Editorial”, 128).

Esther Leslie conversely argues that visual technologies became productive tropes for representing memory as intrinsically fluid for modernist theorists and writers, including Walter Benjamin. In this way, photography has increasingly become a means of exploring the persistence and malleability of memory itself for writers of the modernist and postmodernist eras.

This chapter seeks to embrace the fictive qualities of memory and time in relation to the photographic archive, to look past photography’s relation to memory as a socio-political function and to encounter it as a resonant dynamic. In this way, I treat photographic images’ capacity to blur, split and materialise time and memory as inherently fictional and having the ability to create fictions. To do this, I focus on two examples of Julia Margaret Cameron’s full-size presentation albums, the “Thackeray Album” and the “Herschel Album”, whose portraits and illustrative images, selected to produce a profound aesthetic impression on the viewer and to be “read” slowly and carefully, produce a complicated mosaic of temporal dynamics that interrelate with a mesh of fictions and histories. I link the dynamics of these albums with two post-Cameronian texts that manipulate photographic time and memory to produce fiction in narrative form: Anne Thackeray Ritchie’s “From an Island” and Gail Jones’s Sixty Lights. These four “texts” all play with the suspension
and separation of photographic time, with the resonance of memory and with the
temporal implications of the fixing of light.

Photography, Cultural Memory and Translation

In her comprehensive study of cultural memory, Aleida Assmann has argued that images are mute and thus “the simultaneously precise and vague memory of the image will take on a phantom life of its own as soon as it is separated from its framing narrative, for it is only the text that can translate external images back into the language of living memory” (210, my emphasis). Whilst I agree that the displaced image does have a continuing “phantom life” that is manifested in encounters with the image and in fictionalisations of the photograph, I would say that the claim that photographs are “mute” is problematic, especially considered in the light of W.J.T. Mitchell’s claims about the speaking power of the “imagetext” in which texts are “already inside the image, perhaps most deeply when they seem to be completely absent, invisible and inaudible” (98). I follow the arguments of Mitchell, and those of Mieke Bal in Reading ‘Rembrandt’, that images convey messages of cultural memory in themselves, which can be extracted wordlessly from an image, or retrospectively applied to it by the gaze of the viewer, and which operate at a level of “speech” that initially comes before the conscious articulation of words.

On the other hand, when “translated” into language, the memory embedded in images can achieve a different form of articulation, albeit one inherently transformed between media. Louvel argues that images cannot in fact be strictly “translated” to text, as this implies a direct representation that is not possible, but rather heterogeneously transposed in an “infinite dialogue” as

the two media remain irreducible; but, they have been brought as close as possible, their friction being creative. And the text is all the richer for it, for it also displays tolerance and openness, that of limitless or unprejudiced invention ready to experiment beyond boundaries (“From Intersemiotic to Intermedial Transposition”, 25).

12 Louvel adopts this term from Foucault as one of the central terms of her theory of pictoriality within novels.
It is Louvel’s formulation that it is the impossibility of exact representation that provides the creative space with which fictions can be born from the image. However, taking this admission on board, I find the term “translation” more useful not only due to the associations it has gathered in theoretical works of several disciplines including photographic criticism and cultural memory, but also because Cameron herself was a translator and commented on translation as a phenomenon.

“Translation” can also work in the reverse direction to that of pictoriality, instead moving from text to image; indeed photography itself can be considered as inherently an act of translation. Langford considers that taking a photograph is the first step in a series of “act[s] of translation” (*Suspended Conversations*, 19), whilst Eduardo Cadava writes that “[t]he disjunction that characterizes the relation between a photograph and the photographed corresponds to the caesura between a translation and an original” (15). Thus to photograph something is figured as a textual act or transformation, yet in a wider sense the “original” to be translated, may not only be the physical persons or things being captured, but a cultural text or even an idea. In Julia Margaret Cameron’s works, the memories of texts are translated into images. Cameron’s work often employs cultural memory in relation to shared Victorian cultural knowledge, or what I have elsewhere labelled an archival imagination.

The theme of “translation” is peculiarly apt in relation to Cameron, whose first published work was a translation of Gottfried Bürger’s poem “Leonora” from the German. In her preface to this work, she claims to produce the most directly literal copy of the poem in contrast to Scott’s and Walter Taylor’s translations (vi). This assertion is made in a spirit of boastful modesty that appears to be intended to belie her real ambition but ends up resulting in an almost transparent act of self-promotion. Yet even in this insistence on lack of creative spirit, Cameron writes that the “sole merit” of her work is in “accurately and vividly representing” the original (v). The possibility of a copy being both accurate and vivid seems like a contradiction – “vividly representing” implies an act of magnification, highlighting, bringing to life. Yet, it is no such thing in Cameron’s philosophy, in which a “translation” may be both truthful and illuminating; by representing the original in a new medium, one makes the essence of it more apparent, brighter, and somehow clearer. This is tellingly expressed in her later statement that she has “studied only to catch the likeness of a beautiful picture” (vii). Olsen notes that this phrase bears
much similarity to Cameron’s outlining of her photographic philosophy in “Annals of My Glass House”, suggesting that the appearance of modesty in each case, was designed to shield her from male criticism (69). Looking in more detail, Cameron confuses text and vision by figuring the original text as a visual form, which must be “translated” to paraphrase Assmann, “into the language of living memory”.

“Catching a likeness” is a phrase that suggests a doubled position, both implying the taking of an accurate copy and the admittance of a fleeting attempt to represent an original. In the introduction to _Leonora_, Cameron sees herself as drawing a likeness of the original “beautiful picture” in a different medium in a manner that I believe proves a grounding philosophy for her photographic work. For Cameron reproduces features of her sitters accurately or “From Life”, taking their “likenesses”, but also depicting them through the vivid prism of the cultural texts she uses as subjects, the shared memory of her social circle and the chance of expression implied in “catching a likeness”.

With present lifespans of only 150 years, Cameron’s albums are archival objects that have picked up cultural associations like a sponge, coloured as they are by the Freshwater Circle, the Bloomsbury group, and the work of Helmut Gernsheim, whose explanatory annotation is still extant on many of the album pages. They are full of memory, but this memory is conditional, influenced by fiction and cultural history. Yet this is not unusual for a body of photographs – Langford regards any such intertemporal reading of photograph albums as involving “an act of translation” inevitably “tinted by nostalgia and shaped by our knowledge of subsequent events” (_Suspended Conversations_, 20). In Cameron’s case, culture and memory has “translated” the albums into a kind of fiction; producing an aura which intermingles with the fictional elements already present in the images.

Assmann makes a division between “artificial” and “natural” memory, arguing of the former that “canon and archive presuppose systematic organization, economy and accessibility” whilst natural memories “which record our sensual perceptions and biographical experiences, generally remain in a productive or destructive state of unmastered disorder” that “remains unsystematic, contingent and incoherent. What holds it together is the magic web of variable, individual associations” (149). Yet these “artificial” memories can be later informed and coloured by “natural” memories, a phenomenon that can be observed in Cameron’s image of Julia Jackson.
in the “Thackeray Album” (Fig. 27, p.160) which is held in an implicit web of “variable, individual associations” of multiple generations, artistic techniques, literary iconoclasm and Victorian melancholia.

The photograph album is undoubtedly a form of artificial memory, but is no less contingent for that; it does not fit into the prescribed archival paradigm that is suggested by “systematic organization”. Not only can it be manipulated and re-ordered, but even when it is read in a fixed order, the album mimics the vagaries of memory itself whereby individual images are called into association with each other through the process of reading, and filtered through “sensual perception and biographical experiences”. Adrian Duran and Anne Leighton Massoni have recently argued that linear narratives are further exploded when the album is not centred around an individual’s experiences, but is made of fabulist invented memories that bend time, becoming a “desirous projection, a making of histories yet to come – or that could not have been or may never be” so that the finished product is “an alchemical self-determination, a writing of a truth born of fiction” (202). Whilst Duran and Massoni are here discussing postmodern reworkings of the album space, Cameron’s non-linear albums of characters and ideas cannot be reduced to a definitive set of moments or facts; they operate as a fictional text of imagined histories, “a desirous projection”, a “magic web” (Assmann, 149). The image within the album demonstrates the potential flexibility of archival memory, what it has meant and what it might mean in the future are both uncertain. In Cameron’s albums, material fragments speak to one another, shedding the drops of other people’s memories as they meet the mind of the viewer and recrystallizing them into new “translations” in “the language of living memory”.

Like the chaotic blend of memories developed in Cameron’s albums since their creation, the neo-Victorian texts in this thesis attempt to “translate” the complex cultural memory of Cameron’s photographs into fictional representations relevant to the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Like Cameron, they attempt intangibly to “catch the likeness of a beautiful picture”, and place those pictures in new contexts. These “likenesses” are not accurate copies of the content of an image but “catch” their qualities of vision, style, and technique. In this chapter, I explore “likenesses” or “translations” in fiction of the temporal distortions in Cameron’s photographs and albums. This can later be seen in discussions of Thackeray
Ritchie’s “translation” of Cameron’s photographs into fictionalised memories, and in Gail Jones’ *Sixty Lights*, in which life has the temporal resonance and elusive disjointedness of a photograph album. Firstly, I demonstrate how time and cultural memory are means of aesthetic expression in Cameron’s albums, where, as for Jones’s characters, “[a] catalogue of shared experiences is dissolved in clouds of unknowing” (59).

**Mirror Time: The Photograph as Self-Reflection**

“Let's pretend the glass has got all soft like gauze, so that we can get through. Why, it's turning into a sort of mist now, I declare! It'll be easy enough to get through -- ‘She was up on the chimney-piece while she said this, though she hardly knew how she had got there. And certainly the glass was beginning to melt away, just like a bright silvery mist.’ (Lewis Carroll, “Through the Looking-Glass”, *The Annotated Alice*, 149)

The pivotal moment when Alice climbs into the looking-glass has become one of the most discussed episodes in literary history. It has been seen as the archetypal modern literary example of the Lacanian “mirror stage” in which the child first recognises themselves as a coherent individual whose image then becomes a displaced identity. Hélène Cixous suggested that such a neatly fitting Lacanian reading ignores the disruptive possibilities of the looking-glass as inverting the logic of cause and effect in a manner that presages the possibility of death (238). Karen Coats has more recently addressed the psychoanalytical implications of looking-glass world as a more sustained displacement into a fictional self by noting that Alice “has entered into the process of self-alienation that comes from knowing oneself through an external image” (86).

Yet, pulling aside this heavy theoretical curtain for a moment, what strikes me is that the physicality of the passage bears remarkably similar qualities to viewing nineteenth-century photographs. The “silvery” surface of the early daguerreotype had a notoriously uncertain and magical quality, whereby the subject could only properly be viewed from a certain angle or else fall out of view, as Allen Trachtenberg has observed, arguing that the daguerreotype “has weight yet behaves like a ghost” (173). The wet collodion photographic techniques that Carroll used
himself,\(^\text{13}\) also involved the extensive use of chemicals including silver nitrate and the use of glass plate negatives. Thus the process involves another form of mirror, in which a different form of reversal is performed, this time chromatic, rather than symmetrical. Considering Carroll as a prolific photographer, one could hardly fail to connect the qualities of the “looking-glass” and the wet collodion plate. Cixous, in fact, connects Carroll’s photographic work as a “fixer of light” with the novel’s frequent scenes of “frozen desire” (246). Yet the liquid language used by Carroll to describe the mirror’s surface – “soft like gauze”, “a bright silvery mist” – is hardly redolent of his own precise, stagey images of young girls. Instead, these phrases seem more appropriate to the blurred effects in Cameron’s photographs, derided by Carroll (Olsen, 155-6), which have a tactile quality like soft gauze and at the same time, create the illusion of an intangible “mist”, which may be there and not there. In images such as Daisy (Fig. 27, p.160), it is possible to imagine “the glass beginning to melt away, just like a bright silvery mist” (Carroll, 149), but such fantasies of traversing the photographic frame or the mirror glass always reiterate the presence of a barrier. It would be difficult to contend that Carroll had Cameron in mind in writing this passage, but it might be suggested that the qualities of her work may have been a potentially latent influence on it. However, the connection really underlines the notion that there is some quality in Cameron’s photography akin to a semi-permeable mirror, presenting a space of identification that the viewer desires to move into yet must remain eternally outside.

A significant body of critical writing supports this claim. I return here to Green-Lewis’s argument that our present relationship to Victorian photography has the quality of a desire to identify with the past (“At Home”). We are visited by the fantasy that we can step through the frame and find ourselves within another world, like Alice stepping through the mirror, only this time stepping not simply into fictional space but into the depths of another time (31). This identification is particularly effective, says Green-Lewis, because of the most famous Victorian photographers including Cameron, “[a]lmost all are elegiac in their invitation to look

\(^{13}\) Carroll’s familiarity with the wet-collodion process is in evidence in a description of its chemical treatments in his poem “Hiawatha’s Photography”. This social comedy in verse does not resemble the elegiac qualities of Through the Looking-Glass other to say that the process is “mystic and awful” (16). This poem also features parodic descriptions of artistic and studio photography including a young man who mimics Ruskin’s prescriptions for curved forms in his pose, but predates Cameron’s work by eight years.
back – they already have […] a relationship with the past that is itself an expression of the way that they are used today” (39). Cameron also produced images where the subject is visibly looking into a mirror, including an image of May Prinsep that Sylvia Wolf considers to be “not simply […] an allegorical subject or a vanity pose, but […] a contemplation and questioning of women’s identity” (47). Lindsay Smith suggests that this can be taken further by arguing that Cameron’s child-portraits are “situated at the distance of self-reflection in a looking glass” (Politics of Focus, 48). Following this thread, I argue that many of Cameron’s images, particularly her “Life-Sized Heads” (Cox and Ford, Introduction, 3), display an intrinsic mirror quality, which constructs both identity, time and memory, creating a sense of elegiac time-slip.

What image more commands identification than one that appears to mirror the perspective of the viewer? Benjamin argued in “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire” that “to perceive the aura of an image we look at means to invest it with the ability to look at us in return” (my emphasis, Illuminations, 188), and Caroline Duttlinger has discussed the way in which Benjamin suggests that the gaze of the sitter themselves is a “conduit, enabling his imaginary entry into the picture” (93). Similarly, aura seems to be pre-invested in many of Cameron’s images, through an integral suggestion of the returned look. This effect is crucial to the appeal of the “Life-Sized Heads” which Cameron specifically intended to “electrify and startle” the viewer (qtd. in Weiss, 21) and in which she was a pioneer.

In Cameron’s exhibitions, the placement of such life-size images at head height in a gallery would have intensified this effect by bringing the viewer into direct parallel with the subject. One’s eyes appear to meet those of the long dead sitter, encouraging an uncanny identification of equals, whether the subject is child or adult, male or female. MacKay has argued persuasively that such images are “mirror-like confrontations” and that Cameron’s “mirroring and doubling weave an illustrated tale of transpersonal femaleness” that obliquely refers to the images’ self-reflexive autobiographical qualities (Creative Negativity, 45). These images call to a multi-faceted self that can be read through the eyes, working as “a series of soliloquies – providing us with access to a kind of imaginary internal discourse” (“Soaring Between Home and Heaven”, 67). The viewer thus identifies with the historical or literary subject of the image, its creator, as well as, in a reflexive sense, themselves.
The internal figures of Cameron’s cultural history are “translated” into the external and accessible reality of the nineteenth-century photograph. Cameron invites us to step into facets of the past with her, through the direct gaze of her sitters and models.

In the following section, through the analysis of several Cameron portraits and their literary sources, I argue that the interaction with the interiority of the photographic subject mimics an act of looking into the mirror and thus a desire to step into different relations to time and the self. This powerful phenomenon gestures towards the desire to “know[…] oneself through an external image” like Coats’s Alice (86), that through the form of the album resolves into an exploration and extension of identity.

Whilst it may be countered that this mirror effect may already have been experienced through representations of the direct gaze in painted portraiture and moreover, that studying portraiture is overtly not looking at oneself in a purely logical sense, it can be related to a turn towards subjectivity and the inward in the Victorian dynamics of looking, identified separately, by Jonathan Crary and Kate Flint. Flint particularly notes a link between the trope of the mirror, divided perceptions of female identity, and the condition of vision in paintings of the period, arguing that the mirror can be made to stand for the ways in which aesthetic understanding was becoming problematized; the ways in which a dialogue was developing between the practice of observation and the role of subjectivity (Victorians and Visual Imagination, 237)

The photograph presents a facsimile of a porous surface, mimicking the subjective phenomenon by which any person, looking in a mirror sees not herself but a created character separated, yet informed by, her interior consciousness. Thus, if the mirror does not represent the essential copy of oneself, then the portrait photograph may point to possible visualised subjectivities that may evoke the interior consciousness of the self in a disembodied manner. To adapt Lynda Nead, who argues that in a mirror, “[woman] experiences herself as an image” (qtd. in Flint, Victorians and Visual Imagination, 237), in Cameron’s large-scale portraiture, woman experiences an image as herself.

Cameron’s early image of Daisy, shown in Figure 1, was taken before her development of “life-size heads” but bears resemblance to these later works. The
image shows the sitter with her head tilted towards the viewer, intensifying her apparently troubled gaze. The hand placed on her chest could be considered as resembling an act of self-identification, self-awareness and self-protection. This also functions in the image’s appeal to an audience where the photograph appears as a mirror, a vision of self-analysis that encourages identification; it is one of the portraits that is “situated at the distance of self-reflection in a looking glass” (Smith, Politics of Focus, 48). The abstract stripes behind Daisy’s head, suggest both an informal setting, and an unsettling harshness that ties to her recalcitrant expression. Meeting the gaze of the image, especially on a life-size scale, produces a sense of concurrent time, a simultaneity of returned looks – creating an impression not merely of looking at a subject, but of looking at a mirror, at a figure standing for oneself.

The early image of Daisy was evidently considered as success for it appears in the carefully selected “Herschel Album”, designed to demonstrate Cameron’s photographic powers to her scientific mentor, Sir John Herschel. Whilst on one hand, the flaws in the negative testify to the materiality of the object as a trace and thus its displacement from the present, at the same time, the front-facing gaze in the image insists on a form of present connection. Whilst being aware that the original girl has gone, has grown up and passed away, the viewer sees and connects with her as a mirror presence. This is complicated by the fact that, like Alice’s looking-glass, the suggestion of a mirror presents a fictional intangible world, not a fixed trace of real persons. Time in the mirror-effect photograph is both simultaneous and divided, indissolubly in a separate temporal space from the viewer and yet undeniably insistent on its presence, recorded evidence that yet partakes in the mirror’s intrinsic fictitiousness.

Cameron’s range of full-face portraits present several modes of self-reflectiveness to the viewer. Many enact an overtly fictional reflectiveness in which the subject represents a specific character which the viewer is called to identify with. In Annie Lee, Cameron’s frequent child model Katie Keown portrays the isolated wife from Tennyson’s narrative poem “Enoch Arden” (Fig. 28). The gaze of the sitter meets the eyes of the viewer with the expression of an accessible, legible self, as if we meet the eyes of one whom we could otherwise only encounter in the internal world of reading. For one familiar with the poem, it could be experienced as if projected from
the mind’s eye onto a surface. The child character of Annie Lee also has an appropriate temporal poignancy that makes an apposite subject for the frozen future-past of a photograph. The image is taken from the beginning of Tennyson’s poem, already set “a hundred years ago” (10), in which Enoch and Annie’s childhood affection and triangular relationship with Philip Ray, is set up as a pre-figurative pattern of tensions that haunts the rest of the poem. The image conjures the temporal slippage and irony of Tennyson’s text, by representing the illusory desire of the adult Enoch to return to this apparently idealised childhood state, a state which ironically already prefigures the complexity of the protagonists’ adult lives. This temporal interplay is then enacted by the self-reflexive viewer, who, due to the mirror quality of the image – like Daisy, Annie Lee has a direct scrutinising gaze and lays a self-identifying hand on herself – is encouraged to identify with a memory of the childhood of an adult character, whose future self is implicated yet absent from the image. The literary connections thus separate the image from a simple portrayal of a child to be admired; instead the sitter appears to portray both an adult and a child.¹⁴

Temporal uncertainty is expressed through the particular aesthetics of Annie Lee as well as its literary status. The slight blur of the image and the hair which fades into the blackness, leaving the face isolated, suggests that we are seeing “Annie” through the filter of uncertain time, an effect found in many Cameron portraits.¹⁵

Significantly here, the dolefully solemn expression of the sitter, Katie Keown,

¹⁴ The prefiguring of adult traumas in images of children appears to have been a favourite theme of Cameron’s, also being observable in her *Paul and Virginia* (1864) (Cox and Ford, *Complete Photographs*, 122-123), an illustrative image based on a popular novel by Saint-Pierre, which also portrays the idyllic childhood of characters later to be separated as adults.

¹⁵ This is one of Cameron’s most recognisable effects. See, for example, portraits of Julia Jackson/Duckworth, Carlyle, Herschel etc. as well as “fancy pictures” like Iago (1867) (Fig. 2) and *The Mountain Nymph Sweet Liberty* (1866) (Fig. 29, discussed below) which use darkened backgrounds to place the subjects outside of normal time constraints.
appears to prefigure or warn of “Annie’s” eventual fate, an unwittingly bigamous marriage to Philip Ray conducted whilst her husband is stranded on a remote island. Tennyson evokes the adult Annie’s uncertainty on her second marriage: “But never merrily beat Annie's heart / A footstep seem'd to fall beside her path, / She knew not whence; a whisper in her ear, / She knew not what;” (509-512). In her portrait, Cameron seems to combine the opening of the poem and its portrayal of the “dawn of rosy childhood” (37) with the quality of this later haunted feeling, so her single image of Annie Lee is able to conglomerate a memory of childhood from the perspective of an adult with a foreboding of future adulthood from the perspective of the child.

The photograph’s themes intertwine with the poem’s heavy investment in memory as abstract visual force, expressed in a central passage concerning Enoch’s mental impressions whilst marooned on the island:

A phantom made of many phantoms moved
Before him haunting him, or he himself
Moved haunting people, things and places, known
Far in a darker isle beyond the line;
The babes, their babble, Annie, the small house,
The climbing street, the mill, the leafy lanes,
The peacock-yewtree and the lonely Hall,
The horse he drove, the boat he sold, the chill
November dawns and dewy-glooming downs,
The gentle shower, the smell of dying leaves,
And the low moan of leaden-colour'd seas. (598-608).

Tennyson figures the memory of Annie as somewhere between tangible and visual, it “moved before him”, suggesting the simultaneously ethereal and material nature of a photograph. Cameron bears out Tennyson’s concept of “[a] phantom made of many phantoms” by producing an image of Annie Lee that contains within it many temporalities and memory perspectives that float together in the “phantom”-like blurred image. Alison Chapman’s analysis of this photograph’s relation to “Enoch Arden” suggests that Cameron “places her [Annie] back in the centre” as “a subject and agent in her own right” and “feminizes both the materiality of vision and its
trace” (63), but I would suggest that Cameron’s image represents Enoch’s memory of Annie as much as a portrait of the character “in her own right”. The informed viewer of the photograph therefore takes the place of Enoch looking at Annie, as well as viewing an introspective mirror of Annie herself. Chapman suggests that Cameron portrays Annie as “representing a fading subject whose boundaries of self are in the process of dissolution” (63). By reading the image through “Enoch Arden”’s focus on visual memory, rather than considering it as primarily a reassessment of the poem’s gender relations, this “dissolution” as an expression of temporal flexibility makes more sense; it is as if Annie’s identity has been floated in the memories of others and thus lacks centre (and conventional focus) in an identifiable present. Cameron and Tennyson thus share a deep fascination with the uncertain dynamics of representing visual memory, concerns that the poet also expresses in other works illustrated by Cameron, such as “The Gardener’s Daughter” in which the protagonist paints an image based on a distant memory (212). In fact, Tennyson’s portrayal of Enoch’s indecision as to whether he is haunted or “he himself / Moved haunting, people, things and places” could express the uncertain reflexivity of many of Cameron’s mirror portraits where identity is both haunted and haunting, magnetically present and temporally dispersed.

The Mountain Nymph Sweet Liberty (1866) (Fig. 29), which among several prints appears in the “Herschel Album”, performs a different sort of fictional mirror as it is based, not on a realist character, but on an allegorical figure from Milton’s poem “L’Allegro”, symbolising freedom, space and the pleasures of youth. The confrontational gaze of the nymph meets the eyes of the viewer with something between a challenge and a call to a responsive desire for freedom. The sitter gives the impression of reaching us from both outside of time and from many times, from the Dimbola glasshouse in 1866, from the seventeenth century of Milton, from mythology, from the non-time of poetic metaphor.

This combination of cultural memories ends up, not so much as a cross-hatched map of specific times, but as something combining and beyond all of them, condensed into the gaze of the “nymph”. The mirror effect of this portrait brings the viewer into a kind of metaphysical contact with being outside time, and thus always in a time concurrent to the viewer. The famous effect by which the subject is “thrusting her head out from the paper”, according to Sir John Herschel (qtd. in Cameron,
“Annals”, 12), intensifies the gaze by its focus on the eyes, nose and mouth, so that the nymph appears to be engaged in an act of looking at which we are looking – so that in meeting the eyes of the portrait, we are engaged in a form of mirror activity.

Cameron’s interpretation of Milton’s nymph does not conform to conventional classical tropes. Her “mountain nymph” is dressed, not in a draped white linen, but in dark rough wrappings, and her face is angular and faintly Nordic, its sharpness emphasised by the focus on the facial features, and the cheeks are flushed as if chafed by the air. Comparing this image to Cameron’s *Teachings from the Elgin Marbles* (1867) (Cox and Ford, *Complete Photographs*, 453), one of her most conventionally classical images, with its rounded cheeks and limbs, pure fabrics and use of strong light, suggests that she intended something darker and earthier for the “mountain” nymph. Added to this, the nymph’s serious expression belies Milton’s suggestion that with her one may “Come and trip it as ye go / On the light fantastic toe” (33-34), unless in some strange sombre dance. Rather than attempting to capture Milton’s pace of movement, Cameron introduces a space of stillness and identification as in her image of *Annie Lee*, to produce a mirror whereby one comes face to face with a spirit, and is called to identify with a metaphor. Cameron’s

Figure 29. Julia Margaret Cameron, *The Mountain Nymph Sweet Liberty* (1866).
nymph is cold and still, not warm and lively; like Keats’s figures on the Grecian Urn, her effect is to “tease us out of thought / As doth eternity” (44-45). As in Keats’s Ode, Cameron isolates a metaphoric figure from its origins, and presents it as a vitally direct yet suspended presence, yet she creates this effect through a photograph, using that most temporally specific of media in her own attempt to somehow get outside of time. MacKay considers “time dilation and suspension” and “the interplay of reality and illusion” to be some of Cameron’s “trademark features” (“Soaring Between”, 84) and in the Mountain Nymph these characteristics meet at what may be considered the zenith of the artist’s call to abstraction.

The use of the material representations of physical persons to effect an escape into this “non-time” is found in many of Cameron’s more metaphorical works. Mirroring is found, not merely in the relationship between the viewer and the subject but between subjects themselves, who in many of the group portraits function as reflections of each other. This produces the sense that the intended meaning or action of the piece lies between the subjects, just as I have argued the intended meaning of Cameron’s photographic selection lies between images in the albums. An exciting example can be found in Cameron’s 1866 image The Dialogue (Fig. 30) which appears in the “Herschel Album”. The Complete Photographs refers to three possible poems to which the two versions of this image may refer. These include John and Charles Wesley’s poem between Christ and man, James Howell’s “The Dialogue” about the muses and art and John Byrne Leicester Warren’s 1862 “The Dialogue of Life” between Cassandra and Aeneas (Cox and Ford, Complete Photographs, 522). Whichever is the true source, it is not insignificant that Cameron chooses to translate one of these morally serious poems into a dialogue between two women; the depth of the purported converse being conveyed not merely by their expressions but through their positioning, whereby their features are horizontally aligned in the frame. Yet they exist in a mirrored relation only in the eyes of the viewer; on their own terms, they gaze obliquely across each other, or into the flat space of the frame that contains the other, without directly making eye contact. This draws attention to the space between them as three dimensional, which is further implied by the blurred focusing of May Prinsep on the right in relation to the sharper focus on Mary Hillier on the left. The centre of the image is not either of the models’ faces, or the strip of darkness that sits between their heads, but the centre point of their gazes which
apparently converges just in front of the frame, midway between their heads. Thus the centre of the image is not in the image itself. Of course, in real space, the models’ gazes would not meet at all, but exist at uncrossed right angles, but the mirroring of their heads leads the viewer to half-project May Prinsep’s eyeline forward to a focal point in front of the image.

Figure 30. Julia Margaret Cameron, *The Dialogue*, detail from “Herschel Album”, 54 (1864-1867).

The deliberate confusion of lines of vision in Cameron’s group images “emphasiz[es] a multiplicity of gazes that both verifies individual identity and disperses it” according to MacKay (“Soaring Between”, 67) but as well as questioning the individual, I would argue that this technique refers to implicit communication between the figures. In *The Dialogue*, the double optical effect both separates and draws the subjects together. They appear to meet each other’s gazes and see through each other simultaneously, the result of which is markedly different from the physical closeness suggested by body contact in many of Cameron’s maternal images. The crossed gaze of the eyes is a form of mental contact, a mirroring that lies between identifying as oneself and as another, or internally “the self and the meta-self” (MacKay, 65), hence embodying the concept of *Dialogue*, a discourse that lies between two voices. Thus the mirror meeting in *The Dialogue*
bears resemblance to the tacit communion with the observer found in the single “full-face” portraits. In this image, Cameron claims for female the ability to hold a more disembodied, mental communication, departing here from the tactile female relationships prominent in her Madonna and child portraits.

This disembodied communication can be related to the theme of stepping outside of time. A dialogue, of course, implies the passage of events, the turns of an argument, but the illustrative photograph holds that space in a symbolic pause that synecdochically stands for the whole. As a potential source for the poem, Warren’s “The Dialogue of Life” published under his pseudonym, George F. Preston, addresses stillness and movement within time as figures for the relation of endurance and heroism, which lends weight to a case for it being the origin of the image. The poem concerns a dialogue between Cassandra and Aeneas in which nature, figured as “patient, exquisitely patient / waiting eternity in solemn calm” (Preston, 7-8) is contrasted with Cassandra’s protest that her “heart seethes and boils and is so restless. / I have not greatness, faith enough, for patience, / Or to abide eternity” (26-28). This conflict echoes the relation between stillness and tension in Cameron’s photograph, in which the title effectively animates the qualities of movement that already lie in the image, whilst at the same time, an air of peculiarly solemn immobility is maintained that is noticeable, even considering the work is a photograph. This unnatural arrangement of the figures coupled with this suggestion of movement evoke the frozen tableaux of Greek sculpture, that takes us back to Keats and is also conjured by the themes of stillness in Warren’s poem.

Warren’s “Dialogue” is also strongly concerned with the value of posterity, a concern that maps easily onto Cameron’s signature themes, positing that “Tis only sound / Hardly reality; for shall we care / if ages hence that name that once we were / Meet censure or find worship?” (67-70). The two female heads, in their frozen tension, may then possibly be questioning the permanency of fame, life and the photographic image itself. Given the resemblance of the faces, this photograph could also works as a self-reflexive projection, with the mirrored image of two women somehow standing for the artist questioning herself. Considering Cameron’s fascination with photographic posterity (noted in Boyce, 103), the dynamics could suggest the dual roles of her vocation, one who is concerned with sending images into the future, and is simultaneously concerned with exploring and preserving the
past. The disembodied space highlighted by the crossed sight lines of the models suggests a dialogic meeting point where such questions are held in unresolved tension. Whatever the source of the image, singular or plural, it is evident that Cameron’s *The Dialogue* highlights tensions between stillness and movement, in mind as well as body, and through the gap between its youthful mirrored figures suggests an abstraction from the present action of being, where disembodied thoughts may meet. Given the temporal character of photography and Cameron’s obsession with immortality, it is not improbable to suggest that this tension refers to questions regarding the permanency of ideas and thoughts that lie between and beyond human beings, and whether such things can be made permanent by fixing them in material form. In other words, the photograph questions whether the trace can carry the weight of intangible ideas, as Cameron so wished that it would.

Crucial to the temporal themes in Cameron’s images, and her project to represent the intangible visually, are her use of deep shadow and light. I argue that this is expressed not only in the *chiaroscuro* effect that can precisely light the lineaments of her subjects, but in her use of blocks of darkness and light to signify the meaning of space. For example, in *The Dialogue*, the deeply dark area behind the figures bears the suggestion of a removed space of thought. My assertion is that in Cameron’s works, these blocks of darkness and light foreground the figures but are also invested with symbolic meaning.

This meaning is brought into relief when purposefully contrasted in image montages in her albums, most dramatically so in the case of mirrored pairs of images. For this purpose, I shall be looking at such a pair of images in the “Thackeray Album”, *La Madonna Vigilante* and *A Sibyl after the Manner of Michelangelo* (Fig. 31). Joanne Lukitsh notes in her article on the “Thackeray Album” that the arrangement of the initial 1864 images was “organised and concerted” as a demonstration of Cameron’s artistry and tailored to the recipient’s needs (48), and furthermore that facing images “influence interpretations” of each other (53). Taking this further, I consider the images in the “Thackeray Album” as performing metaphorical, aesthetic and narrative patterning, forming a creatively structured archive, as outlined in the arguments of the previous chapter. In this section, I consider the arrangement of facing images as taking up the themes of mirroring and time displayed in many of Cameron’s singular works.
The above images function as an aesthetically cohesive pair when placed together due to a number of linkages and counterbalances, most fundamentally, that of shadow contrast. The key note of pure whiteness in La Madonna Vigilante is set against the darker key tone of the Sibyl, which effect is chiefly rendered through the light blocking of the models’ garments as well as the tone of the background and props. This particular print of La Madonna Vigilante is especially bright and chromatically differentiated; the copy given in The Complete Photographs is far more smudged and darkened (144). Effects of overwhelming light are often used by Cameron to indicate ethereality and a sense of pure holiness, and thus a movement into the eternal. This glorification of light is evident in many of the Madonna and classical images and especially in images celebrating the innocence of children, concentrating the dispersed meanings of individuals identified by MacKay (“Soaring Between”, 67) in a radiance that seeks to overpower. This symbolism is also

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16 Cameron’s label in the “Thackeray Album” spells sibyl as “sybil” and Michelangelo as “Michaelangelo” (see mounting on Fig. 31). In my text, I will be following Cox and Ford’s corrected spelling for this image which adopts Cameron’s spelling on other versions of this image (123-125).
observable in another facing pair of images in the same album, *The Infant Bridal* and *The Double Star* (“Thackeray Album”, 41 - 42) where effects of the lens have caused each pair of twinned subjects to be surrounded by circles of light evidently meant to be taken as akin to haloes, which Olsen has claimed joins the subjects together in a singular enmeshed identity that expresses the intended allegorical themes (22). Countering this bright light, the *Sibyl* is draped in dark fabrics within a murky background which indicate a different kind of mysteriousness. Interestingly, Cameron’s *Sibyl* adopts the posture but not the tone of her inspiration for this image, Michelangelo’s “Erythraean Sibyl” in the Sistine Chapel (Weiss, 17). Cameron could have chosen to portray her Sibyl with a pallid glow that would imitate the fresco, demonstrated in her Madonna images, yet she chose to produce an image that is prevalently darker in tone. It is my contention that Cameron loosely uses darkness in her photographs as a signifier of the unknowable and mysterious. If light, in the Christian figuration that Cameron works through, symbolises revelatory knowledge and points towards an overwhelming future of comprehension, then darkness might therefore suggest impenetrable otherness, and the subsequent mystery of the future. The *Sibyl* is, of course, one who looks forward, like Cassandra, to the darkness of human failures as well as triumphs, and is embedded in a mysticism in which the future appears cloudy and contingent, that is in some ways antithetical to the Madonna’s biblical promise of a certain and unstained future.

The intersection of the use of light with the symbolic associations of the subject matter in this contrasting pair of images, for me, lends weight to the idea that light and darkness are invested with complementary meanings in Cameron’s general oeuvre. Cameron’s frequent employment of deep darkness affectively suggests the appeal of the unknowable, yet we might judge from the subjects of such images that this place of mystery calls for a grasping towards meaning that hides itself “through a glass darkly” or in sibylline riddles. For example, portraits of John Herschel, Thomas Carlyle and Alfred Tennyson against deep shadow backgrounds might be taken to suggest the “geniuses”’ careful search for the light of understanding from the darkened mysteries of nature, history and poetry that respectively surround them. The idea of a dimly lighted darkness as a means of gaining inscrutable knowledge, is also mooted by Walter Benjamin, who argues that some ideas “are stars, in contrast to the sun of revelation. They do not shine their light into the day of history, but only
work within it invisibly. They shine their light only into the night of nature.” (qtd. in Cadava, 30). Cadava argues that Benjamin connects stars to a photographic language (26) and I contend that it is borne out in Cameron’s aesthetics, where extreme light is a “sun of revelation” and intense darkness suggests “the night of nature”, which nevertheless holds the potential for ideas to “work invisibly” towards the future (30). We might also think here of Ruskin’s association of the sun with the source of creative work and the inscription of both text and image as shadow, as delineated by J. Hillis Miller in Illustration (93). Thus, essentially, in Cameron’s photographs, light and dark are two halves of the same aesthetic symbolisation of a journey towards understanding, which may be derived through both revelation and mystery.

This dichotomy can be observed in the following facing pair of images in the “Thackeray Album”: The Five Wise Virgins and The Five Foolish Virgins (Fig. 32, 31-32). The doubling in this diptych is expressed not only in the structuring and the subject matter, but also in the models, who, with one exception, appear in both images. The matter is, of course, taken from Jesus’ parable in Matthew’s Gospel, in

Figure 32. Julia Margaret Cameron, The Five Wise Virgins and The Five Foolish Virgins, “Thackeray Album”, 31-32 (1864-c.1875).
which the Wise Virgins bring enough oil to light their lamps until the “bridegroom” or Lord arrives but the Foolish run out of light and thus are shut out of the heavenly “wedding banquet” (New International Version, Matt. 25: 1-13). This parable no doubt appealed to Cameron because the crucial requirement for entry to heaven is sufficient light, but it also illustrates the tension between the present and an unknown future. Cameron’s Wise Virgins hold small oil lamps in their hands guaranteeing their passage to heaven. The Foolish Virgins have resigned their lamps, and could be seen to provide a mere foil for the wise. Their long hair denotes an additional moral laxity in Victorian codes of femininity, as well as forming a “structural element” (Smith, Politics of Focus, 49). Yet tonally, this print of the Foolish Virgins is much lighter than the Wise – the former identifiably stand in Cameron’s glasshouse, whose wooden struts soar over their heads. This may have originally been a result of early mistakes in image processing, but for Cameron, such flukes can be appropriated within a photograph’s meaning. The Foolish are bathed in natural light in a manner that suggests the clarity and apparent self-evidence of surfaces; the desire to read things at face-value in the present that precludes searching for deeper truths. Meanwhile the Wise remain in the dark, both in the tone of the print and in the darker fabric of the central figure: their lamps will illuminate their way within the darkened world, as the Psalms declare that the Word would be a lamp unto the feet (Psalm 119: 105), the store of knowledge as light will lead them safely through the dark uncertainty of the future. Within this mirrored pair, the contradictory associations of darkness and light in images portraying the biblical past are tied to narratives related to the anticipation of a revelatory future.

Besides employing light as a carrier of literary meaning, both of these facing images in the “Thackeray Album” convey choices of feminine identity. One may be foolish or wise, a mother or a scholar – definitions that at first glance appear to be binary oppositions. Their closeness however, is suggested by the mirroring of features and themes. In the diptych between La Madonna Vigilante and The Sibyl, both models are adorned with a crown of plaits, as may be seen in Figure 33. The plaits of Kate Dore, the model portraying the Madonna, form a kind of dark halo, a frame that is further emphasised by the dark curve that Cameron has scratched into the surface of the plate, apparently in an abandoned attempt to black out the background.
Meanwhile, the Sibyl’s plaits are not of holiness but of learning, a replacement for a crown of laurels, in a way that is taken directly from the plaits in Michelangelo’s “Erythraean Sibyl” (reproduced in Weiss, 17). The models also perform similar glances if dissimilar poses, looking under hooded eyes at respectively, a child and a book. The acts of reading a person or a text are thus physically linked by Cameron, suggesting both are a means of gaining knowledge of the potential future, or remaining “vigilant”. Moreover, if this pair is considered to be an essay on modes of femininity, they also suggest the passage of Cameron’s own life – once a young doting mother of small children, she is now an older “sibyl” studying texts to bring new visions to the world. This passage of time is emphasised by the fact that the unknown model in the Sibyl, who bears a striking resemblance to Kate Dore, appears to be unusually mature for one of Cameron’s illustrative portraits. Thus the image placement in this pair functions as a reflection on versions of the self, even whilst it concurrently exhibits ideas on knowledge and time. It is perhaps significant that Cameron gifted this album to the then twenty-seven year old Anne Thackeray, another female artist at the beginning of her career, for the images suggest that one could adopt multiple feminine identities, and be both a Madonna and a Sibyl.

Certainly, Thackeray Ritchie went on to title her analysis of four female writers, A Book of Sibyls, in 1883, which might possibly be redolent of Cameron’s formative proto-feminist influence. Eventually, Cameron’s sibylline desire for posterity would
be fulfilled by becoming a materialised memory for other literary figures, a female artist who takes her place in the archive.

In these mirror images, Cameron employs an affective approach to time that, by inviting the viewer into an imagined interior space, seeks not primarily to freeze a static moment, but to allow the viewer to step into pools of othered time, as if stepping through Alice’s gauzy looking-glass. This is achieved through the self-reflexive gaze of Cameron’s subjects, who on a life-size scale, claim for other times and fictions a fully realised interiority and spiritual integrity that seeks to chime with a viewer’s own empathies. This leaves her work open to a particularly feminised interpretation, as other Cameron scholars have argued, most notably Lindsay Smith in *The Politics of Focus*. Like multiple views in a hall of mirrors, each of Cameron’s images of women presents this feminised viewer with a possible identity. Augmented by the repeated use of models, series of images such as those found in the “Thackeray Album” are able to suggest facets of a singular identity. By leafing through these large-scale albums the viewer may enter many different temporal states and unusual fictional spaces: they are called to identify with the memory of a child in a tragic poem, to feel an emotive connection with the allusive scope of a metaphor, to be drawn into a space of stillness that implies conversational action, to anticipate glory as a divine light and to be seduced by the uncertain promise of darkness. Through immersing themselves in successive images, they can follow an implicit path of understanding amidst the mirrored identities offered to them. Yet, Cameron’s mirrors differ from the “self-alienation” produced by Alice’s looking-glass according to Coats (86); but rather offer the expansion of the self through an invitation to take on multiple roles and characters.

Considering Cameron’s patchwork of affective mirrors as an example of temporal dynamics in a creative archive, we may infer that such an archive, in its imaginative potential and narrative structure, acts as a kind of well for experiences of suspended time in which images, or other forms of trace, appear to offer a window onto another kind of thinking, into Carroll’s “looking-glass” logic. Expanding this, one may infer that any collection of immersive yet disparate historic objects may form such an experiential web, inducing what Tamboukou, borrowing from Foucault’s concept of “heterotopia”, describes as a sensation of “heterotemporality” (“Archive Pleasures”, para. 41), a feeling of fluidly experiencing multiple temporal conditions. In this way,
in terms of reader/viewer experience of a succession of traces, the archive can function as literature. The archive holds different sorts of time that inform, parallel and antagonise each other, so as a collection presents a myriad of elements that parade under the appearance of a uniform surface.

The Translation of Memory in Cameron Fictions

Cameron’s images, with their calls to interior space, to “time out of mind”, have frequently re-issued themselves in texts ever since their production, as if culture retained a kind of photographic negative that reprinted the originals in a new “translated” form where “external images” are brought “into the language of living memory” (Assmann, 210). Such implicit suggestion of remembered works of art or genres of art is referred to by Liliane Louvel as “mnemopictoriality”, whereby:

The text suggests a painting to the individual who has it in mind, and the suggestion activates the shift between textuality and pictoriality, which become superimposed without losing their specificity – hence several possible readings and layers of meaning. The “memories of paintings”, or mnemopictoriality, function as allusions with various degrees of explicitness (Poetics, 59).

The two Cameronian fictions I look at in the proceeding section, Anne Thackeray Ritchie’s “From an Island” (1877) and Gail Jones’s Sixty Lights (2004), follow this pattern, whereby images and styles lie behind the surface of the text, awaiting activation by the reader’s memory or cultural memory, whilst at the same time, the image in the text and in reality remain separately distinct. In this way, the memory of a work of art shapes and adds dimension to the suggestions of photographs in the novels. As Green-Lewis noted, Cameron’s images are already steeped in memorial quality (“At Home”, 39), so producing Cameronian mnemopictorial texts, further destabilises a sense of the present, and telescopes more intensely into the past.

The memorial distortion of a visual trace can also be related, in a wider sense, to the way that the archive operates in relation to memory. Like the literary resurrection of the other’s visual trace, the archive is always firstly a part of someone else’s memory, someone else’s narrative that can never be fully accessed. Something of this can be discerned in Derrida’s claim that the archive is “spectral”, being “neither
visible nor invisible, a trace referring to another whose eyes can never be met” (84). This sense of obscured spectral memory inevitably increases the complications and permutations of the creatively imagined archive. Figlio claims that our perception of history is deceptively empirical, as culture transforms time into a series of objects and the past is seen as a materially distant space that we can physically enter. This ironically produces the sense of history as a continuous consciousness so that “[m]emory becomes akin to imagination rather than to an assemblage of objects in the mind” (154). This recalls in reverse, Foucault’s argument that history should not be regarded as a continuous process conforming to an “overall shape” but instead as the “space of a dispersion” (10).

However, the phenomenon of distorted memory has non-linear creative potential when utilised in art and literature, particularly when conjured via archival traces. When the same traces are revisited repeatedly in fiction, these ghostly distortions inevitably increase. Julian Wolfreys writes “to tell a story is always to evoke ghosts, to open a space through which something other returns, although never as a presence or to the present. Ghosts return via narratives, and come back, again and again, across centuries, every time a tale is unfolded” (Victorian Hauntings, 3). In the case of both Cameron’s albums and novels recalling her work, an assemblage of archival objects becomes akin to imagination-saturated memories, with the material both spectrally producing and produced by the memories attached to it. There is thus no unmediated archive or archive literature that represents a portal to a single time; instead the archive novel, like Cameron’s albums, is a patchwork of many memories, times and desires to move, like Tennyson’s “Enoch Arden”, into other temporal “places”.

Memories of Light: Anne Thackeray Ritchie’s “From an Island”

One early mnemopictorial impression of Cameron’s work can be traced in Anne Thackeray Ritchie’s 1877 short story “From an Island”, published as part of her collection, From an Island: A Story and Some Essays, which presents a fictionalised account of Freshwater life. The story is narrated by the self-deprecating and financially-dependent Queenie, possibly modelled on Thackeray Ritchie herself, who has found sanctuary in the household of the great painter, St. Julian, a somewhat
pompous genius whose art bears relation to G.F. Watts but whose personality also ties him to Tennyson since “his charm is almost irresistible, and he knows it, and likes to know it” (24). The story’s slight plot involves several intertwining social dramas fabricated from the characters of the Freshwater group, including the visit of a male photographer called Hexham to the eponymous island, who pursues both evocative photography and a romantic interest in Hester St. Julian, the painter’s daughter. This plot, however, is incidental; the real matter of the narrative is the synthesis of vision and memory. This is expressed both in its form – a series of mnemopictorial aesthetic set pieces recalling Freshwater scenes - and the conversations of the protagonists as they debate the rendering of visual experience in art. This seemingly light tale thus asks serious questions about the visual and textual representation of the past.

Thackeray Ritchie’s interesting decision to cast the dominant personality in her fictional Freshwater as an artist rather than a writer opens the way for a direct comparison between visual artforms. It could be seen as a compromise that Thackeray Ritchie chooses to portray a male photographer in her memory narrative when Cameron was such a formative influence in her life. Hexham has, in fact, been identified elsewhere as representing Lewis Carroll – Karoline Leach refers to a character key in a copy of the story belonging to Thackeray Ritchie’s daughter Hester, which identifies Hexham as Carroll, Mr St. Julian as Watts, Mrs St. Julian as Cameron and Tennyson as Lord Ulleskelf (In Search of the Dreamchild, 307). Leach attempts to explain the prominence of Carroll by arguing that his role of “romantic hero” in the novella derives from a potential emotional attachment on Thackeray Ritchie’s part (“Lewis Carroll as Romantic Hero”, 3). This formulation would, however, make Tennyson and Cameron quite minor characters in the story – Mrs St. Julian has no artistic role and is mainly characterised as an anxious and easily tired wife and mother, not a very fair reflection of Cameron, and perhaps more reminiscent of Emily Tennyson. The character of Lord Ulleskelf, meanwhile, is a patron and not a poet, although he does express a Tennysonian preference for walking outside in storms (14). Winifred Gérin also mentions both Cameron and Lewis Carroll as present in the novella without assigning them to specific characters (185).
Whilst Leach’s index presumably correctly refers to basic character identities intended by Thackeray Ritchie, it is evident from the narrative that the origins of characters and ideas in the novella are a lot more fluid. Indeed, Colin Ford identified St. Julian as an amalgam of Watts and Tennyson, and Hexham as possessing something of “Mrs Cameron’s excitable character” (Cameron Collection, 14) in his 1975 book on Cameron. As I will demonstrate, evocations of artworks in the text combine features of Tennyson’s, Watts’ and Cameron’s works. Moreover, the dedication to Tennyson suggests both his potential importance to the narrative, if only as an aesthetic and literary influence. In terms of personal character, the initially sceptical and emotionally manipulative Hexham can be seen to embody present day views of Carroll – it could be telling that at one point he flirts with Hester’s fifteen-year-old sister Aileen to make her jealous (65) – yet it will be seen that “his” photographic art draws heavily from Cameron’s techniques and styles rather than Carroll’s. This suggests that Thackeray Ritchie’s photographer actually embodies an amalgamation of memories taken from two contrasting figures.

Whatever the origins of the characters, it is evident that something more complicated with memory is occurring in “From an Island” than an attempt to “draw[…] from faithful experience” (Leach, “Lewis Carroll as Romantic Hero”, 3) like a documentary photograph, something that bears out Thackeray Ritchie’s reputation for literary impressionism and her connections to Cameron’s aesthetics. Rather, the story embodies a form of adjusted memoir in which the shift and fictionalisation of even very recent memory can have creative potential; where the just-present can be reassembled into a new image that makes sense from the disordered contents of memory. In “From An Island”, the effect of these heightened and fragmentary memories is akin to shifting patterns of light or transparent images superimposed upon each other; it is not for nothing that Woolf referred to Thackeray Ritchie as “creating an atmosphere of tremulous shadows and opal tinted lights” (Platform of Time, 72-3), and that Thackeray’s “proto-modernism” and “impressionistic style” has been credited as an important influence on Woolf (Dell, 65). Yet the result is far from intangible; the narrative is full of material memory in both its reference to artworks and the Cameronian visual qualities that bleed into its fictional world.

In Thackeray Ritchie’s curious blend of artforms and memories, the life of the “island” is rendered in fictional paintings, embedded with references to poetry, takes
on qualities of photography, and is finally presented to us as prose literature. Thackeray Ritchie builds self-awareness of this intermedial construction into the text – significantly, St. Julian, in his artwork, “grasps at life as it passes, and translates it into a strange quaint revelation of its own, and brings others into his way of seeing things as if by magic” (23, my emphasis). Whilst this ostensibly functions as a thinly-disguised homage to Watt’s art and perhaps also Tennyson’s poetic effect, it works on multiple levels - the notion of “grasping life as it passes” and “translating” it into something else bears qualities of photography, a new seemingly “magical” technology capable of imbuing moods and fictions into perceptions of passing reality, resulting in new “revelations”, as is, of course, seen in Cameron’s works. Thackeray Ritchie’s own literary project is also deeply implicated in this translation ethic, for her work most closely seeks to transform memory into art. Blurring the boundaries between art forms is a part of Thackeray Ritchie’s comment on memory formation, for in her story, the rendition of reality itself takes on the quality of visual artwork, so that memory both colours and is conditioned by the archive. This reminiscent story’s mixture of impressionistic visual references implies the impossibility of objective memory and posits that both memories and traces partake in fictionality and are themselves part fiction. Rather than hinting at an absence at the core, Thackeray Ritchie rather suggests that the fictionality of such memories has integrity – that the perception of reality itself is creative.

This sense of creative memory is discussed in relation to the imprint of light in a discussion between St. Julian, Hexham and Lord Ulleskelf, during a walk on the cliffs. St. Julian considers the scene of “strange wild glory” (25) as ripe for evocation in art but suggests that both photographer and artist are “helpless … when we look at such scenes as these” as they are unable to “reproduce” them (27). Yet the ability to represent experiences of overwhelming light is posited as a subject of photography. Lord Ulleskelf, asks Hexham

‘Have you ever tried to photograph figures in a full blaze of light?’ […]
looking at Aileen, who was standing with some of the children by Hester. They were shading their eyes from a bright stream that was playing like a halo about their heads. There was something unconscious and lovely in the little group, with their white draperies and flowing locks. A bunch of illumined berries and trailing creepers hung from little Susan’s hair: the light of youth and of life, the
sweet wandering eyes, all went to make a beautiful picture that graces and models could never attain to (27).

Hexham gives a prevaricating answer to the effect that he has attempted such an image and that “Nature is a very uncertain sort of assistant” (27). However, Ulleskelf’s description of the unrepresentable scene, besides being produced in Thackeray Ritchie’s words, appears to be an evocation of several Cameron photographs and is awash with her blazing aesthetic.

Figure 34. Julia Margaret Cameron, Circe (1865), May Day (1866) and The Infant Bridal (1864).

Thackeray Ritchie’s impossible picture draws on Kate Keown’s head adorned with grapes in Circe, the figures bedecked with nature in group images such as May Day, and the halo effect generated in The Infant Bridal and other images of small children (see Fig. 34). Aesthetically, it also recalls Cameron’s more experimental Madonna images in which the subject is overcome by light, or some of the most elegiac images
of Julia Jackson such as La Santa Julia (1867). The photographs have here fully blended into memory in perfect example of mnemopictoriality, and ironically, constitute an experience that for the characters, cannot be represented. Of course, Thackeray Ritchie’s scene cannot be reduced to any one of these images or particular combinations of images, they have been translated into an idealisation beyond Cameron’s idealisation, placing the story in a rhapsodic elsewhere in which visual memory, even, we suppose, Thackeray Ritchie’s own memory, is coloured over and over with art. Although, it is hard to judge what Thackeray Ritchie’s original impressions were, and how they were distorted, her story creates the impression of distance from an original experience by being consciously concerned with material representations, with the strain to create a trace that captures memories and feelings that seem to be indefinable. This might be considered to be the aim of many members of the Freshwater Circle, but particularly resembles Cameron’s yearning to “arrest all beauty that came before me” (“Annals”, 9). Cameron’s art, her material archive, if not her character, may thus be considered an ur-text for “From an Island”, visually and ideologically flooding the text.

In the internal plot of “From an Island”, the characters’ rapturous experiences must be translated into material form in an intertwining relationship with the conceit of the whole text. Inspired by a visionary experience of Hester in a garden that recalls both Tennyson’s poem “The Gardener’s Daughter” and Cameron’s identically titled illustration of the same poem (Cox and Ford, Complete Photographs, 257), Hexham is able to perform such a defining photographic moment. He arranges several female characters of different ages into a group “placing them in a sort of row, two up and one down, with a property-table in the middle. He then began focussing, and presently emerged, pale and breathless and excited, from the little black hood into which he had dived” (59). St. Julian “becomes interested” in the image and directs lilies to be brought in from the garden and asks Missie, Queenie’s young child, based on Margie Thackeray, the writer’s adopted daughter (Gérin, 185) to let her hair down. The resulting arrangement of people is described by the narrator as “a dream of fair ladies against an ivy wall, flowers and flowing locks, and sweeping garments.” (60). This obvious reincarnation of Cameron’s group photography particularly suggests The Rosebud Garden of Girls (1868) (Fig. 25) and May Day (1866) (Fig. 34), with their white-clad groups of women composed against a
background of briars, as well as Spring (1865) (Cox and Ford, Complete Photographs, 446) which features Mary Hillier and two young girls against an ivied wall. Although Hexham likely represents Carroll, the described photograph so evidently resembles Cameron’s works that it as if she is teaching Hexham/Carroll how to create an inspired trace. Yet, interestingly, it is St. Julian the painter who provides the aesthetic input that perfects the image, perhaps in an allusion to Watts’ significant critique of Cameron’s developing work as well as her awe of Tennyson’s advice. In this way, crossed strands at each turn in the text diffuse the idea of a sole origin for material traces; instead memory blends all artists and their works into the textual fabric. The importance lies in a remembered atmosphere, not in solitary genius.

Significantly, Queenie, coming upon this scene, experiences the group image not as a trace but as a “living, breathing picture”, thus existing in a pre-photographic “natural” state. This representation of a photographic image as “living” recalls Cameron’s desire in her “Preface” to Leonora to “vividly represent[…]” the poem (v), to imbue it with more life than the original. This is redolent of Thackeray Ritchie’s impossible project in “From an Island” to return to the origins of the trace, to the fleeting moment that produced something permanent. Ironically, in attempting to capture this moment before the trace, Thackeray Ritchie produces a memory text that is constituted of traces. This is further underlined by being made manifest in the construction of the novella – the reader receives proof that Hexham loved Hester through a letter “found in Hexham’s room after his departure” (65) but which is delivered to the reader in a footnote half way through the text, disrupting the linear narrative. The story also significantly ends with a selection of letters as if it is decomposing into the fragments from which it is constituted.

Similar to many Cameronian texts, the fear of decomposing traces and losing memories is a source of excitement in Thackeray Ritchie’s novella. The group photograph is praised by St. Julian who enthuses that “‘It takes one's breath away […] to have the picture there, breathing on the glass, and to feel every instant that it may vanish or dissolve with a word, with a breath.’” (61). Pertinently, the potential loss of the image is figured as words and breath – so that text, image and life, the three media of the story, are thus figured as slippery, likely to pass away if not fixed in memory. The elusive memory of Freshwater life is embodied in the creation of
visual traces, which anticipate a future of being read as tokens of memory as they are “created” in the fictional world. The novella’s construction can thus be seen as an example of what Mark Currie identifies as literary “prolepsis”, the anticipation of a future that has already happened (31), a concept which I will be returning to in the following section.

Thackeray Ritchie’s novella invites an absorption into the past as a texture more than an event, operating in a similar fashion to the wells of time displayed in the “Thackeray Album” itself. It also significantly pre-empts Virginia Woolf’s “past-impressionism”, especially in her own coastal novel of memory and visual representation, *To the Lighthouse*, whose visionary portrait of a summer house party full of “distorted” photographic moments (Dell, 128) bears a significant relation to “From an Island”. Indeed, Woolf valued Thackeray Ritchie’s luminous treatment of memory, arguing that she will be “the transparent medium through which we behold the dead. We shall see them lit up by her tender and radiant glow” (*Platform of Time*, 77), thus figuring her, suggestively, as a kind of window that transforms the past through an application of light.

The translation of the present into the past, and into the quality of pastness, is, in Thackeray Ritchie’s prototypical rendering of the Cameron story, a means of anticipating the future, of living memories as if they were already being remembered, by transforming them into objects. In “Reminiscences”, an 1893 essay that accompanied a selection of iconic Cameron portraits under the title, *Lord Tennyson and his Friends*, she declares:

> We look back at our own best treasures of remembrance, we turn towards the days when hope was strongest, but we all know at the same time that much of all that the past contained of what was best, *will go to make our own future and that of those who are coming after us*. Hidden in time lie the poets for whom Tennyson is yet to sing, and the men and women who will love his message; and meanwhile we hope and we remember, and we are grateful to those who *give back to us with light and with shadow*, or with bodily presentiment and faithful effort, what is so worthy of *being lived again* (15-16, my emphasis).

In this summary of future-orientated belatedness, photography, the medium of “light and shadow”, is a means of *reliving* the past in the present as objectified “treasure”
with “bodily presentiment”, and it is these physical forms that will re-animate the future in a confluence of word and image, poetry and photography. Memory is materialised, but it is also capable of producing future song or intangible effects of light and shadow. These photographic memories are pertinently reanimated by a sense of narrative process implied in “being lived again”. This concept of “living again” might be taken from the variegated patterns of time embodied by the “Thackeray Album” itself, with its reanimations of the fictional and historical and its pull towards interior experience. Thackeray Ritchie evidently applies this philosophy in her own “From an Island” through its interior animation “with light and with shadow” of an album of images, “lived again” (“Reminiscences, 16) in the narrative present of the text.

Yet Thackeray Ritchie’s memories are to occupy not merely the present, but also the future. In her conception of Cameron’s photography in 1877 and 1893, memories of a fiction-saturated past are already part of the future which will be “lived again” (16) when new readers, currently “hidden in time” (15), access the traces of history. Again, the photographic ironically operates here as a form of “prolepsis” in Currie’s terms (41). In this way, narratives conjured from Cameron’s fictionalising photographs, such as Thackeray Ritchie’s, stretch the “temporal hallucination” of images (Barthes, Camera Lucida, 115) almost to breaking point, disassociating the reader from the present of the text, by placing them between ideal past and projected future, whilst committing to neither. This blurred temporality, embryonic in Thackeray Ritchie’s nineteenth-century employment of the photographic in fiction, is further proliferated in the tension between the memory of the archival image and its potential future in the narrative patterns of neo-Victorian photography fiction, in which Cameron's images are also “lived again” (“Reminiscences”, 16).

Fragments of a Broken Mirror: Gail Jones’s Sixty Lights

Photography is employed in contemporary novels as a means to comment on and physically structure a discussion on the bricolage of time, both within and without the neo-Victorian bracket. Gail Jones’ Sixty Lights (2004) uses Victorian photography within the scope of a wider time frame, knitting together multi-temporal strands that both inset memory and anticipate the twentieth century. This novel uses
photographs as means of creatively structuring the narrative, sometimes counter-intuitively, in the manner of de Certeau’s “textual [and visual] recomposition” (94), as discussed in Chapter 2. Added to this arrangement of narrative images is a further layer of temporal recomposition, of analepsis and prolepsis. This is a mode that ironically, as Currie implies, peculiarly lends itself towards the photographic (41) for although, as Sontag argues, photographs “are a neat slice of time, not a flow” they are also able to cross temporal boundaries, being “a privileged moment turned into a slim object that one can keep and look at again” (17-18). In *Sixty Lights*, photographs as “slices of time”, rearranged as in the format of an album, provide a means of commentary on the experience of remembering and processing time. Jones further blurs temporal and fictional boundaries by evoking both photographs and personal vision in a Cameronian elegiac style, figuring images as experiences of overwhelming light or as blurred fictionalised memories rather than as mere documentary records.

*Sixty Lights* takes the notion of photographs as “slices of time” to its structural apotheosis as the narrative is decisively split into sixty sections corresponding to experiences of lights or images. Whilst photography is the central subject, the power of overwhelming light, as in “From an Island” overspills the description of material objects and many of the “lights” are memories or experiences that leave no tangible trace but in the text itself and in the minds of the characters. Such a correspondence between image, light and memory is confirmed by Aleida Assmann who argues that

> [p]ictures fit into the landscape of the unconscious in a way that is different from texts: as the boundary between the picture and the dream is blurred, the picture is transformed into an internal ‘vision’ that takes on a life of its own. Once this border is crossed, the status of the picture is changed from being an object of observation to an agent of haunting (217).

Jones’ novel explores this concept of the unconscious photograph, which stands on the border between archive and imagination. Kate Mitchell interestingly compares *Sixty Lights* to *Afterimage* as texts in which photographs exert a peculiarly haunting and anachronistic power, “utilis[ing] the spectrality of the photograph as a means to explore the uncanny repetition of the Victorian past in the present” (175, 176). Mitchell is concerned with the photograph in *Sixty Lights* as a ghostly emanation of
the “real” Victorian world for access in the twenty-first century and describes the images as “hallucinated” (153, 173). In my view, the novel’s aesthetic origins are more than hallucinatory, being rooted in real Victorian aesthetics and even images. The evocation of photography in *Sixty Lights* is not merely about the recovery of loss (Mitchell, 153) but is figured as a positive act of creation. Jones has said herself that she wanted to refute ideas that photography only connotes death but instead aimed to reinvigorate the spirit of its early days, when photography “must have seemed so life-affirming” (Interview, para. 18). In this section, I show how Mitchell’s productive ideas can be deepened by exploring the connections in Jones’s novel with Cameron’s work, aesthetics, and techniques.

Mitchell also considers that the novel’s construction of sixty separate images “is akin to an album of photographs, or a collection of memories” seeing these as producing a disconnected anti-narrative (173). Extending this, I argue that this formulation ties the novel to the structural and temporal interplay that I have identified in Cameron’s albums, with their implied narrative connections, especially because the image-texts in question are arranged aesthetically rather than chronologically. As in the “Thackeray Album”, the images in *Sixty Lights* act as pools of extraordinary time, experiences of startling light and deep darkness invested with meaning. Jones herself has said she wanted to “punctuate my book with images that stand alone, that have no narrative reason for being there except that they cause a moment of stasis” (Interview, para. 9), connecting her work not only with Barthes’ “punctum”, pricking the reader’s attention with unusual moments of detail (*Camera Lucida*, 28), but also with Louvel’s argument that series of pictorial images can “punctuate” and thus “impert [their] own rhythm” to the text (*Poetics*, 177). In fact, Jones’s novel may be considered as entirely composed of a rhythm of images. Although Jones asserts that she created images that “stand alone” (para. 9), I find that these still moments do have wider resonances that shape the text, perhaps because of their apparent isolation. As in Cameron’s albums, the images are connected by chromatic coding and repeated associations with memory. In *Sixty Light’s* “album” of images, the heroine sees herself reflected in visions of light and time, entering a hall of temporal mirrors that transport her outside of normative chronology.

Jones’s novel tells the life story of a young Australian photographer, Lucy Strange, whose name obviously evokes the notion of “strange light”. Enraptured by light and
stories at a young age in rural Australia, Lucy and her brother Thomas are soon orphaned by the death in childbirth of their mother and subsequent suicide of their father, whose romance we learn of in sporadic flashbacks in the first half of the text. They are left in the care of an uncle in London, Neville, whose eventual bankruptcy means they must be put to work, Thomas for a magic lantern show, and Lucy for an albumen paper manufacturer. Lack of money eventually means that Lucy is sent to India to marry Neville’s old friend, a man interested in collecting and experimentation, aptly named Isaac Newton. Becoming pregnant on the voyage by another man, Lucy does not marry Isaac but learns how to become a photographer in India, after which she returns to London to pursue her vocation and bring up her daughter. Towards the end of the text she finds romantic happiness with Jacob, a painter, but contracting tuberculosis, dies at the age of 22.

Whilst Cameron is never explicitly mentioned in the text, Jones’ narrative about the emotional and artistic development of a female photographer in the mid-nineteenth century - dates are never mentioned, but Great Expectations (1861) is first published within the novel’s time frame – uses language and evokes techniques and visions that are highly redolent of Cameron’s aesthetic. Like Cameron, Lucy is fascinated by “the material and its ethereal incarnation in light” (186), and sees and creates the world as a series of blurred images. Jones’ use of hyperbolic language of light throughout the novel can also be linked to Cameron’s own ecstatic prose in “Annals of My Glasshouse”.

This connection is cemented in the form of a letter sited towards the end of the text to Isaac Newton, a man who has posed as Lucy’s husband in India, in which we hear the heroine’s own voice for the first time:

As you know, the glass slide must still be wet with emulsion when the photograph is exposed, and for a long time I worried about bubbles in the mixture and the appearance of thumbprints on the corners of the image. Now these seem to me charming, although the men of the Society of Photographers consider thumbprints a sin and me an irredeemable sinner for refusing their wise counsel and continuing wilfully to reproduce this faint mark of my own handiwork. The photograph should appear, one of them wrote to me, as if God had breathed it onto the glass. Reprobate that I am, I am still wedded to the
maculate and the human sign, and accept now that my work will never be exhibited in the halls of South Kensington. If I could locate another woman interested in photography, I feel sure I could speak honestly and openly of these matters and defend more confidently my maculate aesthetic. (198-199).

The references to thumbprints, disputes with the masculine photographic establishment and the South Kensington Museum, besides the resemblance of the text to “Annals of My Glasshouse” and to Cameron’s letters to Sir John Herschel make the connection unmistakable. Cameron wrote in a similar vein to Herschel about her technical obstacles, explaining that “I get into difficulties + I cannot see my way out of them from ignorance of the scientific causes of those failures miscalled ‘accidents’” (qtd. in Olsen, 149).

Jones has also selected certain elements of Cameron philosophy to magnify. Whilst Cameron writes of the “mortal but yet divine! art of photography” in the Watts Album (qtd. in Olsen, 149), this fruitful contradiction is seemingly pared down to Lucy’s sole commitment to a mortal “maculate aesthetic” rather than an immaculate art, in Sixty Lights (199), embodied in her Cameronian thumbprints. Yet this apparently material interest also has ethereal qualities that embrace divinity; Lucy’s obsession with the “so-particular nature of things” also “seemed to lodge in some ephemeral question she could calculate or figure” (83). Rather than shedding Cameron’s interest in divinity as Humphreys does in Afterimage, Jones is invested in Cameron’s distinctive concern with the representation of haptic processes in relation to the spiritual, seen for example in the smudges and alterations made to La Madonna Vigilante (Fig. 31), although she dismisses Cameron’s outwardly Christian motivations.

Jones uses this “maculate aesthetic” (199) as a comment on physicalised memory, expanding Barthes’s assertion that the photograph indisputably depicts “the thing that has been there” (Camera Lucida, 76) to include the photographer themselves, who physically marks the plate. The dismissal of Lucy’s haptic work by the “Society

17 Cameron famously left thumbprints on some of her finished images, including The Dream (1869) (Cox and Ford, Complete Photographs, 208); she also submitting a great deal of work to the then embryonic South Kensington Museum, now the Victoria and Albert Museum, and corresponded with the museum’s first director Sir Henry Cole (outlined in Weiss, Julia Margaret Cameron); her ongoing difficulties with the photographic establishment are detailed in many texts including those of Gernsheim, Olsen, P. Roberts, and Weiss.
of Photographers” reflects the attack on Cameron by the Photographic Society, who were “convinced that she herself will adopt an entirely different mode of representing her poetic ideas when she has made herself acquainted with the capabilities of the art” (qtd. in Weiss, 33-34).

Provided with this key to the text, many of the other aspects of the novel reveal themselves as potentially Cameron-orientated – the visit to India where Lucy is offered in potential marriage to a much older man, the birth of a child to who becomes her “true focus” (199), her maverick sensibility and ambition, the desire to collect experiences in material form in diaries of “Special Things Seen” and “Photographs Not Taken”, even her frequent use of dashes in a letter. It becomes obvious that Lucy’s desire to meet “another woman interested in photography” is a pointed reference to Cameron, a memory-figure who cannot be embodied or “met” within the text because that memory has become eclipsed by Lucy Strange herself.

Returning to the beginning of the text with this Cameron connection in mind, the first experience of “light” that the reader encounters is that of a mirror that accidentally smashes and kills an Indian man as he falls off a building. Carrying with it the threat of temporal breakage that reflects the novel’s construction, Lucy Strange is struck most, not by the ravages of blood and gore, but that the mirror continued its shiny business: its jagged shapes still held the world it existed in, and bits and pieces of sliced India still glanced on its surface. Tiny shocked faces lined along the spear, compressed there, contained, assembled as if for a lens. She simply could not help herself: she thought of a photograph (4).

The “bits and pieces” thematise the broken and even violent structure of the novel as a whole, which relentlessly tears time into shards and reassembles them as an archive. Moreover, this beginning underlines the notion, discussed above, that photographs embody not so much the record of an event but a reflection of the self recording that event – significantly “Lucy remembered […] seeing her own miniaturised face retreat and disappear” (4). The mirror episode is further delineated as a break in time by the fact that even in this first small segment, the reader is disorientated within temporal space. Introduced in the opening words to a scene of a marriage bed that later proves to be no marriage at all, the narrative pulls back to the
mirror accident and then forward to the death of the heroine “in a few years’ time, at the age of twenty-two” (4), which the moment of lying awake in the bed is experienced as an anticipated memory by the reader and strangely also by the heroine, who simultaneously experiences analepsis and prolepsis, being “stranded in this anachronistic moment no-one can tell her about” (5).

Immediately destabilising the “present” of the narrative, Jones materialises the concept of the unnaturally stretched time of the archive by portraying a photographic moment that is essentially surreal and evokes death in both its immediate content and as an anticipated memory. This, as the novel’s “Acknowledgements” admit, constitutes an active figuration of the arguments of Barthes and Sontag, most pertinently, their mutual consensus that photography connotes death. The passage follows Sontag’s famous assertion that “[a]ll photographs are memento mori. To take a photograph is to participate in another person’s (or thing’s) mortality, vulnerability, mutability” (15). Jones’ first symbolic text-image also seems to literally anticipate Lindsay Smith’s related argument that for “anti-imitative” photography “the invisible temporal dislocation inherent to photography (in the form of duration) fractures the smooth surface of the image – the way in which a captured moment in the present can never simply remain present to us” (“The Wont of Photography”, 83). In Jones’ first chapter, both the mirror and the present are fractured by a surreal moment.

Jones’ novel also destabilises the present by playing with the texture of narrative itself, particularly in its manipulation of tenses, of remembrance and anticipation. This brings to mind Currie’s assertions that temporal surrealism most significantly takes place, not thematically, but in the quality of narrative logic involved in the process of reading time into being (29-30). Jones’s first chapter also more specifically evokes Cadava’s observations on the role of the preface as akin to photography:

[The preface] casts a future tense on the significance of what has already been written. Like the photographic negative that can only be developed later, it traces the imprint of what is to come. At the same time, it is written only to be left behind. […] The preface names the transit between light and darkness that we might also call writing (xvii).
This conflation of photographic and written time is particularly pertinent as Jones interestingly *prefaces* Chapter One with a related quotation from Cadava: “There has never been a time without the photograph, without the residue and writing of light” (qtd. in Jones, 1), emphasising a precondition that is to be “developed later” (xvii) through her intermedial project. The proleptic character of the opening segment will only begin to form a connected part of the central narrative when the relatively normative time-stream reaches the mid-point of the novel, reflecting the way that within the passage itself, the tense patterns reach backwards and forwards before settling in a present that seems to encompass all these time periods, so that “She is stranded in this anachronistic moment” (3-4). This parallels the photograph’s uncertain temporal engagement with the past and future and its concurrent invitation to participate in a surreal endless presence, a quality we have already seen enacted in Cameron’s startling mirror works.

The most interesting resemblance of *Sixty Lights* to Cameron’s albums lies in its concern with the intersection between the narrative arrangement of material objects in space and singular moments in time of overwhelming light. This overall structure is miniaturised in the four “lights” detailing Lucy’s private diary “in which she recorded and stored her apprehensions not of events, but of images” (86), thus reproducing the dynamics of the visual album in textual form. Yet, Lucy’s diary of “Special Things Seen” is not drawn as a rendering of fictional photographs but of fictional visual experiences. These experiences are imagined as having a photographic quality, through which Jones is able to comment on the surreal disjointedness of photographic perception as a mode of narration. Kate Mitchell interestingly identifies the “Special Things Seen” sections with the form of the anachronistic historical novel which constructs a “shrine” “in fractured form, as shards of memory” (175). Jones specifically compares Lucy’s London diary, an “irregular sequence”, with the standard biographical format of the Victorian Bildingsroman: “a novelistic concatenation of events, the way people conventionally describe movement from childhood to adulthood, logical, sequential, cementing identity more firmly” (86). She suggests that the rendering of life as selected moments of a photograph album might release more profundity – “a venerable randomness” – than a nineteenth-century novel’s slow methodical movement through time. A photographic construction instead focuses on the “discrepancy
between bodies and words, between the niggardly specificity of things, often tiny inconsequential mundane things” (86). It will also engender new ways of looking, and like Cameron’s albums, will “compel attentiveness” and “set her formally agape” (178). Yet Lucy Strange’s commitment to material realism is also related to the affective, for she is fascinated by the transformative properties of the apparently mundane Barthean “punctums” that pepper the novel – “the cloudy abstractions they brought in their wake” – and resolves that she can best “know” this contradictory world “by its imagistic revelations” (86). In this way, *Sixty Lights* combines the carefully structured photographic musings of Thorpe’s *Ulverton* photographer with the hyperbolic treatment of experiences of light found in *The Luminist*. Lucy’s “Special Things Seen” and “Photographs Not Taken” are revelatory moments that expand the time of a single moment, solidifying the present’s knife-edge inaccessibility into a photographic permanence. The final image in the first diary section is seen during a rare visit to church. Jones’ determined swerving from the overt religious content of the Victorian period in general and Cameron’s photography in particular, a decision that seems likely to relate to the twenty-first century orientation of the heroine, means that this experience is initially couched in boredom and dismissal. Yet in a passage bearing remarkable similarity to the visit of Eligius to the Galle Face church in *The Luminist*, she is subject to a vision:

> But a sudden shaft of light from outside hit a window of Christ and his flock, and the sun was instantly visible in the belly of a kneeling sheep. The stained Christ was lovely, as were the wheat sheaves and the clouds and the spikes of green grass, but only the humble sheep appeared truly supernatural, conveying the entire sun in its semi-transparent body. Lucy turned her rapt face towards it and thought to herself: this is God’s language; he speaks in gatherings of light (90)

This transfer of the auratic quality of the photograph to other mediums and experiences is, as in *The Luminist*, symptomatic of the traces’ pervasion of the text. The way in which this experience of light veers towards a spiritual vision, where light itself becomes “God’s language” is suggestive of the implicit claim made by both Rocklin’s and Jones’ novels that photography has a “sacred aura”; that it can lead to encounters with the ineffable, even through “inconsequential mundane
things” (86). In *Sixty Lights*, the light falling through the window deifies the apparently incidental, the “humble sheep” which contains the “entire sun” (90), yet this is an image that nevertheless brings to mind the image of Christ as the “Lamb of God” and “The Light of the World”, thus remaining within the key of an auratic symbolism. The novel rejects Benjamin’s thesis that photography is the destroyer of aura, or that it has a related but lesser “secular aura” as argued by Mary Price (93). Instead, in *Sixty Lights*, an expanded conception of photography as “light-writing” or “God’s language”, is that which generates profound, yet chance, auratic experiences that gesture beyond the material world.

Yet, in *Sixty Lights*, photography also speaks in darkness as well as light. As an adult on her return to London, Lucy resumes her diary of “Photographs Not Taken”, in which the final image is the skylight that she sleeps under:

> It is so like a photographic glass plate – a rectangle of dark possibilities within which features emerge. She wakes to see stars that have moved and the slight shifts of colour, and notices for the first time the many gradations of the dark. There is a purple stage and another where the sky has a slightly coppery tinge. […] Photographs of the night will convince everyone of the existence of God. (183)

Darkness is also a place of possibility, and that by which light may be known. The subtle colours of the night sky through the confined space of a window can be referred to the variable shades of darkness in photographic prints, which in Cameron’s images often contributes towards the effect of the image. The darkness of *La Santa Julia* (1867) in the “Thackeray Album” (86) has a bronze colour that suggests medieval icons. A print of *The Angel at the Sepulchre* (1869-70) held at the Victoria and Albert Museum is a deep shade of mournful maroon (see Fig. 1 and Fig. 37). These are effects that can be seen in many nineteenth-century photographs, but what especially ties this passage to Cameron, is the sense that darkness conveys something holy, profound, a way of knowing God held in tandem with “gatherings of light” (Jones, 90). Through the window of the photographic plate, Lucy imagines that things may yet be accessed that are currently beyond understanding.

This is expressed strongly in Cameron’s image of John Herschel, the astronomer and photographic scientist, whose bright halo of hair against the darkness can be taken as
akin to the stars he studied (Fig. 35). Lucy Strange’s reference to “a rectangle of dark possibilities from which features emerge”, meaning stars, correlates with this image, in which the “features” of the face of an astronomer emerge from a space of enigmatic darkness. In both text and image, the excitement of the unknown, of scientific and spiritual discovery, and thus of narrative possibility is connoted by darkness. The evocations of stars in Sixty Lights particularly appear to reference Cadava who argues that “the history of photography can be said to begin with an interpretation of the stars” as starlight itself embodies a temporal paradox which “figures an illumination in which the present bears within it the most distant past and where the distant past suddenly traverses the present moment” (26, 28). Yet, stars also connote Lucy’s “dark possibilities” for the future. For Cadava, quoting Benjamin, they represent “ideas” which “shine their light only into the night of nature” (30), a concept that can also be related to the uncertain reach into the future embodied by Cameron’s use of darkness. In Lucy Strange’s experience of the skylight, as in Cameron’s photographs, darkness signifies both the allure of the deep past and the unknown future; the potential of developing and inscribing ideas, images and traces.

Figure 35. Julia Margaret Cameron, J. M. W. Herschel (1867).
In Lucy Strange’s map of vision, there are also meaningful shades between light and dark. The novel’s extended motif of “blurring” expresses the conflation of light and chance. A proleptic scene during the childhood section of the novel, has the adult Lucy musing that the “light of mother-of-pearl” is “the light of memory, and of the earliest petals of gardenia. It is the blurred aura, perhaps, between concealment and unconcealment” (46). This figuration of pearly light as memory can be related to Louvel’s observation that pictorial novels use shadows to “blur vision and thought”, which trigger “instant knowledge and flashes of consciousness” (Poetics, 145). Like the “aura” which reveals as well as distorts vision, time is figured as a pale blur through which “concealed” images can be discerned.

In the same letter sent to Isaac Newton, Lucy encloses “my favourite photograph of Ellen”, her daughter, which is “a little blurry” but you can see her quicksilver glance and her aspect of intelligence. The beguilement of infants resides not in their posed formality or settled good behaviour, but in these evasions of order, these clever rebellions. You must not think the image blunted, but on the verge of locomotion (200).

Lucy considers the photograph to be “devotional. Physical. A kind of honouring attention. I think of photography – no doubt absurdly – as a kind of kiss” (200).

Writing once more in a distinctly Cameronian voice, Jones seems to express not merely an imitation of the photographer, but also a critical theorisation of her images of children. Jones may draw her metaphor of photography as a kiss from Cameron’s many images of solemn and ceremonial kisses, such as The Infant Bridal (1864) and The Kiss of Peace (1869). Yet she is also evidently referring to the way that Cameron’s children, whilst staged in a variety of allegorical situations, resolutely refuse to comply with a pose, and appear not as angels, holy children or allegories, but staunchly as themselves. Critics such as Mary Price have considered that these images are therefore unsuccessful (101), but it is evident that Jones, and indeed Cameron, did not share this view.

A particularly interesting example from Cameron’s works is a seemingly improvised image of Elizabeth Keown in the “Thackeray Album”, which is evidently cut off from a larger print and enthusiastically entitled “A Scrap!” in Cameron’s hand (Fig. 36). The image is heavily blurred and a drip of silver nitrate is pouring down
Elizabeth Keown’s neck. Moreover, the “scrap”, evidently figured as an incidental leftover of another image, has been hastily cut into a lopsided arched shape by Cameron. The child, rather than expressing holiness, has a recalcitrant, even piteous expression that meets the viewer as a “quicksilver glance” rather than “settled good behaviour” (Jones, 200). Yet Cameron chose this image, a chance detail selected from an attempt at a larger composition, to include in this presentation album, clearly prizing it, as Lucy Strange prides her image of Ellen, who “would not be bribed to stay wholly still” (200).

This blurred and “maculate” image (199) suggests both physical movement (“locomotion”) and the movement of memory, and the incidental appearance of the image suggests attempted “evasions of order” by both the artist and the child, which are nevertheless incorporated in the narrative of the album. The grey blurred tones in this and other Cameron images exemplify the “light of mother-of-pearl” that Lucy identifies as “the diffuse glimmering light, she has seen inherent in wet collodion and silver-nitrate photographic prints” (46). Mitchell persuasively argues that Lucy’s experience of illness and death at the end of the novel is figured as a blurring out and a transformation into memory “as she dies, she is meant to be an asterisk, or present
mark of an absent present” (171). In Jones’ integral adaptation of the artist’s aesthetics, Cameron’s signature blur embodies memory and the passage of time, and is related to the qualities of narrative itself, which distorts even whilst it clarifies, and makes order from incidental “scraps”.

The treatment of photographic experience in time and memory distinguishes *Sixty Lights* from Rocklin’s novel as a rendition of Cameron’s art, adding dimensional and theoretical complexity. Lucy Strange’s anachronistic life becomes akin to the temporal anomalousness of a photograph. She anticipates twenty-first century technology, “imagining” the invention of colour photography, x-rays, astronomic photographs and television (190) and describes herself as a “seer […] a woman of the future, someone leaning into time” (230) – becoming the Sibyl of Cameron’s imaginings, peering through the dark. She is also a seer of theory and literature, as well as technology. She frequently paraphrases Barthes and Sontag, and like Rocklin’s Julia Colebrook and Humphreys’ Annie Phelan, she anticipates the memory of Virginia Woolf. Evoking a famous passage in Woolf’s “Modern Fiction”, Lucy pronounces that

> In the future […] people will understand that life is not a series of gig lamps or gas lamps symmetrically arranged: it is more encompassing, more immersing, more like an ulterior halo. Life […] is a kind of semi-transparent envelope, in which we see, in which we feel, in which we fall in love. One day someone will write this (218).

Jones’s protagonist thus blends shades of Cameron with paraphrases of Woolf, and the author almost winks at the reader in her desire to ironise this, as when Lucy muses “If I could locate another woman interested in photography” (199). In this act of overt anachronism, Jones anticipates a future that is already past, blurring analepsis with prolepsis, in the very act of re-voicing Woolf’s own commentary on the blurring of experience.

In *Sixty Lights*, Gail Jones attempts something more than a social history of photography, or even a portrait of an artist; choosing to present a world that blurs both Victorian specificity and archival materiality. Instead, Lucy Strange’s dispersal in time, the segmentation of her life, becomes a vocalisation of the photographic concept itself. Yet this photographic sense of being retains a distinctly Cameronian
flavour. In Lucy’s visit to a photographer’s studio in India, Jones outlines an alternative vision of photography:

For Lucy it was a shift in time itself, and a celebration of the lit-up gaze. [...] There were still moments in time, moments arcane, seductive, trivial, breathtaking, that waited for the sidelong glance, the split-second of notice, the opening up of an irrefutable and aural presence. She had always known this. She had always believed this to be so. She had always been, after all, a photographer (142).

This understanding of photography resembles the variable times displayed in the “Thackeray” and “Herschel Albums” which range from “arcane” power of the Sibyl to the apparently “trivial” quality of “A Scrap!” and the “auratic presence” of the Madonnas and portraits of Julia Jackson, which use the powerful “lit-up gaze”. Of course, Cameron’s influence in *Sixty Lights* is blended with the “split-second of notice” of twentieth-century documentary photography, and a removed postcolonial perspective, but the vision that powers Lucy Strange owes more than a little to the “Priestess of the Sun”; turning Cameron’s aesthetics into the pattern of a life.

The novel uses this blurred temporality as a means of negotiating the borders between image and text. Jones’s arrangement of photographic time is connected to consideration of the novel itself as a manipulator of time, and a way of organising experience. Lucy Strange thinks about

what it meant to read a novel. What process was this? What self-complication? What séance of other lives into her own imagination? Reading was this metaphysical meeting space – peculiar, specific, ardent, unusual – in which black words neatly spaced on a rectangular page persuaded her that hypothetical people were as real as she (114).

This sort of intervention is of course a standard trope of the postmodern text where the “politics of the act of making are made manifest” (Hutcheon, 56). Hutcheon draws specific attention to the “paratextual attraction to photos within postmodern fiction” as a means of analysing questions of time (87-88), like Keen (184), considering archives and photographs as documentary additions to narrative which problematise the idea of accessing historical evidence in the present. Yet, in *Sixty Lights*, as in other neo-Victorian Cameron fictions, photographic traces are
transformed into an internalised mode of seeing which becomes a means of experiencing time in textual form – making the novel a “metaphysical meeting place”. In *Sixty Lights*, taking photographs is a metaphor for the pleasures of creating literary narrative, of fashioning a possible unknown future, yet literature is itself the means to render and untie the knots of photographic time, with its simultaneous pulls forwards and backwards, and its expanded sense of the present. Memory in *Sixty Lights* is about the archive’s “promise” of the future (Derrida, 36) and about the compression of chronology, but this does not result in chronological collapse or archive fever; instead, the effect is of a blurred mosaic of different types of time, resembling the temporal pools of Cameron’s albums. The narrative, and Lucy Strange’s life, are experienced as a kind of metaphysical photograph album.

**Writing with Time and Light**

In *Sixty Lights*, as in each of the photographic “texts” discussed in this chapter, dissociation from normative temporality opens a space for stepping outside of time, into the wells of time summoned by the archive. Submergence in such an archival time may be figured as a kind of retreat into a world of death, and it has been articulated as a “tomb” (R. Roberts, 301), “a crypt” (Boulter, 7), and “a submersion, perhaps even a drowning” (Farge, 4). This understanding conditions the archive as a space of loss, whose evocation of other times calls for a working through mourning and melancholia.

Yet, death and loss are not the primary motifs of time and memory in Cameron’s “Thackeray” and “Herschel Albums”, Thackeray Ritchie’s “From an Island” and Jones’s *Sixty Lights*. Instead, it is my view that light is the figure for time in all these examples; of its expansion, contraction, allure, revelation and mystery, qualities also expressed by the negation of light, deep darkness. Through the play of these opposing qualities, patterns of time emerge that inveigle photography as an expression for narrative movement and the ellipsis of moments in memory. Light is a means of *translating* what has been seen, through its primary capacity to effect representations in the retina, but also to transform what “has been there” into the illusion of something else, a quality essentially shared with photography as defined by Barthes (*Camera Lucida*, 76). Light and time become analogies in the expression
of a narrative that is not conditioned by consecutive events, but by the transformation
effected by experiences. These experiences of light are held captive within the
arrangement and selection of the photographic archive, which holds time and light in
wait for the response of the viewer or reader.

I would argue, in line with pictorial critics, that the photographic archive offers a yet
greater potential for narrative and temporal dislocation than fragmentation found in
textual archive narratives (Brindle, 12), for the translation from the visual offers a
greater intermedial potential. Horstkotte and Pedri suggest tantalisingly that
photographs are necessarily disruptive as “[d]ue to their fragmented, discontinuous,
static nature, photographic images (apart from the relatively rare case of image
sequences) cannot inscribe a ‘before’ or ‘after’” (3). Yet in the case of the “image
sequences” found within the fictions and albums in this chapter, the disruptions are
more ambiguous and disruptive, slowing down and speeding up the “text” at odd
points, isolating moments of time.

This “fragmented, discontinuous” photographic disruption of time can be discerned
in Cameron’s “Thackeray” and “Herschel” Albums, where images suggesting
differing temporal states are glued onto the linear narrative of consecutive pages:
elegiac futurity sits next to deepening mystery; the foolish are a warped version of
the wise (see Figs. 31-33, p.180-184). In the albums, the arrangement of visual
material suggests implicit, blurred connections that remain relatively opaque to
interpretation even whilst being wholly visible. In photographic fictions, these
implicit connections pass through translation into textual form, making them
ostensibly more legible but further destabilizing narrative successiveness for the
described images are evoked static moments suspended somewhat uncomfortably
within the web of a supposedly linear text. They may evoke the past of memory, as
Thackeray Ritchie’s photographic groups do in “From an Island”, or the hope of the
future as Lucy Strange’s visions of stars do in Sixty Lights, but they do not easily
portray movement smoothly through time as textual archives may do; they remain
relatively resistant to the concept of continuous narrative progression. Thus as a
means of expressing temporal surrealism in fiction, the photographic archive may be
more subversive than the textual archive. Instead of the text translating the image
into comprehensible slices of time, the translation of vision into language disturbs
the clarity of the narrative sequence, suggesting a productive aporia.
Julia Margaret Cameron’s photographs, though frequently categorised as unsuccess fully literalist renditions of fictions, or an idealised greatness-worshipping exercise, are staged in the featured novels as theoretically-rich conduits for disruptions of narrative, time and the archive. This is possible because Cameron’s original works already involve complex treatment of time and memory, notably through her evocative uses of light and darkness – the blinding flash and the brilliant white of holy revelation, the darkness of uncertain possibility and hard-won insight into the future. These motifs resurface in Cameron fictions – in Hexham’s view of the St. Julian daughters on the cliff top where “a bright stream that was playing like a halo about their heads” (Thackeray Ritchie, “From An Island”, 27); in Lucy Strange’s “rectangle of dark possibilities within which features emerge” (Jones, 183). All these translations of Cameron’s Victorian aesthetics of light and dark detail an act of looking by a photographer figure who perceives metaphorical meaning in these visual extremes.

Furthermore, in this chapter, I have explored how Cameron’s portraits underline the reflexive gaze in their various embodiments of mirror effects which present the viewer with a reciprocal stare, a fictional and/or historical version of the self. Cameron also explores consciously the dynamics of mirroring within images like *The Dialogue* which posits a liminal space between the self and the mirror. In her works, the role of the mirror is more than a place of indexical reproduction but one of transformation, of dialogue between different versions of the self, and crucially, between different time periods and memories.

In this way, an analogue with neo-Victorian photography fictions can be identified. Marlene A. Briggs refers to such mirrored connections between modern writers and the historical photograph as the “flickering of the aura” which “derives from a self-reflexive awareness of antithetical conditions: distance (uniqueness, difference) and proximity (repetition, similarity)” which “signify changeable co-ordinates rather than absolute values” (116). If this mirror flickers according to the observer’s glance, then this effect is amplified when the original material itself embeds conditions of reflexivity, distance and proximity. In *Sixty Lights*, looking is self-consciously foregrounded as a reflexive activity between past and future selves that provokes pivotal moments of change in character and understanding. In true Cameron style,
these reflections are not indexical but translations of one time into another, of memory into the present, of image into text, of the archive into the self.

For it is the material archive that both distorts time and comes to rearrange the self within time, an effect seen in all the texts, although prominently in *Sixty Lights*. By arranging her moments of light, and her “maculate” images (199) disjunctively, Lucy’s memory and identity is distorted from straightforward chronology, but not to her destruction or temporal collapse as might be suggested by models of archive fever. Instead, the rearrangement of the archive is a vindication of her life and a signal of defeating death, she is reflected in her “lights” or moments as in a broken, multiplicitous mirror, whose jagged pieces she encounters symbolically at the beginning of the text. Cameron’s albums may also be seen as broken mirrors, whose pieces arranged within the pages, present aspects of the self and of memory, of modes of femininity, of ways of identifying with fiction and history. The albums are thus a form of archival space containing different types of time. The fictions within this chapter hold time in similar ways to Cameron’s albums, demonstrating overt (Jones) or subtly integrated (Thackeray Ritchie) arrangements and translations of the archive as meditations on the past and its telescopic translation into the present. Each “text” is a pattern of time and light.
Conclusion

“Schemes of Light” and “Schemes of Form”

Figure 37. Julia Margaret Cameron, *The Angel at the Sepulchre* (1869-70) and *The Kiss of Peace* (1869); the first two listed works in *Exhibition of Photographs by Julia Margaret Cameron*, Serendipity Gallery, 1904.

Mrs. Cameron had an almost Venetian feeling in composition, and had a sense of form which she strangely enough succeeded in expressing by means of a medium so separate from the manipulator’s own will as is photography. […] It is not easy to understand how she compels the camera to take this noble view and to envelope the form, the head, with so much dignity. Obviously light is her principal means. It is interesting to see how she uses beautiful shadow and light to mould and invest the figure, how the scheme of light reveals the scheme of form.

Alice Meynell, “Note”, *Exhibition of Photographs by Julia Margaret Cameron*, 4-5.

In the early twentieth century, the connection of light and form with character, was the aspect of Julia Margaret Cameron’s work that most struck Alice Meynell as a poet and writer of art criticism. Meynell intriguingly pays tribute to “the scheme of light that reflects the scheme of form” (5), regarding this form as symbiotically arranged with the lighting of the model so that the tangible and intangible matters of
the image work in harmony. The posing of the model or object of study is somehow integrally involved with the treatment or “incidence” of light, so that the character or subject of the image is revealed.

Yet this commentary was first published in a text suggesting another variety of form – the form of the exhibition catalogue, and is also a retrospective or “memory” text surveying Cameron’s career, being a programme for Cameron’s first twentieth-century exhibition at the Serendipity Gallery which is accompanied by a list of the displayed images. Meynell’s emphasis on Cameron’s “Venetian feeling” and “beautiful shadow and light” (5) rather than on the fame of the male sitters is reflected in the images that head the 1904 exhibition: “The Angel at the Sepulchre”, “The Kiss of Peace”, “A Study (Mrs. Duckworth)” followed by a range of Arthurian images of men and women (Exhibition of Photographs, 7-10). These first two religious images featuring Mary Hillier (Figure 37) use light to “envelop the form, the head, with so much dignity” (5), yet point towards a third, spiritual space beyond the sitter or even the intended subject portrayed. The “scheme of form” in the exhibition reflects a concern with enigmatic aestheticism, with the “scheme of light” and produces a reading of the past comparable to short tonal story told in images.

Meynell’s pronouncement that the “scheme of form reveals the scheme of light” not only reflects the dynamics of this early selective interpretation of Cameron’s archive, but it is a principle that can be discerned both in Cameron’s original albums and in the five neo-Victorian photographic fictions addressed in this thesis. Like the composition of images in the albums, the novels select and arrange Cameron’s archive with different emphases, tempering and directing light onto the chosen traces, firing new imaginative connections to reveal tone and character, stringing together movements and creating patterns of pauses and ellipses, producing new presentations of the past. Form and light become the building blocks of each Cameron fiction discussed in this thesis.

In this survey of one Victorian and five examples of neo-Victorian writing on Cameron, I have found that Cameron’s theories and techniques are integrally involved in their meditations on her works to a remarkable degree, making what we might call the “schemes of light”, of vision and imagination, symbiotic with the “schemes of form”, of structure and the archive. They re-arrange Cameron’s
photographic archive in the context of Victorian art practices and appropriate her aesthetics, themes and methods to both ontological and affective purposes, in order to produce new forms. These forms – representations, realignments, and critical rewritings of the past – crucially derive from lateral connections to the original material. Each piece of fiction draws on the photographs’ ambiguous representational qualities and fluid link to the past as an opening point.

Contemporary novels on Cameron also owe a lot to the relation of vision, memory, history and materiality in Virginia Woolf. Woolf, influenced by Cameron’s creative representations of history, treatment of light and archival imagination, seeks to interrogate boundaries that separate fact and fiction, proposing a fluid treatment of the archive, as we have seen outlined in “The Lives of the Obscure”. In this way, Woolf reads the archive, through herself, considering the affect (what we might call “light”) that it has on her and applying imagination to a new representation (“form”).

In a wider sense, Woolf becomes the expressive mediator and the prism of archival creativity for many contemporary works of historically creative fiction that play with the archive, the inaugurating spark of objects, and the matter of the past more generally, employing the creative “scheme of light” to reveal the meaning concealed in the “scheme of form”. This influence is too wide to review extensively here, and could be more deeply considered in a further study. What is exciting in relation to my current subject, is the idea that these major ripples in literary history were in some sense influenced, by Woolf’s relation to Cameron. Cameron thus becomes a far more important figure, not only in the history of photography but in a lateral sense, in the history of literature.

In this thesis, I have drawn a line from Cameron’s “scheme of form” and “scheme of light” and her constant re-contextualisation of fictions and histories, through Woolf, towards neo-Victorian fictions that employ Cameron’s works to express the operations of form, time and light, of memory and materiality, and of representation and identity. By tracing this line of cultural development through the concept of the archive and its dynamics, I have shown how material traces continue to evolve and influence culture beyond their original contexts, in matters of both structure and aesthetics, form and light.
The Fluidity of the Archive

In this thesis I have attempted to pose a border-crossing between material and immaterial archives – fluidly considering archives as specific material objects and also as tropes of cultural memory, intangible formulations of histories, fictions, cultures that can attach themselves to objects as auras, and can be channelled into new creative endeavours.

The materiality of the photograph is also a critical colouring factor in this discussion of archives as fiction, or fiction as an archive. Starting from the critical position that the materiality of images are imaginative and “readable” nodes within a memory culture, I have suggested that photography is a pivotal medium for archival creativity, for it is a medium that is highly resonant for the viewer, impressing them with both a sense of reality in a fiction, and of the fictional construction of a reality. Photography is unquestionably material in its form, yet implicates such an immaterial range of impressions and memories, resulting in a peculiar dialogic between the tangible and intangible. In this way, photography embodies fruitfully the qualities of that which I have called an archival imagination.

As we have seen, these elements of the material and the immaterial, narrative and document, are particularly prevalent within the work of Julia Margaret Cameron and subsequently in the work of writers who have appropriated her art. As the chapters have unfolded, I have attempted to show that certain qualities of Cameron’s photography can be densely interlinked to the archive along ontological lines, and have traced a weaving of this archival fictionality from its creation in the Victorian period to the literary forms in which it flourishes today. In this hybridised project, I have been building a twofold argument. Firstly, I wanted to underline the presence of experimental and affective forms in Victorian art photography as a means of conveying fluid meanings, particularly as a precursor to the conveyance of such a collage of affective meanings in literary representations of Victorian photography in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. As an adjunct to this, I have particularly stressed the role of imagination in Cameron’s works as producing an overflow of experience which breaks down barriers between genres, subjects and styles, and counters models of the Victorian photograph as an indexical monitor of social structures. Secondly, on a related but more expansive level, I wanted to address the
qualities of the archive as material and metaphor for fictional production, considering how the roots of this genre can be found in Victorian forms which have exploded into an ever-expanding body of novels in which the archive is both an organising principle and the source of a powerful affectivity that destabilises linear narrative and established boundaries.

Tying these strands together, I considered Cameron as an archivist figure compiling a cultural collection as a parallel to the archivist role performed by the neo-Victorian writer who selects and presents a range of nineteenth-century traces. In the following summary, I trace how these arguments have been developed in my chapters in relation to three areas of archival creativity: imagination, structure and temporality.

Photographic Imagination: Archival Energy

From the start of this thesis, I have emphasised the integral nature of Julia Margaret Cameron and her works to my archival arguments. Rather than suggesting that Julia Margaret Cameron’s photographs, having been designated as archival by posterity, become material nodes in the works of others, which would make her an incidental figure, I wanted to suggest that she was a truly archival artist. Specifically, Cameron’s techniques emphasised an archive of the imagination, which was to be mediated by the imagination of the viewer. She drew on the cultural archive available to her as a mid-nineteenth-century artist, in contemporary influences from Tennyson, the Pre-Raphaelite painters and Lewis Carroll, and historically, in medieval lore, Renaissance painting and religious iconography among other things, and was not afraid to combine these influences and themes within her individual prints, and in her albums and exhibitions. Informed by her own extensive reading, she produced artworks that captured the elements of myths, fictions and histories that particularly resonated with her, making her output a document of her wide-ranging imagination. Yet she does not dictate to the viewer, but allows space for them to impute meaning to the images whose subject often can only be discerned by the titles that divide subtly differing representations. The enigmatic expressions of the models, their eyes and hair, invite speculation towards the inwardness of perspective that critics like Kate Flint have attributed as a defining feature of Victorian visual culture, and Lindsay Smith and Carol Hanbery MacKay have particularly associated with
Cameron. In this way, her photographs are never definitively “completed” even in their initial context. Always an eager proponent of the incidental, Cameron allowed unexpected effects in her work to suggest new ideas of beauty to her, famously claiming that her discovery of soft focus was a “fluke” (“Annals”, 10), and she also was a critical adaptor and reader of the affectivity of her images when she created her albums. It is evident from Cameron’s choice of titles for her photographs that she read them subjectively herself, even after the image was originally created. She repeatedly gave multiple titles to single images and reversed images (Rosen, 154) implying that she reassessed their contents after printing the image, and she exercised creativity in putting together the albums, evidently reconsidering the associations of the photographs and their likely effect on a new audience. In this way, we might make the case that Cameron considered her own photographs as flexible sources of imagination, not ultimately finished works.

This application of a readerly imagination that looks beyond the surface presentation of an image can be related to Cameron’s philosophies and techniques. Cameron was invested in a reading of the individual, phrenologically and spiritually, or “recording faithfully the greatness of the inner as well as the features of the outer man” (“Annals”, 11). This inward reading is implicated on the level of Cameron’s initial practice of selecting and posing beautiful models with “unusual attributes of […] character and complexion of mind” (“Annals”, 11). A readerly imagination is also implicated in the presentation of the finished photographs, wherein often initially disconnected content and titles need to be read through each other, and through the cultural archive, in order to receive the intended impression(s) or to pick up on the “internal focalizers” (Bal, 159). One may see this, for example, within the many influences feeding Cameron’s 1872 Pomona photograph of Alice Liddell (Cox and Ford, Complete Photographs, 230), as discussed within Chapter 1, with the hands tellingly posed to reflect Carroll’s Alice Liddell as the Beggar Maid.

If it may be suggested that the photographs are only culturally eclectic in the eyes of a contemporary viewer, it is evident from her exhibitions, image price catalogues, letters to artistic mentors (Cox and Ford, Introduction, 3, Complete Photographs, 538-541, Weiss, 38-40) and from the composition of her albums in which single images are used in many different contexts, that Cameron often re-assessed her works. Categories of separation suggested by Cameron “portraits”, “Madonna
groups” and “fancy pictures” (Cox and Ford, Introduction, 2), which have sometimes been taken up by twentieth-century critics as static categories, belies her own inter-appraisal of images of men and women as both fictional and historical persons, blended by an archival imagination. As we have seen, male and female subjects, nominally denoting real and fictional identities, are often conditioned by the same mythical sensibility, swathed in fabrics denoted the “historical” and draped in *chiaroscuro* from whence they stare enigmatically at the camera. Many of her character studies call for double reading, inviting the spectator to consider the pose and emotion of the idea or figure nominally depicted, as well as the model’s particular glance, resulting in an unresolved blend of themes and implications.

If Cameron’s images are only half-complete before being fused together in the culturally-literate mind of the Victorian viewer, she has been even more open to creative reinterpretation and appraisal by writers, especially once her images had re-entered the canon of Victorian art after Gernsheim’s revival of her reputation in the sixties and seventies. The openness of both Cameron’s images and her life to speculation on the degree of her allegiances to various ideologies and the value of her work as art, make her a fruitful subject for neo-Victorian writers. In Helen Humphreys’ *Afterimage* and David Rocklin’s *The Luminist*, fusion with tales of class inequality, feminism and Postcolonialism invoke Woolf’s concept of “lives of the obscure” who can be rescued from the archives and given new life by being rewritten. Yet all the neo-Victorian photograph fictions in this thesis may be considered as Woolfian in aim, “[j]oin[ing] a present onto this past” as Woolf’s Katherine Hilbery desires to do with the Cameron photographs she views in *Night and Day* (95), by offering a narrative completion of the intangible qualities of Cameron’s artworks and career. These novels are similarly archival, functioning as “readings” of Cameron’s work and life, in which ekphrasis can be considered as opening up the archive through imagination, leading to new reinterpretations.

Unusually, the chief value of photography in these Cameron-inspired texts is expansive, precluding the reduction to specificity that is usually cited as the chief function of photography in fiction. Horstkotte and Pedri have recently argued that the representation of photography leads to “a self-consciously contrived reality effect as the photograph lends itself to a (mock-) documentary aesthetic that may be at odds with the literary fictions with which it is combined” (3). Yet in the fictions I have
considered in this thesis, photography is, in most cases, the least realist element of the narrative, both in terms of its visual content and its function in the narrative. Photographs operate as portals to shared metaphysical experiences that draw the disparate protagonists together under the umbrella of a universal Romanticism and the presentation of the photographs are chiefly characterised by non-realist composition and smoky, blurred light effects. Cameron’s archival imagination, her ambivalent reinterpretation of that which her fictional alter ego Isabelle Dashell refers to as “the stories that people know” (Humphreys, 63) is here the factor that illuminates and expands the categories of photographic, biofictional or archival text.

The novels in this thesis dramatise the relationship between characters and photographic traces through a process of archival imagination. Their depiction of photographs attempts to express a Victorian poetics of the inward which was to be “read” in the outward world and in material representations. Accordingly, the visual assessment inscribed in these novels is preoccupied with intensely studying the outward value of the image (its contents and composition) as a gateway to its inward value (spiritual/metaphysical qualities). Thackeray Ritchie’s “From an Island” expressed this contemporary Victorian fascination with the inward depth of outward forms in her blurred impressionistic narrative. This movement from the incidental outer layers towards the inward is then reproduced in the neo-Victorian texts; in Afterimage’s introspective assessment of heroines and The Luminist’s emphasis on the imaginative impact of light effects in the mind of Eligius. It can be seen in the Ulverton photographer’s George Eliot-like assessment of the spiritual significance of the objects captured by her camera; in Manticory’s reading of multiple visual sources as maps of identity in The True and Splendid History of The Harristown Sisters; and in the phantasmagorical reading of the world that Lucy Strange translates into her “maculate” images (199). All six texts take a metaphysical approach to both the photographic process and of photographic traces, foregrounding the strangeness and revelation of photography as a new process of being and inhabiting the world in the nineteenth century. In this way, the novels both hint at,

\[18\] For arguments on Victorian aesthetics of the inward, see Kate Flint, The Victorians and the Visual Imagination (2000) and Lindsay Smith, Victorian Photography, Painting and Poetry: The Enigma of Visibility in Ruskin, Morris and the Pre-Raphaelites (1995).
and defamiliarise, the archival sources they invoke, in many ways re-inventing them anew by having the photographs remade in the course of the narrative.

The archive invoked by the novels also points to the cultural archive which lies within Cameron’s photographs, including Romantic poetic sources and Renaissance artworks, Ruskin’s art criticism and Pre-Raphaelitism. This deepening invokes a further layer behind the representation of the Victorian, positing the question of a Victorian creative representation of history. This action of “reading” stages the nineteenth-century characters as analogues for the contemporary reader of historical fiction, as archivists of culture who face the problem of how to shape history into a form and more contentiously, how to empathise with and imagine it.

I make the further assertion that the neo-Victorian texts employ Cameron’s works and artistic philosophies to address the potentiality of a photographic imagination, not just as a means of capturing and augmenting beauty, but as a medium for social change and connection. They make this imaginative action visible, by foregrounding the process of reading images, both internally within the world of the text, in interactions between characters and fictional photographs, and metacritically, as a pictorial “double fiction” (Louvel, “Photography as Critical Idiom”, 46), between the reader and the archive. In these novels, an archival imagination is grounded in Victorian visual theory. Ever reaching inward through the materiality of the photograph, this type of imagination favours the lateral over the literal, the quality of vision over the subject, and can be equated to an endorsement of the workings and potential of “magical” over “meaningful” value (Larkin, 99). Yet, this mode of understanding is not merely redolent of fuzzy thinking, but is suffused with neo-Victorian concerns with the possibility of making connections between disparate and socially marginalised individuals. Through a shared imagination, the novels attempt to “rescue” these footnotes of the archive, writing them back into history, as Woolf wanted to do in “The Lives of the Obscure” by breathing life into material remains as a creative exercise. In Cameron’s albums, archival imagination suggests a rich site of interpretation, and hints at the visual equality of individuals; in the novels, imagination becomes the medium of change.
Photographic Structures: The Meaning of Fragmentation

The concept of archival structure as a metaphor for Victorian society has passed into a cultural truism. Yet, this thesis demonstrates that arrangement and order can have creative potential in Victorian culture in a way that has a continuing legacy in modernist and neo-Victorian works. My emphasis has been that the arrangement of archival objects or images can create narrative within both textual and visual forms. Narratives are formed from sequences of visual traces, which in novels, can operate as a secondary “double” strand, running alongside the ostensible events of a novel. To demonstrate this, I have made use of Louvel’s quasi-musical understanding of “rhythm” in pictorial texts (Poetics, 177) to argue that hidden structures in these novels are held together by implicit and affective links which appear to emanate from the reader, but which are generated by the text’s construction. We can see this working within both photographic fictions and Cameron’s albums, which as visual texts, both invite the subjective inter-reading of pictures, whilst conditioning the responses to the invoked artworks. Thus the presence of pictorial rhythm in the albums and the novels is active in implicitly “reconstituting a plot” (Louvel, 172).

Whilst a wider study of confluences between archival and literary forms in a variety of eras could deepen understanding of archival structure as a form of narrative, it is my particular contention that Victorian scrapbook albums display especial narrative potential. Cameron’s use of this form as a hybrid public/private space takes this experimentation to a more self-conscious level of composition than vernacular albums, using artworks as well as commercial and art photographs. Cameron’s hybrid photograph albums can be seen as an experimental example of Victorian “new techniques of viewing” (Flint, Victorians and Visual Imagination, 37) that had radical consequences for vision and narrative, through their proposal that the image can be repeatedly conditioned in different ways by new subjectivities, destabilising the idea of a single meaning. In this thesis, I have explored how this Victorian multi-perspective technique has a continuing legacy in the incorporation of scrapbooking and archival patterns and metaphors in contemporary literary forms by demonstrating, how novels which draw on Cameron’s photographic albums operate as “laminated texts” (de Certeau, 94), as “reconstitute[ed] […] plot[s]” (Louvel, Poetics, 172), or as what I have called archive fiction.
By adapting this Victorian practice of scrapbook making, itself emerging in criticism as a female form of radical deconstruction according to Di Bello, Julia Margaret Cameron created aesthetic narratives of female transformation, of intertemporal meetings, of the real and the fantastic, of heroines meeting heroes and light meeting darkness. In the preceding chapters, I have expanded the theoretical horizons of existing discussion on Cameron’s albums as “visual auto/biographies” (Dell, 94), by viewing the albums through the lenses of fictive narrative and archival construction. This approach, as well as generating a commentary on the fluid nature of Cameron’s artistic practice, has a wider resonance in regards to the employment of photography as a proto-narrative form in the nineteenth century, and in regards to the role of the implicit and fictional in Victorian visual records.

In my second chapter, I demonstrated how the albums form complex archives which are deliberately constructed, but held loosely for the viewer to freely move, reading aesthetic, emotive and ideological narratives in their path through the images. The viewer is free to draw parallels between photographs on multiple levels, depending on how they are culturally inclined and/or wish to read these ambivalent collections. The albums can be read as delineating social boundaries, or as opening up an aesthetic equality of value; for the viewer, in experiencing the album, participates in its visual arrangement. In Cameron’s albums, social constructions can be read between generations of mothers and daughters, and in aspirational associations of the famous and the familial. Gender constructions can be traced in the blurring of Cameron’s own photographic categories, whereby male and female portraits are visually linked, interspersed, and aesthetically represented as bestriding reality and fiction. Most excitingly, in the multiple female identities offered in the large format albums, isolated aspects such as beauty, wisdom, motherhood, insight, creativity, anxiety, foolishness and disorder can be seen as fragments of a wider self. All these interlinked strands and filters are blended within Cameron’s image arrangements, held within the contained spaces of her albums.

If it may be levelled at this study that Cameron’s intentions in placing the images may be considered as subject to chance or unlikely to be deliberate, the evidence would argue otherwise, for Cameron’s practice of making albums using the same key images repeatedly in novel contexts suggests a sustained fascination with arrangement of her images and the different creative permutations possible, as well
as a keen interest in the impact of each album on its recipients. As I have discussed, her early scrapbook albums bespeak the roots of this fascination in the arrangement of photographs and prints in non-realist, cross-temporal formations. Supporting this, Cameron’s flexible use of materiality in her frequent experimentation with titles, subjects, reprints and models to modify the meaning of her images, and her specific choice of images for exhibitions to create certain impressions have already been commented upon (Rosen, 305). In fact, Cameron’s image narratives were already recognised in her own lifetime - Annie Thackeray Ritchie referred to Cameron’s exhibitions in a review as “A Book of Photographs” according to MacKay (46). Moreover, an investigation of Cameron’s legacy in the photograph albums of Virginia Woolf, adapting Maggie Humm’s ideas on the latter, supports the notion that Woolf’s albums’ experimental techniques were inspired and adapted from the earlier forms that Woolf would have been privy to in her youth.

In novels which draw heavily on the material traces of the past, the concept of the archive is a useful way of visualising the selection and manifestation of references. Texts featuring Julia Margaret Cameron’s photography add complexity in that the artist’s own practice of album-making and image-ordering is parallel to, or even explicitly interwoven into, the visual narratives. Cameron’s albums can suggest transformations in identity or the multiple facets of a single individual via image selection, and with the added element of time in the novels, a successive “archive” of images can signify the progress or deterioration of character as is the case in Ulverton, Harristown Sisters and Afterimage. Sixty Lights specifically employs the photograph album format as the metier of implicit self-expression on both macro and micro levels; the whole text operating as an archive of the self in images.

The image-narratives in these Cameronian novels present a hall of female identity to be negotiated. In The True and Splendid History of the Harristown Sisters, the artistic mediums represent refractions of possible selves, casting highlights and shadows on the identity of the heroine, until she encounters a trace that aligns to a fair representation of herself, suggestive of Lindsay Smith’s empathetic “aesthetic of focus” (26). A parallel to Manticory’s visual progression in Lovric’s novel, might be drawn in Lucy Strange’s negotiation of femininity and vision through the process of experiencing each of her “sixty lights” in Jones’s novel of the same name. In this progression, Lucy Strange rejects a masculine fixity of vision, “sedated and
mortified” and made up of “vain posturings; the stiff fictions of a happy marriage, placement in other, more remote and more comfortable worlds” (142), on a journey towards finding her own “maculate” traces (199). Afterimage rather presents the reader with a journey from the multiple to the singular, presenting the reader with a gallery of Cameronian female cultural identities to be negotiated, which culminate in a portrait of the heroine in her own identity. In each of these novels, this journey of negotiation is implicit, as it is in Cameron’s albums – the relationship between the images is rarely specifically articulated, but held within the context of the narrative, awaiting the reader’s configuration of visual elements.

The writers of these novels perform an archival activity in selecting and positioning their chosen materials. Through this process, they construct aspects of art history that correlate to certain theories of periodisation or feminist interpretation. For example, Lovric positions her archival narrative as a movement from masculine definitions of female forms to the recognition of female creativity and subjectivity in art. In Ulverton, “Miss Peep-Hole’s” Ruskinian symbolic realism descends into madness which resurfaces in a stream-of-consciousness memory text. In Afterimage, the journey suggested by the chapter structure: Guinevere – Ophelia – Sappho – Grace – Humility – Faith – Madonna (Mortal) – Madonna (Divine) – (6, 41, 73, 107, 167, 207) suggests a movement from the fallen woman to assertive transgression, then towards sanctification and peace. Rocklin’s The Luminist suggests a development from the imputed flatness of conventional portraiture to the living qualities of art photography. Despite differing widely in style and ideological focus, these novels employ a consistent dynamic in which art history becomes symbiotic with an axis of personal development. These adaptations of art history are transformed into the tales of liminal liberation that form the crux of the neo-Victorian genre.

Whilst acknowledging the mutability and partiality of these reconstructed histories, I argue that within the “archives” of Cameron’s albums and in most neo-Victorian archive fictions a movement towards an underlying meaning is implicit. Whilst the albums’ meanings are multiple and expressed in a large variety of permutations, they retain a movement or force towards the concealed, the hidden, and the inward, towards that which promises revelation. In this they draw on Victorian culture’s post-Romantic obsession with inward realities, a desire which is expressly manifested in Cameron’s writing, in which she claims that “my whole soul has
endeavoured to do its duty towards [my sitters] in recording faithfully the greatness of the inner as well as the features of the outer man. The photograph thus taken has been almost the embodiment of a prayer” (“Annals”, 11). The analogy of prayer suggests that the photograph represents a reaching towards a central sublimity that is veiled and not always obviously accessible, and yet can be expressed by attempts to reach it. If a series of images is thus a book of prayers, the albums represent so many partial facets or traces gathered in different formations around an implicit centre of meaning, rather than a dispersal of fragments with no centre.

Similarly, the novels present a shimmering spectacle of Cameronian traces with variable significances and new formations, but which gather implicitly around centres of meaning, even though they are rooted in postmodern mutability. *Ulverton* bridges this dichotomy explicitly, with its fragmentations of recorded traces gathered around the idea of an English village, resulting in a narrative that is splintered into multiple voices and literary modes, which despite the novel’s premise, gesture implausibly towards an elliptical centre in which there “lie[s] a secret web of knowledge, that once ascertained and drawn out, could provide a key to all mysteries” (198). *Sixty Lights* also holds this tension between fragmentation and completion. Lucy Strange’s dramatic rejection of traditional mores, structures and faiths, as well as established photographic techniques, marks her out as one who glances aside at the structural certainty of the world about her. This motif is expressed in the splintered form of the novel – a form which evidently derives from the disparate mismatch of a photograph album. Yet Lucy Strange finds herself again and again drawn back to a mysterious centrality that culminates in her death in which “Special things seen, and memories, and photographic prints, all converged to this quiet private point. She tilted the glass. She was still anticipating images. She was still anticipating, more than anything, an abyss of light…” (246). Drawn towards a vanishing point composed of many images and memories that “converge” towards a combination print of central meaning, Lucy Strange disappears into a photograph, or into the essence of photography itself. She heads towards an elliptical void that returns her to the medium of images and thus a dispersal into all things, reminding us of Arias’s argument that photography in neo-Victorian fiction is about “collapsing the boundaries between spirit and matter, life and death” (97). Lucy Strange’s life as a photograph album is, like Cameron’s, a series of prayers towards a central beauty,
the power of light itself. Through the application of creativity to archival structure, the six featured post-Victorian texts suggest impenetrable depths that lie behind the partial facets of materiality. Like the project of the archive itself, they reach towards an organisation of the represented world that may only be expressed through fragmentation.

Photographic Time: A Hall of Mirrors

Julia Margaret Cameron expressed the fluidity of time through her striking use of light. She implicitly animated her photographs with variable blurring and sited them as operating in narrative spaces which are to be completed by the viewer. Adding to the integral memorial qualities of the photograph, she expressed an inward experience of time through her aesthetic treatment and subject matter. In my third chapter, I made the case that intense darkness and powerful light in Cameron’s illustrative works contribute to the temporal meaning of her images, evoking different forms of understanding and being in time, and offering an empathetic window into fictional subjects. Correlating with the subject matter, bright light suggests the promise of a revelatory future whilst darkness suggests mystery and an uncertain quest for knowledge. These qualities of being are brought into dialogue through an ongoing theme of doubling and mirroring in Cameron’s works; an archival fragmentation that holds meaning as implicitly centred between traces.

In this final chapter, I argued that the subtleties of Cameron’s depiction of time can be seen best in her large illustrative portraits or “Life-Sized Heads” (Cox and Ford, Introduction, 2). This may be because portrait photographs employed as a form of illustration, hold peculiar powers in relation to the real, and to an in-between state between life and death, fiction and reality. The life-size dimensions of the photographs cause them to operate like a mirror to the viewer, an effect augmented by Cameron’s characteristic blur which projects the subject out of the frame, inviting the viewer into the world of the photograph, just as Alice is tempted into Carroll’s “gauze” looking-glass (149). This mirror promises to show other places, times and potentialities as tangible experiences. The photograph thus makes the “dead” literary source “live” by presenting it as a human reality, even when it embodies the core of a metaphor, or the essence of a poem as a tangible human being.
These portraits posit the existence of an embodied character who can have no existence outside of the illustration. *The Mountain Nymph Sweet Liberty* is immanently present because she only lives in this moment; in the substance of Milton’s metaphor, enlivened by the viewer’s cultural memory; yet Cameron’s mountain nymph is unmistakably and tantalisingly human. In this way the photograph also operates in the opposite way, involving the “living” metaphor, with “death” by fastening the abstract to the human, to an image as “memento mori” to quote Sontag (15). Characters that seem to transcend temporal moorings or exist in the “no-time” of metaphor, are cornered into the flash of impermanence.

Read in this literary sense, the photographs collectively present ideological questions that suggest an engagement with the central questions of the mid-Victorian age. The adjacent images of a Madonna and a Sibyl in the “Thackeray Album” reflect contemporary musings on the “woman question” from the point of view of a woman who embodied both these qualities. The two figures also suggest a contrast between divine and Classical wisdom, perhaps suggesting a divide or confluence between the world and the church, or between past and future. Cameron’s ambivalence, or rather, belief in the compatibility of these multiple modes is reflected in her eclectic choice of subject matter, and its admission of the variability of the self. As explored extensively in the third chapter, this is also expressed in the mirroring and pairing of images in the albums and within individual works. *The Dialogue* particularly stresses this tension point in a meeting of equals, hinting at unresolved questions suspended in a single moment. These temporal clashes can be seen as not the weakness of the albums, but their strength.

The albums are mosaics of time, of views that that look forward, backwards and out of time, forming meditations on the self. The spliced images of Cameron’s early scrapbook albums suggest a movement towards the synchronicity of past and future, with their interchanged and recontextualised generations. This disparity is then continued within the large-scale albums, with their mirrored Madonnas and Sibyls. These later arrangements build on Cameron’s early experimentation with visual narratives, not merely contrasting different generations, but bring about a dialogue between cultural mythologies, faiths and worldviews. They embody different ways of thinking about the past and future and of being within time.
Therefore, I would argue that far from attempting to fix a period in memory, Cameron’s work opens up her own history and the cultural histories she adapts to the interpretation of the viewer. It is perhaps this ongoing affective potential she intends, when she claims that her work is immortal, not designating an absolute fixity, but an endless adaptability that she would have experienced in viewing the Renaissance art that inspired her, and as she saw reflected in Tennyson’s adaptation of the Arthurian myths. Yet, through her selection of favourite Victorian themes and subjects, Cameron nevertheless reflects the cultural milieu of her time. In this way, her work reflects archival memory’s twin characters of traditionalism and subversion, both being deeply of her time, and containing the potential for change, when new audiences read the photographs “‘against the grain’ to bring out new voices which speak in opposition to power, or that insert irony or sarcasm or doubt” (Schwartz and Cook, 14-15). These applications of chaos, irony, doubt and artificial cohesion can be seen to represent practices of temporal engagement within the featured post-Victorian novels, notably within Lucy Strange’s smashed mirror of time fragments in Sixty Lights.

Cameron’s practice of spatially flattening temporal distances by repeating and combining images can be mapped onto neo-Victorian texts, where repeated evocations of same nodal images continually resurface in memory. These recurrent images are most often characterised by evasive blurrings and a sense of inscrutability; memory itself being figured as a blur, a hallucinatory effect expressed in Cameron’s Annie Lee. This effect can be found in Ulverton’s haunting resurgence of photographic glass negatives, and there are many examples in Sixty Lights, where repeated contemplation of a stained-glass sheep inspires a sense of the holiness of ordinary things (90, 104) or the blurred “ghost” photograph of Lucy Strange which expresses a resurgence of her liminal identity after her death (248).

Most profoundly, Anne Thackeray Ritchie expresses her whole novella of memory through a blur of Cameron images in “From an Island”. Thackeray Ritchie expresses crucial moments for the characters as powerful images corresponding to Cameron photographs, flooding a depiction of real life with the memory of the archive. Trying to recapture the elusive experience of the photographic moment, and staging discussions between the characters on the best means of capturing light, Thackeray Ritchie expresses memory as a blur of images, which for the artist, must be “grasped
as it passes” and “translate[d] in a strange […] revelation of its own” (23). This formulation of memory as photography was embedded within Victorian culture, according to Kate Flint, whereby scientists and literary writers conceived of the depths of the mind as a photographic archive whence “memories return unbidden, just as they had been stored away as visual resources” (*Victorians and Visual Imagination*, 144). This is expressed expansively in Thackeray Ritchie’s impressionistic novella, which might be considered as an experience of being haunted by images, a blurred album in words.

This slippery idea of memory was developed by twentieth-century writers as conducive to a model of non-linear thought. Virginia Woolf’s short story “The Searchlight”, originally based on members of the Freshwater circle according to J.W. Graham (385), is a pertinent example of her treatment of light as activating the chance effects of memory. The extended second induced by a pre-war searchlight which “struck straight at the balcony, and for a second a bright disk shone, perhaps it was a mirror in a ladies’ handbag” (*Haunted House*, 116), becomes the occasion of a character pouring out a memory of distant time, a Cameronian photographic vision through a telescope, that dissipates as quickly as it arrives, leaving darkness – for “the light only falls, […] here and there” (120). Eudora Welty observed of this story that “light is a character, the main character” (para. 8), and the ultimate expression of the chance effects of memory.

Informed by the musings of Eduardo Cadava on the confluence of writing, philosophy, and photography “a solar language of cognition that gives the mind and senses access to the invisible” (5), and deliberately amalgamating the characteristics of Cameron and Woolf, Lucy Strange’s obsession with what Elizabeth Bowen referred to as the “chancy and temperamental” mental photographs of life (346), produce waves of evocative memory, and forms the subject of her photographic art. Lucy’s story is produced as such a series of chance moments and latent memories, pulling the self apart into sixty resonant memory-images that add up to a portrait of the subject, comparable to the Ulverton photographer’s unintentional self-portrait in images supposed to capture a village. The format of these two novels are comparable with Cameron’s large-scale albums, which can be taken as multiform galleries of contrasting aspects of the female artist. Photography in these Cameronian texts becomes synonymous with patterns of memory, but this motif has a history in the
repeated significant images in Cameron’s albums, in her blurred presentation of
history, and in Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse* with its Cameronian instances of
photographic visual return. Each of these forms entails the recognition that time can
be bent through the rearrangement and resurgence of material objects, materially or
in fiction.

Yet, in the photograph albums such meanings remain more implicit, not being
aligned to a narrative of personal progression as is the case even in *Sixty Lights’*
multiform explosion of the self as a concept. Cameron’s albums represent time
through the medium of light, capturing both forms and thoughts – they are
meditations on personal memory crossed with cultural memory – and consider the
act of being in time not as a mere contrast between past and present, but as, by turns,
remembrance (*Annie Lee*, “Thackeray Album”, 9), an abstraction (*Mountain
Nymph*, “Herschel Album”, 82), a search for knowledge (*The Sibyl*, “Thackeray
Album”, 30), a pause in collective thought (*The Dialogue*, “Herschel Album”, 54),
an anticipation (*The Five Wise Virgins*, “Thackeray Album”, 31) or a promise
(*Madonna* series, Cox and Ford, *Complete Photographs*, 140-165). Cameron uses
literary and cultural sources to construct alternative mirrors of being for the
contemporary Victorian audience, and perhaps also for herself, for Cameron, like
Lucy Strange, splinters herself into multiple mirrors or forms of being in her albums.
The hall of mirrors in the albums presents a range of semi-permeable surfaces in
which the viewer invests their own cultural memory and if, the albums are “read”
thoroughly, moments of stillness or movement that are intended as gateways to a
transcendent inwardness. The treatment of Cameron’s photographic albums as
archives opens up speculation on Victorian concepts of arranging and being in
history, and in the present, that are complicated by the photograph’s strange relation
to time. These meditations are reflected in performances of this archive in literary
forms which also set up permeable borders between temporalities, treating cultural
memory, photography, narrative and fictionality as fragmentary mirrors.

**Reading Archival Creativity**

In this project, I have attempted to break new ground by emphasising how
interactively “reading” the photographs of Julia Margaret Cameron opens up
questions about the relation between affectivity and narrativity in her photography, and about the role of viewer imagination as an activating force in any archive. Furthermore, I have emphasised that the inclusion, selection and treatment of Victorian photographs in literary texts is akin to an archivial project, in which the creative potential of the photographic trace is expressed through form, imagination, and as resonant fragments of time. Cameron’s temporally rich traces have acted like a germ which sparks new materials and forms.

Cameron’s literary photography has lent itself to being translated into text since it was first created. In her own lifetime, Annie Thackeray Ritchie employed Cameron’s artwork as a filter to her own memories; and within fifty years of her death, Virginia Woolf read Cameron and her works as a window to her eccentric family heritage, an experimenter in visual structures, and as a mistress of the art of light. More recently, contemporary exhibitions of Cameron’s work have kept her cultural currency alive and sparked archival imagination leading to further new re-writings. For Gail Humphreys, it led to a refiguring of Cameron’s cultural tropes as feminist iconography, and for David Rocklin, to a rewriting of her treatment of light as a transcendental force. Cameron’s latent cultural presence as the most prominent female art photographer of the mid-Victorian period also informs writings that touch her work at an incidental angle, informing the structures of meditations on art and photographic history, as can be seen in the novels of Lovric, Thorpe and Jones. These forms are chiefly borne out of viewer responses; from imaginative re-drawings of Cameron’s archive in the light of wider cultural refigurations. Such literary forms are inspired by the conditioned impressions that artworks induce in different eras and contexts, not primarily by a debt to a nominally objective representation. This is why, to understand the full cultural impact of the archive and its proliferation of new forms, the imaginative, emotive and affective connections that it makes with its intended audience cannot be neglected, for this is the atmosphere in which new forms are bred. Mieke Bal notes that all such audience connections to artworks are themselves conditioned by contextual historical assumptions and cannot simply be taken as “revealing” the original image, since “the meaning of the work is […] situated as an effect of meaning” (Reading Rembrandt, 6-7). Indeed we have seen this self-determined context at work in the coded ways that each novelist presents their version of Cameron and her art as catalysts for their
particular projects. Each new form both borrows from the original and pastes onto it deceptively transparent layers that could be considered as varnishes, creating altered versions of cultural history within their own new “archives” or “albums”. Whilst Woolf magnified Cameron’s reputation as an eccentric, the neo-Victorian fictions featured in this thesis shape Cameron’s legacy by attempting to deconstruct the bounds between intention, representation and context in Victorian photography, participating in a form of pseudo-critical fiction. Yet this deconstruction, which attempts to place itself objectively outside of criticism by being voiced by a twenty-first-century appraising or archival figure within the text, is also necessarily a particular reconstruction of the archive, tied to the social aims of the text, genre and modern cultural currents.

The potential for this cultural rewriting is particularly varied in Cameron’s case as her original archive is already so fluid and experimental. The effects of the ongoing feminist revival of Cameron in criticism and fiction as a serious artist and a proto-modernist remain open, and the impression drawn on her archive of artworks will only become apparent in future decades. Yet Cameron’s changing reputation, like that of all historical figures, is likely to be one of further colouring and layering rather than simply stripping away conventions and prejudices. Not only is this integral to the way that the archive works in its recycling of history into new fictions and meanings, but more pertinently, reflects Cameron’s experimental fluidity as displayed in her frequent border crossings and her variable placement of images to construct new narratives. Cameron’s creative archive of albums and her individual works remain flexible and porous mirrors, leaving the way open for further interpretation and re-formations of this archive in fiction and criticism.

However, rather than ending at a general elucidation of the intertwining of archival and fictional processes, which, though valuable, tells us little of substance about Victorian photographic practices or their continued literary re-invigoration in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, I would rather comment on the constructions of meaning that this practice resurrects when applied to Victorian art photography and Cameron’s work in particular. Following Victorian understandings of “doublethink” that Olsen attributes to Cameron (242), and elucidations of the blurred relation between the “empirical” and “transcendental” to Victorian viewers (Smith, *Victorian Photography*, 3), this project has inferred throughout that in Cameron’s photography
and its literary echoes, the apprehension of meaning and an appreciation of the variations of individual perspective need not be mutually exclusive. I argue that through Cameron’s heterogeneous selection of subjects, perspectives and ideas there is a suggestion of a movement towards a “transcendental” centre which always remains implicit. Cameron’s art and its diverse literary afterlives produce a kind of centrifugal effect that draws attention to the angles, interpretations and constructions of disparate elements that produce new meanings, whilst hinting through these glimpses at a search for a form of hidden centrality or an “abyss of light” (Jones, 246).

Cameron’s art, like the wider project of the archive, revolves around such an invisible centre of implicit, elusive and obscured meaning, in which the drive towards representation is dependent on this meaning never being fully revealed, but is reached towards in the viewer’s imagination. Likewise, the search for the interior depths, hidden stories and multiple permutations of Victorian artworks in creative archival fictions produces reflections and refractions of the displaced matter of the Victorian cultural archive, including its marginalised “obscure” figures and ideas, bringing them once again into the light, as called for by Woolf (Common Reader, 146). Yet each of these fictions is also simultaneously concerned with a revelation of the “magical value” (Larkin, 99) of Victorian photography as a material emanation of the past, which is to be accessed through the imagination. This thesis has demonstrated that in Cameron’s aesthetics and albums, the search for the intangible can be effected through a proliferation of variable and shifting meanings, in which the substance of the past and of the present, in both material, social and cultural senses, is malleable on the axes of imagination, space and time. By applying this creative fluidity to the archive, the image or the text, the writer or artist may reshape, twist and inject life into it, reflect the “scheme of light” with a “scheme of form” (Meynell, 5), or, in Julia Margaret Cameron’s words, “clothe my little history with light, as with a garment” (“Annals”, 9).
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Referencing: MLA 7th Edition


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# Appendix

## FORM UPR16

### Research Ethics Review Checklist

Please include this completed form as an appendix to your thesis (see the Postgraduate Research Student Handbook for more information)

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<td><strong>First Supervisor:</strong> Dr. Charlotte Boyce</td>
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<td><strong>Start Date:</strong> (or progression date for Prof Doc students) 10/2013</td>
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If you are unsure about any of the following, please contact the local representative on your Faculty Ethics Committee for advice. Please note that it is your responsibility to follow the University’s Ethics Policy and any relevant University, academic or professional guidelines in the conduct of your study.

Although the Ethics Committee may have given your study a favourable opinion, the final responsibility for the ethical conduct of this work lies with the researcher(s).

### UKRIO Finished Research Checklist:

(If you would like to know more about the checklist, please see your Faculty or Departmental Ethics Committee rep or see the online version of the full checklist at: [http://www.ukrio.org/what-we-do/code-of-practice-for-research/](http://www.ukrio.org/what-we-do/code-of-practice-for-research/))

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<td>e) Does your research comply with all legal, ethical, and contractual requirements?</td>
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I have considered the ethical dimensions of the above named research project, and have successfully obtained the necessary ethical approval(s)

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