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Title:

Desperately Seeking Suzanne: photographs in Suzanne Chick's adoptee-narrative *Searching for Charmian*

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Abstract:

In 1994, Suzanne Chick published *Searching for Charmian*, an adoptee autobiography that relates Chick's discovery of her birth-mother's identity. Chick had been aware from a young age that she was adopted, but only discovered in middle age that her birth-mother was well-known Australian author and journalist, Charmian Clift.

Unlike the reconciliation trajectory that many adoption autobiographies take, a physical reunion between Clift and Chick was impossible as Clift committed suicide in 1969. In the absence of any prospect of physical reunion, *Searching for Charmian* relies upon other narrative structures. Resemblance as a marker of familial relationship becomes the text's organising principle, one that is thrown into relief with the numerous photographs Chick encounters in the course of her search, and a number of which are reproduced in the text. Significantly, the photographs of Clift are not only, or merely, the person they represent; Chick's narrative insists on the specific context of her adoption in order to create and read these photographs anew. The photographs are integral components of the life-narrative that turns around the importance of resemblance and difference in establishing this adoptee's identity. They are also potent markers of the ways in which visual media can transform ideas of family, of social relations and of the self.

Keywords:

Adoptee autobiography, life-writing, photography, Suzanne Chick and Charmian Clift, resemblance and difference

In writing of her birth-mother and the considerable number of photographs taken of her, adoptee Suzanne Chick makes a flippant observation: 'She had obviously flung herself in front of a camera whenever she saw one' (104). By way of contrast, Chick writes of the mother who raised her, 'Pictures of Mum are very rare. She always considered herself ugly and avoided the camera' (106). The distinct and diverse relationships with the camera that Chick affords her mothers, and juxtaposes, are at the heart of her life-writing text, *Searching for Charmian* (1994). This autobiographical account of Chick's discovery of her birth-mother's identity commences with its author, 'secure in my identity of forty-eight years, an art teacher, a painter, a wife, a mother [...] a daughter' (3), receiving information she has requested under the New South Wales *Adoption Information Act 1990* (63/90), as Chick had long been aware that she and her brother were adopted as babies. Her birth-mother, she learns, is the highly regarded Australian author and journalist, Charmian Clift, whose out-of-wedlock pregnancy at the age of nineteen—which resulted in Suzanne Chick *née* Shaw being born on Christmas Day in 1942 as Jennifer Clift—was largely kept secret from Clift's family, friends and readers.

The parliamentary law that enabled Chick to uncover the truth of her parentage was devised in order to reverse the secrecy the State had previously imposed regarding adoption in New South Wales (Anon.). The *Adoption Information Act* substantially enhanced the rights of people involved in adoption to access information, and allowed for the establishment of registers so adoptees and birth-parents could express or veto interest in contact. Chick's book is one of a number of adoptee life-narratives published in Australia in the 1990s following those legislative changes (Souter). As Chick herself notes in *Searching for Charmian*, "The relaxation of adoption laws in America and Australia has produced a lot of adoption stories [...] I've been reading every book on the subject I can get my hands on" (147). Among the books she likely read are Kathleen Silber and Phyllis Speedlin's *Dear Birthmother* (1983); Betty Jean Lifton's *Lost and Found: the Adoption Experience* (1979) and *Twice Born: Memoirs of an Adopted Daughter* (1975), and Jean Paton's *Orphan Voyage* (1968), all of which turn on an adoptee daughter's desire to 'find', if not reconcile with, her birth-mother. In addition, in Australia in the mid-1990s there was a heightened awareness amongst non-Aboriginal Australians of the policies and practices across decades that saw Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children removed from their families, and institutionalised, fostered and adopted, in accordance with racist Federal and State Government policies. Many of these life stories were registered painfully and powerfully in Robert Riley's research report *Telling Our Story* (1995) as well as the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's report on the Stolen Generation (as these removed children have come to be known), *Bringing Them Home* (1997).

If Chick's book was made possible by the increased public understanding of, and sympathy for, the personal trauma often associated with the act of surrendering a child and the uncertain impact on an adoptee's identity development, what was impossible was the reconciliation trajectory that underpinned many previous adoptee life-narratives. As Chick quickly discovered, Clift had committed suicide in 1969, when Chick was in her mid-twenties and well before she had the legislative support to seek her birth-mother's identity. In the absence of any prospect of physical reunion, Chick therefore needed to find another narrative device around which to structure her text, and which could also serve the purpose of building a relationship with her birth-mother

at the same time as it expressed her own quest for identity. In this case Chick chose to rely on photographs as a means of instating her familial ties to her deceased birth-mother.

While thinkers on adoption such as Charlotte Witt might counsel that “personal identity, because it requires some degree of self-understanding, is not directly constituted by any of our properties, whether they are necessary and genetic, or contingent and social’ (141), *Searching for Charmian* does have a pronounced and invested interest in resemblance, understood in terms of both physical similarities (or differences), and similarities (or differences) of personality and character. At the outset of Chick’s quest, soon after she discovers her mother’s identity and with only a scant knowledge of her life-story, it is the issue of physical resemblance that initially intrigues her. As an acquaintance of Chick’s comments early in the narrative, as photographs of Clift begin to find their way to the author from a variety of sources, ‘There is quite a look of her about you, once you know’ (22). This seemingly spontaneous moment of acknowledged or alleged likeness, placed in the first pages of the text, sets up the narrative’s privileging of resemblance (and by inference, difference), which finds its most obvious registration in the integration and interpretation of many photographs.

Chick’s quest therefore is immediately structured around the familiar ‘fantasy’ present in many adoptee narratives that there might exist someone (a birth-mother, a birth-father, a birth-sibling, a birth-grandparent) who is in some way similar to (if not exactly the ‘same’ as) the adoptee. Many adoptees have lived with an unsettling sense of difference, or an identifying physical trait, that sets them apart from the family with whom they share their lives, and the act of adoptee life-writing frequently attempts to resolve (or replace) this difference with familiarity. In Chick’s case her distaste for the difference she feels within her adoptive family is evidenced by passing accounts of her adolescent aversion to her full lips and high cheekbones, which she recognises as markers of her adoptee identity. When she eventually views photographs of her extended birth-family, ‘My great-grandparents, Pardie and Emma Clift, on what looked like their fiftieth wedding anniversary,’ her exclamation to ‘look at the planes of that face [Emma’s] and the high cheekbones! Mine! Mine and Gina’s [Chick’s daughter]’ (129), points to a joy in similarity, in trans-generational resemblance, that the images afford. It is a pleasure of recognition that Gina also shares; she calls her mother with ‘fantastic news’; she has just bought a book, ‘By some guy called Kinnane’ and ‘it’s got pictures of *her* [Clift] in it. And she looks just like *us*! Like you and me. The big mouth and the eyes and everything. And the cheekbones’ (62).

Indeed, the enthusiasm Gina and her mother share for the photographs’ status as ‘evidence’ for physical resemblance raises the question: ‘How do photography and lived experience fold into one another?’ (Jordan 51; Adams; Haverty Rugg) Not only does the text underscore Chick’s interest in and knowledge of visual representation as a teacher of art, a practicing artist and an amateur photographer (she has her own darkroom where she eventually develops photographic prints of Clift and her extended family). It also features many reprinted and juxtaposed photographs of Clift and Chick in the knowledge that no (unaltered) individual photograph can exist that pictures birth-mother and daughter together within the one frame. The many photographs and references to photographs that Chick’s narrative evokes and rests on draw particular attention to the complicated notions of kinship and identity that shape both her sense of

herself and her role as an author, and also to the central place photographs assume in the narrative structure of her adoptee life-writing. In this regard, Chick's text is not alone in turning to photographs to establish connections between children and their birthmothers; to grapple with what an adoptee identity might 'look' like and what this 'look' might mean. The respective birthmother memoirs by Janet Mason Ellerby (*Following the Tambourine Man* (2007)) and Karen Salyer McElmurray (*Surrendered Child* (2006)) use photographs to establish connections between birthmothers and their surrendered children, while Kate St. Vincent Vogl's adoptee memoir *Lost and Found* (2009) also peppers her narrative with photographs to tell her life-story. Yet in distinct contrast to Vogl's text, Chick's narrative not only repeatedly references the presence of photographs and their centrality to the formation of the story told, but also expressly arranges particular photographs on the page so that their function in the narrative goes well beyond illustrating or proving 'resemblance'; they are key in constructing, mediating and questioning the idea, and desire for, resemblance in this adoptee narrative.

* * *

From the moment she discovers her birth-mother's identity Chick faced the prospect of (re)assessing her own identity in the shadow her birth-mother's very large personality. Clift is remembered as one of the great Australian literary personalities of her era. Born in 1923, she came to public attention immediately after the war when she started a very public relationship with renowned (and married) Australian war correspondent George Johnston. The two eventually married and commenced writing fiction, with their debut, jointly authored novel, *High Valley* (1949), winning the major Australian literary prize of the period. The public interest in the couple only increased after they expatriated with their two children to London in 1951, and then to the Greek islands of Kalymnos, and finally Hydra, where they lived and wrote (and had a third child) between 1955 and 1964, and where they also became the cornerstone of an international community of writers and artists. Upon returning to Australia in 1964 Johnston achieved his greatest success with a series of high profile novels, and Clift began a new career as the country's foremost newspaper columnist writing widely syndicated articles for the *Sydney Morning Herald*. Even to those Australians who may have read little of her writing, Clift served as a symbol of bold, bohemian living during some of the country's most deeply conservative years. The question of physical resemblance was also potentially daunting for Chick, as Clift had a reputation as a great beauty. As her biographer Nadia Wheatley wrote, she "seemed to shine with some inner quality which sent ripples of light across her mobile features" (124). Moreover, it was a beauty that transmitted photographically, with Wheatley also noting that Clift was blessed with "that indefinable thing which makes a certain face photogenic. It is clear that the camera loved Charmian—and that the feeling was mutual" (124).

This 'love' between camera and subject was apparent in the great number of photographs Chick quickly finds of Clift. At one point Chick exclaims, half-exasperated, half-elated, 'Never, apart from media stars, has a woman been more photographed' (252). As she finds herself confronted at every turn by photographs of her birth-mother, Chick's field of vision and her emotional response become 'full of contradictory images' (132). The narrative declines to reconcile or draw definitive conclusions from these contradictions, deferring instead to the essential autonomy of the person represented—

'who can ever know how she saw herself?' Chick asks at the end of her text (345). But the photographs of Clift are not only, or merely, the person they represent, and Chick's narrative insists on the specific context of her adoption in order to create and read these photographs anew. Nor are the photographs simply illustrations that add colour to the written narrative; they are integral components of the life-narrative that turns around the importance of resemblance and difference in establishing this adoptee's identity. In turn they become potent signs of the ways in which visual media can transform ideas of family, of social relations and of the self, and constantly remind us that resemblance is a heavily mediated and potentially fraught concept.

The existential challenge that Chick faces in placing herself in relation to Clift becomes abundantly clear as she sifts and searches through the seemingly innumerable photographs of her birth-mother, and finds herself confronted by both a powerful presence and a permanent absence. Writing in, and of, her narrative, she reports that:

My story is the incarnation of the first half of the most common childhood fantasy of adoptees: *my mother is really someone famous/ beautiful/ special*. The second half of the fantasy (no longer mine) is: *she will reappear and reclaim me and love me perfectly*. (147-8)

Chick acknowledges here that adoptee life-writing, and the singular experiences it strives to represent, is always narratively mediated (see also Homans, *The Imprint of Another Life*). Moreover, adoptee narratives follow recognised arcs and use established vocabularies that make possible, but also perhaps limit, what might be said (and felt) about the specificities of individual lives and kin relationships. Chick's awareness that some narratives, more than others, are culturally available to write and read directs readers to attend to the representational forms called on in *Searching for Charmian*, including the use of photographs.

The many photographs that are invoked throughout *Searching for Charmian* serve not only as visual 'checkpoints', but also act as prompts for the multitude of life stories adjacent to and distant from Chick's experiences. Nearly every person she seeks out gives or promises Chick photographs of Clift or of moments that are conjoined with Clift in the memory of those left to narrativise the images. On meeting Wheatley, who was not only writing a biography of Clift at the time but is part of her subject's extended biography, having commenced the biographical project at the urging of Martin Johnston, the eldest child of Clift and Johnston, and Wheatley's partner during the 1970s, Chick is presented with a 'proof sheet' of photographs of Clift. These are, readers are told, the first images of her mother Chick has seen. Roseanne Bonney, the widow of Martin Johnston, who Chick credits as 'providing unfailing encouragement, affection and practical help' (ix), pulls out a photo album at their initial meeting and shows Chick pictures of her late husband. Bonney also offers Chick the opportunity to borrow 'all the Johnston family photographs' that Garry Kinnane 'had borrowed for his biography' of Johnston (104). These are images with which Chick is by now familiar, and not only because ideologies of the family anticipate how such photographs might be seen (Hirsch). She had read Kinnane's biography; noted the selection of photographs of Clift; and wondered at what motivated their inclusion, at the meanings, not at all self-evident, that might be attributable or projected on to 'one picture in particular with her face turned to the light, so terrible that I wondered what point Kinnane was trying to make

by choosing it' (86). With these comments, Chick registers her awareness of the ways photographs can be multiply interpreted, or indeed how they can stall attempts at interpretation as well as be pressed into the service of interests that might not be entirely apparent.

Other friends of her mother share photographs; Cedric Flower produces 'little contact sheets' of photographs he took on Kalymnos that show the furniture being moved out of the house in which Clift and Johnston lived. Flower also lends Chick negatives from which she makes prints in her darkroom that portray Clift's island life in some detail. As Chick produces these images Clift's other children—Chick's siblings—materialise before her eyes in a way that invokes thoughts of visual sorcery.

When a photographer prints up her own negatives, she knows what images are there [...] With this role of film I did not know what was coming next. There! There was my mother beside a market caique: baskets piled high on the waterfront, an old Greek produce-seller grinning toothlessly at the camera, Charmian in full skirt and white shirt choosing beans from a broadly striped woven basket [...] There! Like an outdoor painting by Renoir. The whole family at a taverna table, dappled with sun and shade, empty clear glass bottles refracting the light. Both children bare chested [...] One by one the magical images progressed across the negative carrier, were transmitted to photographic paper, floated up in the developing tray, were 'stopped' in the acetic bath and then "fixed" in the hypo [...] Witchcraft. (102)

This existence of photographs in such abundance attest to the ubiquity of a camera culture, at least amongst the artists and writers with whom Clift and Johnston and their family worked and lived, and to whom Chick turns as she tries to discover more about her birth-mother's life. And while it may be that a photograph suggests nothing more than a fleeting moment in time—Chick writes of the 'one two-hundred-and-fiftieth of a second of my mother's life' (252)—these images are also 'priceless relics' (104).

For Chick, her initial and perhaps principal interest in these photographs is in confirming the bureaucratic documentary evidence of Clift's identity as her birth-mother by establishing a physical resemblance. The response Chick has to the photographs Wheatley provides is immediate and striking: 'They formed a bridge between Charmian and me that was undeniable. *I am her daughter. See! I even look like her*' (48). This emphatic identification underscores what the narrative acts out, as Wheatley and Chick accumulatively discuss intimate details relating to Clift. They speak of Clift's unfortunate dental history—'That explained my dental history, too' Chick writes (48), although it might well not; Chick also asks her birth-mother's biographer if Clift suffered from migraine headaches—'No, not her, but there is a mention of someone—was it her mother Amy? (49), Wheatley replies uncertainly—and if she knows about Clift's collarbones because 'Unlike everyone I know, I have dead straight collarbones instead of the usual V-shape' (49). Amused by this unexpected and unusual query, but unable to answer it, Wheatley helpfully suggests that the answer 'might show up in a photograph somewhere' (49). Within three paragraphs of the life-narrative, the photographs conceived of by the biographer as evidence and by the daughter as images of desire raise more questions than they can be asked to solve.

Chick's photographic retrieval of her identity eventually extends beyond Clift to her extended family, and at every turn the new evidence places herself and her own daughters in a lineage of resemblance:

But look at the planes of that face and the high cheekbones! Mine! Mine and Gina's [...] The same grandmother, sepia-toned as a young girl. My second daughter to the life! I *belonged* amongst these faces. Here were bits of us, my girls and me, scattered back through the generations. To most people this phenomenon is self-evident. To me it was miraculous. (129-30)

If, as Annette Kuhn has observed, the family album 'produces particular forms of family in particular ways [and] there is always room for maneuver within this,' (20), then as a result of her careful selection Chick compiles, 'my I-look-like-my-mother photographs' (173) that she carries to numerous meetings with Clift's acquaintances and affiliates. The cross-generational juxtaposition of images becomes integral to the instatement of physical resemblance as a component of identity. Chick takes 'a bundle of photographs' to her introductory meeting with Bonney (78-9), and when she meets Wheatley for the first time she takes photographs of both her younger self and her daughters. Both Bonney and Wheatley duly comment on Chick's apparent physical resemblance to Clift. Wheatley, considering Chick's family photographs fanned out before her, asserts, 'Yes, you look particularly like her in *this* one and *this* (a nineteen year-old-Sue in Moulin Rouge cancan dancer's costume at an art student ball)[...] and in this colour print you even have exactly the same pattern of freckles' (47). Wheatley's determination that Clift and Chick share 'the same pattern of freckles' arguably speaks less to their specific facial features than a persistent tendency to search out resemblances between biological relatives, particularly children and parents, and even more particularly children and birth-parents in instances of adoption.

In Chick's narrative, 'looking like us'-physical resemblance-opens up, rather than flattens out, her adoptee identity and its associated possibilities. In addition to collecting and scouring photographs of Clift and her family for physical similarities, Chick also begins to assemble photographs of herself in order to compile an enhanced record of evidence of not only Clift's lived experience, but also her own. She realises that photographs are once again her staunchest ally as she tries to further reveal how 'the child who had been left behind fitted into all of this. Me' (105):

I began to reassemble myself.
I went to my parents' box of memories and to photographs. [...] I wanted to find them, every one. I raided the albums, ripping out whatever I could find. I went through old albums of Mum and Dad's, doing the same. I leafed through bundles of loose box-brownie prints, turned out shoe boxes full of faded images. I bought a big new album. In bold letters I labelled it SUE. (105)

In this way the trope of resemblance becomes an avenue for Chick to imagine that if she *looks* like her mother, then she could *be* like her mother; that she too may be capable of living a wilfully independent and bohemian lifestyle, and that she too might break free

of the conventionality that has been a hallmark of her life and instead dedicate herself to a life shaped by adventurism, travel, and artistic and literary ambition. Many of the pictures that Chick encounters depict Clift with her later children in exotic settings—London, Paris, Kalymnos, Hydra—so unlike the rural and suburban Australia that frame photographs of herself. When Chick makes prints from Flower’s negatives capturing images of Clift and her family on Kalymnos, she is transported to both another life and another world, both of which might have been hers had she not been surrendered at birth:

And what was this? The inside of the rented yellow house? Charm and George at the dining room table, typewriter in front of her, typescript and fountain pen in his hands, burning cigarettes in the ashtray, cut watermelon in a large pottery bowl. The casement windows are open, an earthenware amphora on the window ledge, light flooding into the room, texturing the white walls. She is turned away from the light, reaching out her strongly contoured arm, its wrist encircled by an exotic heavy linked chain bracelet, to another large bowl full of—figs? Olives? (102)

Through viewing such images Chick achieves an understanding of her mother’s large personality; her renowned love-of-life; her joy in the pagan sun-drenched island lifestyle; her willingness to embrace opportunity and live in the moment. Chick, on the other hand, stresses her own adherence to a certain conformity in her life-choices, and wonders if this might not relate to her circumstances as an adoptee. Writing of her younger self in the third-person (as she frequently does when writing of her childhood and adolescence, as if emphasising the fact that her identity has been cleaved into ‘B.C. and A.C. [...] Before Charmian and After Charmian’ (138)) she even speculates as to whether her habitual timidity is the result of having been surrendered:

From the time she was a tiny child, Sue had always been terrified of the next life-step. Perhaps that first abandonment had made her cling to whatever security she had [...] Looking ever backwards, she dug her fingers and toes into the safety of what she knew. (206)

And although she finds in her artistic temperament a point of connection to Clift, its particular manifestation in her job as an art teacher seems to once again dissemble this apparent resemblance of temperament. She writes, ‘As an art teacher I have needed to constrain my intellectualism and develop my commonsense and compassion. The current mode for teaching art is a practical one. Do first. Theorise later’ (163).

The particular comparison she makes in this regard is with Martin Johnston, Clift’s ‘other’ first-born child, who as a young man ‘journeyed comprehensively in the land of the intellect [and] is a consummate mind-traveller’ (162). Tellingly, Chick refers to the intellectual life as ‘this foreign country’, an evocation of both the exotic, expatriate life enjoyed by Clift and her later children, and a reminder to Chick that in contrast she has never travelled outside Australia. Chick notes that she shares with Martin the call to lead an adventurous intellectual life, but that ‘My choices have been different’ (162). Once again Chick is confronted by the insurmountable and even imponderable gulfs that exist between her biological inheritance and the life she has made for herself. For most individuals this is an issue mediated from an early age by the physical presence of birth-

parents, siblings and an extended family. For Chick, her only means of addressing the issues are through the stories apparent in the words of those who knew Clift; the words Clift herself left behind; and, most immediately, in the photographs she constantly encounters.

A number of these photographs are included in *Searching for Charmian*, where they are separated from the written narrative and distributed more or less evenly throughout the book in six sections consisting of eight pages each. The presentation of the images is not consistent; some pages have one image only, others two, and others still have five or six images of differing sizes and with their edges overlapping. At times, the photographs are printed on a slight angle, in a pastiche of a clumsily compiled family album. The handwritten font that provides a heading for each section of the photographs supports this effect. For example, the section headed 'Charmian Clift's children' (images 21-4), features four rectangular photographic portraits of Chick, Martin, Shane and Jason, which are cropped to the same size and emphasise the open, smiling faces of the children, who are around the ages of three and four. While the children are pictured individually, the symmetrical arrangement, the consistent size of the images and the repeated portraiture shots have the effect of rendering them the same, with each having an equal claim to the identity and kinship the title announces. On the page, the images are placed in a two-by-two formation. Reading left to right, the images are sequenced in the order of the children's births, with Chick's photograph at the top left corner and Jason's in the bottom right corner, thereby restoring Chick's primogeniture. Reading vertically, the left column depicts Clift's daughters, the right her sons. The overall shape of this formal stacking of the images is a larger rectangle that frames and unifies the individual images, which are separated by a thin white gutter. It also asks us to consider not only that the children look alike, although this invitation is in play, but rather how childhood photographs (can be made to) resemble each other, and how this photographic resemblance has a hand in making ideas of, and stories about, a family.

This double logic of photographic resemblance is repeated throughout the same group of images. Turn a couple of glossy pages further and possibly the most immediate and understandable reaction to this two-page spread is to gasp at just how much Chick and Clift do look alike. No amount of training in photographic theory seems strong enough to impede this initial impression, although it does, at least, prompt a sustained consideration of how that reaction is evoked. Two passport-sized photographs (images 31 and 32) of Chick at age fifteen and Clift in her thirties are placed horizontally alongside each other. Cropped at mid-torso, both Chick and Clift are pictured with their bodies facing the camera; their hair tied back; their heads turned to their left at the same angle. The impression given is that, more than looking uncannily alike, the girl and the woman are united across time by their attention having been arrested by something or someone outside the frame.

Indeed, what the layout of the pages has these images looking at is the opposite page, which consists of two half-page images. One is of Clift holding Jason as a toddler; it is placed atop a similarly sized image that pictures Chick holding her toddler daughter, Kristin. Both women are turned with their left shoulders to the camera, so the left side of their faces, with their high cheekbones, is in profile and the fall of their dark hair down their backs (the darkness of hair is underscored by the light coloured sweaters

both women are wearing) is mirrored across the two images. Both children are held close to their respective mothers, and face the camera.

With these images, resemblance is not only looked for; it is looked at, both thematically and formally. What the sequencing relies on is the still widely-held and powerful idea that photographs record what was there; that these images show what Clift and Chick looked like at particular, separate moments in time. And by juxtaposing the photographs in the present *Searching for Charmian* (re)produces the resemblance between mother and daughter, which the viewer is invited to look for and identify. Moreover, the repeated pairing of selected photographs on this two-page spread (there are four pairs of matched photographs) encourages a reflection on this deliberate doubling to consider the mediation of resemblance by visual technologies and their role in the creation of kinship. Resemblance in this life-writing text is important for establishing, and narrativising the ties Chick has to Clift, and yet resemblance, as evidenced by the photographs, is not only something there before the camera –call it physical, biological, hereditary–but also bound up with the camera–call it representational. The images relate and rest on the presumed importance resemblance has in undergirding Chick’s efforts to ‘reassemble’ herself in the knowledge she is the daughter of Clift (105). But, at the same time they also signal that the privileging of resemblance as a marker of kinship is mediated, produced and naturalised by means of representation including writing and photography, and the readers and viewers who share these media.

But while *Searching for Charmian* ruminates on familial physical resemblance and difference, Chick is also at pains to indicate that this is a dubious, conflicted and superficial characteristic. For whereas Chick frequently reminds the reader, both through her own words and the testimony of others, of Clift’s reputation as a beautiful woman, she is nonetheless confronted with her own self-assessment that, ‘I do look very like the photographs I have seen of my mother [...] But beautiful I have never been’ (71). She proceeds to tell a self-deprecating story of being told by a drunk at a party that she is beautiful, an incident so marked by its singularity that she remembers it in ‘crisp detail’ (72). Therefore despite the book’s focus on photographically produced resemblance in the alignment of lips, eyes and cheekbones, and their importance in providing a veneer of trans-generational ‘sameness’, there is a profound undercurrent that speaks to the ways in which resemblance can dissolve into difference, and of how familial ties can disassemble those very markers of identity they are assumed to bestow.

Therefore while the book’s selected photographs play with, and evoke, the apprehension of resemblance, they also extract a telling array of differences, compiled in order to mark out the life Chick might have led. This is immediately evident in the wide selection of photographs from Clift’s expatriate years in London and the Aegean. These photographs are of interest to Chick because they frequently depict Clift with her later children, at a point in their lives where they are most obviously a ‘family’, but also apparently because they illustrate most strikingly how different her life may have been had she been raised as Jennifer Clift rather than Suzanne Shaw. So that images of dockside markets, fishing caiques, cobbled streets, white-washed walls, and the children on donkeys–all of which represent the strikingly exotic appeal of the Aegean islands–are coupled with photographs that represent by way of contrast the comparative mundanity and conformity of Chick’s own childhood. A sundrenched family photograph

taken on Kalymnos, with the children bare-chested in front of a bottle-laden table (image 42, tellingly captioned 'A sunny, happy family scene'), is juxtaposed with a picture of a young Chick, carefully arrayed alongside her brother and 'visiting children', and depicted in their smartest jackets, the boys wearing ties and Suzanne apparently in her best frock (image 43). Several pages later, Clift is pictured 'in the midst of a Greek family celebration' (image 58), a picture that with its casual composition, spontaneously smiling faces, and the central place given to children, suggests a gathering marked by high spirits and inter-generational inclusiveness. It is juxtaposed with a picture of 'The Shaw family en masse' (image 59), which depicts the serried ranks of the generations; stiltedly arranged according to height and relationships, the children relegated to a corner of the image, faces carefully and dourly composed for the lens. Look!, these photographs are saying, at how similar the experiences were. Look!, they are also saying, how very different they were.

It should not be assumed that Chick is prone to overtly romanticising Clift, or her lifestyle or life-choices, or the Aegean island experience generally. She is well aware of her birth-mother's shortcomings; of her frequently fraught relationship with Johnston; of her heavy drinking and infidelities and sadness (which she believes may be related to her surrendering of her first born); and to the financial and other challenges associated with her choice to live a life devoted to creativity and the intellect. Chick also dwells on the troubled relationship between Clift and her other daughter Shane, at the heart of which seems to have been a certain conformity on Shane's part that is not dissimilar to that of Chick herself. Chick is also insistent throughout the narrative that her own life has been a good one, that she has been happy and loved, that she made a sound choice in her life-partner, that she has wonderful children. Understandably, however, the discovery of her birth-mother's identity prompts conflicting responses, emotions and desires, and a need to confront the extent to which her own identity has remained provisional and perhaps unfulfilled. This resolution of her own identity is partly apprehended as a therapeutic exercise, although it would be incorrect to suggest that Chick presents her experiences as a child adoptee and as an adult discovering the identity of her birth-mother, as inexpressibly traumatic. In assessing her motives for writing her book—'Was ordinary everyday suburban housewife and teacher Sue, trying to cash in on the myth of her celebrated mother?' (148)—Chick determines that writing would 'force' her 'to codify my experiences, my emotions, my thoughts. To make sense of them. To know myself' (148).

It is an axiom of much life-writing to which Chick appeals here—writing to know oneself—even as recent scholarship insists that any self that might be known is mediated by language and cultural values, and that the assumption that there is a self to know is itself an effect of particular discourses. It is also the case that Chick is far from naïve about the extent to which she comes to know her birth-mother. She writes that while she comes to know 'far more *about*' Clift than she does Marjorie, despite having been close to the mother who raised her for over forty years, 'I *know*' her (322). Chick's knowledge of Marjorie is felt and ineffable; irreducible to language and facts, or indeed to the photographs her adoptive mother hates and avoids. By contrast, Chick can never truly realise her quest to find her birth-mother—she died before Chick knew her name—and her search is necessarily an epistemological one; she seeks to find out *about* Clift in the realm of information and images, of representation. And it is from those same

images that she also attempts to extract something of her own unfulfilled identity, of the different other(s) that might have been her birthright.

This determination to know oneself carries a particular charge in adoptee narratives that are often a search for origins, biological or cultural (Melosh; Novy; Yngvesson), a pursuit telescoped in the title of Chick's narrative as 'searching for Charmian'. Yet, the narrative that takes place in the name of this search complicates the quest by seeking to know not only the birth-mother, but also the adoptee self who writes her life story, and the other self, the one who has not to this point eventuated, the one who by the enforced dissonance between nature and nurture remains essentially unknowable. Chick is not only searching for Charmian, she is also, she realises, desperately seeking Suzanne, compelled by the need to understand what happens when 'the baby daughter of a wild, passionate, pagan girl', is adopted by 'middle-aged, conservative, church-going parents' (339).

Arguably, the autobiographical writing form itself inescapably narrates not only this otherness of others, which Chick hints at when she says that she both knows, and does not know, Marjorie and Clift, albeit in different ways, but also of the otherness, or potential others, that reside within the self. Indeed it is an aspect of life-writing that is accentuated in adoptee narratives that thematise the complexities of identity formation. As Chick writes matter-of-factly: 'It would indeed be remarkable if an adopted child did not have specific problems to do with her identity' (333) because of the ongoing stress still given to biology, to heredity, to origins, to so-called blood-kin, in imagining and understanding identity. And these features are amplified further in those sections of *Searching for Charmian* where Chick refers to herself in the third person. The effect is to produce prose self-portraits that gesture towards private experiences; that distance the narrator from the narrated self; and that foreground the other unformed self or selves that constitute part of the textual quest for identity. These self-portraits are undeniably, painfully, shaped by (gendered) social expectations and demands, and parallel, in their shared visual aesthetic, the photographs published in the book. But, they also highlight the limits of what such images can and should represent, with regard to either similarity, or difference.

One of the most striking of these passages, which mobilises intensively the notions of resemblance and difference in terms of her life experience and that of Clift, is when Chick relates having an elective abortion as a young, unmarried woman. In this autobiographical act of imagining the self, Chick refers to herself in the third person as 'Sue' and pictures her 'Naked except for a hospital gown, her knees were bent and her feet were strapped wide apart in stirrups.' (292). Yet, the prose-portrait Chick offers of Sue and her emotional and physical experience of terminating a pregnancy respects and enacts Sue's refusal of the visual realm. During the operation Sue is said to have her eyes tightly shut and the image Chick creates of Sue's intense physical and emotional pain is underwritten not by the descriptive, anthropological function of the image but rather by its affective pull.

Such shifts between third and first person point of view, and the oscillation in the narrative between the past and the present, the coupling of resemblance and difference, replicate the act of doubling that the printed photographs also are asked to carry. Chick arguably narrates Sue's abortion not simply because autobiographies carry expectations

that private details will be revealed, or because this act of narration, attuned to the visual, lays bare the mechanics of autobiographical writing and makes visible the act of narrating the self as other. It also speaks to her birth-mother and their shared experience.

It matters that the account of Chick's abortion is framed by conversations with her birth-mother's friend, Toni Burgess. Burgess is the last of the interlocutors Chick introduces into the narrative; the text leads up to their meeting not only because Burgess has proven to be the most difficult of Clift's friends to trace, but also because her memory of Clift is given the most weight due to their close friendship. Burgess is the first person Clift has met who knew about Clift's first pregnancy and its outcome, who *knew* about Chick's birth. Clift had confessed to her with great anguish that she had given birth to a baby girl before her marriage to Johnston, which her own mother had forced her to relinquish. Burgess is direct in her assessment of Clift: 'she mucked up her life. She was much more fragile than anyone realised. She wasn't equipped to cope with her life—with him [Johnston], with being a mother, with the writing' (244). She eventually tells Chick; 'You're very lucky, darling [...] Very lucky. I loved your mother dearly, but I didn't see her through rose-coloured glasses. She made her choices and you were very very lucky that she didn't choose to keep you' (329). Chick's questioning of Burgess as to why Clift herself did not abort her first pregnancy concludes with a recognition of the gendered power relations that intimately impact on women's sexual and reproductive lives, and which determined Clift's relinquishment of her first baby. Chick writes, "I know exactly why she had to give me up,' I told Toni. 'If it was shameful in my day to have a baby before marriage, what must it have been like in *her* day?' (293).

Chick's evocation of shame is a reminder that whether it be adoption or abortion, there are some life-events where the camera is not present, or welcome, and some photographs [and lives] that never take their place in the family album. With her use of the photographs in *Searching for Charmian* Chick has set about recompiling the family album, and narratives, from which she was excluded, and reconstructing the physical resemblance that was denied her for so long. For the rest, for the resemblance that transcends the physical, Chick again relies upon Burgess to fill in the gaps. When she tells her birth-mother's friend of her decision to also become a writer, in the form of her adoptee memoir, Burgess exclaims: "You're your mother's daughter! And not just in your broad cheekbones and green eyes and wide mouth. She would have done exactly what you're doing. Without a qualm. In fact, she's probably sitting up there on a cloud right now and cheering you on!' (306). If resemblance is knowingly evoked in *Searching for Charmian* by interwoven visual and written means as markers of heredity and a way to claim kinship and origins, then this concluding emphasis on resemblance is figured as a way to begin to understand adoption and the lives it shapes.

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