Visions of Light:
Gender and the Photographic Imagination in Victorian Poetry

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Abstract

The status of photography as a legitimate art form was a matter of intense debate in the nineteenth century. Despite unprecedented literary opportunities, women also faced challenges attaining full recognition as poets. Women poets seemed to be a contradiction in terms, just as the technological nature of photography seemed to clash with the idea of artistic creativity being based in human originality. This dissertation investigates how the development of photography and the increasing presence of women poets in the literary marketplace offer different but complementary perspectives on the problematic concept of creative vision in the nineteenth century. In this project, I explore the Victorian preoccupation with the nature of vision as both a mechanical and a creative process and the relationship of this idea to evolving theories of art as the result of vision and the artist's role as mediator of vision. I argue that the Victorian idea of vision as conductor of the creative imagination engages the problem of modern subject formation on multiple levels: the construction of individual subjectivity, the social function of art, and the conception of gender.

Using a variety of critical methods—psychoanalysis, semiotics, cultural anthropology, dramatic theory, postmodern theory, and gender theory—I examine how the work of four women poets and photographers illuminates the connection between artistic vision and subjectivity. The first chapter explores Christina Rossetti's use of a liminal position in her poem "The Convent Threshold" to conceptualize her own relationship to creative vision in a photographic manner that combines imagination with fact. Concentrating on the mirror as a trope in Augusta Webster's interior monologues "By the Looking-Glass" and "Faded" and in Clementina Hawarden's domestic photography, the second chapter proposes that these works reveal individual subjectivity to be a type of self-reflection that is performative. The third chapter

shows how Julia Margaret Cameron's photographic *tableaux vivants* in her edition of Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* displays the performative power of art by representing the boundary between the sign and the signified as open to change, a potential that she cautions may be destructive if misunderstood.

Although the difficult negotiations Victorian women artists/poets often performed between the contradictory aesthetic positions of subject and object have received a great deal of critical attention, and much work has also been done on photography's relation to art, subject-formation, and the "real" in its early years, the connection between the liminal status of photography as a contested art form and the similar position of women poets as artists in the literary world has not been addressed. I seek to fill this critical gap by elucidating what I perceive as a crucial relationship between photography's development and that of women poets as recognized artists in the Victorian era. Examining the ways in which these two categories tackle the debate about the status of art and the role of the artist offer a new perspective on the complex association among art, technology, gender, and subjectivity in this period.

Acknowledgments

In this dissertation, I discuss the ways in which performance operates as a means of identity formation for women poets and artists who wish to attain creative recognition. This project has itself functioned as a meta-example of my central argument because it gradually materialized, as most dissertations do, out of my own performative assumption of the role of creator. This dissertation's creation process was long and arduous, and finishing it would have been impossible without assistance. I am humbled by and profoundly grateful for the immense support that I received from so many quarters during this project's inception and writing.

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Introduction

Alfred Tennyson's immensely popular poem "The Lady of Shalott" (1832, revised 1842) is centrally concerned with the nature, function, and effects of vision. Embowered within the "[f]our gray walls" (l. 15) of an island tower, the titular Lady's vocation is to re-create the cinematic images of the outside world on a tapestry. The moving pictures she captures as static, woven images are doubly mediated by a mirror strategically placed by a window showing the road to Camelot, and the Lady is required by a curse to rely only on the mirror to structure her perception of the exterior vista framed by her window. Acknowledging herself to be "half-sick of shadows" (l. 71) within her static, isolated existence, the Lady longs to participate in the world she sees from her mirror. Consequently, the Lady's unmediated gaze on Lancelot passing by her tower—the point at which she makes direct visual contact with external stimuli—is the poem's climax:

> She left the web, she left the loom,
> She made three paces through the room,
> She saw the water-lily bloom,
> She saw the helmet and the plume,
> She looked down to Camelot.
> Out flew the web and floated wide,
> The mirror crack'd from side to side:
> "The curse is come upon me," cried
> The Lady of Shalott. (ll. 109-17)

The Lady's effort to fuse shadow with substance underscores the complex function of vision as the filament connecting direct perception with indirect representation. Just as the Lady's

forbidden action sets the curse in motion, mobilizing her web and shattering her mirror, Tennyson suggests that vision is a dynamic current that has the potential both to spark the artistic imagination and to recreate it.

By figuring the uncertain nature of vision as primary, "The Lady of Shalott" epitomizes a broader aesthetic concern that lay across the Victorian threshold of a modern, industrialized culture. The Lady's literally liminal situation amid visual interactions served many artists and writers as a metaphor of the troubled relationship of art to society.[1] Aesthetic representation within the Lady's isolated chamber is founded on a complex structure of simulated images that channel interpretation. Within this chamber, and later in the poem when the Lady's lifeless body arrives at Camelot, the proliferation of signs blurs the boundary separating imagination from reality.

Vision is the mediator in this network of signs. Instead of clarifying the relationship between sign and signified by fusing the two into a single entity (for example, by subsuming the reflected image of Lancelot within his actual person seen outside the tower), vision instead complicates this connection further by creating even more simulations (the mirror cracks, presumably multiplying the number of reflections). "The Lady of Shalott" demonstrates how the idea of vision as conductor of the creative imagination entails much more than a problem in optics because it engages the problem of modern subject formation on multiple levels: the construction of individual subjectivity, the social function of art, and the evolving conception of gender.

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[1] Between 1850 and 1915 at least 54 works of art (not including illustrations accompanying publications of the poem) were created depicting Tennyson's Lady (Poulson 173). The nearly-obsessional artistic interest taken in this figure reflects its deep symbolic significance within the context of Victorian cultural and aesthetic values.

By restructuring the nature of vision, and enabling the multiplication of visual signs, photography profoundly reoriented perspectives on the issues Tennyson's poem highlights. Just as the Lady's crisis concerns the problematic relationship between the public, social world (the "real") and the private space of individual aesthetic production (the imagination), so also the crux of the nineteenth-century conflict about how to categorize photography hinged on its ambiguous position within the crossroads of art/science, reality/imagination, seen/unseen. Photography, like the Lady, inhabits a threshold where the camera functions as a conductor of the photographer's vision and a mediator between perception and representation. In doing so, the camera, like the Lady's broken mirror, complicates the relationship between sign and signified, adding layers of complexity to the definition of the "real."

In this dissertation, I explore the Victorian preoccupation with the nature of vision as both a mechanical and a creative process and the relationship of this idea to evolving conceptions of art as the result of vision and the artist's role as mediator of vision.[2] The issues raised by "The Lady of Shalott" fittingly illustrate the ways in which this aesthetic concern is intertwined with corresponding debates about subject/object relationships and gender ideologies, as well as the role of science and technology in defining social interactions. Accordingly, I utilize these different dimensions as means by which to approach the subject of vision. As the increasing presence of women poets in the literary marketplace and the development of photography offer

[2] I use the word "artist" to refer to a maker of a creative work in a variety of media, which include poetry, painting, or photography. Because both painting and poetry were considered fine arts in the nineteenth century, women who wished to gain recognition as artists in these areas faced similar gender-based challenges (see Deborah Cherry, *Painting Women* and Dorothy Mermin, "The Damsel, the Knight, and the Victorian Woman Poet," for accounts of the gender barriers for women in painting and poetry, respectively). Conversely, photography's perceived connection to scientific reality rather than to the imagination made the title of "photographer" easier to attain but subjected photography's artistic status to ongoing debate.

different but complementary perspectives on the problematic concept of creative vision in the nineteenth century, I focus on these topics as points of entry into my broader concern with the relationship between vision and modern subject formation.

The Embowered Victorian Lady

Elizabeth Nelson relates that the emphasis of "The Lady of Shalott" on the disjunction between the aesthetic, inner life of the Lady in her tower and the outer, material one represented by Camelot demonstrates the Victorian perception of an essential divide between the public and private realms. The situation of the artist—torn between the demands of social involvement and the need to remain secluded from the world in order to create art—is mirrored in the similarly conflicted situation of the Victorian woman, who likewise was held responsible to be the moral guardian within the confines of the domestic environment. Thus, the poem's portrayal of the "highly complex Victorian conception of woman, and the correlative Victorian attitude towards the home" (Nelson 6) was a major part of this subject's attraction. As Nelson suggests, "Tennyson's Lady of Shalott, who could not be more unattainable, perfectly embodies the Victorian image of the ideal woman: virginal, embowered, spiritual and mysterious, dedicated to her womanly tasks" (7).

In Pre-Raphaelite iconography, women were simultaneously exalted and constricted as the inspiration and ideal object of art, but also in a deeper sense occupied the subject position by signifying the "artist's own soul, the creative impulse of his art" (Marsh, *Pre-Raphaelite Women* 12). The Pre-Raphaelite aesthetic developed out of the Romantic conception of art as an expression of the inner self rather than of the outer environment, and both opened new opportunities for women and complicated their position. A pioneering individual whose talent was innate, the Romantic artist had a moral duty to be true to his own vision and not succumb to

outside pressure exerted by the marketplace or cultural artistic standards (Orr 14). Thus, the artist was seen as occupying the private, enclosed space demarcated by the high moral calling of art, much like the situation of Victorian women within the domestic sphere.

This similarity, as well as the gendering of creative inspiration itself as female, might have made entrance into the professional art world and artistic recognition easier for women to attain. However, while the muse or creative imagination was gendered female in the mid-nineteenth century, the artist who shaped that inspiration into an artistic object remained male. Women's artistic potential was mostly perceived as imitative rather than original in correlation with their social role as essentially relational beings. Although the male artist had the choice of asserting his individuality by either remaining true to convention or spurning it to break new artistic ground, the female artist was not granted the same freedom (Orr 15). The paradoxical identification of femininity with artistic creativity is strikingly reflected in the Pre-Raphaelite preoccupation with idealized women, whose pedestal (like the Lady of Shalott's tower) often also functions as a gilded prison.

For the women embowered within Victorian conceptions of femininity, achieving recognition as an artist was as difficult an endeavor as it was for Tennyson's Lady.[3] Gendered limitations on female self-expression and independence often debilitated the ambitions of women artists.[4] The situation of Christina Rossetti, a popular poet in the nineteenth century, illustrates

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[3] I need to stress here that the gender connotations of the artist figure in this period are complicated. The artist's soul was gendered female, but the artist himself was male: the idea of the artist, therefore, was at some level simultaneously male and female. Women gained access to a certain level of subjectivity through this complex interplay, but were also locked more securely into the position of exalted artistic object and thus found achieving professional status more challenging.

[4] The ambiguous status of women artists in the nineteenth century has been well established. Various studies claim that the Victorian gender ideology of separate spheres, which

the ambiguous position that even highly-regarded women poets occupied in the mid-Victorian professional literary world. Both of her brothers were founding members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, but although Rossetti was eminently qualified to become a member—even lauded as the "Queen of the Pre-Raphaelites" by her brother William Michael (Rossetti 74)—she was excluded on the basis of her gender. Rossetti's career, although successful, was restricted by her gender in ways that her brothers' careers were not. While the avant-garde painter and poet Dante Gabriel Rossetti could flout artistic and social convention in order to break new ground, his sister could not similarly test the limits of creativity without risking social censure for failing to conform to the restrictions of proper female identity.[5] In both the literary and visual arts, women were denied avenues for training, growth, and recognition that were available to men.

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confined women to the domestic arena, reinforced women's aesthetic status as art objects and presented a considerable obstacle for women attempting to create careers as artists (see Lynda Nead, Griselda Pollock, Susan P. Casteras, Deborah Cherry, and Jan Marsh). Sandra K. Gilbert and Susan Gubar famously articulate a paradigm of female poetic creativity as requiring excruciating acts of self-denial to deal with the ideological restrictions embedded within Victorian culture. Likewise, Angela Leighton shows that the Victorian idea of the poetess was anchored by a restrictive gender ideology that figured sensibility as feminine and social ambition as masculine, an idea that Dorothy Mermin develops in her argument that women poets must simultaneously inhabit the positions of subject and object in order to produce art ("The Damsel"). In her study of gender's affect on genius, Christine Battersby identifies gender as a deciding factor in social constructions of artists: while women are shunned as "others," men are glamorized and rewarded as "outsiders." Linda H. Peterson examines how women authors negotiated the intricate demands of the literary marketplace to achieve fame and professional success. Similarly, Kathy Alexis Psomiades demonstrates how the elaborate construction of femininity as a cultural sign in Victorian aestheticism addresses the pressures exerted by an evolving commodity culture on definitions of the artist.

[5] Likewise, Rossetti observed firsthand the predicament of her sister-in-law, Elizabeth Siddall, an aspiring painter whose involvement in the Pre-Raphaelite circle ended tragically with her untimely death. Initially gaining entrance into the art world as a model, Siddall's artistic ambition was simultaneously encouraged and exploited by the Pre-Raphaelite milieu, and her story illustrates the sharp contrast between the opportunities for men and women in the mid-Victorian world of art.

Women artists who did attain critical acknowledgment and success were often caught in the gender ideology that framed female identity as the problematic meeting point for the aesthetic subject and object. George Gilfillan, a prominent Scottish literary critic, strikingly demonstrates this mindset in his 1847 review of the popular Romantic poet Felicia Hemans' body of work. To Gilfillan, Hemans' identity as an artist is inseparable from her femininity; he claims that while the male genius is defined by public ambition, the female genius is characterized by "sympathy" and "emotion" that are expressed on a more private, domestic level. Thus, the very quality that gains Hemans praise from Gilfillan as "the most feminine writer of the age" also bars her from recognition as a serious artist on par with her male contemporaries. She essentially cannot be what Gilfillan terms a "maker" or creator because she adheres to the limitations imposed by her gender, and her artistic identity is collapsed into the work she creates. In this circular system, the tribute of an admiring audience, as illustrated in Gilfillan's concluding pronouncement that Hemans' "life was a poem" (363) although she herself was not a true poet, further cements the barriers incarcerating the female artist within the limitations of her femininity.

This bondage motif is strikingly underscored in Pre-Raphaelite interpretations of the Lady of Shalott. Many Pre-Raphaelite artists focused on the climactic point when the Lady breaks off her weaving to gaze out of the prohibited window and thereby receives the mysterious curse, her death sentence. The prominent Pre-Raphaelite painter William Holman Hunt was particularly fascinated with the moment when the Lady realizes her fate, and he worked on various depictions of it over much of his career. To Hunt, the Lady's situation represented the contrast between the universal self-sacrifice required of the artist who must remain true to his moral and aesthetic calling and the transgression of that sacred social duty. Hunt explains:

> The parable, as interpreted in this painting, illustrates the failure of a human Soul towards its accepted responsibility. . . . She is to weave her record, not as one who mixing in the world, is tempted by egoistic weakness, but as a being "sitting alone"; in her isolation she is charged to see life with a mind supreme and elevated in judgement. (Hunt, *Pre-Raphaelitism* 401)

For Hunt, the iconography of the embowered woman artist represents a virtue that is only perfected in seclusion, and the Lady, before her disobedience, functions as the moral foundation of her society. Hunt accordingly considered his virtuoso painting *The Lady of Shalott*, finished in 1905 when he was seventy-eight, to be the epitome of his aesthetic philosophy (Nelson 177). (See fig. 1.) In contrast to Hunt's reading of the poem in moral terms, however, Tennyson himself stated that the Lady's acknowledgment "I am half-sick of shadows" is the key to the poem (Hallam Tennyson 5), emphasizing that the Lady's situation represents the predicament of art trapped in the impasse, not between art and society, but between imagination and reality.

Although Hunt's and Tennyson's interpretive philosophies are different, both fix attention on the problematic threshold between the public and private worlds and the tenuous position held there by the artist, who is figured as female. The constructs of the Victorian woman and of the artist were similarly built on moral ideals. While the model woman was conceived of as a keeper of the domestic hearth, the archetypical artist as influenced by Pre-Raphaelite ideology was charged with the moral guardianship of society as a whole. Although lionized in their respective positions, both figures were isolated by the responsibility, as Hunt puts it, "to see life with a mind supreme and elevated in judgement" (Hunt, *Pre-Raphaelitism* 401). This pedestal was even more difficult to negotiate for those who combined the two categories. Femininity and the idea of art—woman's divergent roles as both artist-creator and aesthetic

object—are conflated in Tennyson's original poem and in Pre-Raphaelite depictions of the Lady of Shalott. As an artist, the Lady is doubly constricted by the Victorian gender ideology that holds her captive within her island and limits the art that she creates to shadowed imitations of reality. The window, as the only link to the outside world for the imprisoned Lady and mirrored inspiration of her art, is her point of crisis.

The Light-Chamber

In 1832 "The Lady of Shalott" articulated issues associated with vision that photography was about to literalize. The Lady's chamber operates as a type of camera in that the "[f]our gray walls" (l. 15) of the Lady's tower create an enclosed space that "imbowers" (l. 17) her. Just as a camera's aperture permits outside images to enter the dark chamber of the camera and be recorded on a surface, so also the Lady's window allows "[s]hadows of the world" (l. 48) to be captured on her mirror, which are then translated by the Lady's creative agency to her "magic web" (l. 38). The Lady, in this sense, literally dwells within the camera itself: she occupies the threshold between perception (the images from the outside world viewed in her mirror) and representation (the pictures she creates on her magic web). Subsequently, the enclosed space of her island chamber—which is a type of *camera obscura*, or "dark chamber"—serves to define the limits and potential of creative vision.

Jan Marsh notes that the female gaze is figured in this poem as the "gesture of independence" that is the catalyst for the curse (152). This gaze is mediated through the window, which also frames the transformation of the Lady's system of perception from reflections to reality and the subsequent unraveling of her art and self. The curse itself is associated with the crossing of a type of threshold from one state of being into another. After the Lady confronts reality by gazing out of the forbidden window, she cannot retreat back into the safe, passive

shadows of her previous existence. The mirror that was the previous inspiration of the Lady's art shatters as a direct result of her attempt to look beyond the limits of her tower, because the ideals that are the basis for both the creation of art in Pre-Raphaelite philosophy and for Victorian femininity (Hunt's "mind supreme and elevated in judgement") cannot remain intact after this encounter. By looking directly at the world outside her window, the Lady extends her internal and external visual perspective. For the first time, she confronts the real and recognizes that it is necessarily mediated by interpretation. Even direct vision, the Lady comprehends, is an imaginative act because it is filtered through individual perception.[6]

Photography impacted Victorian literature and culture partially because it revealed the complex relationship between objective data and subjective interpretation at work in vision.[7]

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[6] Herbert F. Tucker similarly interprets the Lady's crisis using erotic terms, asserting that the mirror presents Lancelot's reflected image as a sensual symbol of the interpersonal connection that the Lady craves. However, the Lady shortly recognizes that the Lancelot she desires is a "mirage" that represents "not an alternative to the prison tower of self but evidence of its inescapability" (113). Because the reality can never match the ideal, the curse is "entrapment in the vicious cycle of a desire for illusions of her own making" (114). Perception is thus inevitably subjective in the poem.

[7] The significance of photography's influence on Victorian culture has been widely accepted. Geoffrey Batchen argues that the invention of photography—patented by Louis Daguerre in 1839—was enabled by a condition of nascent modern identity specific to the nineteenth century. Jonathan Crary accordingly establishes that the development of industrialized culture in the Victorian period reshaped individual subjectivity by forming a new type of observer. Carol T. Christ and John Jordan draw attention to the influence of optical technologies like photography on the Victorian creative imagination, and Kate Flint extends this emphasis on the function of vision in Victorian culture by reading the role of photography and other visual tools in relating the visible with the invisible as a pivotal social issue. Isobel Armstrong figures the camera lens as part of a larger Victorian glass culture that contributed to constructions of artistic identity by positing glass as a metaphor for the problems of mediation between subject and object (*Victorian Glassworlds*). Lindsay Smith connects the concerns of photography to those of poetry in the Victorian era in her assertion that the new conception of sight inaugurated by the camera revolutionized social and aesthetic modes of understanding subjectivity. While Nancy Armstrong applies the advent of photography to developments in the Victorian novel, maintaining that photography influenced the realist mode by defining the "real," Daniel Novak claims that photographic technology instead established the literary project of realism as based in

Likened to both a window and a mirror, the camera offered insight by illuminating the self along with the other. This interpretive complex, as it relates to gendered subject/object relationships, is my primary subject in this dissertation. Chapters One and Two explore the implications of the camera (and poem) as a *camera lucida*, or "light chamber." My point of departure in these chapters is on the mechanisms that form the physical design of the camera and the interactions with light that these devices enable within the photographic space. The lens (or threshold) directly manipulates incoming light by transmitting and refracting the beam. Chapter One investigates windows as a type of lens: transparent glass whose function is to let light into a darkened room, to illuminate. The aperture of a camera is adjustable, and the photographer operates it to exert control over light. Consequently, the idea of aesthetic illumination as active and malleable, demonstrated through photographic operations, seemingly affected the Victorian conception of vision by suggesting that the artist's identity is partially self-actuated.

The camera functions as a type of threshold permitting both public exhibition and private introspection. This duality is anticipated within Tennyson's early poem. For the Lady of Shalott, the window functions as a threshold zone that permits the manipulation of vision and thereby allows control over the subject/object relationships that vision creates. The Lady's crisis occurs at her window, but only after she chooses to approach it and more overtly determine the direction of her gaze—and, thus, manipulate her vision. A frame for the moving images outside her tower, the Lady's window serves as a lacuna, or gap, that the Lady must enter to gain greater clarity of perception than possible by means of the simulated images she sees on her mirror. It is only

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the imagination. Helen Groth and Jennifer Green-Lewis each extend this focus on the social impact of photography on literary production to the areas of poetry and other cultural texts.

through the window that the Lady is able to look at the outside world and thereby exert agency over the meaning-making operations of her gaze.

Accordingly, Chapter One examines the ways in which Christina Rossetti utilizes the liminal position represented by the window or threshold to conceptualize her own relationship to creative vision. Rossetti articulates the possibilities of the threshold for the woman poet throughout much of her oeuvre: I focus principally on the implications for creative vision as seen in the iconic woman-at-the-window in "The Convent Threshold." Rossetti suggests in this poem that a liminal position between imagination and fact, an idea popularly represented by the camera and the practice of photography, may be productively directed into individual subjectivity and artistic identity. By superimposing the virtual over the real, photography thereby presented an attractive model for women poets and artists aspiring to actualize identity through performance.

Chapter Two concentrates on the mirror as a trope illustrating more complex implications of the vision enabled by the lens as window. While the *camera lucida* replaces darkness with light, thus suggesting clearer perception, it also serves as a prism that replicates images and figures light as a multidimensional spectrum. The images that the Lady sees in her mirror are "[s]hadows of the world" (l. 48): simulations of reality that widen the distance separating sign from signified rather than shorten it. Although the instability of the mirror erodes the basis of visual truth, it also multiplies space itself. Just as the use of a tilted mirror in the *camera lucida* device creates a virtual image that enables an artist to achieve better perspective on a scene, so also the manipulation of the possibilities of simulation can enhance creative vision as well as complicate it.

This chapter focuses on the interior monologues of Augusta Webster, which showcase the self-analytic capacities of the dramatic monologue form as a means of illuminating the dark

chamber of the mind. Webster's use of mirrors in poems like "By the Looking-Glass" and "Faded" figures the subject/object relationship as based on a network of interactive reflections that highlight the mirror's potential as a virtual space in which to construct, or simulate, self. These poems reveal individual subjectivity to be a type of self-reflection that is performative, even in the absence of a clear auditor, and they defy easy generic categorization because they engage the unstable relationship established by photography between reality and artifice. Lady Clementina Hawarden's often theatrical photographs of her daughters—many of which utilize mirrors and windows within the enclosed space of the home— exhibit a likewise self-reflexive sensibility that showcases the potential of photography to construct identity.

While Chapters One and Two address the spatial implications of the camera as a liminal chamber mediating between nature and art, Chapter Three focuses on the temporal dimension of the photographic process. As represented by her movement to the window, entrance into narrative—or time—catalyzes the Lady's curse, destabilizes her art, and transforms her static identity into a dynamic one. Photography's theoretical relationship to time has been complicated since its inception. Because of the close association of this artistic medium with "reality" as represented in nature, the photographic process is often theorized as a means of fixing a part of this reality as memory. However, by replicating—and thus recreating—the subject, the camera also establishes a narrative structure by juxtaposing past reality in relation to the present.

The tension figured by photography between temporal fixation and mobilization underscores the ability of creative signification to reshape the real. In this final chapter, I show that Julia Margaret Cameron's photographically-illustrated edition of Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* exhibits her vision of poetry as a collaborative aesthetic that crosses disciplinary (and gendered) boundaries and has the potential to unite imagination and reality alongside text and

image. The sequence of photographic *tableaux vivants* that comprises these illustrations also constructs the poetic text as itself a deliberately staged visual and verbal *tableau vivant*, and this presentation displays performance as an interpretive act that transforms the verbal imagination into material form. Cameron's portrayal of Tennyson's "Lancelot and Elaine" demonstrates this principle by acknowledging the complexities of Elaine and underscoring the performative power of art in her narrative. Cameron uses Elaine's story to represent the boundary between the sign and the signified as unstable and open to change, and she presents Elaine's tragic end as a cautionary tale for the aspiring woman artist.

Visions of Light

In a speech to the National Photographic Association in 1872, Albert S. Southworth explained the complementary relationship between light and vision in terms that resonate with the sister arts this dissertation considers:

> There are two indispensable elements required by the artist, viz: light and vision. Light is an element of nature, existing without and independent of ourselves, free to the use of our natural and rational faculties. Whilst vision is a part or power of, and belongs exclusively to the individual. Having the perfect sense of vision, the beautiful colors of the external world and the infinite variety of the forms of natural objects, are presented to us through this sense for contemplation and enjoyment.

The symbiotic connection that Southworth describes is especially relevant for photography as an artistic medium. Created both by means of light and by the agency of the photographer, the photograph represents a complex pairing of nature and art, reality and imagination. The real is necessarily situated within the subjective interpretive frameworks of both the photographer and the viewers, and these perceptual acts construct meaning out of the signs provided by light rays

captured on a silver-treated surface. Photography is, as the Greek root words indicate, "light-writing": a technology that, like words on a page, gains significance by being arranged within a contextual structure. By displaying the real as a dynamic network of signs whose meaning is shaped by subjective perception, photography more broadly shows that identity itself is not fixed but is instead open to imaginative construction.

Because of the shift to a mass-market audience, poets and artists were compelled to redefine their cultural roles in the nineteenth century. Women poets and artists negotiated a particularly ambiguous position within debates about the changing status of the artist and the function of creative vision. The gender ideologies embedded within aesthetics often interwove the concerns of artists with those of women, but women artists—like the Lady of Shalott—were often figured simultaneously as both the subject and object of art. While women artists were thereby seen in one sense as a contradiction in terms, changes in the way art was theorized and received also enabled them to enjoy widespread recognition as legitimate artists to a greater extent than previously possible. The complex relationship of women poets and artists to creative vision thus suggests interesting parallels to the similarly contested status of photography as an art form.

Although the difficult negotiations Victorian women artists often performed between the contradictory aesthetic positions of subject and object has received critical attention, and much work has also been done on photography's relation to art, subject-formation, and the "real" in its early years, the connection between the liminal status of photography as a contested art form and the similar position of women poets as artists in the literary world has not been adequately addressed. This dissertation explores what I perceive as a crucial relationship between photography's development and that of women poets as recognized artists in the Victorian era.

Examining the ways in which these two categories influenced the debate about the status of art and the role of the artist can shed new light on how the Victorians approached creative vision as the conceptual basis for an emergent, modern subject.

Introduction Figure

Fig. 1: Hunt, William Holman. *The Lady of Shalott*. 1905. Oil on canvas. Tate Gallery, London.

Chapter 1

"Your Eyes Look Earthward, Mine Look Up": Perspective, Virtual Reality, and the Photographic Imagination in Christina Rossetti's "The Convent Threshold"

John Everett Millais's *Mariana* (1851) features one of the most recognizable examples of the woman at the window, a prevalent iconographical image in Victorian art. (See fig. 2.) Originating in Shakespeare's characterization of a woman who perpetually awaits her lover's return in *Measure for Measure*, Millais's version depicts a woman in medieval dress standing before a window. Her back contorted as if stretching after a long time held in the same position, the woman gazes out of the aperture before her, but her line of vision is constricted by the window's stained glass panels. When it was first exhibited in 1851, the painting was accompanied by a selection from Tennyson's poem "Mariana" (1830) that expresses the despair felt by the eponymous woman at her lover's continual absence:

> She only said, "My life is dreary,
>
> He cometh not," she said;
>
> She said, "I am aweary, aweary,
>
> I would that I were dead!" (ll. 9-12 in Tennyson; see Fowle for the painting)

The constricted space against which the woman strains in Millais' painting reinforces the mood of hopeless isolation that Mariana repetitively voices in the poem. For Mariana, the window underscores her lack of options by showing her a vista that she cannot access. Elaine Shefer comments that the Victorian artistic rendition of the woman at the window trope often indicated

imprisonment within the domestic sphere. "Unlike its Romantic counterpart," she states, "the Victorian window, even when open, did not offer freedom. Protected and sheltered from the 'outside world', the woman usually either awaits her destiny or dreamily recalls an experience that may hold a future hope" (14).

As a threshold between public and private worlds, the window carries great symbolic significance in Victorian art, often representing the tension underpinning a gender ideology that conceives of men's and women's roles in the spatial terms of separate spheres. Relegated to the domestic sphere of home and family, the woman at the window can only look out onto the realm outside of her confined existence and, like Mariana, is barred from joining it productively. The window in these works of art, which provides a view onto the outer world, thus also functions as a barricade restricting access for the woman embowered within the protective restraints of Victorian femininity.

Christina Rossetti (1830-94) has often been figured as one such trapped woman. Considered the model Victorian woman poet, Rossetti achieved widespread success in her own day due, in part, to her supposed embodiment of exemplary femininity and acceptance of the gender ideology that constrained her to the domestic sphere. More recently, however, feminist literary critics have perceived subversive strategies in Rossetti's work and have reconstructed her as a woman poet who inwardly critiqued the very ideological structures she outwardly accepted.[8] Regardless of the many variations it has undergone over the years, Rossetti's critical reception has been frequently mediated by her position as an embowered nineteenth-century woman.

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[8] Feminist readings of Rossetti's work are numerous, as I will observe in more depth later in this chapter. Isobel Armstrong (*Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics, and Politics*), Angela Leighton (*Victorian Women Poets*), Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar (*The Madwoman in the Attic*), and Dolores Rosenblum (*The Poetry of Endurance*) provide some foundational interpretations of Rossetti's aesthetic from a gendered perspective.

While Rossetti's firm location within the domestic sphere was praised by her contemporaries, her stance at the window of these gendered constraints—and what has been perceived as her steady gaze at the world outside of her restricted existence—is nowadays often lauded.

The symbolic window is key to all of these interpretations. Rossetti's construction either as what the Victorian Theodore Watts-Dunton termed a "sweet lady, and poet, and saint" (355) or as "Victorian Studies' hottest property" (Kooistra 247), in the assessment of a more recent critic, is built on her position as a woman artist at the threshold between the public world of poetic production and the private one of nineteenth-century femininity.[9] The sill, or limen, is the point of convergence for these antithetical realms and the likewise contradictory aspects of Rossetti's identity. The tension produced by the meeting of the incongruous categories of "lady, and poet, and saint" in Rossetti's persona has the potential to turn the threshold between public and private life into the site of an irresolvable and potentially devastating conflict for Victorian

[9] The way in which I am using the terms "threshold" and "window" needs some explanation. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, a threshold is literally "the sill of a doorway; hence, the entrance to a house or building." Figuratively, a threshold is a "[b]order, limit (of a region); the line which one crosses in entering" and refers to an "entrance, the beginning of a state or action, outset, opening" ("Threshold, N."). While the threshold is most often associated with doorways, it may also be connected to windows. Literally "[a]n opening in a wall . . . to admit light or air, or both, and to afford a view of what is outside or inside," a window may also more broadly function as "an opening or gap" of any type, particularly as "a shutter, valve, door, or similar opening" ("Window, N."). The idea of the window as a means of admitting light into a room was structured throughout much of the nineteenth century by the architectural necessity of using long vertical windows; horizontal windows only became a possibility once reinforced concrete emerged as a building material later in the century (I. Armstrong, *Victorian Glassworlds* 116). In this period, windows were often large enough to permit use as literal doors, and the distinction between the window and the doorway as separate types of openings was blurred. (I focus in Chapter 2 only on Lady Hawarden's use of mirrors, but the large windows that form part of her home studio also demonstrate the common architectural feature of door-like windows. Hawarden often draws attention to the threshold function of windows by showing her daughters hovering on or stepping across them.)

Metaphorically, eyes are also connected to windows as "inlets or outlets to or from the mind or soul" ("Window, N."). Windows enable vision to cross the division between outer and inner space, and they are thought to initiate thought and understanding as well as facilitate vision. The window thus functions as a type of threshold, and vice versa.

women artists like Rossetti. In another sense, however, the very ambiguity of the iconic woman's stance at the window creates an opening for a productive renegotiation of these restrictive categories and for a reconstruction of identity. While it can be dangerous, the threshold also is a useful starting point for the woman artist to explore, and potentially exploit, the possibilities inherent in her contradictory position.

A position at the window offers a vantage point at which different perspectives may be simultaneously exercised. Operating by the use of a literal aperture, as well as blurring the separation between human creativity and the natural world, photography manifests the complex action of the window in enabling multiple perspectives and reorganizing visual fields. By controlling visual acuity through the camera's depth of field, the photographer has the ability to influence how the natural world may be seen and interpreted. Consequently, the advent of photography in the nineteenth century profoundly impacted the nature of vision. As a liminal mechanism that mediates between the photographer and the artwork, the camera complicated traditional conceptions of the relationship among the artist, art object, and viewer. Like the eye's formulation as a "window to the soul," the camera functioned as a type of threshold, a window, permitting both public exhibition and private introspection. By manipulating the distinction between artistic imagination or interpretation and factual evidence, photography altered perspective by superimposing the virtual over the real.

In this chapter, I explore the popular Victorian iconographical figure of the woman at the window as being crucially influenced by the revolution of vision signaled in large part by photography. Situated at the threshold between the public and private spheres, and able both to see and be seen, the woman at the window aptly illustrates the complex liminality epitomized by the photographic image. I argue that Christina Rossetti's rendition of this threshold in her

dramatic epistolary poem "The Convent Threshold" engages with the potential for creative growth and subjective identity afforded by the influence of photographic ways of seeing. [10]

I begin by discussing how photography influenced the idea of the window as a transformational space in the nineteenth century and by detailing how the threshold operates as a key concept in Victor Turner's theory of liminality as part of cultural rites of passage. I then analyze the dynamic way that Rossetti treats the threshold space, primarily focusing on "The Convent Threshold." The speaker of this poem—a woman on the brink of entering a convent who pleads with her lover to join in her decision by making religious vows of his own—embraces renunciation of the public world as the solution to the deadlock of her situation. While many critics interpret this renunciation to indicate a defeat of aesthetic ambition, I propose that the poem instead illustrates a liminal experience in which the Victorian threshold woman is able to envision how she may successfully come of age as an artist. The speaker's position on the threshold enables her to achieve a visual scope within time and space that she would otherwise not have. Instead of retreating from the threshold back into the captivity of the private sphere, the novice recognizes the creative opportunities of her liminal position and uses it to negotiate between the confinement of traditional Victorian femininity and personal freedom, paradoxically realized through her acceptance of the boundaries signified by the convent. The convent threshold thus functions for the speaker as a place from which she may gain a greater perspective of herself and her surroundings. By deliberately framing herself as an image, the speaker is able

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[10] My unusual definition of this poem is deliberate. As I will explain, Rossetti's poem is based on an epistolary poem by Alexander Pope, but its use of the epistolary form is more complex. "The Convent Threshold" not only emphasizes the speaker's writing, but draws attention to the way in which the speaker performs the words that she both speaks and writes, thus dramatizing her identity. Accordingly, I use the word "speaker" in reference to the first-person subject to indicate the poem's function as a type of performance in which this female subject assumes and enacts her persona in her writing—not merely describes it. Rossetti's poem is liminal in form as well as in content.

to control her representation and perform the identity that she envisions. In this poem as in others throughout her *oeuvre*, Rossetti's version of the woman-at-the-window theme emphasizes the possibilities of the multidimensional vision enabled by photographic systems of representation as a means of realizing the artistic imagination. By understanding the complex nature of vision and the creative potential of performance, Rossetti suggests, the woman at the window may construct and assume the role of artist.

Photography on the Threshold

Historians like Geoffrey Bachten, Robert Hirsch, and Jonathan Crary have noted that the rise of photography in the nineteenth century was both an element and a catalyst of cultural modernity. Photography is closely related to the concepts of the observer and of vantage points, given that the camera originated as a technology designed to aid the depiction of linear perspective in painting. In his treatise *On Painting* (1435), Leon Battista Alberti famously outlined a method for utilizing linear perspective to depict 3D space on a 2D plane.[11] Alberti likened the two-dimensional plane of the picture to a window and instructed the painter to regard the surface as "an open window through which the subject to be painted is seen" (qtd. in Hirsch 4). Renaissance artists devised a way to use Alberti's method by means of drawing on an actual vertical window while viewing the scene being depicted through an eyepiece placed opposite to the window's center (Hirsch 4). The *camera obscura* also helped the artist depict perspective by projecting a traceable virtual image through a pinhole into a large, darkened room (Hirsch 4). This image appeared to be real, but was actually only a simulation of reality. Early uses of the camera were designed to replicate linear perspective rather than promote a new way of seeing,

[11] Alberti expanded on the idea that Filippo Brunelleschi had proposed in 1413, which conceptualized linear perspective as lines converging on a vanishing point.

but changing ideas of vision in the nineteenth century altered approaches to perspective and led to the creation of photography as a viewing practice. The camera that emerged in the nineteenth century was conceptually different from the *camera obscura* used in previous centuries because it evidenced a modern shift in ideas of subjectivity (Batchen 90).

Crary argues that the invention of photography was linked to evolving ideas of observation. The camera granted new powers of observation by making different visual modes possible to a previously unrealized extent,[12] and vision was increasingly constructed as a subjective mechanism that varied according to individual experience. In the early part of the century, vision became separated from a point of origin and was abstracted, no longer being based on the empirical truth implied by linear perspective. Crary explains that the camera became associated with objective vision that structured reality as a form of knowledge, and the stereoscope symbolized subjective vision that was dependent on the individual body. The ordered, objective system established by the *camera obscura* became outmoded, as the subjective model of vision was more adaptable to the "vast proliferation of indifferent and convertible signs and images" that was a condition of modernity (149).

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[12] In Crary's sense of the term, "observer" refers to one who looks within a system governing observation. This entity fundamentally changed in the nineteenth century from being self-contained to becoming "a distribution of events located in many different places" (6). Crary assumes a Foucauldian stance to support his claim that modernity is a consequence of changes in the social and political structures governing vision before the invention of photography rather than after it as has been commonly accepted. A widespread restructuring of the relationship between the individual body and networks of discursive power resulted in increased institutional control of the subject, and these "new modes of circulation, communication, production, consumption, and rationalization all demanded and shaped a new kind of observer" (14). Optical devices that promoted and symbolized observation, like the camera and the stereoscope, functioned as "points of intersection where philosophical, scientific, and aesthetic discourses overlap with mechanical techniques, institutional requirements, and socioeconomic forces" (8). Thus, to Crary, photographic ways of seeing arose from changes in how the observer related to the world rather than vice versa (5).

By opening the possibility of multiple perspectives, photographic practice democratized vision and redefined perception as dependent on the subjective vision of the observer (Crary 9–14).[13] Over the course of the century, the observer thus became "both a product of and at the same time constitutive of modernity" (Crary 9). The Renaissance and Enlightenment idea of the *camera obscura* as an objective mediator of visual truth was replaced by an increasing emphasis on individual perception as the basis of vision, and the division between the subject and the object was eroded. Photography's rise was one effect of a broader movement that resituated the spectator "outside of the fixed relations of interior/exterior presupposed by the camera obscura and into an undemarcated terrain on which the distinction between internal sensation and external signs is irrevocably blurred" (Crary 24).

Crary's argument that the *camera obscura*'s association with objective vision contrasted with the increasing relevance of subjective knowledge underscores photography's role in making visible the complex nature of the real. The type of vision modeled by the single-lens camera corresponds with the scientific mode established by linear (or central) perspective that constructs three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional plane by means of an unmoving, monocular eye. In *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, Edwin Panofsky famously refutes the idea that central perspective accurately reproduces vision by pointing out that the optical images that we see are subjective. "For the structure of an infinite, unchanging and homogeneous space—in short, a purely mathematical space," Panofsky states, "is quite unlike the structure of

[13] The *panorama* was a particularly successful visual experience in the early part of the century because of its seeming verisimilitude, but the process of viewing panoramas demonstrates changing modes of perception. Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre, the inventor of the daguerreotype process, began as a highly successful trompe l'oeil scene designer and opened dioramas in Paris and London. These dioramas altered the way that audiences viewed their worlds, as the moving parts of the diorama expanded the viewers's perspective into multiple points of view and controlled the amount of time that they would spend seeing an image (Hirsch 10).

psychophysiological space" (29–30). Rather, perspective is a type of "systematic abstraction" from the reality of psychophysiological space and mathematically homogenizes the nuances of perception into an equation (Panofsky 30–31). The static, single line of vision provided by linear perspective diverges from the binocular, "spheroidal field of vision" conditioned by human eyes, which are constantly in motion. Likewise, linear perspective cannot account for the difference between the psychologically-filtered image that we perceive and the mechanical "retinal image" that is actually projected on the concave surface of the physical eye. Panofsky thus concludes that "already on this lowest, still prepsychological level of facts there is a fundamental discrepancy between 'reality' and its construction," a discrepancy that he extends to the camera's function (31).

Panofsky claims that our failure to perceive the curvatures of what we believe are straight lines is a result of conditioning in linear perspective reinforced by photographs (34). The camera replicates central perspective by similarly projecting the linear movement of light onto a two-dimensional space, but this representation contrasts with our curvilinear perception of space and thus seems distorted from certain angles. Like the camera, the eye makes use of lenses that focus visual information on a light-sensitive surface—the retina. Unlike the camera, however, human vision consists not merely of the entrance of light into the eyes, but also of corresponding time, depth, and mental expectation that are together interpreted by the brain (Gale). Accordingly, "[i]t is the brain, and not the eye, that is the true organ of visual perception" (Lee). By showing linear perspective to be a method of interpretation distinct from the psychophysiological framework of human perception, photography called into question traditional ways of seeing and brought previously unnoticed details into view. Photographic representation thus showed reality to be constructed. Photography revealed the divide between human perception and linear perspective

as stemming from a rationalization of vision, thereby redefining traditional boundaries between nature and culture and between the subject and the object of the gaze (Hirsch 20).

By reframing concepts of reality, the camera functioned as both a literal window and a trope symbolizing the threshold space photography came to represent. As a type of mechanical eye,[14] the camera's optical system is dependent on the ability of the aperture to let in light. Photographic lenses—like window glass—operate in conjunction with aperture to manipulate and direct the incoming rays of light. Both parts of the camera are crucial to the formation of the photographic image, and the image produced represents one of many possible perspectives on reality rather than absolute, coherent truth. The photographic image varies with the particular combination of aperture and lens during the processing of visual information, and, as I note above, its meaning is crucially influenced by the subjective perceptions of both the photographer and the viewer. Photography's primary mechanism is often conceptualized to be what Batchen terms as the ability "to picture the world as a series of framed views" (19): it deliberately positions and constructs the viewer as an observer of both self and other. Unsurprisingly, then, the idea of the window—and the myriad viewpoints that it affords—was associated with the function of photography from its earliest origins.

Joseph Nicéphore Niépce took what is considered to be the first photograph in 1827 (Batchen 33).[15] (See fig. 3.) To create this image—which Niépce called a "heliograph," or "sun-writing"—Niépce placed a sensitized pewter plate in his camera obscura and set the camera on a

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[14] The photographic viewer's perspective is often interpreted as aligned with the camera's aperture, which forms a kind of separate "eye" (Friedberg 80) In this sense, the camera may function as a technological extension of the gaze.

[15] According to Hirsch, historians debate the precise date when Niépce created this first permanent image: the possible dates range from 1822-27, but 1827 is the most commonly assigned date (12).

windowsill in his home facing an exterior courtyard. The resulting photograph depicts a view of the landscape outside his window, and because of the lengthy exposure time required to fix it, visualizes the passage of time in the movement of shadows across the frame.[16] In this earliest time-lapse picture, Niépce's photograph reveals a new perspective on the natural world by showing it to be complex and multidimensional: it portrays an amalgamation of multiple perspectives and points within time and space rather than a single, fixed reality.

The window is more than a practical support for the camera in this image. Niépce describes the way that he obtained the first photograph in a letter to his brother: "I placed the apparatus in the room where I work facing the birdhouse and the open casement . . . and I saw on the white paper all that part of the birdhouse which is seen from the window and a faint image of the casement which was less illuminated than the exterior objects" (qtd. in Newhall 13). Anne Friedberg points out that Niépce's inclusion of the window's outline uses the window as a type of frame, but the window glass is completely transparent and thus only imagined to be present, much like the windows used as perspective aids in painting. Julia Orell remarks that windows mediate across spaces, thereby functioning as sites of communication. The trope of the window in painting fuses the viewer's space with the picture space as a "continuum, connected by the gaze of the beholder penetrating the 'transparent' canvas." Similarly, Niépce's photograph of the window "did not frame a transparent plane for *seeing through* but, rather, uses [sic] its frame to encase a surface, its virtual substitute" (Friedberg 73). As a framing mechanism, the visible presence of the casement structures the image as a type of representation and foregrounds the

[16] Although the exposure time for the first photograph is commonly believed to be about eight hours, Hirsch points out that Niépce did not indicate how long it took, and modern reproductions of his method have taken 40-60 hours (21, note 21).

presence of the literal and metaphorical thresholds that mediate between the spectator and the spectacle.

The first positive/negative print, created by William Henry Fox Talbot, also uses a window as a frame but figures the window itself as the subject of the photograph. (See fig. 4.) Talbot had made a series of pictures of latticed windows at his home, Lacock Abbey, in the summer of 1834, and he claimed that these images were the first photographs of buildings. He termed his process of creating prints on silver-sensitized paper "photogenic drawing" and named his images "calotypes," or "beautiful impressions." Talbot understood that photography reveals the workings of both space and time to be dynamic and interrelated. Hirsch claims, "[f]or Talbot photography's purpose was to depict a subject in a fixed compositional order from a lived moment, making time itself the ultimate subject" (16). Likewise, Batchen interprets Talbot's conception of photography as representing a paradoxical point in which "space *becomes* time, and time space" (91). Talbot's calotype method formalized the dual process of making a negative and then producing infinite positive prints from that negative, and the endless replication made possible through the positive/negative process altered the way that the relationship between signs and their signified meanings, or between art and nature, was perceived. Talbot's image, which depicts a window in his home, turns representation back on itself by directing the viewer's gaze at the operation of the window as enabling the vision of the photographer and disclosing him as much as it reveals the outside world. Talbot's camera functions simultaneously as a mechanism for perceiving the world and as a means of introspection or even self-creation. The perception of the viewer both determines vision and is shaped by the images created through it. This liminal image shows that as well as "undo[ing] the distinction between copy and original," photography

"both reflects and constitutes its object" (Batchen 69): the practice of photography and photographic seeing reveal the reciprocal relationship between nature and representation.

Photography thus added new layers of meaning to the window's metaphorical function as a threshold enabling vision and complicating representation in the nineteenth century. The camera showed unilateral linear perspective to be a mode of vision distinct from the complex, subjective interpretive acts actually performed by human perception. Isobel Armstrong's observation that "the window is always about a double experience of self and beholder" (*Victorian Glassworlds* 131) similarly applies to photography. Photographic ways of seeing posited the gaze as multidirectional between the subject and object of vision,[17] much like the reciprocal function of the window as a means of both looking out and looking in. Accordingly, the prevalence of the iconic figure of the woman at the window in the Victorian period demonstrates the increasing cultural significance of the window as a representational form of the threshold, much like photography. Changing constructions of gender positioned women at various thresholds in the nineteenth century as their roles became open to redefinition. The position of the symbolic woman at the window exhibits the ways in which women both gained new powers of observation and were constrained within new representative modes. As Armstrong notes, "[t]he window's boundary marks a 'crossing,' a crisis or epiphany that brings about existential change, a change inherent in the body's position by a film of glass. Freedom and limit come about through the physical pressure of its barrier" (*Victorian Glassworlds* 132).

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[17] In their seminal article, "The Photograph as an Intersection of Gazes: The Example of *National Geographic*," Catherine Lutz and Jane Collins detail the many different iterations of the gaze made visible by photography. They use Foucault's analysis of the rise of surveillance in modern society to argue that photography's primary social function is to reveal or display both the self and the other. Likening the camera to the mirror, Lutz and Collins propose that these technologies "are tools of self-reflection and surveillance. Each creates a double of the self, a second figure who can be examined more closely than the original—a double that can also be alienated from the self—taken away, as a photograph can be, to another place" (376).

A liminal stance also is linked conceptually to the production of art. Subha Mukherji points out that the threshold often functions as a starting point for creativity because of the way in which it can destabilize representation categories (xviii). The artistic imagination may operate "as a threshold where a rite of passage occurs between sense and sensibility" (xix). The emergence of photography refigured the boundaries between different categories of fact and fiction, self and other, art and science to be dynamic rather than static. By showing perception to be intricately related to individual imagination rather than solely to objective sensory data, photography focused attention on the ability of art to recreate the real through interpretation.

Liminality and Rites of Passage

Like the window, photography places the viewer at the threshold of the inner and outer worlds. The multiple perspectives afforded by this liminal position offer many possibilities for personal and artistic growth—a potential that, I will argue, Rossetti recognizes and exploits. Victor Turner first extensively developed the concept of the threshold as an area for critical inquiry in anthropology. Turner's idea of liminality expands on Arnold van Gennep's idea of this transitional phase as part of a three-fold ritual structure in cultural rites of passage between "every change of place, state, social position and age" (van Gennep qtd. in Turner, *The Ritual Process* 94). [18] The structural foundations of the dominant social order are broken down during the liminal stage as a transitional period without cultural hierarchies, and he defines liminality itself as indeterminate "antistructure." While a person with a structural identity possesses a clearly recognized "type" or role within a society, a liminal neophyte has an antistructural

[18] Van Gennep terms the ceremonies that accompany the individual's transition into different life states *les rites de passage* (the rites of passage), which have three primary stages: separation from society, transition or *limen* (the Latin for "threshold"), and incorporation into a new social identity (vii). Although he acknowledges the tripartite structure of rites of passage as defined by van Gennep, Turner develops the importance of the liminal stage by emphasizing its culturally destabilizing effects as a part of the ritual process.

identity that is inherently ambiguous and does not fit any defined social types or roles ("Betwixt and Between" 95). As Turner explains, "[l]iminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial" (*The Ritual Process* 95). Since social structure is demarcated by the indicative and imperative moods (facts and social commands), the lack of this structure marked by the liminal allows neophytes to experience the antistructural subjunctive mood of "pure possibility" (Turner, "Betwixt and Between" 97). As "a fructile chaos, a fertile nothingness, [and] a storehouse of possibilities," liminality in Turner's theory is thus "not by any means a random assemblage but a striving after new forms and structure" (*On the Edge of the Bush* 295).

In Turner's view, the threshold is a place of both death and rebirth. Turner notes the etymological basis of the word "threshold," which "is derived from a German base which means 'thrash' or 'thresh,' a place where grain is beaten from its husk, where what has been hidden is thus manifested" (*On the Edge of the Bush* 198). Similarly, liminality implies a loss of structural social identity and selfhood and thus involves a kind of ritual death for the initiates. The neophytes must be deconstructed in order to be reconstructed into new roles.[19] In a greater sense, the disruption of social norms during the liminal stage helps the overall community—as represented in the newly initiated—reevaluate the function of those norms. Since liminality is "a legitimized situation of freedom from cultural restraints and social classifications" (Turner, "Myth and Symbol" 581), initiates learn the limitations and inadequacy of cultural convention

[19] Liminal guardians subject the initiates to "decomposition accompanied by processes of growth, transformation, and the reformulation of old elements in new patterns" (Turner, "Betwixt and Between" 99). Sacra, or teaching tools encountered during the rite of passage, disrupt the structure of the neophytes' worldview and compel them to reconsider "objects, persons, relationships, and features of their environment they have hitherto taken for granted" (Turner, "Betwixt and Between" 105). Because the camera has the ability to draw attention to alternate possible points of views on the "real," photography may function as a type of sacra.

through the knowledge gained in the threshold experience.[20] Liminality as a stage in cultural rites of passage or as a state of being "is not simply a matter of giving a general stamp of legitimacy to a society's structural positions," Turner is quick to point out. Rather, this experience is "a matter of giving recognition to an essential and generic human bond, without which there could be *no* society" (*The Ritual Process* 97). As a result, Turner asserts that neophytes optimally discover how to rise above categories such as gender, class, or self during liminality and achieve an enlightened knowledge of "a deeper, superhuman order" ("Myth and Symbol" 581) that exists beneath the artificial order of their societies.

For Victorian women artists and poets like Rossetti, liminality represents an aperture through which they can reevaluate, and ultimately renegotiate, the limitations of their gendered social situation.[21] Dolores Rosenblum notes that "Rossetti's threshold woman sits poised between mutually exclusive—and often equally impossible—alternatives," but, significantly, Rosenblum also recognizes that the liminal state represented by this threshold is "particularly suited as a female vantage point" (*The Poetry of Endurance* 137) because the intersection of outer and inner worlds affords the possibility of a greater perspective than would be available from other positions. Hence, I argue, Rossetti's fascination with this theme: she recognizes that

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[20] Likewise, cultural distinctions differentiating status are dissolved between initiates within the liminal as they form bonds of mutual trust and progress through the liminal process together. This state of equality and solidarity is termed by Turner "communitas" (*The Ritual Process* 96).

[21] Many of Rossetti's poems feature women who are suspended in ambiguous liminal positions between states of being or points in time. William Michael Rossetti, Christina's brother, relates that she was intrigued by the possibilities represented by different intermediary spaces, recounting for example that "the point during the intermediate state after death and before the Resurrection" greatly interested his sister (Rogers 30). While Rossetti's use of transitional states or spaces has been the subject of increasing scholarly discussion in recent years, especially in reference to the newly-dead (or nearly-dead) speakers present in so many of her short lyrics, few studies have focused directly on the implications of liminality within the wider parameters of Rossetti's œuvre or considered it in light of Turner's influential theory of the liminal.

the casement could become a site of positive transformation for the Victorian woman. Because the threshold is a location where identities may be destabilized, changed and exchanged, liminality presents an opportunity for women to achieve greater individual freedom and artistic recognition paradoxically from *within* ideological constraints.

In "The Convent Threshold," the speaker successfully reconciles the demands of self and community through the strategic use of a liminal position. This poem explores the potential of the threshold as a transition between two states, portraying it as a catalyst for dynamic change rather than as a place of stagnation.[22] The transitional area figured in "The Convent Threshold" operates as the bridge between the earth—represented by the speaker's past life with her beloved—and a heaven that is doubly indicated: both her initiation into the novitiate and her future acceptance into a spiritual Paradise. While the convent signals the beginning of the novice's new life and opens a perspective onto heaven, it also functions as an intermediate space between the world and the virtual Paradise she envisions. Thus, the convent is itself a threshold, and life within the convent is enacted on a liminal plane of existence in which the speaker is able to relate to both earthly and heavenly experience, the past and the future.[23]

Instead of entailing a simultaneous relinquishment of love, the speaker's renunciation of secular life—figuratively putting to death both erotic love and self as realized within her social

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[22] As Linda Marshall relates, 1858—the year "The Convent Threshold" was composed—signaled a turning point for Rossetti's concept of death, and "a more peaceful and humanized vision of the intermediate state, more the anteroom to Heaven than the exit from hell-on-earth" gradually materializes following this crossroads in her thought (58).

[23] The poem is often interpreted as advocating the rejection of worldly desire as necessary to achieve a self-definition that may only be accomplished by spiritual means. Lona Mosk Packer, for instance, maintains that the speaker is "a nun [who] is forced to choose between love and the cloister, and . . . her choice is the renunciation of love and the vow of celibacy" (127). This poem resists characterization of the speaker's dilemma as a relatively simple choice between two clearly-defined options, however, as the complex nature of the threshold itself illustrates.

context—enables her to realize these qualities of her being and achieve self-fulfillment by relocating to a different environment. The liminal space of the threshold therefore functions as an intermediate portal of transfiguration in which the would-be female novice is resurrected to a new life. On the threshold, the novice utilizes a photographic way of seeing that enables her to attain multiple perspectives on her situation and to recognize the key role of perception in shaping identity. In her corresponding transfiguration she serves as a proxy for Rossetti herself—a virtual double, much like the "other" self created within photographs—and reconciles the tension between the female poet's need for artistic self-definition and equally intense desire for positive interrelationships. In this way, Rossetti exploits the ambiguity of the Victorian nun trope for her own advantage, utilizing the feminine enclosure—and freedom—represented by the convent to construct a space for female subjectivity. Just as photography can replicate the self into images that each contain and project a trace of their subject, Rossetti suggests that identity may be realized through simulation.

The Catalyst

Jan Marsh explains that "The Convent Threshold" retells the doomed medieval love story of Héloise and Abelard and is inspired by Alexander Pope's Ovidian heroic epistle "Eloisa to Abelard" (1717), which draws inspiration from a well-known series of letters between the prominent medieval scholar and philosopher Pierre Abelard and his pupil Héloise. Rossetti's speaker is unnamed, but she is understood by Marsh to be Héloise (*Christina Rossetti* 214). "Eloisa to Abelard" is one of the most famous examples of the epistolary poetic genre, which often features an abandoned female speaker addressing her lover and was frequently used as a means of exploring female experience. Pope depicts the turmoil of Eloisa's mental state and the scope of her emotions as she opens her mind to her former lover and focuses on her futile efforts

to reconcile her sexual desires with the realities of her current situation. Doubly imprisoned within an irresolvable mental conflict and the constrictions of her religious vows, Eloisa is completely isolated, caught in the limbo of convent life. As she is unable to envision a future beyond this oppressive state, Pope's speaker can only fix her inner gaze on an idealistic pre-Lapsarian past for reprieve, musing: "How happy is the blameless Vestal's lot! / The world forgetting, by the world forgot. / Eternal sun-shine of the spotless mind!" (ll. 207-9). Death, she ultimately concludes, is the only escape possible from the agony of her situation.

Rossetti's framing of her poem is significant given this context. By working within a poetic form utilized to explore women's perspectives and referring to a well-known love story that had previously been interpreted by an established male poet, Rossetti in "The Convent Threshold" replaces what had been a ventriloquized female voice within a predominantly male literary tradition with an authentic one. According to Lawrence Lipking, the trope of the abandoned woman appears throughout poetic history because this idea is central to the mechanism of poetic voice itself: not only for women poets, but also for men. Often functioning as a model for the poet as well as a means of expressing women's viewpoints, this figure is a means by which women can explore their own experience, and through which men can envision both women's positions and their own cultural status as poets. The trope of the abandoned woman is inherently "subversive" because it conveys "an implicit reproach or alternative to tradition, a principle of resistance to literary standards that smolders within literature itself" (3). In their respective versions of the Héloise story, Pope and Rossetti draw upon the subversiveness of the abandoned woman figure in different ways. Lipking argues that Pope's portrayal of Eloisa is shaped by his need to understand and control her, and ultimately to use her words as a channel through which to extend his own literary life. In the final lines of the epistle, Eloisa most

strikingly ventriloquizes Pope by directly referencing him as the author of the poem itself: "And sure if fate some future Bard shall join / In sad similitude of griefs to mine, . . . Let him our sad, our tender story tell" (ll. 359-60, 364). Lipking aptly points out that "[v]isionary reciprocity could hardly go further. Pope almost destroys the frame of his painting by insisting on a story of his own, a story that supplements Eloisa's and threatens to replace it" (150). Thus striving for "total possession" of Eloisa, Pope remakes her in his own image (150).

Rossetti's speaker, in contrast, is not merely a different persona for her author to assume: she also bears a trace of Rossetti herself, much like a photograph. While Rossetti alludes to the story of Eloisa, she deliberately leaves her speaker nameless, and this lack of a fixed identity leaves the meaning of the female voice open to interpretation. The speaker is both fact and fiction, just as the speaker's voice arises from the reality of Rossetti's own female experience and her imagination of a specific situation very different from her own. The difference between Pope's and Rossetti's gendered perspectives also strikingly appears in the way each treats the speaker's renunciation of earthly desires. While Pope figures renunciation as the gateway to a loss of freedom and denial of self, Rossetti perceives it as a means of achieving self-definition and fulfillment. For Pope's Eloisa, the convent threshold operates as a static mirror reflecting her current situation and the past events that contributed to it. Consequently, her perception is constricted and collapses inwards, as she wishes for the annihilation of self as release from the torture of endlessly regarding that mirrored image. In contrast, the extended visual range that Rossetti's speaker gains at the convent threshold permits her to look through the temporary condition of convent life and recognize the possibility for fulfillment within the heavenly realm.

Taken as a whole, "The Convent Threshold" can be interpreted as a journey: a female coming-of-age story or *Bildungsroman*. During her harrowing time within the transitional space

of the threshold, the speaker achieves a greater awareness of her social world and her own identity than she had before her ordeal began, and she is able to use the perspective afforded her by the threshold to reframe her situation and to gain control over her own representation. The violent catalyst that begins this journey and plunges her within the liminal space of the convent is the shed blood of father and brother: "There's blood between us, love, my love, / There's father's blood, there's brother's blood; / And blood's a bar I cannot pass" (ll. 1-3). While these references to male family members can be taken to refer to characters in the medieval source of the poem,[24] the absence of pronoun modifiers to claim these male relatives as the speaker's (or as the beloved's) own is significant and may indicate that they function as representatives of a patriarchal order that implicitly separates the lovers through essentialist gendered restrictions.[25] The "blood" of these first few lines can indicate close relational ties as well as wounds caused by violence. Thus, rather than referencing an incestuous relationship between the lovers as is sometimes assumed, the speaker's identification of the blood as "father's" and "brother's" draws attention to the gendered distinctions imposed on universal human blood by the speaker's society. The barrier the speaker "cannot pass" is one of gender: her failure to be fully accepted within the patriarchal tradition, in both social and literary senses, is due to what has been designated as her unalterable femininity.

In this sense, the speaker's beloved, as a male, is ultimately inaccessible to her on an equal social footing. Because of her realization of this hierarchal structure of her society—a

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[24] Historical accounts record that Abelard was castrated after his relationship with Héloise was discovered by a group that included her uncle, who mistakenly thought that he was abandoning her.

[25] Serena Trowbridge assumes a similar view regarding the reference to "blood" in "blood's a bar I cannot pass," which she sees as representing a Gothic reference to the physical presence of blood and the patriarchal social system and family structure (15).

society in which equal opportunity is entirely impossible for those outside of the patriarchal ruling class on the basis of qualities of "blood" or essential nature—the female speaker decides to create a new avenue in which to pursue her desire for self-fulfillment in art as well as love. By casting a female speaker as an assertive, autonomous subject, Rossetti engages dominant gendered discourse. Additionally, the poem's structure as a dramatic monologue places Rossetti's work at the forefront of the literary experimentation of her historical context and boldly centers the reader's focus squarely on the inner psychology of the female speaker. This form enables Rossetti to manipulate the perspective of the poem to focus more precisely on the condition of her speaker and to permit her readers to visualize the speaker's viewpoint better. Likewise, the dramatic form of the poem places the speaker more directly within the liminal area connecting experience and imagination.

According to Sharon Smulders, the dramatic monologue form permits the speaker to undergo a "sustained self-realization" (*Christina Rossetti Revisited* 50) and thus is particularly suited to the subject of this poem. The self-realization that Smulders argues is an outcome of the speaker's experience in "The Convent Threshold" is not, of course, an essential element of the dramatic monologue form. Many of Robert Browning's speakers—such as those in "My Last Duchess" and "Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister"—reveal themselves to the reader while they themselves remain absorbed in their delusions. Dramatic monologue, however, does permit close scrutiny of a speaker's psychology, and this outlook can allow the reader to perceive changes in a speaker's mental state to a greater extent than perhaps is possible in other poetic modes. Moreover, this form allows Rossetti to explore and express a female consciousness to an extent unavailable for Victorian female poets in the lyric mode. In this sense, the guise of a fictional (or historical, in this case) character provides the female poet with a degree of separation between art

and life and functions as a compromise between the practical need for social acceptance as a Victorian woman and the desire to assert a strong female poetic voice.

Significantly, William Michael Rossetti recognized that the speaker's statement later in the poem that "I cannot write the words I said" (l. 130) suggests that the poem is "intended for a written outpouring, not a spoken one" (*The Poetical Works of Christina Georgina Rossetti* 482). The framing of the poem as both a dramatic monologue and an epistle doubles the subversive impact of the speaker's assertion of subjectivity as figured in both speech and writing. Voice, in this sense, is both literal and figurative, and the unnamed female speaker of Rossetti's poem employs it to construct the self-image that she projects to her audience.

The Conversion

Instead of accepting her inability to overcome the circumstances that positioned her at the threshold in the first place—what she terms the blood shed by father and brother—the speaker redirects her attention to a perspective in which she does have agency: the "stairs that mount above / Stair after golden skyward stair" (ll. 4-5). Beyond these stairs the speaker can envision a "city" and a "sea of glass" (l. 6) through which she will be able to eliminate the contamination of her stained heart and alleviate the hopelessness of her current predicament. By means of her imaginative gaze, the woman here creates a new world beyond the constricting situation of her present life, one in which she might be able to "wash the spot, to burn the snare" (l. 14) caused by her existence within a flawed society and achieve control over her representation.

The convent threshold enables the broader perspective making this recreation of self possible. Without the catalyst of the threshold, the speaker might not be able to look beyond the blood on her heart. Lipking relates that the extremity of the abandoned woman's situation is a key factor that contributes to her ability to innovate through the expression of her voice.

"Precisely because the abandoned woman has nothing left to lose," he points out, "she is free to describe her feelings with an honesty and candor that other verse seldom approaches" (9-10). Throughout the poem, the speaker emphasizes the distinction between the earth and the heavenly realm. The blood that separates her from her beloved also drastically diminishes the viability of her past way of living and increases the attractiveness of the convent as a site for remaking her life. Although she cannot return to the exact relationship that she previously enjoyed with her beloved, she can choose to embrace the opportunity for redefinition offered by the convent as a transitional area. At the convent threshold, she must completely relinquish her previous identity, but in doing so, she gains a breadth and depth of vision that she could not fully appreciate within the restricted scope of her past perspective—the limitations of which she is able to observe acutely in her beloved. The speaker's liminal position thus provides her with sufficient insight to be able to "choose the stairs that mount above" (l. 4).

The very religious commitment that permits the speaker's visionary outlook, however, contributes another dimension to the tensions inherent in her transitional position. She is divided not only between the demands of erotic and social relationships and her need for self-fulfillment as an individual, but also by the standard upheld by her religion, a standard that at some level contradicts both of her other desires and competes for sovereignty against them.[26] The speaker's aspiration to enter a new world in which all desires of her being—physical, imaginative, and spiritual—are perfectly satisfied is an ambition that overreaches the limits of her experience on Earth.

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[26] Trowbridge interprets the convent as representing an impediment to contentment and accordingly reads "the stairs that mount above" to reference the speaker's only hope for escape from the convent itself (125).

In other ways, though, the speaker's all-consuming embrace of convent life on Earth and fervent religious commitment provides her with the hope of future resurrection and empowers her to seek a better life beyond the cycle of sin and guilt implied within her patriarchal culture.[27] As a woman writing under constricting social conditions, Rossetti's religious devotion let her successfully reconcile the conflicting demands of her gender-based society and her personal desire to assert herself through her art. Smulders argues that the blood of brother and father functions as a catalyst—a "ritual sacrifice" ("'A Form That Differences'" 166)—enabling the female speaker to act upon her aspiration and renounce her love. Converting sexual desire into spiritual ambition permits Rossetti to foreground the novice's self-identity without transgressing the gendered constraints of her society (Smulders, "'A Form That Differences'" 166). My own reading of the speaker's Christianity slightly differs from that of Smulders as I see the speaker's Christian commitment as liberating her to defer the love of her beloved to a *new* sphere, not eliminate it altogether. Unlike Pope's Eloisa, Rossetti's novice willingly crosses the convent threshold because she recognizes that it provides her with an opportunity to achieve self-fulfillment. The threshold provides multiple perspectives on her situation. Rather than being psychically destroyed by her conflicting desires, the speaker seeks to strategically renegotiate

[27] Betty S. Flowers points out that the "Victorian ideal woman exactly matched the Victorian ideal of the obedient Christian—dutiful, self-sacrificing, always attuned to the needs and wishes of others" (163). While Flowers relates that Rossetti, like her speaker in this poem, always prioritized her Christian commitment over secular artistic aspiration (164), she claims that Rossetti's Christianity paradoxically provided an opportunity for her to write, permitting her to pledge her allegiance to Christ rather than an earthly husband (165). Likewise, Sarah Fiona Winters asserts that Rossetti's Christianity provided her with the courage to enter the literary marketplace and to assert herself as a poet (291). Winters argues that Rossetti published her work because "she was able to reconcile her identities as a woman and as a poet by subsuming both under her identity as a Christian. . . . For Rossetti, religion was a justification for writing rather than a barrier" (299). As a Christian woman, she felt that it was her God-given duty to write (Winters 300).

them on a different plane, one that can support the harmonious coexistence of religious convictions and social integration on the one hand, and art and love on the other.

The Vision

Within the liminal space of the threshold, the speaker assumes a dynamic, multi-dimensional perspective on both the heavenly and earthly worlds. This threshold is both spatial and temporal. It offers dioramic viewpoints not only on various places—earth, the convent itself, and Paradise—but also on different positions within time—the speaker's troubled past, liminal present, and future hope. Susan Conley asserts that Rossetti radically seeks to reverse the traditionally passive position of the female Muse by replacing this mythical figure in her work with that of the Medusa. "The Convent Threshold," which is composed in a hybrid mode that Conley terms "Gothic epistle" (98), produces a liminal space—figuratively located between heaven and earth—in which the speaker's gaze is split between the past and the future (99–100). By positioning the novice of "The Convent Threshold" on the point of entry into the convent rather than firmly within it as Pope had done, Rossetti draws attention to the unique properties of the liminal threshold space. Her speaker achieves a poetic voice while on the threshold, this experience functioning as the driving impetus for the writing of the epistle itself.

The visual field of her beloved seems constricted in contrast because his sight is trained only "earthward" (l. 17) as hers was in the past. Her liminal position grants the speaker a greater clarity of vision than is possible within the secular world alone and permits her to see what others who have not yet entered this space cannot. She is able to perceive that the "day wanes" and "night draws nigh" (l. 41), while her beloved can only focus on the "[m]ilk-white, wine-flushed" (l. 51) pleasures of the earthly world, blind to the possibilities offered by renouncing it in favor of the spiritual realm. Within the threshold, the speaker gains the contextual knowledge

necessary to perceive that her identity is open to adaptation in ways that she had not realized when her focus was limited to her present situation. Both the past and the future overlap in the liminal present, much like the temporal layers of a photograph in which past and present coexist. Because of the ambiguous position that it represents between defined identities, the threshold space encourages the speaker to adopt a photographic way of seeing by which she envisions different points of time simultaneously. The speaker thus emphasizes the power of the visionary gaze she achieves on the threshold because it enables her to see that "the far-off city grand . . . where the righteous sup" (ll. 18, 21) exists as a future possibility.

The discrepancy in perspective between the speaker and her lover is partially accounted for by the gendered difference between masculine and feminine viewpoints—the male beloved having less reason to relinquish his masculine position of social privilege than the female speaker has to relinquish hers. However, the speaker's liminal position between one life and another (referencing both a change of lifestyle or identity—from lover to nun—and the literal transition from physical life to the afterlife) also grants her greater visual range and consequently has transformational potential. The beloved's problem, the speaker repeatedly states, is that he *cannot* see in the way that she can. His perspective is unilateral, extending only to earth, while hers extends in multiple directions. "You linger, yet the time is short" (l. 38), she states, imploring her lover to recognize that his current viewpoint is limited: "[t]he time is short and yet you stay . . . Why will you die? why will you die?" (ll. 46, 50). Because the beloved's vision is constricted within the social system in which he lives, his understanding is stagnant, and he is unable to comprehend "the shadows stretched at length" indicating that "day wanes, that night draws nigh" (ll. 40, 41).

The speaker is able to visualize the "far-off city grand" (l. 18) not by natural vision, but by mental—or spiritual—perception. Accepting the new mode of perception gained at the threshold, the novice uses it to reshape her representation from the stained status she originally held into the identity of a righteous inhabitant of the heavenly Paradise she conceptualizes. The righteous citizens of the heaven that she sees "bore the Cross" and "drained the cup" (l. 25): their previous identities were completely broken down by being "[r]acked, roasted, crushed, wrenched limb from limb" (l. 26) on earth. Yet, even while these saints became "the offscouring of the world" (l. 27), they were transfigured in heaven, where "[t]he sun before their face is dim" (l. 29). The paradoxical coexistence of a physical identity that contrasts with a spiritual one is an insight that the speaker gains in her liminal position. By viewing her earthly existence photographically through the recognition that it conveys her image but not the totality of her person, the speaker comprehends that her representation, and thus her identity, is malleable. The "stain" (l. 12) that constricts her identity within the context of earthly life may be removed within "the sea of glass and fire" (l. 13). In allowing her to reframe reality as constituted of multiple perspectives rather than operating on a single linear vantage point, the convent threshold becomes a window of opportunity through which the speaker achieves a new point of view. The speaker creates her vision, and thus her reality, by means of the imagination.

The Gaze

Theories of the gendered gaze have traditionally portrayed vision as internally alienating for women because the binary relationship between active subject and passive object cannot be satisfactorily resolved within the same person.[28] John Berger famously characterizes women as

[28] Psychoanalytic theory ascribes crucial importance to the function of sight and the assertive gaze in the formation of subjectivity. Jacques Lacan's idea of self-identity as originating from the point at which the self divides into conscious and unconscious aspects—

being divided along the lines of the surveyor and the surveyed with a gaze that figures the self as object as well as subject. By means of this self-reflexive focus, the woman transforms herself "into an object—and most particularly an object of vision: a sight" (46–47). Similarly, Laura Mulvey declares in her seminal analysis of film spectatorship that "pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female" (27). As men are culturally constructed to be active spectators and women to be passive objects of the desiring "male gaze" (33), women are objectified as "image" and men wield authority as "bearer of the look" (27).

Although the particulars of Berger's and Mulvey's arguments about the gendered gaze have been challenged by subsequent critics, the role of gender and power in spectatorship remains a significant area of critical inquiry.[29] I argue that in this poem Rossetti's female speaker recognizes that the relationship between agency and vision is complex and assumes visual power by dividing her representation between subject and object of the gaze. Within the threshold, she achieves greater control over the direction of her vision and becomes a spectator of her own past, present, and future selves. Accordingly, Rosenblum points out that Rossetti formulates female subjectivity throughout her oeuvre into a form split between the role of subject and of sign: "a self that sees while being seen" (123). Rossetti's "In an Artist's Studio" (composed 1856) particularly displays this dynamic. This poem, unpublished in Rossetti's lifetime, is generally regarded as referencing the relationship between her brother, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and his model and wife, Elizabeth Siddall. The model's identity is reduced to an image, a "face" (l. 1)

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figured at the point at which an infant perceives his or her own likeness in a mirror and thus separates from the concept of the mother—is more relevant to my argument regarding mirrors than it is here, and I address it in Chapter 2.

[29] The idea of the male gaze has been criticized as essentialist, and some scholars have suggested that it may be adopted by women as well as men (Kaplan; Silverman) and that women may assume active subject and passive object positions simultaneously when exercising the gaze (de Lauretis).

that lives within the "dream" (l. 14) of the artist. Every rendition of this image, however superficially different, always "means / The same one meaning; neither more nor less" (ll. 7-8) because her identity is a product of the artist's imagination. These canvasses thereby function as "screens" behind which the model "looks out" (l. 1). Because the idea of the model is a mirror of the artist's and viewer's own imaginative interpretation of reality, Rossetti recognizes that this representation, like photographic images, is subject to interpretation and thus is not reality itself. The artist who trains the gaze on the model is seeking inspiration for the creation of his own subjectivity as founded on the female sign the model represents, but, Rosenblum explains, what the female subject "sees is *herself being seen*" (111). Thus, the image is a construction of identity that may function as a "mirror" (l. 4) of self for both the model and the viewers: it is a liminal area between self and other.

Similarly, in "The Convent Threshold," the speaker's ability to see her own image accentuates the reflexive quality of her gaze and shows her the potential for utilizing it as a means of self-creation. The increased optical range available within the threshold provides the speaker with the ability to see the heavenly world previously invisible to her. Contrasted to the fleeting tableaux of earthly joys, the brilliant cinematic images of the righteous enjoying the fruits of their labors convinces the speaker to strive to enter the heavenly realm and herself become part of this spectacle. To exchange her current stained identity for that of a saint, she tells her lover she must remove herself from his sight and retrain her vision into a new way of seeing: "I turn from you my cheeks and eyes," she says, "[m]y hair which you shall see no more" (ll. 61-62). Within the liminal space of the threshold, the speaker must "unlearn" the "lore" (53) she had previously accepted to actualize herself through vision; she must attain a new perspective on herself as other to gain the ability to remake her identity. Much like Rossetti's

own position as both the inspiration for the art of other Pre-Raphaelite artists and the progenitor of her own, the speaker's deliberate occupation of the threshold as both seer and seen suggests that this stance may provide a space for the active agency of the artist *within* the role of object.

The Viewer and the Viewed

The multidimensional conception of selfhood that the speaker assumes displays the increasingly intricate way that the gaze was conceptualized in the nineteenth century, a more general understanding of which can better illuminate Rossetti's nuanced treatment of the speaker's liminal position between subject and object. In his foundational discussion of the reflexive nature of representation in *The Order of Things*, Michel Foucault proposes that the modern idea of the self is influenced by the unstable relationship between subject and object as mediated by vision. Linear perspective—the primacy of which was eroded by the emergence of photography, as I have shown—places the viewer in the position of an all-seeing observer. Foucault uses a painting from the Classical period, Diego Velázquez's *Las Meninas* (1656), to illustrate the function of representation as figuring an intricate network of relationships between subject and object rather than demonstrating a binary, unilateral one. (See fig. 5.) The layering of representation present in this seventeenth-century painting reveals the reciprocal, performative nature of vision that photographic ways of seeing more widely accentuated in the nineteenth century.

Observation is many-layered and complex within *Las Meninas*, and Foucault shows that it draws attention to the function of representation at every level. Object and subject are caught in a reciprocal circle: the spectator is also the object of vision. The gazes intersect and converge in this painting, and the position of the spectator is always already occupied (308). The painting's object of representation—the king and queen who commissioned the work—elude the

gaze as mirrored reflections that are unnoticed by everyone within the space of the painting, and even the viewer of the painting is the object of the painter's gaze. “No gaze is stable,” Foucault argues, “or rather, in the neutral furrow of the gaze piercing at a right angle through the canvas, subject and object, the spectator and the model, reverse their roles to infinity” (5). Foucault’s analysis focuses on the painting’s representation of spectator and spectacle as inextricably linked. David Carroll notes that Foucault portrays this relationship as “a kind of labyrinth of representation . . . from which there seems to be no escape, where the outside (all subjects and spaces in front of or behind the space of representation) is brought inside and the inside is projected outside” (59). The foundation and end point of this representation—the subject—is “elided” within the “essential void” figured by the painting (Foucault 16). Thus, Foucault concludes, the absence of the subject means that representation is liberated to “offer itself as representation in its pure form” (16). The painting thereby prefigures the condition of the modern subject as an “observed spectator” (312).

In his analysis of the painting’s treatment of the subject, Foucault points out that the painter is positioned between the viewer and the viewed and thereby “rules at the threshold of those two incompatible visibilities” (4). As the spectator and object of the painting, we cannot see ourselves as the painter sees us. We watch the painter watching us, and to the painter, we are models, not spectators. The literal threshold in the painting contains a figure who pauses in the doorway to look in, caught in the liminal space between actions, but the painter himself inhabits a metaphoric threshold. Carroll believes that Foucault is fascinated with the threshold of visibility occupied by the painter “for the threshold indicates the fragility of any perspective on the visible, including Foucault's own. The painter is said to ‘*rule* on the threshold,’ but, in fact, the threshold is precisely the fine line where no one and no one thing rules, where all sovereignty

is undermined" (62). Carroll adds that the painter's stance on "the threshold of different modes of visibility undercuts the stability of the spectator's perspective as well" because our gaze as viewer cannot be determined other than as "a visible absence" (63). The threshold is figured as the point at which multiple gazes intersect and where the spectator becomes the spectacle and the observed becomes the observer.

William Mitchell interprets *Las Meninas* as prefiguring the complex visual field exhibited by photography. "It is like *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* from the point of view of the invading pods: we look in the mirror and see somebody else looking back," he points out. "We are confronted with the paradox of disembodied viewing—a paradox that every photograph and every consistently constructed perspective contains" (133). Batchen explains that as the new concept of the viewer "who is for the first time both the subject and the object of representation" (77) emerged as a widespread cultural entity in the nineteenth century, the camera came to operate as "the sensitized mind's eye of the individual human subject, a subject who views and, in viewing, constitutes both image and self" (78). Photography, Hirsch believes, arose from the fundamental desire for "tracing a subject's presence" (20). In the early years of the medium, Daguerre framed the invention of the daguerreotype as transforming the human subject into an agent with the ability to harness nature. He proclaimed, "I have found a way of fixing the images of the camera! I have seized the fleeting light and imprisoned it! I have forced the sun to paint pictures for me!" (qtd. in Hirsch 20). Even as it seems to offer control of the gaze to the viewing subject, however, photography reveals the subject itself to be illusory. Jean Baudrillard states that "[t]here is indeed a symbolic murder that is part of the photographic act. But it is not simply the murder of the object. On the other side of the lens, the subject too is made to disappear. Each snapshot simultaneously ends the real presence of the object and the presence of the subject"

("Photography, Or the Writing of Light"). Photography operates at the intersection of visibilities, the symbolic threshold, and it makes visible the complex relationships that converge at this crossroads. The instability figured by photography's liminal position within space and time shows not only how the distinctions separating subject from object may be eroded, but also how these categories may be opened to redefinition.

Rossetti's speaker in "The Convent Threshold" utilizes the complex visual ambiguity signified by photographic ways of seeing to interrogate the central, "fixed" perspective of a dichotomous relationship between subject and object. Rosenblum states that Rossetti addresses the "fragmentation of her poetic consciousness into an observer and an observed" by assuming "both roles, becoming the observer seeing herself observed" (*The Poetry of Endurance* 116-17). "Reflection" (composed 1857), another poem unpublished by Rossetti in her lifetime, showcases her understanding of the way that the photographic gaze constructs identity as liminal. The first stanza establishes the two entities of the poem as parts of the same person:

> Gazing thro' her chamber window
>
> Sits my soul's dear soul;
>
> Looking northward, looking southward,
>
> Looking to the goal,
>
> Looking back without control. (ll. 1-5)

This woman at the window has often been interpreted to be the inaccessible female object of the male speaker's vision, and the poem has been considered to be a subversive response to the courtly love tradition in which a male poet addresses a female beloved (Stuby; Leighton, *Victorian Women Poets*). Christine Wiesenthal, however, argues that the poem instead figures the woman at the window as the reflected image of the female speaker and asserts that

"Reflection" accordingly "represents a mirror poem most fundamentally concerned with an exploration of consciousness and subjectivity" (392). The layers of reflection represented by the "dear soul" of the speaker's soul in line 2 support Wiesenthal's assertion that the woman depicted at the window is intimately related to the speaker of the poem. This persona is both subject and object connected by the gaze, which extends from the "chamber window"—the eyes—to exercise an omnidirectional gaze uncontained by any type of boundary, including the subjective consciousness of the speaker herself. This persona represents what Wiesenthal terms as "the 'split subject' of desire" (393) in that the self is essentially divided into observed and observer of itself, thus emphasizing the uncontained and intimately reciprocal nature of the gaze. "Who can guess or read the spirit / Shrined within her eyes" (ll. 16-17), the speaker wonders. This poem may be read as developing a photographic negative—a mirror image. The photographic likeness splits the self into both subject and object of the gaze, a split that reveals these categories to be reciprocal rather than oppositional. Just as the photograph creates the observer into the observed, it likewise opens the perspective of the look and offers the possibility of agency by extending visibility and making the position of observer available.

Photography is a threshold mechanism, and the gaze that it circulates is transformational for both subject and object, neither of which has a fixed identity. According to James Elkins, "[u]ltimately, seeing alters the thing that is seen and transforms the seer. Seeing is metamorphosis, not mechanism" (11–12). The seeing subject requires interaction with objects to define self. Because the gaze is reciprocal (74), the object "*makes* the observer by looking, and the other way around" (75). Elkins claims that the operation of seeing posits that "observers and objects alter one another, and meaning goes in both directions" (43), concluding that "[t]here is ultimately no such thing as an observer or an object, only a foggy ground between the two" (44).

The threshold is the site at which these gazes intersect and the means by which identity may be created through vision. The window, Isobel Armstrong asserts, "is an inlet, particularly for women, into real and imagined space, and a moment where reading—since we view the viewer—becomes a reflexive and textual act of seeing" (*Victorian Glassworlds* 124). The window reveals the interaction between the self and other as doubly transformative—"each is checked by the other's subjectivity" (*Victorian Glassworlds* 132). "This joint subjectivity," Armstrong continues, "is the third term that turns the gaze . . . into a mediated relation of double change. Individual experience takes a social form" (*Victorian Glassworlds* 132).

Rossetti's speaker realizes the transformational potential of the widened visual field to which she has access at the convent threshold. Not only does the perspective that she gains grant greater knowledge of her position within space and time, but it also provides her with the ability to reimagine her identity within her social world. By photographically visualizing herself as both subject and object, the speaker recognizes that attaining subjectivity is possible because these categories are not fixed but rather exist in a state of constant change. The "spot" and the "snare" (l. 14) that ties her to a hopeless situation over which she has no control may be respectively washed and burned, and she may transform by means of repentance within the convent into one who instead keeps future company with "Saints and Angels" (l. 71) as equal "friends" (l. 73). The boundary separating reality itself from imagination is amorphous, and if reality is in flux, then it may be shaped by creative interpretation. The speaker's liminality is crucial as it provides a space within which she may redefine herself and start restructuring her future. She may opt to "choose the stairs that mount above": this option is available by means of the imaginative vision that creates it within the threshold as the crossroads of visibilities. By taking advantage of the multiple perspectives open within the threshold—earthward and heavenward, past/present/future,

herself as subject and object—the speaker is able not only to recognize the reflexive quality of representation, but also to redirect her gaze onto a new plane of existence. The convent threshold, like photography, enables her to occupy at once the seemingly contradictory roles of observer and observed, a position that in turn offers the potential to control her self-representation. The window thus may transform the dual roles of model and artist from a debilitating obstacle hampering subjectivity into a useful starting point for a female aesthetic.

At the Edge of the Convent

In "The Convent Threshold," the threshold symbolizes a dual passage from secular life into the convent and from the convent to death and resurrection. It functions as the necessary gateway from old to new life and represents a portal, a transitional period, through which those who aim to recreate their world must pass to reach the convent and eventually attain their desire. The liminal space of this threshold signifies a metamorphic experience, a rite of passage through which the speaker and her beloved may restructure their lives and achieve a new perspective on their relationships with their society and with each other. Turner considers liminality to be an essential element of rites of passage that individuals must experience when transitioning between roles in social networks. These individuals possess ambiguous identities while in the process of transformation "betwixt and between" (*The Ritual Process* 95) roles and are reeducated about themselves and their social relationships. As a novice, the speaker states that she is in the process of turning away from her past life: she exists in a role between the secular world and the convent, and this liminal position provides her with the perspective necessary to evaluate her situation productively. This phase of destruction and renewal—of retraining the self—is necessary for successful integration within society at new levels.

Yet, while the rites of passage in Turner's theory denote a closely-monitored evolution from one kind of socially-accepted identity to another, the novice in "The Convent Threshold" must pioneer an alternative rite of passage in order to realize a new social identity: that of the professional woman artist who reconciles art with femininity. In this sense, the neophyte speaker's liminal position within the dynamic area of the convent threshold is thus particularly ambiguous—or *antistructural*, to use Turner's terminology—by lacking clear definition within her culture.

Rather than perceiving the borderland featured in "The Convent Threshold" as a positive place offering the opportunity for transformation (in accordance with my view), Angela Leighton argues that this "threshold is not a single step, but a shifting subliminal line; it is not a place, but a boundary." She alleges that entrance into the convent "is not, for Rossetti, a step into safety, but a nightmare plunge into vague, unconnected territories of the mind" ("'Because men made the laws'" 222). Instead of triumphing in her decision to join the sisterhood, the speaker becomes caught in a "hellish fantasy of decay and death" that leads her consciousness to compress on itself instead of soaring upwards towards Heaven. Leighton claims that "[c]ertainly some deep and terrible doubt underlies this poem of religious penitence" which projects "passionate hallucinations" and "profound and brilliant incoherence" ("'Because men made the laws'" 224). Assuming a somewhat more positive stance, Rosenblum asserts that the liminal state represented by the threshold is "particularly suited as a female vantage point" in Rossetti's corpus because it holds her female subjects "poised between mutually exclusive—and often equally impossible—alternatives" ("Poetic Sequence" 137).

I agree with Rosenblum that Rossetti chooses to focus on liminal states as representative of a singularly conflicted female perspective. The speaker of Rossetti's "From the Antique" (yet

another poem unpublished in her lifetime, quite possibly because of its frank critique of unbalanced gendered power structures) expresses the frustration that arises from a gendered role that she characterizes as inherently liminal:

> It's a weary life, it is; she said—
>
> Doubly blank in a woman's lot:
>
> I wish and I wish that I were a man;
>
> Or, better than any being, were not (ll. 1-4)

A "woman's lot" is "[d]oubly blank" in that women are helplessly transfixed by cultural conventions between desire and the ability to act. This position is figured as a limbo in which the yearning for agency without the means to realize it is a kind of torture. Accordingly, the speaker grasps the limited choice open to her by opting for the non-identity of "nothing" (l. 15) as a release from impotent desiring. In annihilating herself, she would escape from the gendered identity structures that oppress her and disconnect herself from the repetitive cycle of a world whose inhabitants continually "wake and weary and fall asleep" (l. 16) without purpose. The speaker's liminal condition between desire and agency produces despair precisely because it keeps her from exercising creativity. Lack of any viable choice other than self-extinction separates this speaker's situation from that of the novice in "The Convent Threshold." Although her circumstances are similarly bleak, the novice gains agency through the choice to embrace the new worldview represented by life within the convent rather than to mourn her previous life and remain a victim.

As "From the Antique" demonstrates, Rossetti does portray some liminal positions as having the potential to be places of stagnation and even despair, just as photographs may be ruined by being under- or over-exposed. However, while this speaker's vision becomes myopic

within the limbo of her seemingly-pointless existence, the novice's perspective expands on the threshold to enable her to recognize the potential heavenly life that extends beyond her earthly circumstances. Rossetti's overall preoccupation with liminality ultimately indicates her recognition of the transformation afforded by a position on the threshold. The "shifting subliminal line" of the threshold, to use Leighton's term, may prove stifling to those who cannot see beyond its boundaries, but it also has the ability to provide a space for renegotiation of a seemingly impossible situation. Rossetti suggests that the threshold, like photography, offers viewing practices that have the potential to influence the real.

Leighton's emphasis on the psychological implications of the threshold space for the female speaker of "The Convent Threshold" is valuable in that it highlights the intensity of the transformation accomplished on the threshold and, more broadly, within the convent as well. But while the speaker does suffer "hellish" fantasies during her metamorphosis, her experience does not end with these. Rather, by the end of the poem, she achieves her greatest desire: the reconciliation of her love with her need for self-fulfillment and spiritual satisfaction. In order to realize this future joy, the speaker must indeed undergo a harrowing martyrdom within the threshold, renouncing her previous life so as to embrace the next. The speaker's "lily feet" have become "soiled with mud" (l. 7) because of her integration within the secular world; her thinking patterns have become contaminated by the distorted ideologies and warped gender system of the society in which she has lived, and this "scarlet mud" (l. 8) must be cleansed from her consciousness before she may be free to enter the convent. The "sea of glass and fire" (l. 13) that the speaker seeks in order to purify her "selfsame stain" (l. 12) is an apocalypse of fire and ice in which her mind is tortured like those of the heavenly saints she admires, "[r]acked, roasted, crushed, wrenched limb from limb" (l. 26)—in short, martyred. This martyrdom is a profoundly

internal one enacted within the individual soul, since, within the Christian tradition that surrounds her, the former life of the self must be killed to allow the birth of a new self. Like Christ, she dies so that she may rise again.

Turner explains that liminal space is often symbolized as both a womb and a tomb since this period in cultural rites of passage represents the birth of a new self enabled by the death of the old ("Betwixt and Between" 94, 98-99). In Victorian iconography, the ambiguous space of the convent was often related to a type of prison implying a death of self. Susan Casteras explains that Charles Collins's popular painting *Convent Thoughts* (1851) depicts a novice's imprisonment in a female garden of purity (79-80). (See fig. 6.) Dressed in white, symbolic of chastity, and standing on a small island in the midst of the brilliant blooms of a convent garden, the novice seems to be unassailable within the dual walls of the convent and her inner contemplation. The prison motif is extended in the air of mortality permeating Millais's *The Vale of Rest* (1858-59), which portrays two nuns in a convent graveyard at twilight. (See fig. 7.) While one nun sits on a tombstone and steadily gazes at the viewer, the other is engaged in digging a grave. In this way, entry into the convent was popularly equated with a self-inflicted live burial inside of the impregnable fortress the trope of the nun represented (Casteras 80–81). Despite the horror this concept aroused for many mid-century Victorians, Millais's painting also associates the convent with respite and suggests that the burial of self was productive rather than destructive within the Christian concept of resurrection, implying a death necessary for rebirth (Casteras 81).

Rossetti herself was deeply influenced by the revival of Anglican sisterhoods, the legitimacy of which was a matter of hot debate in Victorian England. Celibacy and the idea of a spiritual marriage with Christ were perceived by many as an attempt to undermine the family as

the foundation of Victorian culture, and when convents were supported, they were seen as a way for women to extend their female nurturing role beyond the home to the community (D'Amico 46-58). Casteras adds that when convents were reestablished in England after a nearly two-hundred-year absence, many Victorians deeply distrusted Anglican sisterhoods as representing a subversion of conventional gender ideology in addition to a dangerously creeping influence of Catholicism:

> . . . [convents] supposedly posed a threat to the family structure by usurping patriarchal authority and by challenging the institution of marriage itself, for holy celibacy, enclosure, and perpetual vows were considered unnatural for women and denial of their destiny as wives and mothers. In a society that idealized the sanctity of motherhood and the family it was not readily conceded that virginity could be a more honorable spiritual state than matrimony—or that women had any right to exercise their independent choice by opting to dedicate their bodies and souls to God instead of to a husband. (77–78)

This cultural anxiety about the nun's autonomy and asexuality was often manifested by constructing the novice as a victim in need of salvation from what was perceived as the imprisonment of the convent, a variation on the popular damsel-in-distress theme (Casteras 79). D'Amico maintains, however, that Rossetti herself viewed the celibate lifestyle as permitting a clearer spiritual perspective for women (60). In D'Amico's view, the convent functions in Rossetti's work as "not merely an escape from the sorrow and pain of this world but a place to see more clearly the spiritual life to come" (52).[30] The convent, to Rossetti, offers a way of

[30] Rosenblum correspondingly notes that in Victorian contexts, Christian ideology is often gendered feminine because the inner, emotional life of the subject is perceived as female (*The Poetry of Endurance* 6). A psychic split in female perceptions of self occurs when the inner

seeing women's social roles that diverges from the type of cultural linear perspective represented by domesticity.

Within even a loving intimate relationship, there is a very real danger of subsuming the self within the person of the beloved as other and thus losing individual identity. Accordingly, Rosenblum asserts that the aesthetic of renunciation, when applied to the individual poet, "is not so much self-denial as a poetic strategy for asserting control over diffusion, even dissolution of self" (*The Poetry of Endurance* 19). Significantly, the speaker's gaze is resolutely trained on the "sea of glass" that she sees beyond the threshold. This phrase, which she repeats twice in lines 6 and 13, references the practice of looking in a dual sense. In the book of Revelation, the apostle John sees the sea of glass in Heaven as part a vision of the future that is granted to him by an angel, a vision that he then relates to others to encourage them to persevere in the faith. Literally, the glass that the speaker emphasizes also is the material forming the transparent substance of the window.

Both the ocean and the window are media that convey. As part of the window, glass enables what Armstrong terms as "the passage of sight" (*Victorian Glassworlds* 115): it "turns both inward and outward. Instigating both transitive vision and obstruction, it is a faultline, the point of tension. At its intersection, trauma, crisis, and epiphany occur" (*Victorian Glassworlds* 115). The glass of the window—which is paradoxically both present and absent in its translucency—makes a wide range of perspectives possible. Knowledge as well as the ability to

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wills and outer socially-gendered personas of women separate, and Rosenblum maintains that "the poetry of endurance becomes a strategy for dealing with the most extreme kind of self-division, a division forced, rather than reinforced, by a particular symbolic system and by particular cultural attitudes" (*The Poetry of Endurance* 7). In the female literary tradition—like the Christian one—suffering transforms into a basis of power in which strength is derived from apparent weakness (*The Poetry of Endurance* 8).

reimagine present reality in order to realize future possibility is facilitated by the liminality of the window. The window opens greater perspectival range beyond the limited space of the viewer's own position, much like a camera lens. Glass is crucial to the creative mechanism of the camera, as the lens permits light to enter the inner chamber and touch the sensitized surface on which the image is formed. By means of the lens, the viewer may focus and expand the limits of human vision. The camera makes visible both minute details and vast panoramas, thereby granting the ability to observe both the self and the world.

The speaker's vision on the threshold is photographic in that it extends beyond the limits of her natural eyesight. The threshold, like the camera, grants her the capacity to see to train her gaze on herself, thus gaining both a more balanced viewpoint on her identity as both an object and a subject of vision and the ability to situate herself within a broader, spiritual context. She understands that her perception of her own place in the heavenly vista is an interpretive act because this identification with the saints exists only in future possibility. While imploring her lover to repent, the speaker references her imagined feelings in Paradise about his lack of contrition. She states:

> How should I rest in Paradise,
> Or sit on steps of heaven alone?
> If Saints and Angels spoke of love
> Should I not answer from my throne:
> Have pity upon me, ye my friends (ll. 69-73)

The speaker's use of conditional constructions like "should" and "if" show that she recognizes that this situation is a possibility and not actual. Yet, by placing herself in the company of "Saints and Angels" within this projected future and defining her relationship to them as

"friends," she also assumes this identity and suggests that this imaginative role may realized. The speaker adopts a photographic way of seeing in her understanding that perception shapes the subjective meaning of the signs that she sees and thereby her personal reality. Just as photography offers perspectives on the real that may in turn alter it, the speaker acknowledges that she can refashion her identity through representation.

Accordingly, the novice repudiates the secular world with the goal of rebuilding her identity in better terms on another plane. She seeks productive remodeling of self, not static preservation. The apparent suicidal release of Rossetti's speaker into a horrific nightmare of suffering and renunciation is thus a *subversion* of her dominant cultural system: a subversion through which she paradoxically *reinforces* her individual identity against that of her beloved. Because the speaker's decision to enter the convent realizes her voice along with her greater visual range, the dramatic monologue itself is entirely predicated on the self-defining experience of the speaker's renunciation of her world. As with John's Revelation, the speaker's vision functions as the basis of her authorship.

Understanding that the old world must be destroyed in order to be renewed, the speaker renounces temporal self-gratification in order to enable the future fulfillment of love and self, but Rossetti does not figure this renunciation as an end in itself. Rather, it is a temporary expedient necessary to achieve heavenly joy. Harrison claims that "The Convent Threshold" is carefully and consciously an aesthetic poem, and that Rossetti's speaker only stifles erotic passion and artistic aspiration so that they may be revived in the Heavenly realm (*Christina Rossetti in Context* 138–39). Notably, the speaker not reject her beloved, since renunciation of love itself is not her goal. Rather, she repudiates love as realized within a fatally corrupted social setting that renders the equality of the lovers impossible. Instead, the speaker implores him to join her on her

journey across the threshold. The poem is, in Alice Meynell's apt articulation, "a song of penitence for love that yet praises love more fervently than would a chorus hymeneal" (203).

Sensing her lover's reluctance to renounce a world that he has not perceived as corrupted, the speaker pleads with him to "Kneel, wrestle, knock, do violence, pray; / Today is short, tomorrow nigh; / Why will you die? why will you die?" (ll. 48-50). In her attempt to persuade him to see her perspective, she states, "You sinned with me a pleasant sin: / Repent with me, for I repent" (51-52), and rhetorically speculates in an allusion to Dante Gabriel Rossetti's famous poem "The Blessed Damozel" (1847; published 1850), "How should I rest in Paradise, / Or sit on steps of heaven alone?" (ll. 69-70). By "exchanging the damozel's desire for the novice's aspiration" (Smulders, "'A Form That Differences'" 165), Christina Rossetti enables the speaker of "The Convent Threshold" to speak independently of the male lover's imagination.[31] Firmly situated within the earthly world, the lover does not have access to the perspective that the speaker enjoys because he is not in a liminal position as she is. The speaker's liminality enables her to reexamine both her own identity and the social structures that she had previously accepted, and she accordingly recognizes that that these cultural constructs are open to redefinition. The perceptual clarity that permits the speaker to see that "the shadows stretched at length / Show that day wanes, that night draws nigh" (ll. 40-41) is a product of her vantage point within the ambiguous area of the threshold. Only able to direct his gaze "earthward" (l. 30), the lover has no

[31] "The Blessed Damozel" focuses on a recently-deceased young woman who lingers on heaven's threshold languishing for her lover while he grieves for her on earth. Even though the damozel exists in an atmosphere of perfect joy, she is not content without the company of her lover, and longs for the day when he will join her in heaven. The poem alternates among descriptions of the young woman's condition and heavenly environment, her own declarations of her yearning for her lover and musings about their future after being reunited, and the lover's responses to his imagined visions of the damozel. Clinging to the "golden barriers" (l. 136) separating heaven from earth, the damozel is only able to weep in response to the great gulf between them.

spiritual perception, and the speaker urges him to gain greater acuity by repenting as she had done. Although like "The Blessed Damozel" "The Convent Threshold" figures the male beloved "on a lower spiritual plane" (Bump 338) than the female lover, the fact that Christina's poem gives the voice to the woman, as Conley points out, fundamentally alters the gender equation from Dante Gabriel's earlier work (105). While the young woman does speak in "The Blessed Damozel," the poem filters her utterances through her lover's imagination of her heavenly condition. Her identity is a construct of his making. In one sense, the reverse is true for "The Convent Threshold"; in another sense, Christina's poem accords to both principals more freedom than does Dante Gabriel's.

The novice of "The Convent Threshold" further distinguishes herself from her blessed counterpart by refusing to function as an idealized muse who merely passively wishes for her lover to reunite with her in heaven. She is no saint who escapes the domestic imprisonment of the Angel in the House only to resurrect into that of the Heavenly Angel. Rather, Christina's speaker fervently exhorts her beloved to share in her renunciation on an equal standing, thereby capitalizing on the moral superiority invested in Victorian constructions of femininity to recreate the female beloved as an active agent in her relationship with the male lover. The speaker's multidimensional perspective enables her to envision more agency than the damozel can. Michael Wheeler notes that time in this poem is figured as more complex than it is in "The Blessed Damozel." The final section of "The Convent Threshold" makes "the anticipated future consummation that which is not yet, also now" (156) by merging "the eternal present of heaven . . . into the locutionary present of the poem" (160). The speaker likewise demonstrates, through this continued desire for her beloved to join her quest, that self-isolation figured as autonomy is not her goal, as attaining this state would not fulfill the many elements of her being. Instead, she

desires a *synthesis* of the fragmented (or, as Rosenblum would term it, "divided") qualities of herself in her future life, the realization of a whole identity in which her inner and outer worlds are fused into one and all her desires are equally satisfied.

The convent itself primarily functions as a place of reeducation, a preparatory space in which the speaker may relearn the concepts necessary to function in a transformed environment. A liminal area, a halfway house, the space of the convent is a type of purgatorial limbo, but with the goal of constructive rehabilitation instead of penance. Rogers maintains that Victorian convents were closely associated with efforts to rehabilitate fallen women, and "The Convent Threshold" both highlights Rossetti's deep concern for the plight of fallen women in her society and indicates the new idea that these women could be reclaimed after their sin (31).[32] In the context of this poem, Rossetti's treatment of the convent is most significant as a symbolic transition rather than an actual place. Within the limits of this environment, one aspiring to a new life receives the necessary preparation to undergo self-transfiguration. As Rogers claims, the convent thus functions as a school that teaches lessons about survival in this new life, which take the form of a series of sequential dreams for the speaker of "The Convent Threshold."

The Skyward Stair

These dreams portray three spheres of existence—cosmic, interrelational, and psychological—progressing from the universal to the particular. The speaker's first dream takes the form of an Apocalyptic vision, as the speaker views the cosmic spectrum of Heaven itself in which a Lucifer-like figure, a "spirit with transfigured face" (l. 86), embarks on a quest to exceed the angels "[e]xultant in exceeding might" (l. 64). The consummate figure of the overreacher,

[32] Rossetti had first-hand experience with reclamation efforts aimed towards fallen women when she later volunteered for service at Highgate Penitentiary, a rehabilitation house for fallen women (Rogers 31). The reclamation community of the sisterhood thus functions primarily in Rogers's view as an institution of "reeducation" (34).

this heavenly being's incessant desire is for light (an implied metaphor for knowledge), but he is "[a]thirst with thirst it could not slake" (l. 99). He continues to demand, "Give me light" (l. 97) as "light was poured on him, more light" (l. 93), and as a result, he is overexposed. Mistaking light for the power of creation, the spirit attains more than he can handle. Just as light is necessary for the exposure of a photograph but too much can destroy the image, knowledge is necessary for insight but too much can obscure perception. This spirit is utterly debased because his search for knowledge utterly consumes him, and the insight he gains does not provide him with the power that he desires. In the end, the spirit relinquishes "his throne to grovel down / And lick the dust of Seraphs' feet" (ll. 103-104). Having witnessed this spectacle, the speaker concludes:

> For what is knowledge duly weighed?
> Knowledge is strong, but love is sweet;
> Yea all the progress he had made
> Was but to learn that all is small
> Save love, for love is all in all. (ll. 105-109)

The lesson of this surrealistic vision is that knowledge—or art—for its own sake is worthless, as total autonomy causes a death-like isolation from community. In his quest for the light of the mind or artistic inspiration, the overreaching spirit realized that he could not survive as an entirely self-sufficient being and that even the communal presence he felt when licking the dust of the Seraphs' feet was preferable to the self-referential segregation of complete independence. The inherent hubris of the Romantic model of the artist, sacrificing all in his Promethean desire for the "aureole crown" (ll. 101) of individual artistic glory, is ultimately self-destructive. Like Laura in Rossetti's "Goblin Market" (1862), the spirit finds the "knowledge" (l. 100) that he

tastes initially intoxicating, but it results in a thirst that cannot be satisfied and whose only antidote is love. This figure's hard-learned lesson has implications for the dreaming woman at the convent threshold. In the desire to gain the knowledge available through light, the woman at the window may open the aperture too wide and risk overexposing herself and lessening her perceptive powers, thereby making any artistic production impossible. The speaker recognizes that although the gaze is reflexive, the subject is not unitary: relationships with others are necessary for self-definition.

While the first dream warns about the effects of overexposure within the threshold space, the second dream addresses the opposite extreme: the absence of light conditioned by the denial of vision. The second dream casts the speaker in the horrifying space of a grave where "It was not dark, it was not light" (l. 111). In this scene, the speaker is transfixed in an intermediate state between death and life, with a heart of "dust" (l. 115) that is unable to respond to a visit by her beloved. While she tells her lover to "[f]ind you a warmer playfellow, / A warmer pillow for your head, / A kinder love than mine" (ll. 118-120), both of them are helplessly frozen in an emotional state in which they may neither reunite nor move forward. In fact, the speaker literally collapses inward and is "like lead / Crushed downwards thro' the sodden earth" (ll. 122-23).

Because the speaker is entirely removed from the dynamic area that the convent threshold signifies in this dream, she has no perspective at all and is utterly transfixed, unable to move of her own volition. In contrast to the convent threshold, in which the speaker has the ability to determine her actions based on the vision that she gains, this space is a true limbo. The grave represents an area in which the speaker's subjective identity is obliterated and in which she loses control over her representation. The speaker is nothing here: while she is beyond any kind of representation in this space, she also has no agency. Much like the model figured by "In an

Artist's Studio," who face is replicated to such an extent that it becomes a signifier for the artist's desire, the speaker has become so disconnected from individual meaning in this dream that her identity is nullified. Her sense of self is so closely connected to her relationship to her beloved that it transfigures her as an extension of him with no unique representation of her own. The speaker's heart is turned to "dust" (l. 115) and her "plenteous hair" saturated by "[c]old dews" (l. 112) as she is transfixed and deadened within the "leaden tester" (l. 118) of her bed like a daguerreotype within a frame. She becomes an image whose only significance is tied to the empty space of the grave, like a photograph the presence of which highlights the real absence of the person it depicts. The speaker's ultimate goal is not merely reunion with her beloved, but self-fulfillment as well, in which her own art also plays a significant role.

This dream engages with the idea of artistic creativity as figured on an inert female body, the deanimated woman as the ground of the aesthetic within a paternalistic culture. The male beloved visits the site of the speaker's grave expecting her to function as a mirror; his only question, "'Do you dream of me?'" (l. 114), focuses on her perception of himself and seeks to valorize her image as a reflection of his own narcissistic desire. Jan Montefiore explains that the amatory sonnet tradition is founded on the inherent masculinity of the desiring subject, who constructs his own subjectivity through his desire for the female beloved. This "lover-poet," Montefiore maintains, "is principally concerned with defining his own self through his desire either for the image of the beloved, or for his own image mediated through her response to him" (98).[33]

[33] Well aware of the gendered convention of the sonnet sequence in which a female beloved is valorized by a male lover-poet, Rossetti composed her own response to this tradition in *Monna Innominata* (1881). In this sequence, Rossetti switches the gender roles by focusing on the perspective of a woman poet and states that her objective is give the woman an opportunity to express herself rather than having her identity determined by others. "Had such a lady spoken

Refusing to be objectified as a static vehicle for the male lover's perception of himself in this way, the interred speaker establishes her own subjectivity by redirecting her beloved's gaze onto a sentient woman. A live woman would be able to be "a warmer playfellow" (l. 119) for the male lover since the very condition of her animation would resist the abstract idealization that could be inflicted upon the inert symbol the dead beloved represents. Likewise, the fact that the beloved is able to speak from the grave at all itself denotes an active rendering of her own image by the speaker as the dream's narrator. Instead of subsuming her identity into the trope of the dead beloved through a passive-aggressive death, the speaker chooses in this dream to reconstruct the underlying idea of artistic creativity itself from, metaphorically, the grave on up.

Expressing opposite extremes, the first two dreams represent what Rosenblum terms the "mutually exclusive" options present in Rossetti's treatment of liminal states ("Poetic Sequence" 137). The third and final dream is pivotal within this sequence, as the speaker discovers how to *reconcile* art with love by means of the greater perspective that she achieves at the threshold. In the third dream, the speaker's struggle moves to the psychological battleground of her mind and heart. Caught between dreaming of her beloved and agonized wakefulness, the speaker is again stuck in a motionless limbo in this dream. Although she attempts to communicate her feelings to God by prayer and to her beloved through the function of the poem as a whole, the speaker cannot effectively express herself. She states:

> I cannot write the words I said,
>
> My words were slow, my tears were few
>
> But thro' the dark my silence spoke
>
> Like thunder. . . . (ll. 130-33)

---

for herself," Rossetti explains in her introduction, "the portrait left us might have appeared more tender, if less dignified, than any drawn even by a devoted friend" (294).

The oxymoronic figure of a speaking silence relates to the speaker's symbolic position within her society. By means of this epistle, she is asserting a voice that, because it is female, would be suppressed by the gendered ideologies of her culture. This dream, then, essentially concerns the self-creation of the female subject as figured through her art. In this final lesson, the speaker must learn how to express herself and use language to communicate and create. It is at the point of artistic production and self-creation that the speaker's final battle is waged and where the most ingrained gendered values represented by her former life must be excruciatingly renounced and remodeled. The novice ages through this liminal experience: her hair turns "grey" and her face is "pinched" with suffering (l. 134). Arriving at the crossroads of her rite of passage and at the brink of death, she must decide what direction to take from the threshold, and this choice is figured as one between death and life.

At the end of this final dream, the liminal tension culminates in her statement that "frozen blood was on the sill / Where stifling in my struggle I lay" (ll. 135). Gillian Beer notes that the idea of the window can represent a channel through which dream states may be approached, and the boundary separating reality and imagination may be dissolved at the threshold.[34] The speaker's very person is utterly caught in the liminal state of the sill—an opening between one space and another—and she martyrs her former self when she completely

[34] Beer makes this point in reference to Emily Brontë's vivid depiction of the window as the site of a violent encounter between Lockwood and Cathy's ghost in *Wuthering Heights* (1847). When Lockwood investigates an unusual sound at the window of his guest room during a stay at Wuthering Heights, his hand is caught by Cathy's ghost, who pleads to be let into his room. Lockwood vigorously scrapes the apparition's wrist on the window glass in his desperation to be free of her grip, thus shedding the ghost's blood on the casement. Rossetti's reference to "frozen blood" here is uncannily similar to Brontë's earlier depiction of female blood on the sill. Both versions depict women at the center of excruciating conflicts between inner and outer space in which voice is at stake. While the struggle in *Wuthering Heights* is overtly gendered between inner/male and outer/female, however, the speaker's turmoil in "The Convent Threshold" is mostly internal.

surrenders to and enters the convent threshold. As it was for the Lady of Shalott (see my Introduction), the sill is figured as the speaker's point of crisis and as the site of her transformation. The transgressive act of directing her gaze out of her window, and thus expanding her perspective beyond the shadows reflected in her magic mirror, is the catalyst that initiates the Tennysonian Lady's fall from grace and subsequent death. Located between the public and private worlds, the space of the sill is a dangerous bridge to cross as it is the portal in which the previous self must die to enable ensuing rebirth.

Like that of the novice, the liminal initiate's gaze must be fixed on the prospect of a new life beyond the threshold to survive this ordeal. If she turns back, like the Biblical character of Lot's wife, in longing for the security of her previous confined existence, the rite of passage will fail and her emergent subjectivity will be lost. The difference between the novice's successful transfiguration and the Lady's physical annihilation is one of perspective: the prospect of a better life beyond the threshold enables the novice to tolerate the bloody struggle necessary to attain it. While the Lady indeed "looked down to Camelot" (l. 113), she is not able to visualize how she might fit within this community, and this restricted perspective causes her to accept the curse that is activated by her unmediated vision.

Similarly to the novice, the speaker of Rossetti's "From House to Home" (composed 1858) credits her power of liminal endurance to a visionary perspective:

> I saw that one who lost her love in pain,
>
> Who trod on thorns, who drank the loathsome cup;
>
> The lost in night, in day was found again;
>
> The fallen was lifted up.
>
> . . . . . .

Therefore, my friend, I would not if I might
Rebuild my house of lies, wherein I joyed
One time to dwell: my soul shall walk in white,
Cast down but not destroyed. (ll. 193-96, 201-04)

Because the speaker of "From House to Home" can look past the anguish symbolized by the threshold space of the sill, she is able, like her counterpart in "The Convent Threshold," to refigure her perception of the grave of self represented by her transitional experience into a portal opening on a perfected plane of being where, as she terms it earlier in the poem, "[h]eart answered heart, soul answered soul at rest, / Double against each other, filled, sufficed" (ll. 189-90). Along the same lines, the novice's progression towards self-transformation is complete at the conclusion of her third dream. By resolving the conflicting demands of art and love, she successfully has renegotiated a seemingly impossible situation. To do so, the novice accepts the simulated reality offered by photographic ways of seeing and uses it to construct and inhabit a *virtual* persona.

Paradise Regained

The final strophe of the poem concludes the speaker's narrative by completing the process of remaking her image. After her symbolic death and resurrection, the speaker has been reborn by means of the greater knowledge of herself and her world achieved through her act of renunciation at the threshold. She explains to her beloved that her face now "tarries veiled in paradise" (l. 140), and that she is therefore unrecognizable. The sign of the speaker's face is disconnected from the signified reality of her self as she achieves her final transformation into the simulated image she has been working to become, and the simulation replaces the reality on the earthly plane. Essentially, the speaker becomes her virtual self.

The idea of the virtual originated, to a large extent, alongside the practice of photography. Sir David Brewster introduced the term "virtual" into English in his *Treatise on Optics* (1831), and he differentiated between a "real image"—an image visible to the eye and that can be projected on a surface—and a "virtual image"—an image entirely conceived within the brain, a retinal image. The concept of the virtual was in wide philosophical use by the end of the nineteenth century, when "the virtuality of the image" came to indicate not "direct mimesis, but a transfer—more like metaphor—from one plane of meaning and appearance to another" (Friedberg 9-11).[35] Talbot's creation of the positive/negative photographic process enabled the endless reproduction of images, thereby complicating the relationship between the image as sign and the reality it signifies. Baudrillard points out that "the photographic image, itself an expression of literality, becomes the magical operator of reality's disappearance" ("Photography, Or the Writing of Light"). The practice of photography thus increasingly showed reality to be virtual, an idea conceived within the brain much like the concept of the subject. "[W]e must regard photography as the representation of a reality that is itself nothing but a play of representations," Batchen claims. "More than that, if reality is such a representational system, it is one produced within, among other economies, the *spacing* of the photographic" (198). In "The

[35] The concept of the virtual image arose out of the burgeoning fascination with the retinal *afterimage*, the presence of an image in the absence of stimulus (Hirsch 11), and the new kind of perception inaugurated in the nineteenth century was based in great part on more accurate knowledge of how retinal afterimages function (Crary 21). Jules Law points out that, as a sign that at some level points to an unvisualized yet signified concept, the virtual maintains a semiotic relationship to the real: "it didn't matter whether the absent, hypothetically projected dimension was time or three-dimensional space: two-dimensional schematization started to acquire its own particular authority and lure precisely as something that gestured beyond itself" (413). Similarly, Rossetti recognizes the ability of the virtual to gain a representative power approaching and even equaling the real. The speaker's projection of her future identity is a means by which it may be realized.

Reality of the Virtual," Slavoj Žižek characterizes the virtual as liminal in nature—a state of pure becoming in which the subject is betwixt and between recognized definitions and points in space.

Accordingly with these ideas, the speaker uses the perspective of her liminal position to reimagine her identity as a virtual image whose connection to her present situation is established in her own mind. Recognizing that her present reality is a type of representation and is thereby fluid, she is able to capitalize on this state of possibility to refigure the meaning of the real to fit that of the future she visualizes. The speaker's emphasis on the virtual image she creates through the new perspective gained by her stance at the threshold does not eliminate the value of the real completely. Instead, the speaker underscores the *interrelatedness* of the virtual representation with the real in her indication that eventually the lovers will refigure their relationship within the new frame of Paradise, where the lovers will reunite to begin a more perfect, equal relationship in which the essential aspects of the "old familiar love" (l. 148) are refined and enriched.

Her face, the speaker reminds her beloved, is now veiled in Paradise, but this veil will be lifted when "we stand safe within the door" (l. 143) at the presumed end of time "[w]hen earth with shadow flees away" (l. 142).[36] Veiled, the speaker's face cannot be fully observed by her beloved, although the speaker states that he may still see her "now" (l. 137). The veil, like a photograph, thus functions as a type of screen that provides an image of the self that both is and is not the real person. This screen enables the speaker simultaneously to observed and to be observed. By projecting a virtual image, the speaker presents herself as a spectacle of sorts, but

[36] The phrase "within the door" implies both liminality and resolution. At a future point in time, the lovers will be in Paradise, a place that is beyond both the earthly realm and the convent. However, the speaker's use of the preposition "within" in conjunction with the vestibule indicates that this space is still liminal to some extent. As she does not aim to erase her identity entirely, the speaker envisions that her projected future self will be liminal in that it will be a refigured, more complex form of her current self rather than a completely new person. In her mind, virtuality superimposes additional meaning onto the real instead of replacing it.

she also gains the ability to separate her essence from her image and achieve some control over her representation. By using her veiled, virtual identity to manage her interaction with her beloved in this final section, the speaker suggests that the divide between the self as subject and object that photography literalizes may be negotiated as a means of gaining representational agency.

By locating her representation within the liminal area of the threshold itself, the speaker continues to control the transmission of her image. Her present identity is an image that she creates by seeing herself within the spatial and temporal panorama of her environment and by negotiating her representation as both a subject and an object of the gaze. In her ground-breaking study *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler argues that because sex and gender are both established by cultural configurations rather than being essential qualities, agency is invariably constructed in and through the performance of roles (25). As the subject is a concept or signifier created by culture rather than an fixed reality, the "doer" is fabricated by the act of doing the deed (142). Gender, she proposes, is thus open to resignification through occupation and repeated performance of the concept of the subject (144). If identity is performative, as Butler claims, it also may be conceptualized as a type of simulation. Devin Sandoz differentiates between the image or simulacrum and simulation by defining simulation as an active operation in which the produced representations are not "likenesses of static entitites" but rather "the processes of feeling and experiencing themselves." Accordingly, Joanna Topor likens simulation to a "kinetic experience" that depends "on the traceability of its origins back to reality." Baudrillard more radically states that "to simulate is not simply to feign" because "simulation threatens the difference between 'true' and 'false,' between 'real' and 'imaginary'" (*Simulations* 5).

The endless reproduction of images initiated by photography widened the liminal gap between the sign and the signified and eroded the distinction between representation and the real. As a result, the increasing ability of the virtual to replace and constitute reality positioned simulation as a viable strategy for achieving representational agency—and thereby subjective identity. In this poem, the speaker resignifies her identity by recognizing it as a representation open to change and then asserting her voice as the narrator of her own story. By recognizing the fluid relationship between the real and the virtual, she uses the mimetic process of simulation as a means of recreating her identity. In performing the role of spectacle, the novice constitutes subjectivity within it.

The role of novice that the speaker enacts is realized by her earnest performance. Throughout her oeuvre, Rossetti conceives of heaven in physical terms as well as spiritual; it is the natural world fulfilled and perfected by sacred resolution rather than the sublimation of the physical to the spiritual. In her poem "Paradise" (composed 1854), Rossetti concludes her depiction of heaven by stating:

> I hope to see these things again,
>
> But not as once in dreams by night;
>
> To see them with my very sight,
>
> And touch and handle and attain (ll. 41-44)

Paradise, to Rossetti, is very *real* in a physical sense and represents a state of being in which she will "touch and handle and attain" (l. 44), not an abstract dream. Accordingly, the speaker's vision in "The Convent Threshold" of a renewed love between herself and her lover does not imply either a reinstatement of a flawed relationship or the spiritualized idealization—and thereby abstraction—of their characters à la "The Blessed Damozel," but rather a reconstructive

metamorphosis in which the old identity affiliation is refined on a physical as well as a spiritual plane. The speaker's visionary understanding of future possibility achieved through her steadfast gaze on heaven and the strength of her personal ambition to achieve the impossible enables her to endure the suffering necessary to resurrect into a transformed world. For the speaker, the tension between the real and the virtual created by the multiple ways of seeing within the threshold is an opportunity to shape her image rather than being defined by it.

Leighton argues that Rossetti focuses on fantasy rather than on spirituality as a means of escaping Victorian gender conventions: "[t]his most erotic and religious of poets is also, at some level of consciousness, profoundly indifferent to both love and faith" (*Victorian Women Poets* 159). While fantasy is certainly a significant element of Rossetti's work, in this poem—as in many others—I believe that religion is promoted as the catalyst that allows the speaker to perceive the possibility of self-fulfillment and enables her to achieve a reconciliation of all of her desires: erotic, artistic, and spiritual. The Christian idea that death catalyzes a dynamic rebirth into a superior state of being frames Rossetti's revisionary female aesthetic. Accordingly, Harrison argues that "[f]or Christina Rossetti art and prayer became the primary modes, not merely of self-expression, but of *existence*. Rather than attempting to mirror reality, they subsumed it" (17). As art and her religious beliefs were both elements of her being, Rossetti understood that neither should be repressed, and thus she worked to integrate both.[37]

[37] Another major Victorian religious poet, Gerard Manley Hopkins, was so affected by "The Convent Threshold" that he wrote a response entitled "A Voice from the World" that defends the male lover's position and supports the validity of sensuous poetry that values beauty for its own sake. Yet, even Hopkins could not overcome the "tension Rossetti constructs between desire and aspiration," just as he could not resolve the tension between religious and artistic ambition in his life. In contrast, Rossetti, his role model, was able to reconcile religion with art, even though she had to do so from within the gendered restrictions of her society (Smulders, "'A Form That Differences'" 168-170).

The Woman at the Window

By simultaneously embodying both model and artist, Rossetti herself was truly a liminal figure. Her image achieved fame well before her poetry did. His younger sister's "appearance being excellently adapted to my purpose" (qtd. in Marsh, *Pre-Raphaelite Women* 31), Dante Gabriel explained to his godfather that Christina was a natural choice as a model for the Holy Virgin in both of the paintings that first brought him critical recognition: *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* (1849) and *Ecce Ancilla Domini!* (Behold the Handmaid of the Lord, later renamed *The Annunciation*; 1850). Later on, Christina also provided the inspiration for the expressiveness in Christ's eyes in William Holman Hunt's *The Light of the World* (1851-53), and, according to Elaine Shefer, even modeled Millais's *Mariana*.[38] For the members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, the character of the real-life Christina became a model of saintly femininity and was thus conflated into the character of the sacred woman she portrayed. "Santa Christina," as she was crowned later in the century by Katherine Tyndale, was perceived by her contemporaries as having what Edmund Gosse termed a "cloistered" (qtd. in Chapman 91) temperament that helped to render her as the ideal Victorian woman enclosed within the privacy of the domestic sphere and thus safely cut off from the moral taint of the public world.

Nevertheless, Christina doubled both as a model and as a skillful poet in her own right within the Pre-Raphaelite milieu. Although Dante Gabriel's paintings helped to achieve critical acknowledgment for the Pre-Raphaelites in the realm of fine art, it was the immense popularity of Christina's *Goblin Market and Other Poems* (1862) that launched their literary success. Certainly the literary equal of any other member of the Brotherhood, Christina was recognized

[38] In addition to proposing that Christina was the inspiration for Millais's painting, Shefer draws attention to the fact that the stained glass panels of Mariana's window depict the angel Gabriel and Mary in a scene from the annunciation that alludes to *Ecce Ancilla Domine!* (18).

by her brother, William Michael Rossetti, as the "Queen of the Pre-Raphaelites" (*Some Reminiscences* 74), lauded by Gosse as "the high-priestess of Pre-Raphaelitism" (*Critical Kit-Kats* 158), and acclaimed by Algernon Charles Swinburne as "the Jael who led their hosts to victory" (qtd. in Gosse, *The Life of Algernon Charles Swinburne* 136–37)—all left-handed compliments that separate Christina from the rest of the Brotherhood just as they acknowledge her skill. Despite her accomplishments, Christina was excluded from official membership in the Brotherhood by reason of her gender. Hence, "Her historical position, in fact, is one of uncanny alterity: both belonging and excluded, she is . . . the focus of their [the Pre-Raphaelite] aesthetic and the point at which it recedes" (A. Chapman 83).

Christina clearly occupied an ambiguous position between her representation as ideal woman and her role as successful poet, but, like the speaker of "The Convent Threshold," she skillfully leveraged this liminal stance to her advantage. One of many critics who have contested the idea that a strictly dualistic separate spheres ideology operated in Victorian society, Anne Digby claims that an ambiguous space existed between public and private areas of social life—the "borderland," in Digby's terms—that many Victorian women could exploit (196).[39] This ambiguous borderland, Digby maintains, "allowed women unobtrusively to build up new skills, confidence, and identity. This social borderland contained not so much a fixed boundary as a moving frontier—an expanding opportunity for women" (214). The indefinite liminal space of

[39] Semi-public activities such as charity work that fit in with the dominant social ideology of women's high moral character were widely accepted (200), and many women used this covering to render their crossings into the public sphere invisible (198). Digby explains that these women created self-contained "female worlds" within the patriarchal structures of private and intermediate zones that would empower women through mutual support, and in contrast to the male rhetoric of the self-sufficient individual, female networks emphasized shared relationships (208–09). When patriarchal authority was contested, as when masculinized public space was entered too overtly, then the subversion of separate spheres became clear and the transgressor often was labeled hysteric. When the public face of dominant masculinity was not seen to be challenged, then activities in the borderland remained unnoticed (210).

the convent threshold is, in my view, an especially apt exemplar of Digby's concept of the Victorian female borderland. Entering the convent, the novice relinquishes her past life, but she gains, by implication, a mutually-supportive female community in its place for the present and the promise of future hope. Placed within existing gendered social structures, the liminal zones of the borderland achieve freedom through outward acceptance of enclosure, as Rossetti's tolerance of the passive role of Pre-Raphaelite saint and model placed her in a position to achieve greater acceptance of her own art in the professional marketplace. For Rossetti, as for her female novice, the borderland represented by the convent threshold consequently functions as what Digby calls an outwardly "moving frontier" (214) rather than an inwardly confined space, and the enclosure figured within the convent walls is a window paradoxically opening onto a limitless horizon.

In her 1898 biography, Mackenzie Bell relates a story of Christina Rossetti's visit on holiday to Penkill Castle in 1866 that illustrates Rossetti's awareness of the possibilities afforded by a position at the window. During Rossetti's time at Penkill Castle, Arthur Hughes reminisced that she could often be observed in the window of her room, a position that she claimed was conducive to writing. The window commanded an outlook on the garden and "exactly framed her," Hughes recounted, and "she could be seen for hours meditating and composing" (Bell 51) in this position. Chapman attributes the popularity of this anecdote with Rossetti's biographers to the desire to represent Rossetti as if she were "herself a living 'framed' picture" (55) and thus to construct her as a sign of the woman artist who both sees and is seen. The concern with Rossetti's likeness as it appeared in life, as indicated by the fixation of her biographers on the accuracy of the 1866 colored chalk drawing Dante Gabriel made of her in a meditating stance (believed to depict her in her stance at the window), demonstrates the elision between the real and the

representation (A. Chapman 55–56). (See fig. 8.) Chapman argues that this confusion shows how Rossetti as image replaces the biographical person: "[t]o present Rossetti at a window in an act of composition and contemplation is also to involve her poetics in the trope of representation, for poetry here becomes an act of perceptual cognition, a reflex of sight" (56).

Although Rossetti can be interpreted as achieving subjectivity through her own gaze out of the window, Chapman asserts that her gaze is portrayed as passive and therefore collapses into the spectacle of her figure constructed by her biographers (56–57). Given her poetic fascination with the opportunities presented by the threshold position, however, I regard more affirmatively Rossetti's status as simultaneous subject and object of the gaze in this popular anecdote. Like the speaker that she creates in "The Convent Threshold," Rossetti is acutely aware of the possibilities and dangers within the threshold. Yet she consciously chooses a literal stance at the window, and assumes the identity of the trope that the woman-at-the-window represents, because it provides her with the widened perspective that she needs for artistic creation. Rossetti's window, in this regard, operates both as an aperture letting in light and thus permitting visual access to the world, and as a frame that fashions her own representation as an object of observation. Permitting herself to be figured as a trope, she reshapes this representation into a space for generating her own art and performs the construct of the woman artist that she creates.

This biographical anecdote also underscores Rossetti's recognition of the complex (inter)relationship between nature and the virtual as mediated through vision, which was increasingly being shaped by photographic modes of representation. The window (or camera) does not provide a fixed plane on which to construct visual truth, but rather is a kaleidoscope of shifting perspectives that is mediated by the imagination. When she submitted six new poems on August 1, 1854 to William Edmonstoune Aytoun, the editor of *Blackwood's Magazine*, Rossetti

included a cover letter in which she declared her devotion to her art, claiming that "poetry is with me, not a mechanism, but an impulse and a reality; and . . . I know my aims in writing to be pure, and directed to that which is true and right" (qtd. in Sandars 85). For Rossetti, renunciation of either art or social acceptance was not an inevitable response to the conflict between the woman poet's need for personal autonomy and the demands of Victorian society. Rather, renunciation functioned for her as a strategy for renegotiating and reconciling art with life, and the liminal state represented by the window provided the ambiguous space necessary for these self-transformations. By emphasizing the possibilities of multiple virtual spaces overlapping the "real" and of the multi-dimensional perspectives enabled by the threshold, Rossetti indicates that the increasingly unstable boundary between reality and illusion need not be creatively debilitating, but may be exploited to enhance artistic vision.

Chapter 1 Figures

Fig. 2: Millais, Sir John Everett. *Mariana*. 1851. Oil on wood. 1851. Tate Gallery, London.

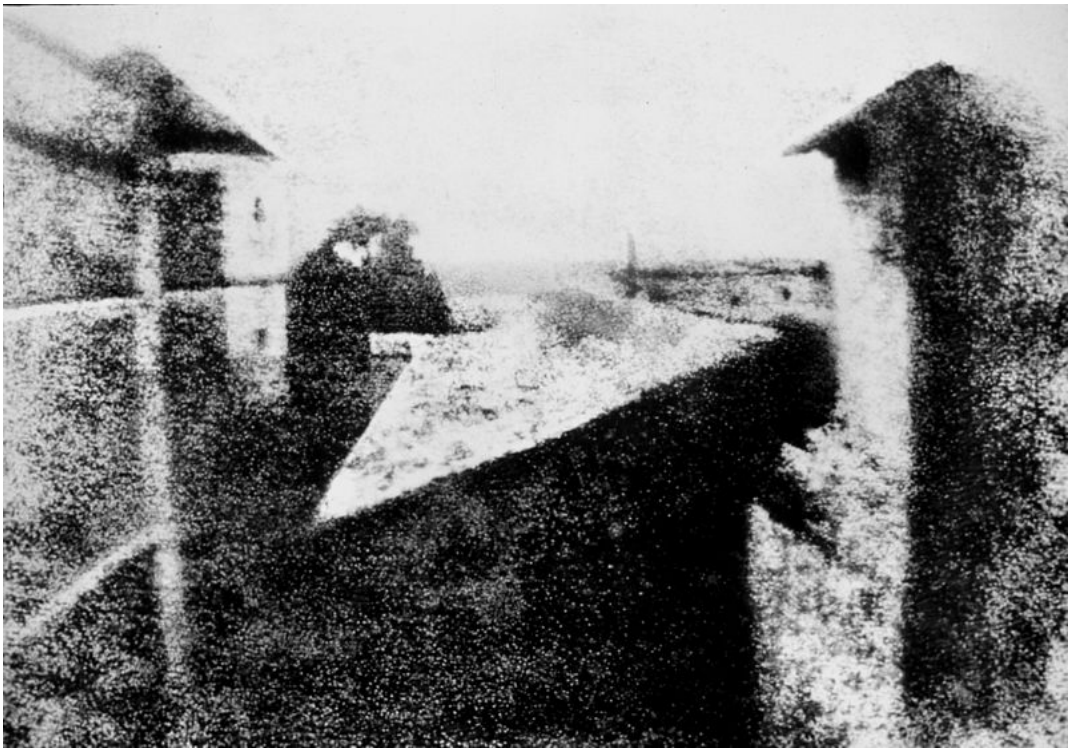

Fig. 3: Niépce, Joseph Niécephore. *View from the Window at Le Gras.* ca. 1826-27. Oil-treated bitumen on pewter. Gernsheim Collection, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin.

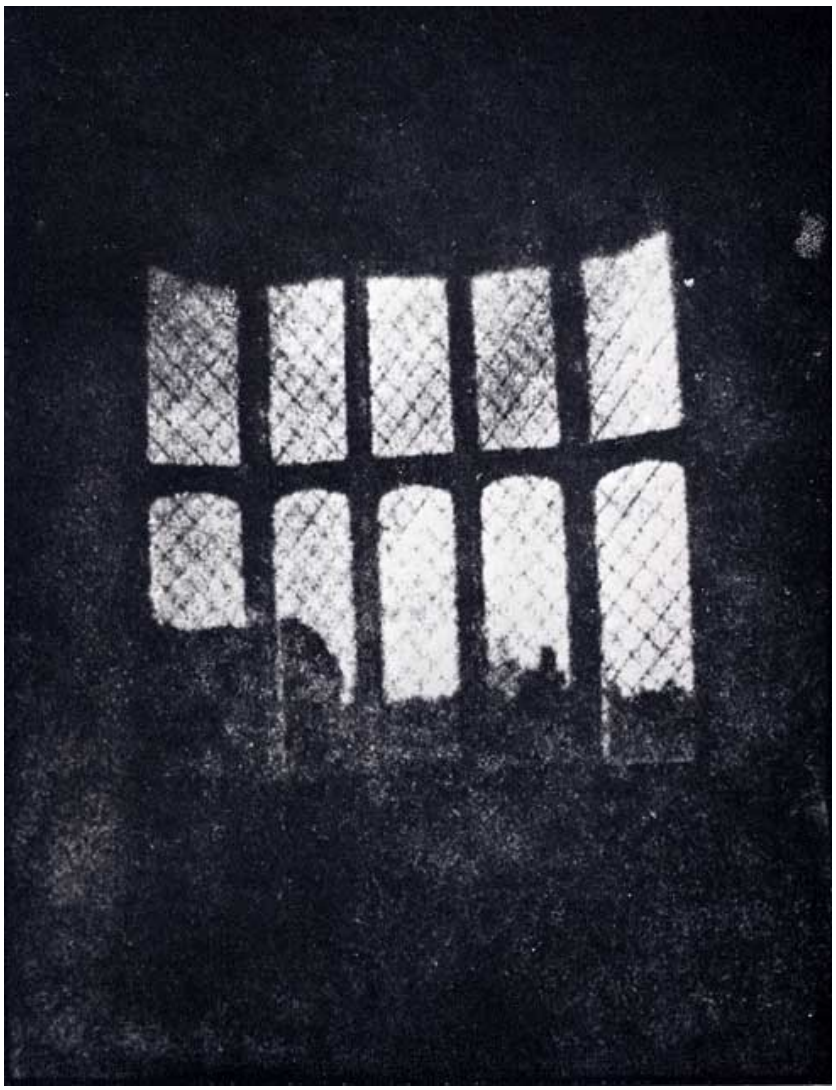

Fig. 4: Talbot, William Henry Fox. *Latticed Window at Lacock Abbey*. 1835. Salted paper print from photographic negative. National Museum of Photography, Film, and Television; Bradford, England.

Fig. 5: Velázquez, Diego. *Las Meninas*. 1656. Oil on canvas. Museo Nacional Del Prado, Madrid.

Fig. 6: Collins, Charles Allston. *Convent Thoughts*. 1850-51. Oil on canvas. Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology, University of Oxford.

Fig. 7: Millais, Sir John Everett. *The Vale of Rest*. 1858-59. Oil on canvas. Tate Gallery, London.

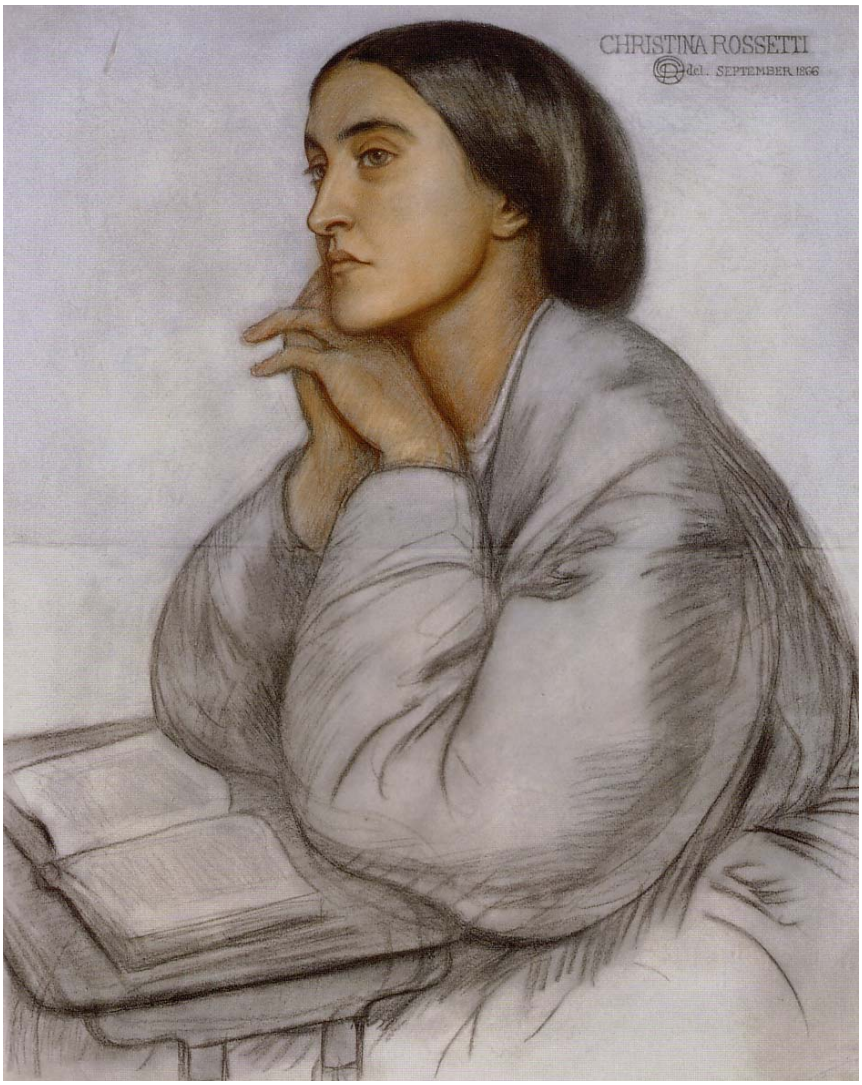

Fig. 8: Rossetti, Dante Gabriel. *Portrait of Christina Rossetti*. 1866. Colored chalk on blue-gray paper. Private collection.

Chapter 2

"But What Am I? A Shadow and an Echo": Self-Reflection and Subjectivity in Augusta Webster's Dramatic Portraits and Clementina Hawarden's Photography

In *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There* (1872), Lewis Carroll famously depicts the looking glass as a portal to an alternate reality for his young female character, Alice. Alice's initial attraction to the world represented in the drawing room mirror stems from her desire to see more of "Looking Glass House" than appears in her immediate line of vision, and this imaginative curiosity leads her to discover that the reflective surface is permeable, "like a bright silvery mist" (Carroll 131). John Tenniel's two-part illustration of Alice's journey through the glass features a pair of mirror images: the first depicting Alice's back as she embraces her reflection on the mantel, and the second showing a frontal view of Alice bilaterally divided into substance and shadow as she steps through the mirror to its other side. (See fig. 9.) The point of division between Alice's physical being and her reflection is obscured, but the dual presentation of the illustration divides her into two distinct but related images. Paradoxically, Alice and her reflection in the glass are both different and the same. Much like the relationship of the living Alice Liddell to her literary double, the real dissolves into the imaginary in Tenniel's illustration just as the looking glass separates the material reality from the image.

The mirror enables Alice to explore the imaginative possibilities that exist within the confines of her everyday world in Carroll's story, and her engagement with the looking glass points to a broader cultural fascination with the mirror as an instrument for determining female and artistic identity in the nineteenth century. Because it can display appearance, the mirror has a long history of being associated with knowledge of self. While absorption with the mirror can

indicate an excessive interest in appearance to the exclusion of the interior being, the mirror can also function as a means of attaining greater perspective on the immaterial self and on the relationship between the self and the world.

As it externalizes a division of self between subject and object of vision that is normative for women, the mirror is an icon with deeply gendered connotations. The mirror has special significance for women in Western culture because women are culturally defined by the exterior surface that the mirror reveals. In 1868, the essayist Eliza Lynn Linton astutely remarked that a woman always sees the mirrored image of self in others and "makes a mirror of existence" (108). Because the "female self as a social, psychological, and literary phenomenon is defined, to a considerable degree, as a visual image," Jenijoy La Belle similarly argues that women are "structured, in part, by continued acts of mirroring" (9). Consequently, La Belle explains the mirror is particularly significant for women as it represents both the power of culture to dictate identity (40) and the opportunity to construct it (18).

The mirror's capacity to rupture the self also points to its metaphorical connection with the general condition of subjectivity in the nineteenth century.[40] Isobel Armstrong relates that the idea that the subject can be turned into an image, and that images are out of the subject's control and may be endlessly multiplied, is pervasive in the period (*Victorian Glassworlds* 114). By creating images, the mirror operates as a prism extending, multiplying, and reorganizing vision. In doing so, it interrogates the function of the gaze, the concept of self as image, and the possibility of cohesive, self-contained subjectivity.

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[40] Of course, Jacques Lacan's influential concept of the mirror stage as a milestone of psychological development usefully develops the implications of this association. I will address Lacan's theory at more length later in this chapter.

Both the dramatic monologue form, as a means of understanding the split self, and photography, as a materialization of the division between visual sign and signified, reflect the intense Victorian interest in the complex idea of self-identity shown by the mirror. As a response to the Romantic perception of a unified "I" conveyable through lyric utterance, the dramatic monologue presents a view of self that is multidimensional, inherently performative, and often fragmented. E. Warwick Slinn argues that the dramatic monologue fundamentally engenders "conflicts about self-conception" by exploring the turmoil of a self-segregated mind (*The Discourse of Self in Victorian Poetry* ix). The distance between the poet and the speaker offered by the dramatic monologue performs the action of the mirror in splitting and replicating the self, thereby separating the signifier from the signified.

Photography similarly complicates the idea of coherent self by enabling the infinite reproduction of images. The photographic lens, Armstrong states, stimulated "light to accomplish its own transformations by making non-mimetic images out of itself. Its simulacra were at the juncture of the visible and invisible, the seen and the unseen, body and mind" (*Victorian Glassworlds* 253). The photograph, particularly in daguerreotype form, was often conceptualized as a type of fixed mirror in the years following its inception. In 1839, Jules Janin used the mirror analogy to describe the effect of photography to his audience: "imagine that the mirror has retained the imprint of every object it reflects, then you will have a more complete idea of the Daguerreotype" (qtd. in Owens 74, note 1). Similarly, Oliver Wendell Holmes famously characterized photography as "the mirror with a memory" in his 1859 article "The Stereoscope and the Stereograph," marveling that the photograph has "fixed the most fleeting of our illusions, that which the apostle and the philosopher and the poet have alike used as the type of instability and unreality. The photograph has completed the triumph, by making a sheet of

paper reflect images like a mirror and hold them as a picture." "Form is henceforth divorced from matter," he exults, and thus "matter as a visible object is of no great use any longer, except as the mould on which form is shaped. Give us a few negatives of a thing worth seeing, taken from different points of view, and that is all we want of it." For Holmes, the photographic image replaces and effectively becomes the reality it signifies, and the world inaugurated by photography in this new Platonism is completely figured on reflected simulations.

In both photography and the dramatic monologue form, the signs created by the mirror may operate as a symbolic means by which to consider simulation's increasing power to define identity. This issue was particularly relevant to women artists, for whom gender further complicated the complex relationship figured by the mirror between self as material being and as immaterial image. In the three sections of this chapter, I examine how Augusta Webster's dramatic monologues and Lady Clementina Hawarden's photography treat female self-reflection as a means of self-fashioning. First, I explore how reflection transmits an image in Webster's "By the Looking-Glass." This dramatic monologue portrays a woman whose unattractive appearance does not match her desire for external beauty. The speaker's perspective controls her vision, and her attempts to mold her outer being to fit her inner sense of identity fail because of her inability to direct her gaze productively. In section two, I discuss photographic mirroring as a dynamic way of channeling the gaze. Hawarden's photographs of her daughters within the enclosed space of her home studio develop the complex female subjectivity displayed by the mirror: by visually splitting the self into subject and object of the gaze, the mirror erodes the distinction between image and reality. The next section investigates how mirroring foregrounds simulation as a means of shaping identity. Both Hawarden and Webster address the self-replicative potential of the mirrored image. The speaker of Webster's "Faded" regards a portrait

of her younger, more beautiful self and experiences a disconnect between herself as subject and as object, a duplication engendered by her image as a type of mirror. This speaker recognizes the complex construction of self represented by her relationship with her portrait as doppelganger. Hawarden's treatment of doubling suggests that it may be harnessed as a technique to understand the divided nature of the self and to generate image as a means of determining signification. Paradoxically, I argue, simulation enables self-creation by adopting and performing the self as an image—a concept whose implications I will develop further in Chapter 3. As Webster suggests in her dramatic monologues and Hawarden in her photographs, the female artist must be simulated to be realized.

Reflection

The mirror's primary use is to reveal the outer appearance through reflection: it is designed as a reflective surface that provides a perspective on self that could not be seen by any other means. [41] In its transitive form, "To reflect" means "to return or cast back" as well as "to display as if in a mirror; to reproduce, esp. faithfully or accurately; to depict. . . . to make manifest" ("Reflect, V."). "Reflect" also may be used intransitively to signify the activity of careful thinking about a subject. From a psychological angle, "reflection" signifies "[t]he process or faculty by which the mind observes and examines its own experiences and emotions," and it refers to "intelligent self-awareness, introspection" ("Reflection, N."). Historically, the presence of the mirror in art customarily signaled vanity, particularly in connection with women. However, the symbolism of the mirror gradually shifted in the nineteenth century to signify self-

[41] Jonathan Miller relates that "to reflect the appearance of the otherwise invisible self is one of the mirror's best known functions" (12). Our optical view of ourselves is confined to the mirror: we cannot see ourselves without it.

searching as much as narcissistic self-love, and examination of the mirror image often conveyed deeper psychological or spiritual introspection (Miller 150, 175).[42]

Reflection enables self-knowledge in both visual and philosophical senses, and it also reproduces images within the representational area of the mirror. As "virtual images," reflections exist outside the physical world within the domain of "glass space" (Armstrong, *Victorian Glassworlds* 96). Armstrong explains that the mirror's action of casting back the image makes known "the split between the eye and the gaze, as the eye is seen not to be in full possession or ownership of the seen" (108). The distinction established by the virtual image between the self as subject and object of vision has particular significance for women, because women are culturally conditioned within Western society to view themselves as objects of the male gaze.[43] As I noted previously in this dissertation, Victorian women artists experienced considerable difficulty assuming the role of creator of art because of the idea that their proper position was that of object, and this situation was no different for women poets. According to Dorothy Mermin, the Victorian woman poet was transfixed between "two mutually exclusive and equally unsuitable literary roles" ("The Damsel" 64). The traditional female role of damsel in need of rescue was untenable because of the woman poet's need to create art, and the masculine role of the knight who rescues her was unavailable because of gender. Because it establishes a speaker separate

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[42] Miller astutely points out that although Narcissus is the epitome of vain self-annihilation brought on by the mirror, Narcissus in fact did not recognize himself in his reflection (156). In this sense, Narcissus' failure to understand the nature of reflection destroyed him, not excessive self-love.

[43] Again, the gendering of the gaze has been thoroughly established within art history, notably by scholars like John Berger, Griselda Pollock, and Laura Mulvey (within film studies). In Chapter 1, I explained that John Berger provides a useful explanation of the male gaze's effects on women's perception of identity in his idea that women mentally conceptualize themselves as "object[s] of vision" (47). For women, the mirror's action of projecting the image occurs internally as well as externally.

from the poet, the dramatic monologue provided a way to finesse this impasse by conceptualizing a female poetic figure that integrated both subject and object positions (Mermin, "The Damsel" 68). Susan Jane Soroka notes that the dramatic monologue was particularly suited to explore the idea of poetic subjectivity for women poets, since this form "takes as its explicit concern the exploration of persona and self" (3). Like many of her contemporaries, Webster apparently was attracted to the dramatic monologue form as a means of exploring poetic and gendered identity.

A highly accomplished writer and literary critic, Webster (1837-94) actively campaigned for humanitarian and social issues like education and women's suffrage (Sutphin 9), and is known for using her literary work to focus on "the social contradictions of the Victorian gender system" (Brown 89). Two compilations of dramatic monologues, *Dramatic Studies* (1866) and *Portraits* (1870, revised 1893), form her most significant literary output, although she also wrote lyrics, a sonnet sequence, verse dramas, a novel, and much journalism, including literary criticism. Webster's sympathetic dramatization of a prostitute's viewpoint in "A Castaway" has drawn the most critical attention in recent years because of its incisive social commentary. Like many of her dramatic monologues, "A Castaway" displays Webster's predominant emphasis on the "social circumstances" of her characters as being "shaped by gender constructions" (Sutphin 16). Angela Leighton accordingly describes Webster as "a determined literalist of the imagination," stating that "her concern is not with the myth of the woman poet, but with real, live women" (164).[44]

[44] Natalie M. Houston concisely sums up feminist criticism of Webster's poetry as revolving around two main ideas: "first, that her poetry is interesting, beautiful, complicated, and intelligent; and second, that her poetry is interesting to us, now — for what it can tell us about the nineteenth century and for what it can tell us about our own interests and purposes."

Self-reflection, either through the mirror or through contemplation of a past or future self, is a common motif in Webster's dramatic monologues. Although the female speakers of Webster's dramatic monologues offer lucid perspectives on social issues relating to gender, they frequently lack auditors, whose absence has caused some critics to question the generic definition of these poems.[45] Webster's poetic type has been classified variously as "monodrama" (Rigg 89), "monologue," "soliloquy," and "blank verse introspective idyll" (qtd. in Sutphin 15). Christine Sutphin, the editor of the current critical edition of Webster's poetry, suggests that "interior monologue best describes the form of Webster's work because her speakers are often alone when they speak" (15). The auditor's absence has significance beyond the technical question of genre, however. Helen Luu claims that the presence of the auditor relates to the speaker's "linguistic power" (110), as the auditor either embodies that power or reflects its existence in the speaker. By omitting auditors and isolating her speakers, Webster emphasizes her speakers' lack of control over their linguistic representation of self (111). Laura Capp assumes a more positive view by pointing out the uniqueness of Webster's dramatic monologues in featuring possible listeners in the form of auditors who are referenced but not present. Capp argues that Webster's choice to include these "minor characters . . . who are not privy to each

[45] The traditional characteristics of the dramatic monologue, as laid out by M. H. Abrams, are a speaker who is different from the poet, an auditor, and the speaker's unknowing revelation of personal characteristics (70). The auditor must be present, but his or her voice can be silent or represented indirectly in the text. As Helen Luu points out, however, each criterion of Abrams' definition has been reassessed over time (13). Therefore, this definition does not adequately cover the entire body of poems that could be considered dramatic monologues. Robert Langbaum's seminal theory of "sympathy vs. moral judgment" as the criterion for dramatic monologue inspired many subsequent critics to reconsider the imperative of restricting the genre's definition to the presence of auditors (for notable examples of later criticism, see Mermin, *The Audience in the Poem*; Martin; and Slinn, *Victorian Poetry as Cultural Critique*). However, critics still remain divided on whether the presence of an auditor is necessary to the genre (13–14). As a whole, the dramatic monologue has proved to be a form that eludes easy generic consensus.

speaker's turbulent, soul-searching utterances" draws attention to "the speaker's need for isolation" when exploring identity (69), because even speaking to no one can involve an assumption of power for female speakers marginalized by gender (6). My perspective builds off of Capp's idea that the absence of auditors highlights the speakers' internal examinations, but I suggest that Webster places emphasis on these solitary connections with the mirror as a potential means of developing subjectivity. Webster's omission of auditors in these poems frames the speaker's interaction with the mirror as an investigation of identity that takes place within the self and is facilitated within the known boundaries of private, domestic space.

For women poets like Webster, the dramatic monologue was attractive because of its reflective ability. Like the mirror, the dramatic monologue provides a way to simultaneously embody both the subject and object positions, and it displays a virtual image that operates as a projection of female identity that is not necessarily conflated into the poet. Similarly, the dramatic monologue permits the introspective action signified by reflection. By assuming the poetic voice of another woman through the dramatic monologue form, the poet may consider what it means simultaneously to adopt the different viewpoints of artist and woman, subject and object.[46] The act of reflection, in both its transitive and intransitive forms, offers a perspective on self that is pluri-dimensional.

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[46] Critics have struggled with how to treat dramatic monologues by women in the period, since these poems frequently differ in some respects from monologues by men—such as the lack of auditors in many of Webster's monologues. While some scholars, like Mermin and Armstrong, address dramatic monologues by women in a category of their own, Luu and others warn that doing "effects a second silence, admitting into the discourse on the dramatic monologue only those poems that already answer to its name" (Luu 29). I recognize that framing the function of the gaze in reflection as primarily a gendered issue carries the danger of over-simplifying its complexity: men certainly used reflection as a means of exploring self as well as women. However, Victorian women often approached the process of attaining subjectivity differently because their cultural perspective necessarily diverged from that of men, and I agree with Luu

The possibilities of this expanded outlook, however, may be subsumed by the self-objectification performed by the mirror. "By the Looking-Glass" dramatizes a young woman who fails to achieve clearer vision through reflection because her focus on her mirrored image is one-sided. The monologue begins with the speaker's confirmation of her solitary status:

> Alone at last in my room —
> How sick I grow of the glitter and din,
> Of the lips that smile and the voices that prate
> To a ballroom tune for the fashion's sake:
> Light and laughters without, but what within?
> Are these like me? Do the pleasure and state
> Weary them under the seeming they make? —
> But I see all through my gloom. (ll. 1-8)

"Alone," the first word of the monologue, underscores the speaker's isolation within her room, a secluded space that provides her relief from the crowd that she just left. Structurally, this first stanza establishes the theme of reflection in its *abcdbcda* rhyme scheme, lines 5-8 being a mirror image of lines 1-4 in which the *b* and the *d* lines are reversed. The world of the ballroom is—like a mirror—all surface without substance: "glitter and din," superficial social politeness and small talk, "[l]ight and laughters." The speaker recognizes the divide between the appearance of gaiety and the inner reality, and therefore she questions whether others around her similarly realize the double nature of their lives. The core problem she articulates, however, is not that this difference exists, but that she does not feel connected to others. "Are these like me?" she wonders, but she

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that these variances emphasize the myriad ways in which identity was conceived *within* the dramatic monologue form rather than threatening its generic boundaries.

cannot know because all that she perceives are the external images that others project. Although the speaker considers the feelings of those within the social world that surrounds her, she begins and closes the stanza by focusing on her own solitary situation.

Capp remarks that Webster deliberately emphasizes the isolation of her speakers despite the closeness of others within their worlds nearby (74): in this case, the ballroom scene from which the young woman recently departed. In addition to the physical absence of auditors with whom she could converse, the speaker's own way of seeing is another factor that isolates her from relationship with others. The speaker declares that she is able to "see all," but because this vision is filtered through her own "gloom," it is a distinct perspective. She sees, but she does not understand completely, and the insight that she does have emphasizes her feeling of separation from those around her.

The split that the speaker experiences between the outer world of appearance and the inner psychic reality more deeply extends to her sense of self. Regarding herself in her mirror, the speaker struggles to reconcile her perception of her reflected image as another person with her knowledge of self:

> A girl, and so plain a face!
> Once more, as I learn by heart every line
> In the pitiless mirror, night by night,
> Let me try to think that it is not my own.
> Come, stranger with features something like mine,
> Let me place close by you the tell-tale light;
> Can I find in you now some charm unknown,
> Only one softening grace? (ll. 17-24)

Like lines 1-8, this stanza also reflects itself in its rhyme scheme of *abcdbcda*. By reading "every line" of her reflected image, the speaker engages in the introspection referenced by the intransitive form of the verb "to reflect." She attempts to achieve a greater knowledge of her identity by interpreting her image as a text, but the mirror is "pitiless" because it reveals two irrefutable aspects of her identity that seem to be incompatible in her social world: that she is a girl who belongs within a fashionable milieu in which beauty is valued and that she is "plain." In response, the speaker undertakes two related strategies to adapt the mirrored image to fit her inner conception of identity, both of which fail. First, she tries to deflect the image that she sees by outright rejecting it as a type of doppleganger, a "stranger with features something like mine." In doing so, she hopes secondly to gain the distance necessary to be able to view the image dispassionately as "other" and discern "some charm unknown." The speaker had overhead "one say: 'Why, she is not so plain. / See, the mouth is shapely, the nose not ill" (ll. 27-28) and had hoped that she could arrive at a similar conclusion, but she cannot disassociate her idea of self from the image that she sees. Her attempts to reflect her image collapse as she acknowledges "Alas! it is I, I, I, / Ungainly, common" (ll. 25-26) at the beginning of the following stanza.

The unusual repetition of the "I" in this statement underscores the lack of meaning that the first-person singular carries for the speaker as a signifier of subjectivity. Although the speaker voices the "I," it is an empty placeholder for her of an agency that she does not possess. Because the signification of her image is beyond her control, the ability to express her thoughts is inconsequential in her mind. Accordingly, critics have commonly interpreted the repetitive vocalization of the "I" in this passage to display the speaker's fractured sense of self. Angela Leighton proposes that the speaker's confrontation with her mirror image results in despair, because she cannot reject the "truth" that the mirror provides in favor of "her own subjective

desires." The recapitulated "I" shows that "the self is not an inviolable inner sanctuary, . . . but a staggered reflection of history, opinions, moralities and prejudices." "The ironic gap in the monologue," Leighton concludes, "is thus not between reader and speaker, but rather between the speaker and her broken other selves" (187).[47] Both Capp and Bing Shao highlight the considerable influence of Victorian gendered social codes on the speaker and point out that the speaker's subjectivity is so cracked that she compulsively performs the role of auditor within herself via the mirror (Capp 78–79; Shao 134–35).[48]

Social standards of beauty do fashion the speaker's identity, but I do not agree that a fractured subjectivity is the heart of her problem. Rather, the speaker's difficulty in establishing a coherent sense of self results, ironically, from her inability to conceptualize the split between her image and her psychic being. In response to the overheard comment that her face has some

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[47] Here, Leighton refers to Langbaum's prominent theory of the dramatic monologue as foregrounding the tension between sympathy and judgment. Many speakers of dramatic monologues express ideas that offend the moral sensibilities of readers, thus inviting the need to create distance through judgment. Through sympathy, however, the poet is able to dramatize the perspective of another person to scrutinize a quality of self, and the reader likewise uses sympathy to understand the dramatized viewpoint. By sympathizing with the speaker, the reader is able to hold off moral judgment of the speaker's actions until the end of the poem, at which point the reader may evaluate the effectiveness of the ideas that the speaker advocates (Langbaum 83–85). The tension between sympathy and judgment works to balance both reactions for the reader, as Langbaum explains that "sympathy frees us for the widest possible range of experience, while the critical reservation makes us aware of how far we are departing" (96).

[48] Capp explains that Webster's female speakers "exhibit split subjectivities to the extent that in speaking to themselves, they are at once speaking to an other—a former self no longer within easy reach" (78). Shao more overtly emphasizes the mirror's function as a dual symbol of both the speaker and her listeners, which makes it "both public and private in reflecting the different values and norms of Victorian culture" (134), and states that the speaker's conception of identity is shaped "as a reflection of social judgments on her" (135). My view is somewhat more radical than these perspectives in that I see the speaker's problem as stemming from her assent to the conflation of feminine value with beauty in her society rather than to a fundamental conflict between culture and self. These core social values have become the speaker's own to such an extent that she does not essentially fight them, even though she does wish that her situation were different.

pleasing qualities, the speaker expresses a desire to believe this judgment but professes an inability to do so from an aesthetic standpoint: "I try to dupe my eyesight in vain, / For I, who have partly a painter's skill, / I cannot put knowledge by" (ll. 30-32). Being an artist, she designates aesthetic expertise as the faculty of seeing clearly. However, because the speaker defines visual clarity by conventional standards, this ability actually indicates *blindness* within the context of the poem. Conventional seeing clouds the speaker's vision, rendering her unable to contextualize her identity outside of the limits of her particular social milieu.

As Shao and Sutphin indicate, the overheard commentator uses a cultural standard of female beauty to assess the speaker's face and thereby frames her as an aesthetic object even as he or she asserts a seemingly positive evaluation of the speaker's merits (Shao 135; Sutphin 21). Instead of rejecting the standard of beauty implied in the culturally-gendered male gaze, though, the speaker reinstates this aesthetic system in her reply, using it as a means of establishing the quality of her own artistic vision. Accurate perception of truth defined as appearance, or symmetrical beauty, is necessary for artistic production in the speaker's mind. Art is conflated into conventional beauty in this definition, and as an artist, the speaker believes that she must acknowledge that an image without such beauty has no aesthetic power. In contrast to the commentator's view, she explains why her lack of optical appeal inevitably excludes her from any connection to art:

> He had not fed, as I feed
> On beauty, till beauty itself must seem
> Me, my own, a part and essence of me,
> My right and my being. — Why! how am I plain? (ll. 33-36)

In the desire to remake herself into the beautiful object of vision that she desires to be, the speaker has aggressively ingested the cultural standard of female beauty to the extent that it has become "a part and essence" of her. Nonetheless, this systematic diet has not changed her perception of her appearance, which remains "plain." The discrepancy between the speaker's unprepossessing image—which she characterizes as resembling a "clumsy creature smelling of earth, . . . a boorish peasant's fit mate" (ll. 43, 45)—and the refinement of her artistic sense and "pride of birth" (l. 46) seems aesthetically incongruous.

Instead of adopting a different view of herself that does not conflate beauty with being, the speaker chooses to attain coherence by subsuming her identity fully into the image that she sees in the mirror. "There, looking back from the glass, is my fate" (l. 42), she concedes. Although the speaker admits that the way that she presents herself to others is malleable, in that she could alter herself outwardly "to be more like the rest" (l. 65) and could "seem gentler and softer souled" (l. 68), she concludes that "I must needs shape myself to my place, / Softness in me would seem clumsy pretence, / . . . I hide in myself as is best" (ll. 69-70, 72). Harmony between appearance and being is the speaker's desire because she values the integrity of her aesthetic vision more than achieving a different perspective on her image. Fearing incongruity in the split between self as subject and self as object, the speaker chooses to foreshorten her perspective and objectify herself rather than to risk being out of place. The image in the glass thus dictates her fate by her own permission. Unable to split her viewpoint effectively enough to see and project other possibilities for subjectivity, her sense of self collapses inward as she withdraws into herself. Consequently, the speaker becomes defined as a one-dimensional plain woman because she does not offer any new outlooks on her identity. Rejecting pluri-dimensionality, the speaker ironically maintains unity by embracing the identity that she hates.

By disintegrating into the stereotype associated with her image, the speaker's psyche reflects what she believes are the thoughts of others rather than establishing any ideas of her own. She longs to lose her unwanted, painful identity by becoming one with the multitude at the ball, becoming anonymous. But her desire "to forget me a while" (l. 49) is stymied by her sense of unique identity, and she laments that "the sense of myself is ever strong" (l. 53). The speaker's consciousness of her image profoundly affects the way that she interprets the actions of those around her and engenders paranoia. "I read in all eyes the bitter truth," she states, "And I fancy scorning in every speech / And mocking in every smile" (ll. 54-56). The speaker's conflation of appearance with identity has so impacted her sense of self that she interprets the world outside her mind within the internal matrix of her own ideas. Perpetually focused on the objectification of her being that her image transitively reflects back to her, she filters her vision through her constricted notion of identity and cannot engage with the world through intransitive reflection. Merely reflected, and unable to reflect, the speaker cannot create. Her narrowed perspective results in the failure of her artistic imagination.

In a final attempt to escape the prison that her image represents, the speaker tries to live vicariously through her "young fair sister bright with her bloom" (l. 178), hoping that she might "feel that glow" (l. 184) projected through another's beauty. This strategy backfires, however, when her sister leaves her to marry the man that she herself had loved, and the speaker is again left alone. The speaker's worship of beauty is dedicated, but not visionary. It is an ever-elusive idea that she appreciates but is unable to reconstruct, and her subsequent psychic collapse stems from a constriction of vision that makes her unable to achieve a more than one-dimensional view of herself.

At the end of her monologue, the light that enables her view of her image fades, taking with it "[t]he poor dull face that looks out from the glass" (l. 211). The darkening of the mirror indicates the speaker's final dissolution into her image and the defeat of her attempt to understand herself through reflection—her conclusive inability to perceive her relationship to her world. In response, the speaker retreats into sleep as an abdication of consciousness, stating her intention to "[l]et self and this sadness of self leave me free" (l. 215). "Lost in the peace of the night" (l. 216), the speaker hopes to jettison the identity that oppresses her by curtailing it entirely. Shao points out the significance of the speaker's decision to sleep as manifesting "a very problematic identity":

> This poem is the only one of the Victorian monologues [by Webster] that doesn't end with the solitary speaker's rejoining the family or community—suggesting the speaker's accepting herself and coming to terms with reality, reluctant as such acceptance may be. Here, the poem ends in the death-like sleep of the speaker, creating a sense of resignation and erasure. (143)

The erasure that Shao notices is not a passive release but instead indicates a self-inflicted violent act. Through sleep, the speaker commits a symbolic suicide of thought. Escaping from consciousness, she silences her voice, gives up control over her mind, and erases her subjectivity entirely. Although the speaker's problem is initially caused by the Victorian social system that locates female value and identity in beauty, her destruction is catalyzed by her failure to understand and effectively engage in reflective acts. Unable to imagine or sustain itself, her self-identity consequently implodes. Webster thereby suggests in this monologue that reflection is a requisite for subjectivity. Comprehending and employing reflection are necessary steps to perceive how self-image is projected and conceptualized. The self must first view itself as an

object of vision to attain self-awareness and procure the ability even to imagine a separate subjective identity. Photography provides a way to envision the self-awareness signified by reflection, and in the next section I consider how Hawarden situates the mirror as a means of conceptualizing and directing the gaze within photographic space.

Mirroring

"The photographic image," Lindsay Smith claims, "gains its identity through a correspondence with, and difference from, the mirror" (77). Both photography and the mirror exhibit a view of ourselves that we could not see without assistance. Jonathan Miller points out that "[o]ur optical view of ourselves is confined to the mirror: we cannot see ourselves without it" (12). Like the mirror, photography replicates the subjects that it depicts, thereby displaying its existence as a reflection of itself, or a *mise en abyme*.[49] Neither photography nor the mirror, however, reproduces the images that they depict exactly as they are in life. While the verb "to mirror" means "to reflect or reproduce accurately," the noun "mirror" is related to the Classical Latin *speculum*, which is defined as a "reflective surface, copy, imitation, image" ("Mirror, V."; "Mirror, N."). Mirroring is paradoxically associated with both truth and illusion. As Miller explains, the mirror "presupposes that as well as recognising [sic] what is in it, we must understand that what we see is, after all, a *reflection* and that what it shows is not where it seems to be" (82). The mirror replicates the image exactly along one axis by keeping the image upright instead of turning it upside down, but it reverses the image across the other axis, flipping it left-

[49] The term *en abyme* is originally taken from heraldry and references a smaller shield being reproduced within the original. In its critical usage, *mise en abyme* refers to a work that presents a smaller version of itself within itself and thus functions as a reflexive commentary (Owens 75).

to-right.[50] Thus, in reflecting the image, the mirror alters it. Photography similarly presents a binary contrast between the positive and negative versions of the picture in that the negative switches the light values in the original image that the positive form reinstates.[51] By making a positive print of an original negative image—essentially, creating a mirror image of a mirror image—the positive-negative process developed by William Henry Fox Talbot corrected the transposition of light caused by photography and enabled the reproduction of images. The daguerreotype direct-positive process, however, combined the negative with the positive versions of the image, thereby making it unique and non-reproducible: a literal mirrored image. The lateral inversion of the direct-positive image made by the daguerreotype particularly complicated the oppositional idea of photography in its early years because the relationship of the mirrored image to the original, as either companion or antithesis, was unclear (Henderson 131).

Photography, like the mirror, both questions and reinforces the notion of coherent self. As Smith relates, the complex relationship of photography to the inverted image of the mirror associates the medium with the formation of subjectivity through Jacques Lacan's much-cited mirror stage of psychological development (78). Lacan posits the "mirror stage" as a significant milestone in an infant's developing idea of self. Between the ages of six and eighteen months, a

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[50] Miller notes that the reflection will always be facing the subject in the opposite direction at the exact distance that separates the subject from the mirror (91). In other words, if the space of the image is considered as a map, the north/south direction—the space between the subject and the mirror—will remain the same in the reflection, but the east/west direction will be reversed.

[51] Henderson asserts that emerging knowledge about light affected the way that the binary positive/negative structure of photography was perceived to function. During the nineteenth century, the scientific perception of light changed from being a body to being a wave, and this alteration affected the idea of physical reality in photography. Photographs began to be seen as the product of "a relational rather than an essentialist logic," because reality itself was perceived as a relational system of "polarities" like positive/negative (121). Photography underscored the structural complexities of the natural world more completely than other aesthetic forms (121).

child recognizes that the mirror reflects himself. Consequently, the child constructs an idea of himself in dual senses of appearance and of physical control over his world. The concept of the "I" that the child constructs is a fantasy because it only exists in the mirror (Lacan 1-2). The child transitions out of the mirror stage when images provided by others take over those constructed by the self in the mirror, and at that point, the child starts to desire and act on contributions from others rather than relying solely on self-image (5).

Lacan explains that we continue past childhood to use the mirror as a tool to adopt an image, or a way of visualizing ourselves in relation to our world. Although the child strives to unite the image with the physical reality, the mirror image will always remain elusive, and Lacan explains that this desire for unification of appearance and substance remains perpetually frustrated in adulthood (2). The illusion of self engendered by the mirror image keeps us from ever understanding what the reality of our identity as "I" is (5-6). Photography, however, exposes the fiction of wholeness that the mirror generates. Smith maintains that the photograph functions as a type of imagined unitary identity much like the mirrored image. The subject's encounter with the normalized mirror image of the photograph produced by the positive-negative process often makes identifying the self difficult (80). In this sense, photography makes possible a "second mirror phase" (80) for adults in which the self fails to recognize the corrected image because of its difference from the inverted mirror image. "It is not . . . that before photography the fiction of the mirror escaped unrecognized," Smith elaborates, "but that the invention of photography, by 'correcting' it, dramatised the mirror's fiction for what it was, and enabled a fantasy of wholeness as distinct from the fantasy given by the mirror" (81). Photography not only permits vision of self, like the mirror, but also generates multiple perspectives on self as situated

within time and space. Photographic reflection perpetuates the idea of coherent self, but in doing so, reveals individual identity to be complex and pluri-dimensional.

Like Webster, Lady Clementina Hawarden focuses on the ability of reflection to reveal different perspectives of the interior being. The mother of ten children, Hawarden (1822-64) was enabled to pursue photography in 1857 when her husband inherited the Viscount title from his father and the finances of the family likely permitted them to hire a governess.[52] At the time of her untimely death from pneumonia in 1864, Hawarden had created an estimated 800 photographs (Dodier and Victoria and Albert Museum 10) and had displayed her work in two exhibitions of the prestigious Photographic Society of London, in both of which she won silver medals. Possessing the distinction of being the first woman to be elected a member of the Photographic Society, Hawarden was widely admired as a skillful photographer by her contemporaries. The *Photographic News* proclaimed in 1864 that her photographs were "surpassed by nothing in this exhibition" and "altogether unrivalled" (qtd. in Ramirez 4 note 4).

Hawarden's work from her most productive period, 1859-64, took place within the second floor of the family's home in South Kensington, which she had converted to a studio (Dodier and Victoria and Albert Museum 32). Hawarden's compositions situate her teenage daughters within the nearly empty space of her home studio in both regular dress and costumes of various kinds, frequently with the large windows of the rooms and mirrors as key elements. Of the 550 photographs featuring her daughters that Hawarden created in an indoor setting, about

[52] Very little factual information is known about Hawarden's personal life as she was apparently a private person who did not write letters often, and primary sources currently available regarding her are exceptionally scarce. Hawarden's first photographs date from 1857, and because we do know that the family social situation and finances significantly improved shortly before that time, the idea that the presence of a new governess sufficiently freed Hawarden from domestic duties to pursue photography (which was considered an aristocratic hobby at the time) is an educated guess (Dodier and Victoria and Albert Museum 21).

100 involve mirroring in some way, either through the mirror as a prop, the reflecting action of a window, or in the deployment of models as doubles (Ramirez 2). Jennifer Otto Ramirez notes that the mirror serves a dual role in photography of the period: not only does it help cut down exposure times by providing more light in indoor settings, but also "fragments and reorganizes space" and provides dual perspectives on a model or setting (2). Mid-century photographers like Hawarden were interested in the scientific, formal properties of the mirror and often likened photography to a mirror (Henderson 132). The camera-as-mirror metaphor was compelling not only because of the precision of the photograph, but also because the camera could invert and defamiliarize an image (Henderson 133). Andrea Henderson proposes that "photography both redefined realism and played an important role in generating a new conception of the real itself" (121). Hawarden's use of mirroring engages this conceptual link between photography and reflection. The concerted attention that Hawarden directs on the photographic properties of the mirror adjoining her daughters demonstrates her interest in the mirror's ability not only visually to reorganize the real, but also specifically to determine female identity.[53] In Hawarden's tightly composed photographs, the mirror operates as a tool that reveals the ways in which visual perspective structures image, the multidirectional potential of the gaze, and the complexity of the self as both subject and object of vision.

Hawarden uses the mirror as a tool to refigure the enclosed domestic area of her home studio as a space encouraging female acts of self-reflection. The ability of the mirror to illuminate areas of a setting that would be otherwise difficult to see contributed to the frequency of its use in mid-Victorian portrait photography (Dodier and Victoria and Albert Museum 48–

[53] Ramirez explains that, for women, "the mirror was the perfect vehicle for exploring the very nature of self-identity. . . . The complex interchanges between the physical self and the reflected self raise questions about the relationship between the self as subject and the self as object" (53).

50). Even as it opened up greater space within the photograph, the mirror could redirect self-vision back on the subject. Figure 10 exhibits Hawarden's characteristic employment of reflection as a means of reorganizing space. Hawarden's daughter, Clementina Maude, is situated in the center of the frame with her back to the camera. She gazes at her image in the mirror, a large cheval glass that often appears in Hawarden's compositions.[54] Clementina's pose is relaxed as she leans into her reflection. Light from a window out of sight in the left-hand section of the image falls on her back, illuminating her shoulder and voluminous skirts. This light is not soft, however, as a sharp line from the shadow of a windowpane diagonally cuts across the skirts. Similarly, while the cheval glass is angled towards the viewer to display Clementina's frontal image and the space behind her, the bright light from the window obscures her reflection, leaving her face in deep shadow.

Hawarden's evocative treatment of light has been frequently noted. Although her compositions were not unusual, Hawarden's approach to light differs from the norm of what contemporary photographers like Lewis Carroll were doing with similar compositions (Carol Armstrong 119-20). Light is important for all artists, but Hawarden situates the window as a focal point by which she manipulates light. Hawarden permits the light within her studio space "to suffuse and dissolve form rather than to disclose it" (Lawson 7). Light functions for her as a fundamental part of her subject, and she portrays it as "the vehicle of spiritual and imaginative transport" (Lawson 9). In this photograph, Hawarden uses light to mark a contrastive boundary

[54] Interestingly, the cheval glass—a full-length dressing mirror mounted on a tiltable frame—was commonly perceived as being connected to interiority. Over time, Hawarden gradually transitioned from using the mirror as an iconographic prop symbolizing femininity to drawing on its potential to distinguish and determine identity (Ramirez 56). The cheval glass is also termed in French "the psyche," a form that was adopted into English use in 1838 with the publication of Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *Alice, or The Mysteries* ("Psyche, N."). Hawarden made use of at least two different cheval glasses in her photographs (Ramirez 58), and this prop functions as an important tool for exploring feminine subjectivity in her work.

between the interior and the exterior, much as Webster juxtaposes the social world of appearances from her speaker's internal psyche in "By the Looking-Glass." Ramirez accordingly reads the window's filtered light as representing the division between the inner and outer worlds, which "creates a dialectic between the realms of reality and the imagination, consciousness and unconsciousness" (67). As it does for Webster's speaker, the mirror makes this boundary visible for Clementina by contextualizing her figure within space. Through the window, the mirror offers a dimensional scene that vividly contrasts with the one depicted by the photograph as a whole. Perspective is foreshortened in the space surrounding the mirror, and the wallpaper stars seem to recede in the background. Outside the mirrored window, however, the viewer can see the railing of the balcony of Hawarden's house, beyond which stand the facades of the neighboring houses. While the vista of the outside world is clearer in the mirror, Clementina is more difficult to decipher within the mirror space. Clementina appears as a dark outline in the mirror, a spectral figure transposed on the background of the world beyond the boundary of the photograph. Her left hand, right elbow, and legs are severed by the cheval glass frame. This visceral fracture causes her reflection to assume the quality of a disembodied Greek statue. Like the view of the public street beyond the walls of the studio, Clementina's surface as represented by her back is lit, but her face—the signifier of her psychic world—is darkened. Given her close proximity to the mirror, she is able to view her face, but the viewer cannot. Even as Clementina's reflection is displayed to view by the positioning of the mirror, her body is arranged in such a way that it deflects the gaze, and the reflection here operates in a closed circuit between Clementina and the mirror.

More broadly, the mirror here performs as a *mise en abyme* depicting the photograph's function as a whole. Mieke Bal interprets the etymological meaning of "photography" as "light-

writing" to theorize the act of viewing a photograph as a type of reading. Photographic portraiture epitomizes this function in its representation of the face as a "self-evident synecdoche of the human individual, a mise en abyme of what it means to be human." In this photograph, Clementina's face is an unreadable text because its specific role as sign cannot be distinguished. The relationship between her substance and her reflection is indefinite, and the identity that would be manifested by her face remains unfixed for the viewer.[55] Nonetheless, while the photograph situates Clementina as an object of the viewer's gaze, it also depicts her as the subject of her own vision. She has the power of signification to an extent that the viewer of the photograph does not, as only she can see her reflected face clearly enough to interpret it. Through the mirror as photograph *en abyme*, Hawarden situates Clementina to reflexively cast back the gaze, and in doing so, Hawarden reflects it at the viewer.

This photograph presents Clementina as maintaining some control over her projection of self and her relationship to the outside world represented by the vista outside both the studio at 5 Princes Gardens and the photograph the mirror embodies. The mirror is not a destructive influence on her conception of identity in this composition, as it is for the Lady of Shalott and the speaker of "By the Looking-Glass." Instead, as Michael Kramp points out, Clementina uses the mirror to explore the boundary between the interior and exterior worlds and to transform domestic space into an "artistic zone" (151) that enables rather than inhibits the female production of art. Kramp contends that Hawarden depicts her daughters as creative artists who

[55] Ramirez suggests that Hawarden's obfuscation of the reflection draws attention to the interiority of the self and conveys "a denial of the objectification of the female body especially as constructed through the male gaze" (66). However, while Clementina's face is obscured in this photograph, her body is clearly visible. Thus, although I agree with Ramirez that Hawarden emphasizes Clementina's interiority here, I instead interpret the composition as positing that identity within a body which is an object of the gaze. Hawarden draws attention to the way that Clementina's body performs its role as an object of the gaze rather than denying this function.

are able to direct their own representation by determining how they are displayed to viewers (156). The ways in which Hawarden's daughters use the mirror to present their image demonstrates their agency over the perspective that the viewer receives (157).[56] More importantly, I believe, Hawarden uses the mirror as a means of commenting on her own role as an artist. In this way, Clementina functions as a stand-in for her mother, a *mise en abyme* of the photographer herself. Hawarden positions her daughter as a model who acts out the creative agency that she expresses through her photography.

Unlike Webster's speaker, who permits herself to become defined by her mirrored image, Clementina relates to the mirror as a tool that provides greater perspective and enhances creative vision. In this photograph, the mirror grants Clementina a greater view of herself as well as permitting her to manage the viewer's perception of her image. Instead of looking out the window directly, Clementina turns away from both the window and the viewer, directing her attention towards the reflected London cityscape. The mirror figures her as a virtual subject within the multi-dimensional environment of the outside world that stretches out past the balustrade behind her. While the faint horizontal line of the window visible in the mirror indicates that this vista lies outside of the area in which Clementina is posed, she sees her body as situated within this space. Clementina turns to reflection as a way of conceptualizing and constructing her relationship to her environment. The mirror enables her to establish depth within the enclosed surroundings of the domestic home studio, to present a dimensional perspective of her figure to the viewer, and to examine the different facets of her identity within her setting.

[56] Similarly, Warner argues that Hawarden's focus on her daughters as subjects endows them with command over the gaze, with "authority over what they see and how they are seen, over what they present and what they conceal" (8).

Hawarden's positioning of Clementina with the mirror thus draws attention to the ways in which Clementina may have agency even as an object of the gaze.

Most significantly, Hawarden uses the mirror to fashion Clementina *as* image. The corners of the photograph are cut off, reconstructing the square print into an octagonal shape that indicates the photograph's apparent placement within a past album but also subtly mimics the shaped corners of the frame of the cheval glass into which Clementina gazes. Much like the photograph that Hawarden creates, the mirror functions as a frame that displays a female subject as a work of art. Rather than being defined by her image, however, Clementina may employ the mirror as an aesthetic surface on which to create it, using reflection as a means of extending the gaze beyond the boundaries of both the looking glass and the photograph itself. In the mirror, Clementina sees not only herself, but achieves a greater view of the world outside of her room, and the viewer of the photograph is granted access to this wider range of vision.

In Figure 11, Hawarden compresses photographic space to display Clementina in a three-quarter portrait. Dressed as if ready to go on afternoon calls, Clementina stands next to the cheval glass and scrutinizes the image in the glass: presumably, given the angle of the mirror, she is able to see the camera but not her own reflection. Her left hand softly grasps the frame of the mirror as if stretching to touch the hand of her unseen reflection—much like Alice reaching through the mirror—and her thumbs nearly converge at the glass. The high contrast between light and dark establishes a polarity that is reflected in the composition. Clementina's white dress underscores the darkness of her hair and hat, and the illumination of the half of her profile turned toward the camera contrasts with the unseen half wrapped in darkness. Space within the square borders of the photograph is symmetrically arranged, as the frame of the mirror bilaterally divides the image into two sides: the female viewing subject and her reflection. While the

reflected image replicates Clementina within the mirror space, it does not do so perfectly, as the reflection offers a different view of her person. Clementina stands in profile to the viewer, but her mirrored image stands facing the camera. Despite this position, the mirror does not reveal any more of Clementina's face because shadow effectively cuts it into a similar profile. Clementina's head and hands are the only points of focus in the space outside the mirror. Within the mirror, however, her face is out of focus. By obscuring the reflection's face, Hawarden directs the viewer's attention back to Clementina's face as the locus of her identity. The image is a replication but not a replacement for the real Clementina; it designates another side to her persona that complicates but does not supersede it. The almost—but not quite—meeting of Clementina's outstretched hand with that of her image represents the simultaneous sameness and difference between her identities as viewing subject and as object of vision separated by the mirror.

Structurally, Hawarden uses the mirror as an instrument through which to reorganize compositional space and disclose multiple points of view on her subject. Figure 12 shows another variation on the woman-before-the-mirror theme, this time with Clementina arrayed in Renaissance-era costume. The contrast between illumination and shadow is even stronger in this photograph than in Figure 11. Clementina's intricate costume and the harsh light falling on her figure create a strong dichotomy between light and dark, a chiaroscuro effect that—as Armstrong relates—fascinated Hawarden (Carol Armstrong 120). Hawarden achieves the dramatic lighting of this composition by positioning the cheval glass directly in front of the window, effectively blocking the entry of light. Clementina is wedged into the constricted space of the shadowy corner between the wall and the mirror, and she turns away from both the obstructed window and the mirror. Although her face is directed toward the viewer, Clementina's eyes glance sideways

out of the frame. Her contemplative posture is not directed towards her reflected image, as it is in Figures 10 and 11, but rather off into the indeterminate and invisible space outside of the representational area of the photograph. The image revealed to viewers in the cheval glass depicts a significantly different perspective of Clementina's figure from the frontal prospect that she turns toward the viewer, as it exhibits the right side of her face—a prospect that is otherwise not fully visible.

This difference constructs Clementina as a person with multiple facets to her identity. Hawarden's treatment of Clementina's figure within this constrained space is comparable to that of a Cubist artist, Dodier remarks, because she makes use of various perspectives to situate her subject within a deeper spatial context (64). In doing so, Hawarden represents "the complexities of identity, particularly feminine identity" (Dodier and Victoria and Albert Museum 64) in a way that reflects the comparable performances of female characters that Webster enacts in her dramatic monologues. Clementina's elaborate garment in this photograph overtly represents her assumption of a character separate from her own. Much like Julia Margaret Cameron and other fine art photographers of her time, Hawarden appreciated theatrics and often arranged her subjects in costumed *tableaux vivants*.[57] As Ramirez notes, Hawarden's use of costumes draws attention to the mirror's function as means of constructing an alternative identity by distancing the interior self from the exterior (99). Clementina wears the guise of another person in Figure 12, but this production simply makes the more naturalized performance that she enacts in Figure

[57] While visiting Rome during her teenage years, Hawarden greatly enjoyed the spectacle of the masquerade and the theater, and Dodier speculates that this early exposure contributed to the theatrical mindset that she later displays in her work (Dodier and Victoria and Albert Museum 18).

11 more explicit. In both photographs, Hawarden displays Clementina to be performing the role that her reflected image represents.

The mirror constructs the self as essentially divided between the representation and the reality, the sign and the signified. Hawarden figures this split as a type of self-duplication enabled by the act of reflection. Within the mirror space of Figure 10, Clementina sees herself as virtual object and, paradoxically, thereby is able to recognize and construct herself as a subject within her inner and outer worlds. In Figure 11, she directs her gaze at the camera via the cheval glass just as the mirror permits the viewer to see her from multiple angles. Turning from the mirror in Figure 12, her reflection moves inward just as her external self becomes more overtly performative. By Hawarden's creative manipulation of the cheval glass, Clementina is able to employ reflection as a means of controlling her representation of self as a complex, multi-dimensional being rather than an empty icon of femininity. Hawarden portrays Clementina as creating her own aesthetic representation even as she is framed as a work of art. In his *Phenomenology of Mind*, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel posits engaging the mirror as a necessary step towards the achievement of subjectivity by asserting that the self must first be split and acknowledge itself as an object in order to develop. In order to achieve "knowledge of spirit," Hegel explains, the spirit "must be presented to itself as an object," but "it must be its own object in which it finds itself reflected" (86). Duplication, in this theory, is a natural result of reflection: it has the ability to fashion subjectivity by acknowledging the status of the self as other.

Figure 13 assumes a different approach to the concept of mirroring by exchanging the cheval glass for a photograph. Clementina again appears here, this time kneeling in profile against a blank wall with her right arm wrapped around the shoulder of her older sister, Isabella

Grace. Isabella Grace leans slightly against the wall as she sits facing the viewer, although her gaze is directed down into the lower right-hand corner of the photograph, away from the viewer's gaze. The girls' clothing follows a contrasting pattern of light and dark that restates the system of polarity Hawarden delineates in much of her other work and plays on the similarities and differences between the two sisters. Isabella holds in her hand a small photograph, but instead of offering it to the viewer's gaze or looking directly at it herself, Isabella lets it hover on her lap, tantalizingly in view but ever out of reach. Presumably, the photograph that Isabella grasps is a figure study taken by Hawarden herself,[58] which functions as a *mise en abyme* of the image as a whole. Sharing the same genetic makeup, the girls mirror each other, but do not replicate each other's characteristics exactly. They are similar, but different, much like the relationship of the smaller photograph to the larger one with Isabella being slightly older than Clementina. In their identities as Hawarden's daughters, Isabella and Clementina reflect her, just as the photographs reflect each other in a self-reflexive circle of signification.[59]

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[58] In her entry on this photograph in Hawarden's catalogue raisonné, Dodier supports this the interpretation of the smaller image as one "clearly" taken by Hawarden ("Photograph--Isabella Grace and Clementina Maude").

[59] Nancy Chodorow's influential social-psychoanalytical theory of mothering is relevant here. In *The Reproduction of Mothering*, Chodorow states that girls and boys grow up with fundamentally different relationships to their mothers. While girls experience a sense of connection to their mothers because of belonging to the same sex, boys feel the need to separate themselves from their mothers to establish masculine identity. Female development, Chodorow thus claims, functions as an outgrowth of identification of the mother with the daughter, and by growing a more symbiotic concept of self in relation to the mother, girls establish more fluid psychic limits than boys. Hawarden's focus on the close female bonds between her daughters in her work indicates her own connection to them as images of herself: Clementina even shares her name. The camera thereby functions as a type of mirror for Hawarden as artist, and she sees her own reflection through her daughters. By posing and photographing them, she vicariously directs the camera on herself. Carol Mavor discusses the implications of this idea further, proposing that "the mirror in Hawarden's pictures serves the double function of reflecting back to us visions of feminine narcissism and showing us photography's own narcissistic trick of doubling its subjects" (101).

The reflexive doubling in this image photographically develops the Lacanian idea that subjectivity results from understanding the symbolic relationship between the sign and the signified as being defined by difference. Ramirez remarks that because self-identity is formed by interaction with others, doubling—seeing the similarities and differences in others as compared to the self—functions as a means of self-identification in Hawarden's work (131). I emphasize that the presence of the photograph accentuates the duplicative splitting into self and other conditioned by reflection. Just as the photograph and mirror offer a perspective on self that could not otherwise be seen, the other can reflect certain facets of a person, and these qualities can be perceived most clearly through interaction.[60] In this image, the condition of the photograph within a photograph draws attention to the subjects it represents as reflecting a series of endlessly reduplicative signs. The girls are doubles of each other and their mother, and they are doubled by the camera, which twice-doubles the photograph that they hold: their identities as subjects are founded on their status as images.

Photography and the idea of femininity are, in Carol Mavor's words, "ontological equivalents" because they function as signs without original referents. Mavor accordingly suggests that "[i]n Hawarden's work, the relationship between the category of woman, the photograph, and the female fetish reflect each other's reflections, constituting a supra-*mise en abyme*" (43). While photography and femininity may be signs without meaning in themselves, their signification may be created. Owens points out that the duplicative condition of photography is linked to the signification process within language in which repetition is used to make meaning. Thus, the mirror properties within a photographic image signal "the possibility of

[60] Owens asserts that duplication occurs in three ways: "by the photography, the mirror, and the other" (78).

a photographic language" so that "the reality presented by the photograph" is "no longer the object of the image, but an instrument of signification" (Owens 84). The photograph is a fluid sign whose meaning is not fixed "reality" but rather is open to construction and interpretation. In this sense, the reflective properties of photography may be directed as a type of composition, or writing. As well as providing a means to understand (or read) the self as object, mirroring offers the potential for rewriting the signification conveyed by the signs it represents. "Reduplicate" means "to make or perform again" (qtd. in Mavor 41), and Hawarden's reduplicative photographs of her daughters show that the mirror offers control over the production of image. By accepting the self/other split the mirror reveals and using it to create signs, the woman artist may achieve the ability to determine subjectivity. The next section addresses the ways in which Webster and Hawarden treat the possibility of gaining subjectivity through performance, or simulation.

Simulation

Hawarden's work has often been compared to that of James Abbott McNeill Whistler, particularly the *Symphony in White* series he created between 1861-67.[61] Figure 14, Whistler's *Symphony in White, No. 2—The Little White Girl* (1864-65), especially resembles Hawarden's photographs of her daughters featuring the mirror. *Symphony in White, No. 2* depicts a three-quarter view of a woman in a white dress leaning on the mantel of a fireplace. Holding an elaborately-designed Japanese fan in her right hand, the woman inclines her head towards the

[61] Critics like Dodier, Lawson, Ramirez, and Mark Haworth-Booth have all noted the similarity between Whistler's and Hawarden's work and have speculated that Whistler was aware of and possibly influenced by Hawarden's compositions (Dodier and Victoria and Albert Museum 98; Lawson 17; Ramirez 11; Haworth-Booth 113). Lawson affirms that Whistler was most certainly conscious of Hawarden's work. While Dodier acknowledges the thematic connection between the two artists, she does state that an aesthetic relationship between them cannot be definitively determined.

mirror above the fireplace but does not look at her reflection directly. Only the woman's face is reflected in the mirror: because her left hand on the mantle cuts off the rest of her image, the woman's face appears to be floating in the mirror-space disembodied. The mirror displays framed art behind the woman's face, establishing a duplicative relationship between the woman's reflected visage and the art on the wall as a *mise en abyme* of the painting as a whole.

In this painting, the mirror provides a different perspective on the woman's figure and turns the painting into a self-reflexive commentary of its own reflective condition. The painting offers a dual perspective on the woman, whose profiled face is displayed by the mirror in three-quarter aspect. By showing these different views of the woman, the painting suggests that she has multiple aspects to her personality: the exterior, whole person; and the fragmented interior psyche contained within the mirror. Both versions are bounded by the limits of the painting, whose compression of the woman's figure suggests that she is confined within this aesthetic space. The woman's averted gaze points to the artistic and psychological fragmentation of her person. As the woman's mirror is fixed and not moveable like the cheval glass, she does not have control over the spatial presentation of her figure as Clementina does in Hawarden's compositions using the cheval glass, and her gaze musingly glances off into indeterminate space rather than engaging her reflection.

Whistler later replaced the painting's original title, *The Little White Girl*, for *Symphony in White, No. 2*, a decision that emphasizes his "art for art's sake" belief that the value of the painting should rest in its status as a work of pure art rather than in connection to narrative.[62]

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[62] Christopher Newall explains that Whistler's painting reveals "the new understanding of the way in which works of art might operate upon the spectator's imagination [which] came about in the progressive circles of English painting [in the 1860s]," a function that operated by "bringing image and symbol together in order to present a psychological state independent of any narrative element" (qtd. in Haworth-Booth 113).

Hawarden's photographs likewise lack relationship to narrative, as her photographs are untitled or are simply designated as either "Studies from Life" or "Photographic Studies" to indicate their generic situation as works of fine art.[63] According to Lawson, both Hawarden's and Whistler's choices to exclude titles are moves specifically "to assert the autonomy of the visual." The lack of titles compels the viewer to read visual signifiers in the absence of linguistic ones, an action that initiates "interpretation and imaginative engagement, an active role rather than the more passive response to 'triggers'" (19). Although Whistler did associate *Symphony in White, No. 2* with language, these linguistic signifiers do not fix the image's meaning in a narrative sense. Algernon Charles Swinburne was inspired to write a poem based on the painting—entitled "Before the Mirror"—the words of which Whistler affixed in gold to the painting's original frame in a Pre-Raphaelite-like fusion of word and image.[64]

"Before the Mirror" explores the psychological depths conveyed by the painting's depiction of the unnamed, solitary woman who is "Behind the veil, forbidden, / Shut up from sight" (ll. 8-9). Much like the Lady of Shalott, the woman is described as isolated within her

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[63] These terms did have special meaning in the mid-Victorian artistic context. Dodier relates that a "study" is a small-scale preliminary work created as part of a larger artistic project, and a study's development related "a serious and intellectual approach to picture making." The term "from life" indicated that a photograph was not a reproduction of another artistic piece but rather depicted live persons or scenes, and it also carried the connotation that a photograph was not altered in post-processing (44). Haworth-Booth surmises that idea of the "subjectless picture" that was developed by Whistler may have been established in part by Hawarden's compositions (113). Whistler's omission of narrative context in his work was more daring than Hawarden's at the time because photographic studies were not considered to require narratives in the same way as paintings (Dodier and Victoria and Albert Museum 98). Significantly, however, Hawarden's choice to title her photographs as studies indicates her desire to contextualize them as works of fine art, an aspiration that is supported by her exhibition of her work at the Photographic Society of London, which was at the time one of the most prestigious groups of fine art photographers. Much like Julia Margaret Cameron—whom I will discuss in Chapter 3—Hawarden deliberately situated her own work as a photographer within the realm of high art.

[64] Dante Gabriel Rossetti famously attached the words of his own ekphrastic poem to the frame of *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* in 1849.

chamber and only able to see her own beauty and perceive the temporal nature of the world that passes by in her mirror, a world in which unseen forces make "all sweet life that was lie down and lie" (l. 49). Unable to understand the meaning of the images that she sees, the woman can only query her reflected image: "Art thou the ghost, my sister, / White sister there, / Am I the ghost, who knows?" (ll. 31–33). Swinburne's use of the preposition "before" in the title situates the poem's musing within in a pre-articulate space, a point in time previous to recognition of self that occurs in the mirror stage in which identity is ambiguous. This question of identity forms the crux of Swinburne's interpretation of Whistler's symbolist representation in the painting as a whole. The reflexive signification established by the visual *mise en abyme* within this painting shows the difference between image and reality to be indeterminate. Consequently, as the origin of reflection cannot be ascertained, identity becomes a wandering signifier.

Miller declares the woman in Whistler's portrait to be "haunted by the phantom of her second self" (202). As Swinburne's accompanying poem suggests, the image in the mirror is at once subject and object, and the boundary separating both versions of the self is unfixed and—ultimately—impossible to designate. Figuring pure simulation without the signified referent, the aesthetic surface of this painting designates its meaning, and the mirror is the means by which the image determines the reality. Isobel Armstrong comments that the mirror's "mediation creates a series of exchanges, turns things to spectacle, spectacle to things, the self into another, the other into the self" (*Victorian Glassworlds* 111). The mirror is a transformative zone in which the self recognizes that identity is not unitary but rather complexly multidimensional, comprised of layers of overlapping signs. For women, whose sense of self is based more directly on image than it is for men, La Belle argues that "mirroring is not a stage but a continual, ever shifting process of self-realization" (10). Hawarden's fascination with female relationships to the

mirror demonstrates her recognition of mirroring's complex role in determining identity for women. Like Whistler, Hawarden focuses on the nature and effects of the duplicative split engendered by mirroring in her work, but she also draws attention to the creative potential represented by the mirror.

In Figure 15, Hawarden exhibits the complex relationship between self and other inscribed within mirroring as an act of constructing subjectivity. This image again features Isabella and Clementina as models reflecting each other's similarities and differences. The dark and light variation of Isabella's ballgown visually contrasts with Clementina's dark riding habit. Both girls stand on either side of a large window opening to Hawarden's balcony, which overlooks the buildings of Princes Gardens in the background. This vista provides perspective to the exterior space that Clementina occupies, while the interior space in which Isabella stands is invisible, being taken up completely by Isabella's voluminous skirts. Isabella stands facing her sister with her back to the viewer, her right hand resting on the windowpane, almost as if closing it. Clementina also touches the window with one hand as if opening it, and she reaches up to grasp Isabella's arm with the other, arresting Isabella's movement towards the window. Inclining her head towards her sister, Clementina gazes into her eyes. The two girls seem caught on the threshold between the interior and exterior worlds as uncanny doubles who simultaneously reverse and reflect each other.

By its situation on the windowsill, this composition overtly addresses the boundary between public and private space. As Henderson points out, however, Hawarden is not simply commenting on the difference between exterior and interior life in this image, because the public version of the woman in social dress is inside, and the private form in the costume of a more casual pursuit is outside (141). Hawarden's composition frustrates attempts to categorize her

female subjects into signs referencing pre-determined meaning. The window here functions as a type of cheval glass that both frames the girls and operates as a means of reflection. As reflections of each other, the girls do not replicate each other exactly, but rather exist as different people who are interconnected. Hawarden uses the device of doubling her daughters, Ramirez relates, to scrutinize "the nature of identity and the self by exploring the possibility of recognizing oneself in another" (113). In this image, Hawarden suggests that the other mirrors the self.

Although it is a reflective surface, the window glass also permits vision to pass through and thereby refigures the direction of the gaze to see outside the self. By establishing the window as a type of virtual mirror in this image, Hawarden underscores the ability of reflection to better perceive the relationship of the self to others and even the presence of the other in the self. The doubling of the two girls on either side of the window as virtual mirror brings into relief their status as simulacra of each other and of the identities that they perform. This duplication serves to "bring the mirror image alive, . . . eliding the difference between image and reality" (Carol Armstrong 115). In doing so, Hawarden shows the imaginative possibility inscribed within the production of image. Kramp professes that Hawarden's photographs "present the domestic realm as both a major institution of regulation and preparation and a site of art that reveals disruptive energies in mundane experiences of beauty and desire." Rather than passively reflecting the cultural values represented by interior space, female life within the home has the ability to signify "a series of artistic performances" in Hawarden's work (147), and the domestic sphere may be transformed into an "artistic zone" that enables rather than inhibits the female production of art (151). As Kramp points out, Hawarden's emphasis on role-playing indicates her recognition of the broader role of performance in social life, a quality that I perceive as crucial to

her aesthetic.[65] Clementina and Isabella enact roles that are free from the denotative fixation of narrative. Because their identities are likewise indeterminate and freely intermingle with each other, the roles of subject and object in Hawarden's composition are difficult to determine, much like the indistinguishable difference, in Swinburne's interpretation, between Whistler's mirrored woman and her reflection. By eroding the connections made by clear signification within established cultural systems, Hawarden restructures the domestic space to be what Kramp terms "a blank canvas on which the young woman may create, revise, and recreate" (162). Hawarden thereby shows that the "I" may be assumed and resignified through simulation: the process of fashioning and performing signs.

In "Faded," Webster also treats the split between self and other that the mirror generates by dramatizing a woman who perceives her reflected image as a type of double. Sutphin believes "Faded" to serve as a companion piece for "By the Looking-Glass" because both monologues feature women who are disconnected from appearances that society deems unlovely (21).[66] Similarly featuring a speaker who is concerned with a lack of beauty, "Faded" differs from "By the Looking-Glass" in that this speaker once was considered beautiful but lost this quality because of age. The speaker begins by setting up a distinction between the face she sees in a portrait of her younger self and the "later drearier self" (l. 8) who regards this picture. This virtual image mirrors to the speaker the person she was: it depicts the "[r]ich, measureless, nameless, formless" (l. 4) hope that the speaker possessed in the past and has no more. Solitude enables the speaker to commune with her reflection, and the quiet enclosure of her room is a safe

[65] Julia Margaret Cameron develops the concept of performance present in Hawarden's work even further with her *tableaux vivants*, which I will explore in Chapter 3.

[66] Although Webster included "Faded" in the 1893 edition of *Portraits*, she omitted "By the Looking-Glass." Sutphin speculates that Webster decided to exclude "By the Looking-Glass" because it deviated from the other monologues in being rhymed instead of blank verse (21).

space within which to contemplate this image in relationship to her current self. The soft light of twilight inspires the speaker to consider the differences between the image and the reality:

> While now we two a little time are one,
>
> Elder and girl, the blossoming and the sere,
>
> One blended, dateless [sic], woman for an hour—
>
> Thou and I thus alone, I read from thee
>
> My lesson what I was; which (ah, poor heart!)
>
> Means trulier my lesson, bitter to learn,
>
> Of what I cease to be. (ll. 17-23)

Even while the speaker voices the fantasy of wholeness—to be "blended, dateless"—this desire for coherence is frustrated by her image, which reflects back to her the essential divide between the self and the other.[67] The portrait is a representation of what she was, a readable text in which she perceives the complex coexistence of her present reality and "what I cease to be" within the sign of her subjective identity. By contrasting herself with her portrait as "other," the speaker gains a dual perspective on herself and must find a way to conceptualize the split between signifier and signified. Unable to reconcile these two conflicting views of self, the speaker surmises that "[m]yself has faded from me" (l. 36), that she has lost her identity.

Shao points out that the speaker's comparison of herself to her image, and subsequent conclusion that her image is more valuable than herself, enacts "a curious, disturbing transformation and ironic place-shifting between the speaker's image and her being" (124). In my

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[67] The disjunction between the speaker and the image of her former self is parallel to a similar incident in Webster's best-known monologue, "A Castaway." In this poem, the speaker, Eulalie, begins by considering her younger self as reflected in the pages of an old diary. The girl that she was, a "budding colourless young rose of home" (l. 8), conflicts so much with her current identity as a prostitute that her past and present selves seem to Eulalie different people.

view, this transformation is not curious but rather is normative because the speaker's conclusion is supported by a cultural context that values image as the primary signifier of selfhood. Sutphin indicates that the speaker cares about her ebbing beauty because it represents her own lessening economic value within her society (20). Age, the speaker states, transforms women into "[i]rretrievable bankrupts of our very selves" (l. 69) who must "blaze our fact / Of nothingness" (ll. 70-71). The ordinary correlation of age with beauty is complicated somewhat here because the image that would normally be called "faded" for being years old is instead associated with youth because of its contrast to the speaker's present self, who exhibits the quality of being faded more intensely. Because it is defined by appearance, female identity becomes valueless when beauty fades. Society conflates image with self, and women whose appearance does not meet the culturally-accepted standard of female identity are disconnected from worth and agency, becoming "ghosts, . . . lifeless husks, / Spent memories that slink through the world and breathe, / As if they lived, and yet they know they are dead" (ll. 77-79). Image *is* reality within the speaker's culture. The sign of beauty has no signified meaning beyond itself, and the women who are associated with the sign of beauty become an endless succession of "lifeless husks" without it. Every detail of the image's appearance illuminates the negative aspects of the speaker's current appearance by contrast. Presumably comparing her mirrored image with her portrait, the speaker proclaims "All in thee / That's likest me to-day is proof the more / Of my to-day's unlikeness" (ll. 30-32). Consequently, she concludes that because she is "old," "Myself has faded from me" (l. 36). Because her personal value is associated with beauty, a loss of beauty correspondingly unmoors her subjective identity.

The speaker's sense that interior being has no significance is expressed by a dream that she relates in the fourth verse paragraph. Like one of Christina Rossetti's dead but psychically

aware women, the speaker dreams that the division she feels between her exterior and interior being is literalized by her death. Observing the actions of her loved ones around her lifeless body, the speaker attempts to communicate with them but remains unnoticed despite her desperate efforts. The speaker relates that she is "grown viewlessness" [sic] (l. 82) in this liminal state, suggesting that just as those around her cannot perceive her, she cannot truly apprehend them. The problem she articulates is a lack of view, the inability to truly see. Characterized as "dead" (l. 90), the speaker cannot be known or understood by those around her, much like the female subject of Whistler's painting and Swinburne's poem. Thus, she believes that "like that dream, / Lost and alone, I haunt our world today" (ll. 99-100). The severance between herself and her image transforms her into a ghost, an empty signifier who has no connection to fixed meaning.

The speaker's dream indicates that she cannot achieve the recognition and relationship from others necessary to establish her own subjectivity in relation to them. Because she cannot use them as a mirror by which to see herself more clearly—as Hawarden's daughters do with each other in Figure 7—she perceives her identity as pure image, a hollow simulacrum referencing nothing. Addressing her portrait at the end of the next verse paragraph, the speaker reflects on the ability of the immaterial image to convey a substance from which she is separated:

> . . . Poor imaged mock!
> Thou art more than I to-day; thou hast my right,
> My womanhood's lost right to meet pleased eyes
> And please by being happy.
> . . . .
> Thou hast a being still; but what am I?

A shadow and an echo—one that was. (ll. 130-33, 137-38)

The speaker's use of the word "mock" in line 130 has dual meaning. The image both ridicules her in its reminder of the person who she was, and it functions as an imitation of who she is now. Thus, although the speaker acknowledges that the image is an empty signifier of herself, she simultaneously recognizes the picture's status as "more than I" because of its power "to meet pleased eyes" and thereby return the gaze. The image operates as a reflective surface for the cultural constructs of womanhood. Unlike the speaker, it reflects instead of absorbs the gaze, gaining its being by reproducing the ideas associated with it. The speaker's disconnection from her visible self points to a broader inability to reflect, or to construct her image. Because she cannot generate a new sign with which to associate herself, her identity becomes fixed in the portrait of her past being, which then assumes the signified meaning that she lacks.[68] The collapse between the subject and the object figured in this monologue results, to a significant extent, from the speaker's mimetic failure to create a representation of self. She cannot simulate the real, and thus she takes the picture's place and becomes the replica, a "shadow and an echo."

Responding to the portrait's power to determine self, the speaker highlights the fact that this power has limits. Like her, the portrait will eventually fade and be replaced with a newer model in an infinite procession of signifiers of female beauty. "As we have our succession, woman to woman," the speaker relates, "so no smiles are missed, there being enough" (ll. 149-50). Because the speaker will be long dead by the time the portrait loses cultural significance,

[68] Critics commonly ascribe the speaker's main problem in this poem to social standards of female beauty. The speaker's identity disintegrates, Leighton argues, because it exists as "an image of the world's approval and disapproval." Thus, "[i]t is not only [the speaker's] beauty which has 'faded' but her very self, which the world reads either as beauty or as nothing. This residual nothing is then imagined as having a cruel sort of afterlife" (188). Although the speaker is certainly in a difficult social situation, I argue that the fate she contemplates is not ultimately compulsory, but instead rests in the danger of her own failing to see the possibilities for attaining agency through simulation.

meaning will finally be completely severed from the image, a "vague counterfeit" (l. 154) that is a "dumb unconscious toy" (l. 158). The speaker's recognition of this similarity between herself and the portrait—the fact that both are ultimately subject to time and cultural signification—leads her to identify with her image after all. She confirms this relationship by addressing the image as "[f]ace of mine" (l. 160) and acknowledges that "[f]orgotten self, thou art woman after all: / Sooner or later we are one again" (ll. 161-62). At the end, the speaker achieves a coherence of sorts by accepting the image as a reflected part of her idea of self. To attain agency as a subject, the speaker must see her relationship to others within her world as an object of vision, a perspective that is mirrored by her image. Attaining clearer perception through reflection also requires associating the subject with the object—seeing the possibility for agency available *within* the object position, which requires assuming identity by acting it as a role and managing the gaze through performance.

The final verse paragraph marks the close of the speaker's internal reflection as she returns to the group in "the merry drawing room with its lights and talk / And my young sister's music" (ll. 168-69). "Maudie's clear voice sends me my favourite song" (l. 170), she affirms, "[f]illing my stillness here. She sings it well" (l. 171). Recognition of the other in the form of her sister—similar to the symbiotic connection between the Hawarden sisters, the younger of whom also has "Maude" as part of her name—pulls the speaker out of her self-reflexive musing, and she responds by moving back to the community gathered within the drawing-room. Maudie can be interpreted as replicating the sign of femininity that the speaker interrogates in the monologue. A younger woman, Maudie is a living duplicate of the speaker's self as represented by her portrait, and Maudie continues the process of replication by asserting her voice in song—possibly as the speaker herself once was able to do. While the speaker may presumably now only

listen to Maudie's rendition of the song rather than sing it herself, she still chooses to rejoin the group and participate in the activity of listening. In doing so, she symbolically fuses self with other.

Webster adds a simple stage direction at the end of this monologue—the word "Exit" in brackets. This indication is significant in two ways: it signals the speaker's literal departure, and it manifests the function of the whole poem as dramatic monologue. Unlike the speaker's decision to escape from herself by passing into the unconscious state of sleep in "By the Looking-Glass," the speaker of "Faded" instead returns to the state of hyperconsciousness signified by the regulated relationships of the public social world. She reassumes her social role and chooses to perform her identity within it. Although this decision can be interpreted as a type of defeat by the symbolic world of the speaker's culture, it can also be seen as evidencing her recognition of her identity as a type of performance rather than an essential quality. By stepping into this role, she acknowledges both the difference between self and image and her own ability to create identity by enacting image. The image is both the self and the other, and the self can be constructed by producing and embodying the other.

Likewise, the stage direction underscores the performative function of the first-person perspective that the speaker vocalizes in the monologue as a whole. This monologue, Webster indicates, is essentially dramatic: the speaker assumes the "I" as a role. If the perspective evidenced by the "I" can be adopted, then the subjectivity associated with this viewpoint can be simulated as well. Mermin claims that communication is inscribed within the dramatic monologue form, for a "dramatic monologue with or without an auditor is a performance: it requires an audience" (*The Audience in the Poem* 11). The dramatic monologue form features the "I" as spoken, which means that it is a sign that may be performed. Accordingly, Capp points out

that "the dramatic monologue invites embodiment and identification in a way that third-person narrative cannot" (101) because the voicing of the "I" enacts and thus realizes it. Thus, the speaker's reading of the "I" enables her to simulate subjective identity within the space of the monologue and affords her the capacity to write herself.

Webster addresses the flexible nature of the subjective "I" in her aptly-named essay "Poets and Personal Pronouns." This essay discusses the relationship between the poet and the personas that he or she creates in the dramatic monologue form, arguing that distance is necessarily implied between the first-person of the poem and the poet's own subjective view. The job of the poet is "make old stories new" (367) by imagining—and thus creating—images of people to portray in poems. Poems are necessarily imaginative, not transcriptive, as the people whom the poet characterizes "must have been born again in his brain; they must be his by creation, not copying." The goal of poetry is to make the reader identify with the speaker so that the reader sees the self in the speaker. "We look to the poet for feelings, thoughts, actions if need be, represented in such a way which shall affect us as the manifest expression of what our very selves must have felt and thought and done if we had been those he puts before us and in their cases," Webster explains (367). The poetic "I" thus mirrors the reader, and poets help the reader see the self in ways that are not possible without assistance. Poets help the reader observe the self by providing a split in the self between the subject and the object. Because the poet functions as a kind of interpreter of human experience and emotions that are not necessarily personal, Webster emphasizes that "as a rule, I does not mean I" (370).[69]

[69] In "Circe," Webster dramatizes a speaker who is in many ways the opposite of the speakers of "Faded" and "By the Looking-Glass" in that she is beautiful and possesses near total control over her environment. Unlike the other two speakers, Circe contemplates her mirrored image as a sign of her power, and she glories in it at length. The gaze that Circe directs at her own image does not reflect the lack of agency that the other speakers experience at being objects

Just as the subjective identity indicated by the "I" can be assumed by the speaker of the monologue through performance, Webster proposes that the role of poet may be adopted through simulation. Like Hawarden, Webster suggests that the doubling caused by reflection is necessary to recognize the dual role of the self as subject and object, and to acknowledge the status of identity as a role rather than an innate quality. Mirroring can function as a generative process of self-creation, a way to discern, elucidate, and fulfill the potential for subjectivity within the self. The realization of this potential is not simply given but must be created.

Through the Mirror

Lewis Carroll met Hawarden shortly before her untimely death in January of 1865. In the summer of 1864, Hawarden personally sold her photographs at a fundraiser benefiting the building fund for the Female School of Art and volunteered to take portraits at the bazaar, the only known instance of her offering her services to the public (Dodier and Victoria and Albert Museum 89–90). Having admired her work at the 1864 exhibition of the Photographic Society of London, Carroll visited Hawarden at the bazaar, purchasing some of her work and even bringing the daughters of George MacDonald to have their picture taken by her—a high compliment from a fellow photographer (Dodier and Victoria and Albert Museum 90). Warner suggests that Carroll was attracted to Hawarden's work because she depicts a type of empathetic bond between sisters that was the hallmark of the Victorian "female imagination" (8). Like Carroll, Hawarden was similarly absorbed in the doubling properties of the mirror, and "she often composed the reflections so that they would appear to be different, to occupy another dimension

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of the gendered gaze, but rather reinforces the authority that she possesses partially through beauty. Her love is by nature reflexive, and she says to her image that, until her imagined lover arrives, "I love you for him" (l. 129). By dramatizing a *femme fatale* who constructs herself as subject through the self-contained circuit of her gaze, Webster demonstrates the flexibility of the poetic "I."

at another angle" (8). Warner proposes that the idea of the mirror as an opening to another world in Hawarden's work is similar to that in *Through the Looking Glass*.

Clearly, Hawarden engages with the mirror-as-portal theme in a manner comparable to Carroll's: in her photographs, reflection functions as a means to know the self. Hawarden's work is reflexive in that it links subjects with objects, much like the grammatical function of reflexive verbs. Figure 16 literalizes the reflexive relationship among the camera, the mirror, and the photographer as makers of the signs that they represent. Clementina again poses with the cheval glass in this image, her white dress contrasting with the dark of her hair and the variegated background of Hawarden's home studio. Her right arm resting on the cheval glass's frame, Clementina directs it at the window on the opposite wall, through which the balustrade of the ouside balcony is visible through the sheer curtains. Interestingly, however, the mirror also reflects the large, black body of the camera in the process of taking the image. Although the camera is clearly visible, the photographer is not: the suggestion of a disembodied hand caught in the act of removing the lens cap signals her presence. Hawarden hovers on the borders of the image, present but not quite visible. Instead, signs that Hawarden has arranged—mirror, camera, and even her daughter—function as signs of her identity as image-maker, an identity whose fashioning she controls just as Clementina is able to position the cheval glass to display a particular perspective. The duplicative nature of photography is explicit here: as Mavor notes, Clementina reflects her mother, who is also named Clementina, and Hawarden is a "complex absent and present" mirror image of her "humanoid" camera (xx). Clementina stares directly at the viewer in this image, but in doing so, she also gazes at her mother and reflects attention to Hawarden as the hidden subject of the composition. Henderson points out the status of the image as a complex network of signs without clear relationship to signified meaning: "Hawarden's

picture insouciantly highlights its relative lack of interest in a traditional notion of 'content'—either material or spiritual—by making reflection *per se* the object of the human figure's pride and solitude" (134–35).[70]

Reflection, the production of signs through simulation, is Hawarden's overt subject in this composition as it is in her photography as a whole. Here, she suggests that identity is image, and that subjectivity may be gained by creating and performing identity. Both Hawarden and Webster used the performance inscribed in the act of reflection as a means of achieving artistic identity. Hawarden's work was situated firmly within the domestic sphere both practically and thematically, but her and her husband's status as patrons of the arts—especially the newly-established South Kensington Museum, later the Victoria and Albert Museum—also freed her to be involved in the mid-Victorian art world (Dodier and Victoria and Albert Museum 88). Webster similarly balanced her gendered role as wife and mother with her artistic ambition. While she used pseudonyms for her early work (including a novel about a woman artist, *Lesley's Guardian*) and often violated gendered stereotypes in her writing, her work was accepted within the literary establishment. Webster was able "to negotiate successfully between her culture's constructions of femininity and masculinity" (Sutphin 33). Both writing and mirroring operate as "semiotic modes of self-realization" (La Belle 159). For both women, reflection is a strategy to explore artistic identity as a sign that is open to interpretation and reproduction.

Webster and Hawarden use mirroring to construct subjectivity as a text. La Belle relates that "[b]y writing texts (and thereby in a sense becoming a text in the eyes of the world), women

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[70] Henderson's point that this image draws attention to the nature of representation itself brings to mind Velázquez's emphasis on the complex interplay of subject and object in *Las Meninas*. As I explored at more length in Chapter 1, *Las Meninas* employs reflection to show the reflexivity of the gaze. Hawarden likewise frames this photograph as a mirror reflecting the meaning-making operations of various gazes, and in so doing, underscores the fluidity of representation.

find one of the few alternatives to becoming mirror images which have been historically permitted—if not always encouraged—by Western culture" (164). I argue that photography particularly erodes the boundary separating reality from representation and thereby illuminates the reduplicative interplay at the core of constructs of identity.[71] The etymological meaning of photography as the "writing of light" reflects the nature of the action it performs. Photographic light is, according to Jean Baudrillard, "the very imagination of the image, its own thought. It does not emanate from one single source, but from two different, dual ones: the object and the gaze" ("Photography, Or the Writing of Light"). The object and the gaze intersect at the mirror. In the indeterminate space of the mirror, the woman artist has the ability to realize herself.

[71] "The practice of the multiple," Rosalind Krauss maintains, "has been understood by certain artists as not just a degraded or bad form of the aesthetic original. It has been taken to undermine the very distinction between original and copy" (59). Hawarden's work shows the boundary between reflection and the real to be porous, and most significantly, suggests that simulation may be utilized as a means of constructing reality.

Chapter 2 Figures

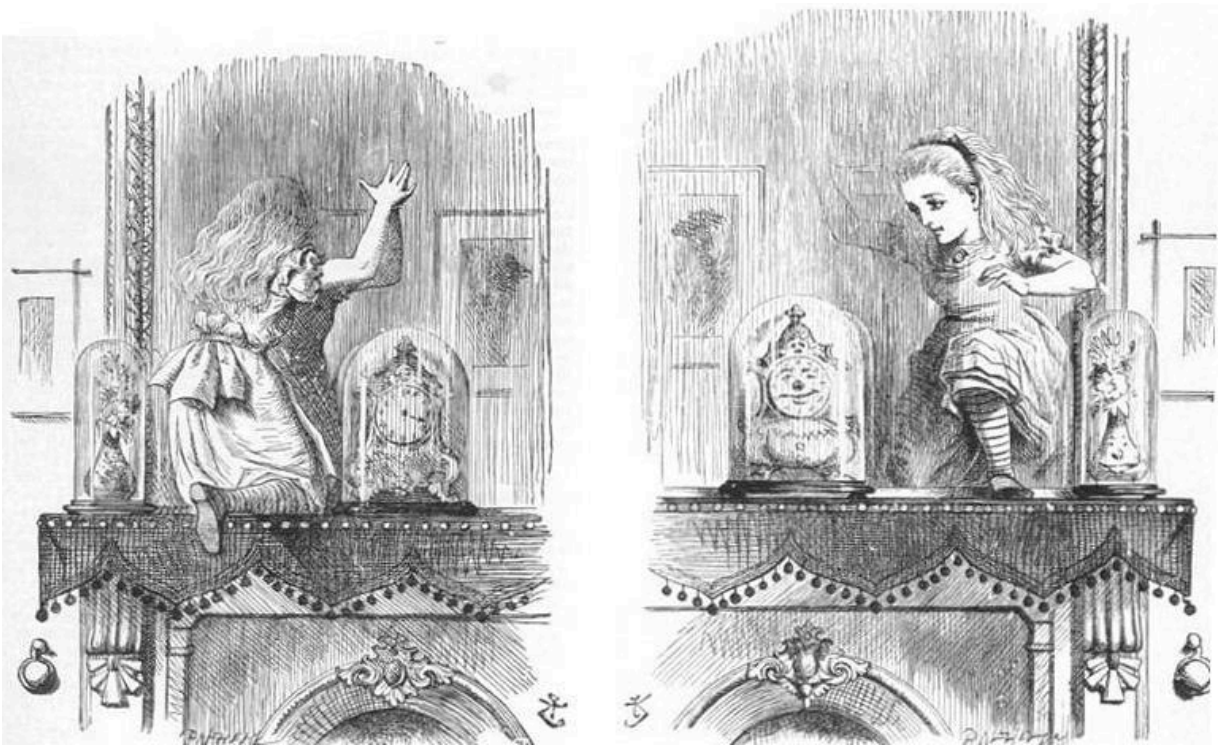

Fig. 9: Tenniel, John. *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There*. Lewis Carroll. London: Macmillan, 1872. Illustration.

Fig. 10: Hawarden, Clementina. *Photographic Study* [Clementina Maude, 5 Princes Gardens]. ca. 1861-62. Albumen print. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Fig. 11: Hawarden, Clementina. *Photographic Study* [Clementina Maude, 5 Princes Gardens]. ca. 1863-64. Albumen print. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Fig. 12: Hawarden, Clementina. Untitled photograph. ca. 1863-64. Albumen print. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Fig. 13: Hawarden, Clementina. *Photographic Study*. [Isabella Grace and Clementina Maude, 5 Princes Gardens.] ca. 1861-62. Albumen print. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Fig. 14: Whistler, John Abbott McNeill. *Symphony in White, No. 2: The Little White Girl*. 1864-65. Oil on canvas. Tate Gallery, London.

Fig. 15: Hawarden, Clementina. *Studies from Life or Photographic Study*. [Isabella Grace and Clementina Maude, 5 Princes Gardens.] ca. 1864. Albumen print. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Fig. 16: Hawarden, Clementina. *Photographic Study*. [Clementina Maude, 5 Princes Gardens.] ca. 1862-63. Albumen print. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Chapter 3

Living Pictures: Photographic Performance in Julia Margaret Cameron's *Illustrations to Idylls of the King, and Other Poems*

Although Julia Margaret Cameron is widely acknowledged as a pioneer of early photography, the many literary images in her body of work have often been deemed to be aesthetically inferior because of their affected element. Cameron's elaborate photographic edition titled *Illustrations to Tennyson's Idylls of the King, and Other Poems* (1874-75), has suffered especially harsh criticism, chiefly for the romanticized, "staged" quality of its arrangements. In *Acting the Part: Photography as Theatre* (2006), Lori Pauli sums up the critical consensus with her pronouncement that "[t]oday, we still consider Cameron's *Idylls* to be among her lesser works" (60). Likewise, Phyllis Rose explains that these photographs "become dated" and "lose their universality" because of their strong resemblance to "the *tableaux vivants* of Victorian after-dinner entertainment" (14).[72] Even Helmut Gernsheim, one of Cameron's most ardent champions, declares that "the Pre-Raphaelites dedicated some of their best work to Tennyson—Mrs. Cameron, some of her worst" (qtd. in Millard 201).

Cameron herself, however, considered her literary illustrations to be her best work and the culmination of her artistic ideal to elevate photography to the status of high art. In a letter written on December 31, 1864 to her friend and professional mentor, Sir John Herschel,

[72] The Bloomsbury critics Clive Bell and Roger Fry both denounce Cameron's *Illustrations* from a more specifically artistic perspective: Bell claims that Cameron's effort to "make a photograph look like a picture" is the work's primary flaw, and Fry judges the illustrations to be "failures from an aesthetic standpoint" (qtd. in Millard 201).

Cameron defends her distinctive soft-focus photographic technique from its detractors by outlining her aesthetic ambition.[73]

> I believe in other than mere conventional photography—map-making and skeleton rendering of face and form without that roundness and fulness of force and feature, that modelling of flesh and limb, which the focus I use can only give, tho' called and condemned as "out of focus." What is focus and who has the right to say what focus is the legitimate focus? My aspirations are to enoble [sic] photography and to secure for it the character and uses of High Art by combining the real and the ideal and sacrificing nothing of Truth by all possible devotion to Poetry and beauty. (qtd. in Gernsheim, *Julia Margaret Cameron* 14)

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[73] Because of her emphasis on concept over technical skill, Cameron's photographs of all kinds were often controversial and garnered both praise and harsh condemnation from the mid-century photographic establishment. Malcolm Daniel reports that the *Photographic Journal* appraised her entries in the 1865 exhibition of the Photographic Society of Scotland with a patronizing air that aggravated Cameron:

> Mrs. Cameron exhibits her series of out-of-focus portraits of celebrities. We must give this lady credit for daring originality, but at the expense of all other photographic qualities. A true artist would employ all the resources at his disposal, in whatever branch of art he might practise. In these pictures, all that is good in photography has been neglected and the shortcomings of the art are prominently exhibited. We are sorry to have to speak thus severely on the works of a lady, but we feel compelled to do so in the interest of the art. ("Julia Margaret Cameron")

The *Photographic Journal* later added that "[s]lovenly manipulation may serve to cover want of precision in intention, but such a lack and such a mode of masking it are unworthy of commendation." Although the *Illustrated London News* applauded these compositions as "the nearest approach to art, or rather the most bold and successful applications of the principles of fine-art to photography," Wilhelm Vogel uncharitably stated a year later that the exhibition of Cameron's portraits in Berlin, where they earned the gold medal, inspired quite the commotion:

> Those large unsharp heads, spotty backgrounds, and deep opaque shadows looked more like bungling pupils' work than masterpieces. And for this reason many photographers could hardly restrain their laughter, and mocked at the fact that such photographs had been given a place of honour. (Daniel, "Julia Margaret Cameron")

Critics now widely agree with the assessment of the *Illustrated London News* concerning Cameron's portraits, but her *Illustrations* were censured in much the same vein as these early reviews for most of the twentieth century.

In this letter, Cameron questions the validity of the technical standards of focus accepted within the mid-Victorian photographic community, choosing instead to define "focus" as a honing of abstract inner vision that is expressed, rather than determined, by the manipulation of a lens. Cameron distinguishes her photographic method as fundamentally different from what she disdainfully terms "mere conventional photography." Her type of "modelling" imparts a three-dimensional "roundness and fulness of force and feature," thus giving life to photographs that would otherwise provide only a two-dimensional "skeleton rendering of face and form." The act of joining objective reality with the ideal, which is expressed through "devotion to Poetry and beauty," is what Cameron believes transforms photography from a mechanical technique to a fine art. For Cameron, like many nineteenth-century photographers, realism and idealism could be coexistent rather than antithetical qualities, and photographic "Truth" was often equated with artistic vision.[74] Cameron states in this letter that artistic truth can be achieved in photography by "focusing" on poetry as well as beauty, and thereby suggests that she perceives poetry as an aesthetic paradigm as well as a particular branch of creative writing. In this sense, Cameron recognizes that her calling as a photographer to "enoble photography" has the potential to create a representation of aesthetic truth equal to that of other forms of fine art, such as poetry. For her, poetry is part of the ideal that can be expressed through photography.

Cameron's edition of the *Idylls* is her most elaborate photographic project, and she designed it to represent most completely her aesthetic vision. As Cameron's artistic reputation has grown in recent years, more serious critical attention has been given to her *Illustrations*, and this work has been increasingly recognized as having value. Charles Millard's early

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[74] Henry Peach Robinson, one of Cameron's fellow fine art photographers, similarly defends photography's status as an art form by contending that photographers can "add truth to bare facts" ("Idealism" 92).

pronouncement in 1973 that the "breadth and unity" of Cameron's *Illustrations* "rank them among the major accomplishments of nineteenth-century photography" (200) has been echoed by more and more critics who argue that the tradition of disparaging this work has been unjust.[75] Much more than a forgettable specimen of high Victorian kitsch, Cameron's *Illustrations* is a multidimensional text that rewards analysis of both its visual and verbal qualities. In this chapter, I seek to extend current perspectives on the function of Cameron's visual rendering of Tennyson's verbal text not only regarding gender, but also concerning the complex relationship between photographic reality and poetic imagination. The *Illustrations* is an exemplar of Cameron's creative philosophy precisely because this work shows most completely how her vision of "Poetry" as a collaborative aesthetic that crosses disciplinary (and gendered) boundaries has the potential to unite imagination and reality alongside text and image. I refer to Cameron's *Illustrations* as a "construction" of Tennyson's *Idylls* rather than a version or an edition, because I see her work as an interpretation of his original text rather than simply a new copy. The sequence of photographic *tableaux vivants* that comprise the illustrations also construct the text as itself a deliberately staged visual and verbal *tableau vivant*.[76]

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[75] Debra N. Mancoff explains that many critics have recently moved beyond a fixation on the aesthetic worth of the *Illustrations* to consider broader historical issues in relation to the text, such as "the negotiation of gender roles in a changing society, and the complex interaction of text and image as a marketable commodity" (89). Sylvia Wolf (79), Victoria C. Olsen (371), Jennifer Pearson Yamashiro (97–98), and Joanne Lukitsh (30) all propose that Cameron assumes a positive feminist approach to the women that she portrays in the *Illustrations*, while Constance C. Relihan (111–12) counters that Cameron's vision reinforces the negative impact of the male gaze on the historical women who were her models in these images. The connection between text and image in Cameron's work, and the way in which gender affects this relationship, has even been used as the basis for an entire monograph. In her dissertation, Melissa J. Parlin claims that Cameron's writings should be considered alongside her photographic work as providing a fuller picture of Cameron's feminist aesthetic.

[76] As Mike Weaver and Mancoff have noted, Tennyson's text is particularly suited to Cameron's method: the term "idylls" means "little pictures," and Tennyson presents each idyll in

The *Illustrations* performs Tennyson's text, but I argue that this work also enacts Cameron's ambition to "enoble photography" and to actualize her position as a recognized artist. As a *tableau vivant*, or "living picture," it shows how her vision may be brought to life by performance as an interpretive act that transforms the verbal imagination into material form. I primarily concentrate on Cameron's four compositions depicting Elaine from Tennyson's "Lancelot and Elaine" idyll. Elaine is a problematic model of the woman artist in Tennyson's text, and the implications of her character for the production of art, the role of the artist, and the function of gender have engendered strong debate. Cameron's portrayal of Elaine acknowledges the complexities of her character and underscores the performative power of art in her story. Cameron uses Elaine's story to represent the boundary between the sign and the signified as unstable and open to change. I conclude by briefly discussing how the analysis that I provide of these sections from the *Illustrations* applies to Cameron's own situation as photographer, poet, and woman artist.

Before addressing the sections on Elaine, however, I begin by providing some background information on the production of the *Illustrations* and by considering how the history of the material book may illuminate its function as a performance in its own right, a *tableau vivant* of Cameron's artistic philosophy.

Setting the Stage

Cameron and Tennyson had been friends and next-door neighbors in Freshwater on the Isle of Wight for several years, when, in the summer of 1874, Tennyson asked Cameron to illustrate a new edition of his poems with photographs. Cameron accepted the commission, and

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Idylls of the King as a "pictured moment" (qtd. in Mancoff 91–92). The title of the *Illustrations* fully represents its subject, because the illustrations of the *Idylls* are intrinsically related to the verbal text, which is itself a series of pictures.

launched the project with customary enthusiasm. [77] Despite her tremendous output of labor, only two of the photographs that she had created were selected for the illustrated edition, and these were reduced in size and reproduced as woodcuts. Disappointed and determined to realize her initial vision for the work, Cameron made arrangements with Tennyson's publisher, Henry S. King, to produce a more elaborate version as a gift book. Two elaborate folio format volumes resulted, each featuring original photographs and selections of text from the *Idylls* and other popular Tennyson poems (Millard 188–89).[78]

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[77] The project was all-consuming. Cameron recruited her entire household to help, and many of those who came in contact with her during this time—friends, servants, acquaintances, and even strangers—were enlisted as models. Cameron labored with painstaking care to ensure that her images met her high standard of quality and best reflected her creative vision. As she later related, she took over 200 photographs to produce 24 final images, and for one scene alone—titled "The Parting of Lancelot and Guinevere"—she took 42 studies (Gernsheim, *Julia Margaret Cameron* 74).

[78] Volume One was published in December 1874 in time for the Christmas market and was promoted aggressively by Cameron. Because of the considerable production cost and resulting expense of this lavish gift book, however, Volume One was probably not the great financial success that Cameron desired, although it was received favorably by critics. Cameron was undeterred, however, and Volume Two was released in May 1875 according to schedule. The precise commercial outcome of the second volume is unknown, but it probably also failed to meet Cameron's financial hopes (Millard 189).

The inclusion of photographic illustrations in books was costly in the 1870s and was therefore an uncommon practice. Cameron's edition involved producing albumen silver prints from her original glass-plate negatives, which were made with the painstaking wet-plate collodion process. Each photograph was then individually pasted into the printed book. Selling for six guineas a volume, the *Illustrations* cost the same as about four three-decker novels, but even this tremendous price narrowly covered production expenses. In the 1880s, the rise of halftone photomechanical reproduction made the mass production of photographs viable for affordable publishing (Gernsheim, *Julia Margaret Cameron* 45–47).

Although the accepted view on Cameron's venture with the *Illustrations* is that it was a commercial disappointment, the criticism is more divided than it is usually assumed to be. While Millard states that the edition was a financial failure (189) and Gernsheim focuses on the cost of producing it (*Julia Margaret Cameron,* 45–46), Lukitsh states that the success of the edition is unknown (156, note 1). Mancoff likewise suggests that the outcome is undetermined (105, note 5).

These selections of text are lithographed facsimiles of Cameron's own handwriting (Millard 195), an unusual feature that was probably intended to add artistic value to the mechanical reproduction of the photographs and of the work as a whole. (See fig. 17.) The presentation of this text is important because it shows not only that Cameron viewed the text and the illustrations as interrelated within the whole work of art, but also demonstrates her awareness of the value of her handwriting as material (re)production of the verbal text. As sign of Cameron's interpretative process, the verbal text is itself a visual representation of the signified poetic ideal that both she and Tennyson illustrate, and it is doubly mediated: first by Cameron's written copy, and then by mechanical facsimile. Cameron's decision to pair her photographs with facsimiles of her handwriting suggests that she perceives her photographs to be works of art because of their origin within her mind. The camera, like the pen, is a tool that helps her realize these works, and it does not determine or diminish their meaning. Rather, the presence of Cameron's handwriting situates the work within time and space and thus evidences what Benjamin would term an "aura" of authenticity even within the framework of the mechanical reproduction of the work. Accordingly, Cameron's juxtaposition of the original within the simulated suggests that the two concepts are not incompatible and instead may be interrelated.[79] Not only does the reproduction of Cameron's handwriting provide her with an equal share in Tennyson's artistic vision as she recreates it within her own, this aesthetic choice draws attention to the complex layers of this text as a visual *and* verbal sign of a signified ideal.

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[79] Benjamin, of course, develops his concept of the "aura" in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." Cameron's effort to convey the originality of her art demonstrates her implicit belief that what Benjamin calls the "plurality of copies" (324) engendered by mechanical reproduction need not destroy her work's uniqueness and artistic value.

While Cameron was invested in the commercial outcome of the *Illustrations*, her persistence on realizing her creative vision in spite of market realities suggests that she was most concerned with its artistic value.[80] Like Tennyson's *Idylls*, the *Illustrations* is Cameron's most complex photographic project, and she clearly saw this collaboration with Tennyson as a prime opportunity to express her aesthetic views in a magnum opus.[81] The *Idylls* provides the structure through which Cameron's vision may be communicated, but the *Illustrations* also reshapes the text that it represents, and it functions as a performance of the *Idylls*: it is a re-vision rather than an edition.[82] Marina Warner points out that Cameron evidently felt that her art and Tennyson's were equal endeavors in the common mission of poetry and visual art to express inner vision. In a letter regarding her work on the *Illustrations*, Cameron proclaims that "Tennyson is *the* Sun of

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[80] Cameron's project to illustrate the narrative arch of the *Idylls* was the first attempt to do so photographically (Relihan 111), and she clearly intended her *Illustrations* to be perceived as a valuable art object within a highly-specialized market. Her emphasis on the uniqueness of her work and the stylistic craft required to produce it seems designed to set this edition apart from other illustrated editions of Tennyson's poetry, such as Gustave Doré's popular editions in the latter part of the nineteenth century and the 1857 edition published by Edward Moxon, which was illustrated by many Pre-Raphaelite artists.

[81] Cameron responded to Tennyson's proposal for her to illustrate his *Idylls* by replying, "Now you know Alfred that I know that it is immortality to be bound up with you" (qtd. in Mancoff 87).

[82] Various conjectures have been offered to explain Tennyson's motivation to encourage Cameron to illustrate the *Idylls*, a request that is particularly surprising given his abhorrence of most illustrations of his work. Millard suggests that Tennyson gave in to pressure from his publisher to produce lucrative illustrated editions and pursued "the path of least resistance by selecting the artist closest at hand" (188). In contrast, Mancoff proposes that Tennyson understood that Cameron had established artistic views of her own when he asked her to illustrate the *Idylls*, and he wanted to collaborate with her because of his respect for her talents and not out of obligation (93). Cameron herself reports in a letter that "our great Laureate Alfred Tennyson himself is very much pleased with this ideal representation of his Idylls" (Gernsheim, *Julia Margaret Cameron* 48). Perhaps Cameron's enthusiasm blinded her to Tennyson's friendly compulsion to appear satisfied with her work, but I tend to agree with Mancoff that Tennyson was probably well aware of Cameron's all-consuming passion for her art and fully realized that her illustrations for his *Idylls* would be defined by her unique aesthetic.

the Earth and I am the Priestess of the Sun of the Heavens so that my works must sometimes even surpass his" (qtd. in Warner 214). While Cameron acknowledges Tennyson's poetic authority as the "Sun of the Earth," she does not place herself within the scope of his power as giver of light. Rather, her allegiance is to the "Sun of the Heavens," a reference both to the heavenly Son of God and to the physical sun within the heavens, which provides the light by which her photographs come into being. Cameron recognizes that she serves a higher authority than Tennyson in her construction of his *Idylls*, a construction that is really what she terms as an "ideal representation" (Gernsheim, *Julia Margaret Cameron* 48) of the poetic truth and beauty that his work delineates. Her art has the potential to "surpass his" because her inspiration comes from a different, higher source—both in an abstract and in a material sense—than his ideas alone.

As an interpretative and creative act, Cameron's text performs its meaning. While Cameron was working on this project, she was also involved in staging amateur theatricals at her home, Dimbola Lodge, where she built a small theater.[83] As the boundary separating stage from studio became blurred in her concurrent leisure and professional activities, Cameron's participation in these home theatricals impacted her work on the *Illustrations*. Lukitsh notes that Cameron's approach to this project reflects her avid interest in "the interplay of fantasy, role-playing, and social self-importance" that was present in the popular Victorian entertainment of

[83] A surviving playbill produced for a home theatrical performed at Dimbola Lodge confirms from its date (January 11 and 12, 1875) that Cameron was involved in amateur productions during the time that she was working on the *Idylls*. (See fig. 18.) In this specific production, Tennyson's sons Hallam and Lionel were active participants, each playing two different roles. Tennyson's son, Hallam, remembered that his family was often involved in amateur plays at this theater, and his father greatly enjoyed this entertainment (Foulkes 131). Cameron invested as much energy into these home performances as she did into her photography, and the productions often borrowed props, costumes, and even models from Cameron's photographic studio.

tableaux vivants (247). Accordingly, I suggest not only that the *Illustrations* reflects Cameron's side interest in amateur theatricals as a form of amusement, but also that this hobby structures Cameron's artistic vision in a more elemental sense.[84] Photography was often conceptualized as a type of performance in this period. Critics of the combination printing method employed by Henry Peach Robinson and Oscar Gustave Rejlander likened these compositions to amateur theatrical productions and *tableaux vivants* instead of professional theater (Daniel, "Dark Room Vs. Green Room" 13). Although the *tableau vivant* was considered a form of high art, references to *tableaux vivants* and the theater more generally were often used to find fault with photographs. A contemporary critic states, "[i]n figure subjects photography can only copy what the photographer has arranged; it cannot invent. It can reach the excellence of colourless *tableaux vivants*—nothing more" (qtd. in Daniel, "Dark Room Vs. Green Room" 14).

Cameron, I believe, capitalizes on this seemingly negative link between theater and photography by structuring her *Illustrations* as an explicit embodiment of the *tableau vivant* form.[85] While Cameron's *Illustrations* acknowledges that photographs are indeed copies of

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[84] Within Victorian middle- and upper-class society, the production of amateur theatricals often functioned as a means of acting out and testing the limits of cultural roles and power structures. Mary Chapman argues that *tableaux vivants* in particular convey an ideology, and are comparable to film in that they are constructed as a collective whole rather than as individual images. "Like the film shot," she explains, "the *tableau* depicts a single instant yet implies a complete narrative" (26). The *tableau vivant* was a predominantly female art form in the nineteenth century, as women formed the majority of its practitioners (M. Chapman 29). The discourse of the theater—which, in the case of the *tableau vivant* form, was "dependent on observation and interpretation of gestures, especially those of women" (M. Chapman 26)—operated as a powerful mechanism for structuring the roles of reader and author, and accordingly shaped the ways that many audiences approached both visual and verbal texts (Allen).

[85] Much as she directed the amateur theatricals conducted at her home, she produces this work as a performance of Tennyson's *Idylls* that is situated within the domestic sphere. As costly gift books, the *Illustrations* were intended to be treasured art objects displayed within the home. Each photograph is placed within the context of the entire work, which combines immaterial signs within a material object. Cameron's *Illustrations* compels the reader to approach the text as

"what the photographer has arranged," this theatrical element does not prevent original invention, but instead encourages it. The distinctive presence of the studio space in these compositions is not an oversight. By drawing attention to the setting within which her imaginative creation is situated, Cameron underscores the importance of historical and social context to her aesthetic product. Cameron's construction of Tennyson's *Idylls* thus not only accentuates photography's ability to convey the imagination, but also balances the ideal in relation to the real and indicates that the domestic milieu of home theatricals has the potential to support artistic production. As I will show in my discussion of the Elaine illustrations, the constructedness of this text suggests that roles—even the role of the artist—may be inhabited and even created through performance of the signs that signify them.

The Lily Maid of Astolat

Elaine, also called "The Lily Maid of Astolat," was a favorite subject for Victorian artists and photographers, in great part because of Tennyson's earlier work with her figure as the titular Lady in "The Lady of Shalott." The character of Elaine was clearly significant to Tennyson, as she again featured prominently in *Idylls of the King* when it was released seventeen years after the revision of "The Lady of Shalott." Tennyson published the first four idylls, one of which was devoted to Elaine's story, in 1859. Over 40,000 copies sold almost immediately, and the first version of the *Idylls* was continuously reprinted thereafter. Ten years later in 1869, Tennyson completed the remaining sections (Gray in Tennyson, *Idylls of the King* 9). When he asked Cameron to create an illustrated edition of his work in August of 1874, his vision for *Idylls of the*

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both a visual and verbal construction, and to acknowledge the difference between the signified ideal and its symbols. The models are actors enacting a role, the scenes are manufactured, and the text is clearly a material construction of the abstract concept it represents.

King was complete, although eleven years would pass before he would publish the final idyll of the series.

In his *Idylls*, Tennyson uses the legend of King Arthur and his knights as an allegory for the changing social structure of his day, and the *Idylls* functioned both as a model for social and individual behavior and as a means to consider the strength (or weakness) of existing ideological structures. Gender roles, definitions of which were in a state of flux during the nineteenth century, is one of the major social issues addressed by the *Idylls*. In his oeuvre as a whole, Tennyson has often been criticized as reinforcing hierarchal gender roles defined by Victorian separate spheres ideology, and many agree with Parlin's assessment that Tennyson's poetry displays a "narrow vision of women" (117). This perspective of Tennyson's representation of gender has not been uncontested, however. Critics like Stephen Ahern and Linda M. Shires propose that the full complexity of Tennyson's approach to gender has not been appreciated, and they suggest that his poetry actually critiques the gender roles that it seems to advocate (Ahern 89; also see note 2 for a helpful overview of views that perceive Tennyson's presentation of gender as restrictive). I agree with Ahern and Shires that the *Idylls* analyzes rather than unequivocally endorses patriarchal definitions of gender identity. Additionally, I argue that, rather than subverting Tennyson's presentation of gender in the *Idylls*, Cameron's work in the *Illustrations* overall directs more focused attention to the critique already embedded within the poetic text, thereby accentuating its significance.

The character of Elaine in the *Idylls* has proven to be an especially contentious female figure and has prompted a variety of responses.[86] Because of her innocence and single-minded

[86] In Tennyson's idyll, later retitled "Lancelot and Elaine," Elaine is a young woman who falls in love with the dashing Sir Lancelot during his visit to her father's home. Despite tending to wounds Lancelot receives during a jousting tournament and nursing him back to health, Elaine

dedication to Lancelot, some critics have interpreted Elaine as a positive model of femininity in contrast to the adulterous Guinevere with her moral failings.[87] In contrast, others have pointed out considerable problems with Elaine's character and actions in the *Idylls*, suggesting that Tennyson uses her story as a negative commentary on restrictive definitions of femininity and the harmful effects of artistic isolation.[88]

In Cameron's construction of the *Idylls*, I argue that she recognizes the complexity of Elaine's character both within the particular idyll in which Elaine appears, "Lancelot and Elaine," and within the sequence of the *Idylls* as a whole. Because of the popularity of the Lady of Shalott/Elaine figure throughout the nineteenth century, Cameron was aware that she was working within a rich artistic tradition when she began the *Illustrations* in the mid-1870s, soon after the publication of the most complete edition of the *Idylls*. Evidently, like many artists before and after her, she realized the prospect for creative interpretation in Elaine's character, and she devoted four illustrations to Elaine: the most of any character in her *Illustrations*. Two illustrations in Volume One depict Elaine in her tower as she reflects on the shield cover that she

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is rejected by him in favor of Queen Guinevere, with whom he is conducting an illicit affair. In response, she dies and has her body dramatically delivered to Camelot by boat to make a public statement to King Arthur's court about her unrequited love.

[87] These critics have applauded Elaine as an innocent victim of forces beyond her control, a near-saint (John R. Reed), a model woman whose idealism matches that of King Arthur (James R. Kincaid and J. Philip Eggers), and a "loyal, determined, courageous, and resourceful" woman who subverts the Sleeping Beauty myth (Donald S. Hair).[87] In this same vein, Parlin argues that Elaine's determined love for Lancelot should be viewed as "a woman's act of independence and free will" (130).

[88] Elaine has been derided as "a self-deluding sentimentalist" (Clyde de L. Ryals), an "innocent of mean intent" with "a lethal purity" (Dennis Grunes), and an idealist unable to survive the "agonized transition from romance to actuality" (Rosenberg).[88] In addition, she has been described as "a negative exemplum of the woman as well as of the artist" (Simpson 341), and an empty image who "symbolizes for Lancelot the dangers of *being* overknown" (Hassett and Richardson 301, emphasis in original).

makes for Lancelot, and two illustrations in Volume Two portray her after death: one as her body is rowed to Camelot in fulfillment of her final wishes, and the other as Arthur's court ponders the meaning of her body after its arrival.

While Cameron emphasizes Elaine's importance in the *Illustrations*, she assumes a qualified stance on Elaine's position as woman and as artist. Although she recognizes the capacity that Elaine possesses to gain personal and artistic agency, and the extent to which Elaine does achieve control over her representation, Cameron also acknowledges the problems with Elaine's approach to realizing her desires. For Cameron, Elaine's artistic vision is myopic, and her story thus represents potential and not achievement. The four illustrations depicting Elaine in the *Illustrations* display the disintegration of her capacity to secure artistic recognition as her role progresses from artist, to actress, and—finally—to (dead if eloquent) icon.

Elaine as Artist

The first two pictures of Elaine, "Elaine, The Lily Maid of Astolat" and "Elaine," are the only illustrations of "Lancelot and Elaine" included in Volume One of Cameron's *Idylls*. As portraits, they display Cameron's preferred artistic method firmly established at this late stage in her career. Tennyson's "Lancelot and Elaine" begins *in medias res* with a description of Elaine as she lovingly contemplates an elaborate case that she has crafted to cover Lancelot's shield left in her keeping. The poem then proceeds to narrate in flashback the story of Lancelot's misunderstanding with Guinevere that led him to enter a joust for a coveted diamond anonymously, then recounts his subsequent arrival at Astolat and meeting of Elaine.

Interestingly, Cameron's illustrations of Elaine in Volume One subtly manipulate Tennyson's chronology by mismatching images with poetic texts. The first illustration of Elaine in this volume—"Elaine, The Lily Maid of Astolat" (see fig. 19)—displays Elaine as she gazes at

Lancelot's shield at the beginning of Tennyson's story, and the second illustration—"Elaine" (see fig. 20)—depicts her regarding the empty shield case after Lancelot's final rejection of her love and immediately before her death.[89] However, the text selections that accompany these images are reversed: lines 982-86 and 997-1011 are paired with the first illustration, and lines 1-12 with the second. While this switch possibly could have been a mistake, I think that this explanation is improbable, as Cameron knew the *Idylls* well and would have been unlikely to pair her images with the wrong selections of text. Cameron's compositional choices as a whole were deliberate in this work, the most significant investment of time, money, and creative energy of her career. I believe that Cameron uses the compositional arrangement of her Elaine portraits interpretively, to draw attention both to Elaine's considerable artistic potential and to the destructive thinking process that causes her downfall.

"Elaine, The Lily Maid of Astolat" is associated with a section of text that displays Elaine's response to Lancelot's final rejection:

> So in her tower alone the maiden sat:
>
> His very shield was gone; only the case,
>
> Her own poor work, her empty labour, left.
>
> But still she heard him, still his picture form'd,
>
> And grew between her and the pictured wall.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> And in those days she made a little song,

[89] This second photograph can also be interpreted to portray Elaine in the process of creating the shield case at the poem's beginning, particularly as the text that accompanies the image is taken from the first lines of the poem. Nonetheless, I believe that the absence of Lancelot's shield, as well as of any sewing instruments, is strong evidence to support the idea that the image represents Elaine after Lancelot's departure.

And call'd her song 'The Song of Love and Death,'
And sang it: sweetly could she make and sing.

'Sweet is true love tho' given in vain, in vain;
And sweet is death who puts an end to pain:
I know not which is sweeter, no, not I.

'Love, art thou sweet? then bitter death must be:
Love, thou art bitter; sweet is death to me.
O Love, if death be sweeter, let me die.

'I fain would follow love, if that could be;
I needs must follow death, who calls for me;
Call and I follow, I follow! let me die.' (ll. 982-86, 997-1011; ellipses in original)

Ellipses separate the two distinct sections of this text in the *Illustrations*: the first five lines describe Elaine's mental state as she retreats to her tower, and the next twelve convey the song that she composes to convey her pain. Cameron's choice to present this part of the idyll first rather than in its chronological order suggests the importance that she places on its representational power within Elaine's story. Clearly, Cameron was drawn to this moment in the poem, as she had depicted it in a different way seven years before she began work on the *Illustrations*.

In 1867, Cameron had created a composition depicting Elaine singing her "song of love and death" as she despairs over Lancelot's departure. (See fig. 21.) Although this portrait

(entitled "Call, I follow, I follow, let me die!") illustrates the same moment in the poem that Cameron's later "Elaine, The Lily Maid of Astolat" does in the *Idylls*, the two compositions are markedly dissimilar. The earlier photograph draws attention to Elaine's white face as she dreamily gazes out of the right-hand side of the frame. Although the space of image is constricted around the torso of the model (Mary Hillier, Cameron's maid), her hair flows wildly out from her face and beyond the borders of the image, suggesting that she is uncontained by these boundaries. The darkness and nondescript nature of the cloth wrapped around Mary Hillier's face make her clothes—the historical markers of a person's identity within time—retreat into the background and become meaningless, and even the photograph's title withholds her name. Cameron's portrayal of Elaine as a defiant woman in this image is strikingly similar to William Holman Hunt's illustration of "The Lady of Shalott" in the 1857 Moxon edition of Tennyson's poetry. In Cameron's photograph, Elaine is unbound by any type of limitation, temporal or otherwise. Mary Hillier's Elaine is a Romantic figure whose words "Call, I follow, I follow, let me die!" represent a woman nobly enduring enforced circumstances.

In some ways, Cameron's composition of this image resembles Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *Beata Beatrix* (1864), which—although completed in 1870 after "Call, I follow"—was in production during the same time period ("Beata Beatrix"). (See fig. 22.) This painting renders Dante's love Beatrice (modeled by Rossetti's late wife, Elizabeth Siddall) as she prepares to enter heaven at the moment of her death. Elizabeth Siddall's torso fills up most of the frame as she quietly sits with her face upturned, her eyes softly closed, and her hands open, ready to

receive a poppy delivered by a dove. Figures representing Love and the New Life are situated in the upper left and right portions of the background.[90]

Executed in Rossetti's highly symbolist style, *Beata Beatrix* depicts a woman on the verge of translation into an ideal, and Rossetti intended it to function as homage to the departed Elizabeth Siddall, who was herself an accomplished artist ("Beata Beatrix"). Likewise, Cameron in 1867 initially envisions Elaine as a tragic artist who functions as an exemplary concept rather than as a real person. Mary Hillier's portrait in "Call, I follow" has a spiritual quality, as if the woman whom she represents—like Beatrice—is in the process of transitioning out of the mundane worldly sphere into a higher plane of existence. Although this woman seems perfect, she is also inaccessible, an issue that Cameron seems to have recognized and addressed in her later illustrations of Elaine. By elevating Elaine's admirable determination to be recognized as an individual and as an artist, this early illustration assumes a soft-focus perspective on her character and thus fails to take a full account of Elaine as a three-dimensional person with flaws. In so doing, "Call, I follow" ironically downgrades Elaine's importance by representing her as two-dimensional symbol of a woman artist who dramatically overreaches the limitations set on her. Cameron's later compositions reflect the change in her thinking about Elaine's meaning in the seven years that had elapsed since she created "Call, I follow," and they perhaps function as a reaction to Rossetti's *Beata Beatrix*, which had been finished and received to wide acclaim in the intervening time.[91] Her portrayals of Elaine in the *Illustrations* carefully avoid the extremes of

[90] The presence of the figures symbolizing Love and New Life in *Beata Beatrix* is similar to the two categories Elaine invokes in her "Song of Love and Death."

[91] Contemporary accounts record that *Beata Beatrix* was a critical success from the outset and was (and continues to be) regarded as one of Rossetti's finest paintings ("Beata Beatrix"). Given her extensive connections within the mid-Victorian art world, Cameron was undoubtedly

either valorization or condemnation and address the issue of artistic agency more fully by establishing a more balanced perspective that acknowledges her faults as well as her strengths.

"Elaine, The Lily Maid of Astolat" assumes a different approach. In this image, Elaine (this time modeled by Cameron's niece, May Prinsep) is explicitly named, and she sits on the left-hand section of the composition with her hair flowing and her gaze directed out of the upper right-hand section of the frame, in which Lancelot's shield is prominently displayed. Under Elaine's outstretched left arm, and directly beneath the shield, rests the shield case that Elaine had embroidered for Lancelot. The material presence of the shield and shield case is the most prominent point of departure in this later composition from the earlier one. While the title of "Call, I follow, I follow, let me die!" has no signifiers other than the title relating it to a specific point in the poem's narrative, or even to Elaine's character at all, "Elaine, The Lily Maid of Astolat" foregrounds the shield and shield case as two major material links between the image and the text, but the very presence of these signifiers disrupts the harmony of this relationship. The photographic composition clearly depicts Elaine at the beginning of her story in "Lancelot and Elaine" when she "[g]uarded the sacred shield of Lancelot; / Which first she placed where morning's earliest ray / Might strike it, and awake her with the gleam" (ll. 4-6). However, as we have seen, the text accompanying this image explicitly highlights the shield's absence. Not only has Lancelot departed; the shield which Elaine had earlier "read" (l. 16), and which had served as an instrument through which she could create "a hidden meaning" (l. 17) and "a pretty history to herself" (l. 18) of Lancelot's character, has also been withdrawn from her access.

The difference between the text and the image of "Elaine, The Lily Maid of Astolat" in the *Illustrations* creates a tension between these two forms of signification within the frame of

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aware of the acclaim of this work and the significance of its relationship to Elizabeth Siddall for Rossetti.

this single illustration. This tension foregrounds the function of Cameron's image as a dynamic interpretation of the poetic text rather than merely a static transference of its meaning from verbal to visual form. By linking an image of Elaine from the poem's beginning to this description later in the narrative, Cameron suggests that this section of text is crucial for understanding the meaning of Elaine's character at the start of her story and, more broadly, within the idyll as a whole.

The quoted text establishes Elaine as an artist by referencing the shield case she had designed to show her love for Lancelot and the lyrics for the song she creates to express her pain at his rejection. Elaine is both an accomplished visual artist and a capable poet; as the poem states, "sweetly could she make and sing" (l. 999). The illustration provides a complete picture of Elaine's artistic potential by referencing both her visual and verbal skills, but in doing so, it also draws attention to the fundamental problem with Elaine's use of her talent.

Elaine conflates fantasy into reality from the beginning of her story. Even when she has Lancelot's shield in her possession, she uses it not as a means of discerning his character through observation of the facts that it displayed, but rather as an instrument for supporting a world that she has established in her imagination. Tennyson describes Elaine at the idyll's outset as an avid reader. Even after she lovingly creates a case for Lancelot's shield, she obsessively pores over the shield in an attempt to determine the meaning of its various marks:

> Nor resting thus content, but day by day,
> Leaving her household and good father, climb'd
> That eastern tower, and entering barr'd her door,
> Stript off the case, and read the naked shield,
> Now guess'd a hidden meaning in his arms,

Now made a pretty history to herself

Of every dint a sword had beaten in it,

. . . . . .

. . . . so she lived in fantasy. (ll. 13-19, 27)

Elaine is evidently a skilled picture-maker with a strong imagination. Her problem is not that she possesses the desire to construct narratives or create pictures, but that this compulsion is unbounded by any limits imposed by reality. Because she isolates herself within her imagination, Elaine indulges in her creative impulse to the detriment of her life and thereby narrows the scope and consequence of her art. By so glorifying her inner vision in her attempt to understand the shield's significance, Elaine ironically misreads the broader meaning of the signs it represents even as she accurately distinguishes their history.

Similarly, while Elaine correctly recognizes the importance of Lancelot's identity within Camelot from the beginning, she is unable to determine his character apart from his legendary status and refuses to accept information that might alter her perception of his identity, which is based on her own internal criteria. In her initial interaction with Lancelot over dinner at Astolat, Elaine astutely recognizes that his outwardly cheerful demeanor disguises "a cloud / Of melancholy severe" (ll. 322-23). Tennyson highly praises Elaine's powers of perception by placing her on the same level as that of the most discerning kind of artist:

And all night long his face before her lived,

As when a painter, poring on a face,

Divinely thro' all hindrance finds the man

Behind it, and so paints him that his face,

The shape and colour of a mind and life,

Lives for his children, ever at its best

And fullest; so the face before her lived [.] (ll. 329-35)

In this passage, Tennyson shows Elaine's interpretive abilities to be sharp, and her inner vision insightful: she is able to identify "[t]he shape and colour of a mind and life" behind the external representation that Lancelot presents of himself. The inaccurate conclusions that Elaine bases on this information, however, reveal the flaws in her interpretative process. Mistakenly understanding Lancelot's polite courtesy towards her efforts to make him comfortable, Elaine thinks "[t]hat all was nature, all, perchance, for her" (l. 328) and infers that he may love her. When Elaine later senses that Lancelot may not return her love later, the static cycle of her thought pattern begins to disrupt her creative ability:

She murmur'd, 'Vain, in vain: it cannot be.

He will not love me: how then? must I die?'

Then as a little helpless innocent bird,

That has but one plain passage of few notes,

Will sing the simple passage o'er and o'er

For all an April morning, till the ear

Wearies to hear it, so the simple maid

Went half the night repeating, 'Must I die?' (ll. 887-94)

When reality clashes with Elaine's fantasy, she cannot accommodate her vision in order to reconcile this new situation.[92] Instead, Elaine's art atrophies and becomes irrelevant as she

[92] Even when Elaine's father later relates the rumor of Lancelot's illicit love of the queen in an effort to shock his daughter out of her infatuation, Elaine will not consider the possible truth of this report, responding that "you work against your own desire; / For if I could believe the things that you say / I should but die the sooner" (ll. 1089-91). By defining her blindness as

literally clings to her original ideas. Retreating into her ideal by refusing to evolve in response to changing stimulus increasingly seems to become the most viable way to maintain artistic and personal agency. This passage shows how Elaine's narrow view of her world has warped the progression of her logic and channeled the signs that she (mis)interprets into what Baudrillard would term a precession of simulacra without any meaning. Repetition itself creates truth for Elaine, but by this endless reiteration, the signs she reads lose their link to reality and become hollow constructs of her own making.

This thought process culminates in Elaine's composition of her "Song of Love and Death," in which the concepts of "love" and "death" become complete simulacra whose reference points exist only in Elaine's mind. The relationships that this song posits between the equal sweetnesses of love and of death, the converse bitterness of one category if the other is sweet, and the necessity to choose one route to follow if the other becomes unavailable, is founded on a circular zero-sum logic that is illegible outside of the definitions Elaine herself creates. As Anna Jane Barton notes, Elaine's song functions as an incomprehensible type of "word play" in which "[t]he obsessive repetition of 'love' and 'death'" reveals "the pathological dwelling on the signifier that characterizes Elaine's relationship with Lancelot's shield" (148). Intriguingly, Cameron pairs her illustration of "Elaine, the Lily Maid of Astolat," which depicts Elaine gazing at Lancelot's shield, with a selection of text that describes her response after Lancelot's departure. In so doing, Cameron draws attention to the cause of the crisis Elaine exhibits in her song. Rather than originating in Lancelot's failure to return her love, as Elaine herself believes, the disintegration of Elaine's art and life stems from the fact that she lives in

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an act of will, Elaine indicates that her imaginative construction is more important to her than whatever the reality might be.

fantasy. Her aesthetic ability is weakened and ultimately ruined by her overreliance on her inner vision and by her misinterpretation of the signs available to her, like Lancelot's shield.

The first three lines of the textual selection that Cameron includes depict the reality of Elaine's situation: she is alone (l. 982), Lancelot's shield is gone (l. 983), and only the case she fashioned for the shield remains (l. 983-84). Instead of adapting her imaginative narrative to fit these facts, however, the next two lines show Elaine's further retreat into the fantasy world that she has created when she had the shield in her possession. Like a photographic magic lantern, Elaine projects the image of Lancelot that she had constructed in her head into the empty space created by his absence—"still she heard him, still his picture form'd" (l. 985)—and this image assumes concrete shape in her consciousness: it "grew between her and the pictured wall" (l. 986). The Lancelot of Elaine's inner vision thereby gains concrete shape as a mental *carte visite* and assumes control over her mind and life. Elaine's "pathology," as Barton terms it, is her fixation on signifiers within the closed circle of her own mind. In her attempt to separate these signifiers from the signified, Elaine so elevates her imagination as an interpretive methodology that she loses the capacity to create relevant art. Her ideas become a static precession of simulacra that has no meaning to anyone other than herself.

Tennyson concludes his opening description of Elaine by expressing that "she lived in fantasy" (l. 19), a statement that sums up what he portrays as her primary flaw. Although the imagination is a necessary element of artistic production, Tennyson suggests in this idyll that living within it cannot sustain a mode of being or stimulate continued aesthetic growth, because relying on inner vision alone produces myopia. Rather than constructing an alternative portrait of Elaine in opposition to Tennyson's description, Cameron's illustrations support the explanation of Elaine's artistic downfall provided in the *Idylls*. Arthur L. Simpson states that "[i]t is Elaine's

radical insistence on creating a private vision of reality and her attempt to impose it on the rest of her world that most strongly identify her as one of Tennyson's negative artists" (346-47). Accordingly, Cameron's portraits of Elaine show her to be an artist whose glorification of her own inner vision blinds her to the meaning of the signs surrounding her and ultimately destroys both herself and her art. However, while the composition and placement of these images in relation to the selections of poetic text support the text's depiction of Elaine's failure to realize her artistic potential, they also emphasize Elaine's dignity as a woman and an artist to a greater degree than Tennyson does in his *Idylls.*

Cameron's first illustration of Elaine depicts the reason for her defeat as originating in her constricted view of the world and herself in relation to it. The thought process that Elaine displays in her solitary obsession over Lancelot's shield later culminates in her choice to fashion her own death as a magnum opus. Cameron's second portrait, titled simply "Elaine," assumes a more sympathetic perspective on Elaine's character because it directs attention to her status as a legitimate artist. In this illustration, May Prinsep as Elaine sits in profile, her face soft and eyes downcast, gazing at the cast-off shield case on her lap. Her right arm lies motionless on the embroidered case, and her left hand gently fingers the fabric. The background is black and empty, save for an ornamented piece of furniture, and Elaine's voluminous light-colored garments cause her to appear to glow from within. As in the other portrait, Elaine here is introspective: her mind is occupied with her creative handiwork.

The text Cameron selects to accompany the image focuses on Elaine's personal identity and aesthetic skill:

Elaine the fair, Elaine the loveable,

Elaine, the lily maid of Astolat,

High in her chamber up a tower to the east
Guarded the sacred shield of Lancelot,
Which first she placed where morning's earliest ray
Might strike it, and awake her with the gleam;
Then fearing rust or soilure fashion'd for it
A case of silk, and braided thereupon
All the devices blazon'd on the shield
In their own tinct, and added, of her wit,
A border fantasy of branch and flower,
And yellow-throated nestling in the nest. (ll. 1-12)

The first two lines delineate Elaine's status within her society, which is significant: both on the basis of her position as daughter of Astolat's ruler and because she possesses the personal characteristics of being both "fair" ("upright" as well as "lovely") and "loveable," or deserving of love. The remaining lines detail Elaine's careful guardianship of the shield entrusted to her and her painstaking creation of its case.

This textual selection portrays Elaine in a positive light as a woman and an artist worthy of respect. Throughout her story, however, Elaine is often regarded by those surrounding her as an ignorant or innocent girl who does not know her own mind. Elaine's brothers goodheartedly dismiss her as a meaningful participant in their interactions, and her father indulges her whims, lovingly considering her to be an innocent, "wilful" (l. 772) child. Lancelot treats Elaine tenderly, but with condescension, responding to her delivery of the joust diamond by expressing gratitude "as we kiss the child / That does the task assigned" (ll. 823-24). When Gawain arrives in Astolat on his quest from Arthur to find the wounded Lancelot, he assesses Elaine only as a

potential liaison, a “wild flower” (l. 640) whose worth is in her appearance and sexual potential. Elaine is firmly entrenched as a paragon of maidenly virtue to everyone around her. Within her world, she is both sexually objectified and honored as an asexual symbol of womanly excellence, but her worth as a whole person is unacknowledged.

In this way, Tennyson shows Elaine’s apparent immaturity to be in part a quality imposed on her by her social role. Gawain shrewdly speculates as he departs from Astolat that Elaine’s potential arrival at Camelot either as Lancelot’s wife or as his lover would affect how she related to others, primarily because she would “learn the courtesies of the court” (l. 695). Like Guinevere, Elaine would learn how to negotiate her different position as a woman within the gendered social system at Camelot, but as Guinevere’s situation demonstrates, this change in status would not result in greater power over her own representation. Both Elaine and Guinevere are portrayed as trapped within the constrictive definitions of femininity perpetuated by Arthur’s ideal society. Guinevere’s disgust with Arthur’s unrealistic expectation of perfection in himself and others shows how this archetypical standard frustrates personal agency by leaving no room for human flaws or individuality. She explains to Lancelot, “He is all fault who hath no fault at all: / For who loves me must have a touch of earth; / The low sun makes the colour” (ll. 132-34). Simpson accordingly proposes that the idyll

> . . . presents the insidious effects of a larger group of Victorian (and contemporary) assumptions about maidens and women—assumptions which, to the extent that they do not acknowledge women's complex multidimensional humanity, are damaging to women, to men, and to the broader society. (348)

Although the way in which Elaine is presented in the idyll can be interpreted as patronizing, I agree with Simpson that Tennyson’s emphasis on Elaine’s lack of complexity can be better

regarded as conveying the stultifying effect caused by the imposition of this feminine paradigm. The description of Elaine as a "simple maid" (l. 893) and as "a little helpless innocent bird" (l. 889) are startling in their stark revelation of the effects of Elaine's representation on the production and reception of her art. More broadly, Tennyson suggests that Elaine's self-destruction previews the forthcoming collapse of the social system in which she lives, which is founded on simulations of imagined ideals.

Cameron endorses Tennyson's implicit critique of this gendered social standard in her representation of Elaine, but she places greater emphasis on Elaine's individuality. Instead of pitying Elaine's choices as determined by the restrictive social system in which she lives, Cameron grants Elaine the dignity of personal responsibility for her actions and takes her decisions seriously. The two portraits of the living Elaine show her alone in her tower, the place of her artistic production. Constance C. Relihan believes that Cameron's portraits of Elaine show a "passive, martyred woman" (122), and that Cameron's concentration on Elaine in these images effectively isolates her character from other meaningful relationships (123). Although I agree that Elaine is indeed set apart in her portraits, I instead interpret Cameron's conspicuous isolation of Elaine in these images as drawing attention to her identity as an artist and to the crucial role that her reaction to her situation plays in determining the outcome of her story. Elaine's figure is framed in both of these portraits, in contrast to the cropping of her torso in "Call, I follow, I follow, let me die!". Elaine strives against the constricted space of her earlier portrait, but the later two pictures situate her symmetrically, which conveys a sense of compositional order. Cameron emphasizes Elaine's function as a compositional element of well-designed pictures in these two images, and in contrast to the earlier photograph, she depicts Elaine as working within the frame rather than fighting it. These illustrations suggest that one of Elaine's problems is that

she embraces convention rather than seeking ways to work creatively outside of the space allotted to her. As Cameron designed her photographic compositions to be read in conjunction with the sections of text that she selected in the *Illustrations*, the full significance of these images cannot be interpreted adequately without also considering the text that accompanies them. Taken as a whole, these illustrations indicate that Elaine's tragedy is as much a result of her own choice to subscribe to social convention as it is an effect of the restrictive gender role imposed upon her.

Although the idyll's title indicates that the story regards Elaine primarily in relationship to Lancelot by joining their names, Cameron's illustrations redirect focus onto Elaine herself, with Lancelot not appearing until the fourth and final illustration. The titles of both portraits refer to Elaine herself, and Lancelot is not referenced in the titles of any of the illustrations based on "Lancelot and Elaine." While the significance of Elaine's story primarily rests in its relationship to Lancelot within the context of Tennyson's broader narrative, Elaine is for Cameron the most important figure within this idyll. The text paired with "Elaine," Elaine's second portrait, describes her admirable qualities, details her vigilant performance of the task given her (keeping Lancelot's shield), and exhibits her aesthetic skills in the creation of the shield case. In the photograph, Elaine's gaze is concentrated on her shield case, and this absorption directs the viewer's gaze to follow and likewise rest upon her art. In this way, the composition invites the viewer to consider Elaine in relation to her creative abilities rather than in association with Lancelot. Cameron thus displays Elaine not as a victim of enforced sequestering within her gendered role, but as a capable woman who is able to create meaningful art despite her limited perspective on life. Elaine has dignity in this illustration, and her art has value.

The companion portrait in Volume One, "Elaine, The Lily Maid of Astolat," explains the cause of Elaine's downfall, but it does not diminish her personhood. The accompanying segment

of text details the way in which Elaine's refusal to adapt her imaginative vision to fit a changing reality distorts her creative ability and perspective of her world. Cameron again shows respect to Elaine as an artist by including the full text of her song even as she accentuates Elaine's warped logic in her composition of the illustration. By linking a moment that depicts the beginning of Elaine's story with a written description of her reaction to Lancelot's later departure, Cameron shows how Elaine always had personal choice in the direction of her life and art. Although Elaine is indeed barred from much active interaction with her world by her gendered role, these limitations do not determine her isolation and subsequent demise: this choice is her own. Elaine chooses to live in fantasy, and Cameron suggests that she should be granted the responsibility for this decision and its subsequent consequences. In these portraits, Elaine is a woman who is often denied attention and respect, but she is not a victim. Cameron respects Elaine by providing a fuller picture of the complexity of her character.

By recognizing Elaine's artistic potential as evidenced by her creative production, but also detailing the implosive effect of her myopic reasoning, Cameron is able to sympathize with Elaine's situation even while rejecting her artistic strategy. These illustrations figure Elaine's story as a cautionary tale of both the power of the uncontrolled imagination to consume the self, and of the danger of destroying the self in the attempt to be recognized within a system in which the creative work of women is often dismissed. As the final two illustrations show, even Elaine's radical attempt to create a place for her art and force recognition of her ability through performance ultimately backfires. Instead of enhancing her status as artist, Elaine's strategy ultimately transforms her into an icon, a simulacrum devoid of consequential meaning.

Elaine as Actress

The compositions from "Lancelot and Elaine" in Volume Two of the *Illustrations* depict Elaine's dramatic choreography of her own death and the reception of her body at Camelot. The first of the two illustrations, the only one of the four in the "Lancelot and Elaine" series to lack a title, is also the most elaborately staged composition based on this idyll within the *Illustrations*. (See fig. 23.) In this image, Elaine (again modeled by May Prinsep) reclines in a boat in the left foreground, her faced turned towards the camera and her eyes closed. A tapestry cradles Elaine's head and mingles with her flowing hair, and a dark-colored embroidered fabric covers her lower body, spilling over the boat's edge. Elaine's right arm gently rests lengthwise along the boat. As the white of her sleeve contrasts with the darkness of the tapestries and wood of the boat in which she rests, the line of her outstretched arm directs the viewer's gaze towards her face, which Tennyson characterizes as being "lovely / For she did not seem as dead, / But fast asleep, and lay as tho' she smiled" (ll. 1152-54). In the right foreground sits Cameron's husband, Charles Hay Cameron, who plays the "dumb old servitor" (ll. 1137)—the mute, loyal servant of Astolat whom Elaine designates as the guardian of her body on her journey. He holds an oar, rowing the boat on its way to Camelot. Elaine's shield case is prominently displayed above her head in the upper left corner to represent the text's description that "o'er her hung / The silken case with braided blazonings" (ll. 1141-42).

Unlike the portraits of Elaine, this image is conspicuously staged, and evidence of Cameron's studio is unmistakable within the illustration's composition. A door, presumably part of the studio space, gleams in the darkness behind the boat in the foreground. Wires visibly support Elaine's shield case from the rafters of Cameron's glass house studio, which had been converted from a chicken coop. In the upper left corner of the image, a series of crude circular

marks—which Cameron hand-applied to the negative during processing—represent the sun or moon. In a similar manner, the bottom of the frame is blurred, a quality added to the photograph to represent the movement of waves.

This image is clearly structured as a *tableau vivant* with May Prinsep and Charles Hay Cameron acting the roles of Elaine and her servant. Because the traces of the artist's hand manifested by the studio space and post-production markings make any suspension of disbelief difficult, the composition is frequently deemed to be an aesthetic failure, and its highly affected nature functions as an exemplar of the problem that many critics perceive in Cameron's narrative photographs. Interpreting the "overwrought theatricality" (Pauli, "Setting the Scene" 60) to be unwittingly amateurish, critics often pronounce compositions like this one in the *Illustrations* to be absurd pantomimes. Gernsheim maintains that these staged photographs overshoot "the mark of what is acceptable . . . in artificiality" and are thus "unintentionally comic" (*Julia Margaret Cameron* 80).

This conclusion, however, is based on the assumption that Cameron intends to achieve a suspension of belief with these illustrations, a premise that I believe is debatable. As testified by portraits like "Call, I follow, I follow, let me die!," Cameron was certainly capable of designing photographs in which evidence of her own artistic manipulation was not so noticeable. Given the tremendous effort that Cameron invested in the production of the *Illustrations*, and the painstaking care that she devoted to the composition of her images, the idea that she failed to consider—or attempted to minimize—the presence of her props and studio space in this finished image of Elaine seems highly unlikely. I believe that Cameron not only recognized the theatricality of this composition, but also deliberately structured the image to incorporate this artificial quality. As I will explain, Cameron's composition of this part of Elaine's story provides

a commentary both on Elaine's radical decision to perform her role as artist and on the performative function of art more broadly. By permitting the elements of artistic production to be visible, Cameron draws attention to the permeable boundary separating reality and illusion, displays the constructed nature of socially-accepted perceptions of reality, and suggests that these fabricated ideas of the real may be changeable.

The dramatic quality of Cameron's version of Elaine's journey to Camelot is all the more striking when contrasted to Henry Peach Robinson's famous earlier composition, entitled *The Lady of Shalott* (1860-61). (See fig. 24.) Robinson's portrayal of Tennyson's Lady is notable in that it is one of the few photographic versions of this popular subject designed and exhibited as fine art. Like his contemporary Cameron, Robinson desired to establish the new medium of photography as a legitimate art form, and he was internationally recognized as a premier fine art photographer. Robinson more authentically depicts the story's setting by posing the Lily Maid outdoors with her boat drifting down an actual waterway. As his version depicts the Lady of Shalott from Tennyson's earlier poem, and not the version of Elaine in the *Idylls*, Robinson's model is alone. The model's body and clothing are depicted much like Cameron's Elaine, but her head is shown in profile instead of turned towards the viewer. The still water in which the boat floats reflects the trees and underbrush shown in the background, and—in keeping with the poem's description—the Lady's name is written on the prow of the boat.

The Lady of Shalott is an albumen print constructed from two separate negatives in a technique known as combination printing, a process that early fine art photographers like Robinson and Oscar Gustave Rejlander helped to pioneer. In combination printing, the photographer merges elements from different photographs into a single print during processing, thereby creating a finished work that is comprised of the best elements of two or more negatives.

Combination printing, its proponents maintained, provides the photographer with the most artistic latitude, as he or she could freely manipulate a photograph to best represent his or her artistic vision in ways difficult or impossible to attain with a single negative. This early photo-shopping technique both permitted a more realistic perspective than was feasible within one negative and granted an increased ability to represent the ideal.[93]

In his painstaking composition of *The Lady of Shalott*, Robinson aimed to realize Tennyson's vision via photography by emphasizing a minute level of detail and thus adhering to Pre-Raphaelite artistic principles. He explains:

> I made a barge, crimped the model's hair, PR fashion, laid her on the boat in the river among the water lilies, and gave her a background of weeping willows, taken in the rain so that they might look dreary (qtd. in Gernsheim and Britain, *Masterpieces of Victorian Photography* 21).

By photographing the model on the boat and the background of the riverbank separately, Robinson was able to attain the exact aesthetic effect he had envisioned. Although Robinson designed this high level of verisimilitude to elevate his composition into the realm of high art by suspending the viewer's disbelief, many contemporary critics had the opposite reaction, claiming that this effort to accomplish realism actually accentuated the constructed nature of the finished product. These critics recognized, Miriam Neuringer maintains, that the naturalism of the image

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[93] The technical limits of mid-century cameras presented many difficulties for photographers who desired to replicate the perception of the human eye. Correctly exposing an image was a particularly complex problem, especially in landscape photography, as accurately adjusting exposure for one area (such as vegetation) frequently required over- or under-exposing another (such as the sky). The development of flash and other artificial lighting methods later in the century helped somewhat with exposure issues, but during much of the century photographers often were faced with two choices: sacrifice correct exposure in one or more parts of the image but maintain the integrity of the single negative, or manipulate the image to various degrees during processing to achieve a more "realistic" final work.

conflicts with Robinson's aim to express an imaginary subject, and instead creates "a photograph so naturalistic that it looks more like a scene of a theatrical production than an imagined view." For this reason, "[t]he viewer cannot willingly suspend disbelief and imagine that he or she sees the Lady on the river. Rather, the viewer sees a model lying in a boat merely pretending to be the Lady of Shalott" (Neuringer). Even Robinson himself eventually regretted his composition of *The Lady of Shalott* and conceded that the photograph did not meet his aesthetic goal because the realism of the image clashed with its poetic subject. Later in his career, he acknowledged that "[i]t was a ghastly mistake to attempt such a subject with our realistic art and ... I never afterwards went for themes beyond the limits of the life of our day" (qtd. in Gernsheim and Britain, *Masterpieces of Victorian Photography* 21).

The perception of photography as recorder of factual data unsuitable for conveying images created within the mind is at the heart of the reaction against Robinson's *The Lady of Shalott*. Malcolm R. Daniel states that the criticism faced by Robinson was common to any nineteenth-century photographer who selected an imaginary subject, because he or she would invariably be compelled "to reconcile the assumed truthfulness of photography with the impossibility of the subject actually having been photographed" ("Darkroom Vs. Greenroom" 16). Daniel relates George Slight's 1865 argument for the superiority of painting over photography in this area:

> We do not look for literal truth in a work of the imagination, because that work is merely the embodiment of an idea which has existence only in the imagination of its author, and it seems right to employ a vehicle for conveying it which is never expected to be literally truthful, such as painting; but on the other hand, if the vehicle we employ be one which we are convinced or believe, from previous observations, can convey nothing but

> truthfulness, and attempt to convey that which cannot be true, there must be a certain amount of jarring and unsatisfied feeling in the mind of the beholder who lays any stress on the proper adaptation of means to ends, and will almost be like making a witness utter a tissue of lies after he has sworn to speak nothing but truth. This is the dilemma which I conceive photography to be placed in when it is used for embodying works of the imagination. (qtd. in "Darkroom Vs. Greenroom" 16-18).

Robinson's subsequent regret finds him in agreement with Slight's premise. However, his idea of "truth" significantly differs from that of Slight. In "Idealism, Realism, Expression," Robinson's manifesto of his aesthetic method, he states that photographers can "add truth to bare facts" and contends that "no art to be successful however it may try, can entirely dispense with idealism" (92). To Robinson, "truth" is another type of perception beyond mere sensory input that is exhibited through an artist's expression of his or her inner vision. "Idealism" is a way to conceptualize this imaginative impulse. In rejecting *The Lady of Shalott*, Robinson qualifies how photography can best illustrate the imagination, but he does not revise his conception of photographic "truth." For Robinson, photography has the potential to represent the ideal, but it does so best within the limits established by the medium. The problem with his version of the Lady was not the attempt to show the ideal, but rather to attempt to literalize it by striving to make the creative work as believable as possible.

Cameron would have been aware of Robinson's interpretation when she composed her image over a decade later. Her choice to use the constricted space of her studio instead of attempting the naturalism that Robinson achieves underscores the theatricality of her illustration as an intentional aesthetic decision instead of an error of judgment. While Robinson presents his photograph to be a snapshot taken by the camera, an impartial "pencil of nature" (using the

termed William Henry Fox Talbot coined in his famous book of the same name), Cameron's illustration foregrounds the performative actions of the models, the artist, and even the reader in interpreting visual and verbal texts.

By drawing attention to the performances inevitably involved in reading texts, Cameron reveals the complex structures—the models, the props, the stage, the inspiration, the artistic vision, the audience—supporting the work of art and its meaning. All of these elements must converge in order to create and sustain the image, and Cameron's *tableau vivant* draws attention to the relationship between truth and fiction by showing how performance is a part of mundane, everyday life.

In a letter to Mrs. Sidney Frances Bateman, Cameron expresses the considerable effect that her observation of the popular opera singer Maria Malibran exercised on the development of her own aesthetic:

> Madame Malibran who was one of the stars of my early days had the gift of making reality of life, stronger in her simplicity of acting, than *dramatic* effect!! I very much appreciate this reserve of power in everything—in painting, in poetry, in acting. It does not *seize* hold of the public but takes hold I hope. (qtd. in Wolf 53, emphasis in original).

Rather than seeking to maintain an aura of illusion, Cameron's composition of Elaine's final journey demonstrates what she terms as "simplicity of acting" by self-consciously revealing the structures by which it is constructed. Elaine and her servant are parts clearly performed by recognizable actors, Cameron's own niece and husband, who also play other roles within her *Illustrations*. The seemingly-clumsy representation of the naturalistic elements of the sun/moon and waves literally manifest the hand of the artist as creator of the final image. In straightforwardly displaying the mechanisms by which art is produced and interpreted, the

illustration conversely refocuses attention back onto what Cameron terms "the reality of life" as a type of art, a volitional rendition of roles.

Elaine, however, assumes a different approach in the extravagant staging of her own death. Rather than recognizing her identity as a type of role and capitalizing on the creative potential within this fluidity, Elaine instead attempts to confine her representation within the limits of what she conceives as its most perfect form. The text that Cameron chooses to accompany her photograph of the dead Elaine in her boat describes Elaine's purposeful assumption of the role of actress in the drama of her death that she engineers. In the first set of nine lines (ll. 1103-08, 1120-22), Elaine instructs her father to arrange the letter that she has written for the court at Camelot with her dead body on the boat, and to assign the family servant the responsibility of steering her funeral barge on its way. The second set of lines on the page, lines 1130-54, relate Elaine's subsequent death and the careful presentation of her body on the boat according to her directive.

Although Elaine's dictate to include her letter with her body is narrated in the first set of lines, her explanation of the importance of this letter is part of the text that is omitted. In a sizeable section of eleven lines excluded from the first set of nine lines via ellipses, Elaine expresses her desire to resemble Queen Guinevere by dressing her body in "all I have of rich" (l. 1113) and her objective to "meet" (l. 1117) the queen by means of her careful self-presentation. The end goal of this staging is to transform her body into a sign powerfully illustrating the letter that she addresses to "Lancelot and the Queen and all of the world" (l. 1100). As Elaine states in response to her brother's offer to deliver her letter himself, she travels to Camelot because "[t]here surely I shall speak for mine own self, / And none of you can speak for me so well" (ll. 1118-19).

The abbreviated portion of text that Cameron pairs with her image conveys a different perspective on Elaine's self-fashioning and subsequent death. In this section of text, Elaine addresses her father, requesting him to arrange her letter in her hands after her death. Elaine relates that because her father "never yet / Denied my fancies" (ll. 1104-05), her "strange" (1105) new request should not be refused. Without Elaine's ensuing explication of the significance of her effort to shape her reception at Camelot, her action appears to be the result of a "fancy," or a whim. The remaining text in the illustration seems to indicate the effects of this impulse in its description of Elaine's wishes dutifully being carried out to the letter.

In the *Idylls*, Elaine's stated determination to replicate the queen in her appearance and standing within Camelot may stem from some brief comments Lancelot makes about her during their first meeting. When discussing the diamond prize of the tournament, Sir Torre, Elaine's eldest brother, mentions that such a jewel would best befit queens, and "not simple maids" (l. 230) like his sister. Lancelot replies that Elaine would be worthy of the diamond because, in his judgment, her lovely appearance places her on an equal standing with queens:

> If what is fair be but for what is fair,
> And only queens are to be counted so,
> Rash were my judgment then, who deem this maid
> Might wear as fair a jewel as is on earth,
> Not violating the bond of like to like. (ll. 235-40)

Lancelot's first estimate of Elaine's worth is founded on her beauty, with which he establishes a relationship to her social standing. From the importance that her family, Lancelot, and Sir Gawain invest in her appearance, Elaine learns that the power to command attention is concentrated in her own status as a visual sign, and she determines that she can control the

reactions of others by shaping her external representation and recreating herself as a work of art. The text omitted from the *Illustrations* relates Elaine's belief that she can assume the representative power of the queen by recreating the visual markers of the queen's identity. By acting the role of the queen, Elaine expects to become her replica.

Cameron's elision of this reasoning portrays Elaine's actions as a type of whimsical playacting and indicates Cameron's own disagreement with Elaine's method of achieving recognition. While Elaine attempts to shape her representation through performance, she only reenacts a set role instead creating a new one, and thus the terms by which her identity is interpreted remain fixed. The entire objective of her presentation is to draw attention to her status as a woman who dies for unrequited love, and the success of this production results in the branding of her identity as a two-dimensional symbol of this type. Perfection of her image is Elaine's goal, but—as with Robinson's *The Lady of Shalott*—her striving to achieve this ideal actually underscores the artificiality of her likeness.

Unlike Elaine, Cameron redefines the limits of convention rather than reinforces them. In this illustration, Cameron exhibits performance as inbuilt within art as an interactive practice that "takes hold" of an audience by directing their attention to the structures (discursive and otherwise) that support its construction. Cameron's modus operandi epitomizes A. D. Coleman's notion of the "directorial mode" (250) of photography. In contrast to realist photographers, who see their environment as a "given" and who thus strive to leave little trace of their presence in the images that they create, directorial photographers perceive the world as "raw material" that can be shaped by human agency (250-52). Although Coleman categorizes Robinson's painstaking combination printing as a prime example of the directorial mode, Cameron's technique pushes the boundaries of directorial photography even further by positioning her final two Elaine

illustrations as self-conscious *tableaux vivants*. In this manner, Cameron's method anticipates Brecht's theory of epic theater and the *Verfremdungseffekt*, the "estrangement effect."

Brecht argues that emotional catharsis should not be the objective of a play, because automatic identification with the characters and action on stage encourages complacency in the audience. Instead, he proposes that the illusion involved in staged events should be made visible to encourage the audience to engage in active self-reflection instead of becoming immersed in the fiction of the performance. The *Verfremdungseffekt* is a mode of performance that involves, Brecht explains, "stripping the event of its self-evident, familiar, obvious quality and creating a sense of astonishment and curiosity" (qtd. in Brooker 191). The *Verfremdungseffekt* requires that the "artist never acts as if there were a fourth wall besides the three surrounding him," and "[t]he audience can no longer have the illusion of being the unseen spectator at an event which is really taking place" (Brecht 91). The performer must "appear strange and even surprising to the audience," a goal that is accomplished "by looking strangely at himself and his work" (Brecht 92). In this mode, Brecht advocates direct address of the audience, unnatural stage lighting and arrangements, straightforward display of the choices made by characters as being deliberate, direct presentation of stage directions to the audience, and the use of the same performers to play multiple roles (138). By emphasizing the constructed nature of theater, the *Verfremdungseffekt* conveys not only that a performance is a mere replica of reality, but also, more broadly, that reality of the outside social world is similarly fabricated and thus open to revision.

By deliberately showing the mechanisms that structure her image, Cameron acknowledges the fabrication inherent in art and suggests that identity is a dynamic role, rather than a static exemplar or rigid paradigm, that may be assumed and interpreted in different ways. The illustration's lack of a title provides a subtle commentary on Elaine's radical attempt to

control her image. Elaine's problem is not that she recognizes the constructedness of her world and aspires to change her situation within it. Rather, Elaine's issue is that she endeavors to *become* the fictive character that she enacts and thus extend the fantasy world of her mind into the real world. In her effort to achieve recognition by becoming an emblem of the love-lorn woman, Elaine empties herself of all significant meaning as her identity melts into this conventional role. The omission of a title for this image reflects the incoherency of Elaine's identity that results from her fixation on performance as an ideal divorced from the real. Elaine has the potential to shape her identity and achieve artistic recognition by strategically working within her social system, Cameron's overall presentation suggests, but she chooses instead to fashion her representation into an object of art rather than its creator.

Like her illustration of Elaine's watery journey to Camelot, Cameron's interpretation of Elaine's arrival at court also showcases the Brechtian principle of the *Verfremdungseffekt* by making visible the aesthetic means and social structure on which it operates. In this last illustration from "Lancelot and Elaine," Cameron shows how Elaine's artistic potential completely disintegrates as she finally transforms into a lifeless icon.

Elaine as Icon

The fourth illustration of Elaine depicts the reception of her body at Camelot. (See fig. 25.) In Cameron's photograph of this scene from the end of "Lancelot and Elaine," Elaine rests on an elevated mattress in the middle of the frame, her face again turned towards the camera with her expression soft and eyes closed. Four people closely surround her body in the upper section of the frame: her loyal servant, King Arthur, Queen Guinevere, and Lancelot. While the servant regards Elaine's face, Lancelot gazes off into the left-hand space of the frame with his right hand on the handle of his sword, and Arthur and Guinevere scrutinize Elaine's letter, which gently

rests on her torso. The white of Elaine's garments makes her body stand out against the relative darkness of the background and draws the viewer's attention to her face, which again seems to be glowing.

The image's title, "And reverently they bore her into hall" (l. 1258), corresponds with the section of text that accompanies the image. (See fig. 26.) Bordered on both sides by ellipses, lines 1237-38 relate the barge's appearance at Camelot, excluding Guinevere's jealous anger towards Lancelot at his presumed unfaithfulness and the wonder of the court at the dead Elaine and their speculation of her identity as a supernatural "Fairy Queen" (l. 1247). Lines 1252-79 chronicle the court's reaction to the spectacle of Elaine's body and the reading of her letter. Cameron's choice of line 1258 to represent this image conveys how she perceives the end result of Elaine's performance. The court's respectful treatment of Elaine's body in this line shows that she has acquired the court's esteem as well as its attention. Thus, in one sense, Elaine achieves the outcome that she desires as her body is received and honored within the hall of Camelot, the heart of its daily life. Likewise, Cameron's soft focus on Elaine's face and body in the photograph grants dignity to her figure. The glowing quality of Elaine's face, as well as the deliberate positioning of her face towards the camera, directs the audience's attention to Elaine's countenance as a focal point within the frame that is aesthetically pleasing. In this image, Cameron permits Elaine to command recognition as an emblem of beauty.

As in the third illustration, however, Elaine is not named in this final illustration's title, and her name similarly does not appear in the corresponding text that Cameron selects to accompany the image. The use of the general female gendered pronoun "her" to refer to Elaine demonstrates how her final performance wipes her identity of signification as a unique individual. On the surface, the court does not know how to interpret the symbol of her body: it

mystifies and "appall'd" (l. 1245) them because it does not fit into their pre-determined structures of interpretation. In a deeper sense, however, the court knows *exactly* what to make of the sign that Elaine provides, precisely because it fits within Camelot's existing signification system. In her desire to inspire a catharsis of sorts, Elaine attempts to shock her audience by presenting them with a spectacle that they cannot interpret in any way other than hers. Ironically, this effort dilutes the representational impact of Elaine's message because the means that she uses support the ideas about gender identity and artistic value that they already hold. The script that she uses is utterly conventional, and the consequence that she suffers by succumbing to these cultural clichés—however spectacular her execution of them—is iconic conformity and thus aesthetic meaninglessness. Cameron's illustration thereby intimates how Elaine's strategy of reconstructing her body into a text to be read actually diminishes her significance as a three-dimensional person within the society of Camelot. Rather than provoking reevaluation of the gendered ideals that failed to provide her with viable options for artistic and personal fulfillment, Elaine's self-determined drama reinforces the restrictive social structures that contributed to her misfortune.

While Gawain "wonder'd at her" (l. 1259) and Lancelot "mused at her" (l. 1260), Guinevere has a more sympathetic reaction in that she "pitied" (l. 1261) the unknown woman. Despite their personal knowledge of Elaine, Gawain and Lancelot maintain a critical distance to the spectacle of her body, but Guinevere emotionally commiserates with what is initially for her a stranger's misfortune. Guinevere's response reflects her recognition of a shared bond between herself and Elaine, who is comparably situated within Camelot as an object of the gaze. Cameron's photographic composition of this scene accentuates this link between the two women. Although the text only explicitly states that Arthur reads Elaine's letter, Cameron positions

Guinevere as reading the letter alongside her husband, thus granting her an equal share in interpreting its contents. However, Cameron also situates Guinevere in a constricted space between the bodies of her husband and lover, signifying the rigid margins of her social situation. Guinevere's representation as queen is restricted to the narrow parameters of an ideal over which she has limited control. For Guinevere, like Elaine, the expression of her identity as a whole person is confined to the domestic area of her tower, the only space within which she is able to articulate her true feelings. The relationship that this image establishes between Elaine's dead body and Guinevere's living one exhibits the similarity between the two women's social position. Although both women are rivals for the affection of Lancelot, the distinction between them fades into insignificance at the idyll's end as the similarity of their positions becomes apparent. For Elaine, as for Guinevere, the ownership of Lancelot's love is only a surface issue covering a much greater concern. The desire to achieve personal agency—the ability to think and act independently and to control individual representation—is the root cause of both of their personal struggles.[94]

The diamonds function as a trope of female value in the poem, and possession of this coveted prize becomes associated with power. At their first meeting, Lancelot conveys a higher status to Elaine than does her brother by placing her on par with the queen as a worthy recipient of the diamonds, an honor that he grants on the basis of her beauty. When Lancelot finally gives Guinevere the diamonds, he poetically describes her physical qualities as outshining the loveliness of the gems and states that his "worship" (l. 1180) of her beauty cannot be adequately articulated through language. For Lancelot and for Arthur, Guinevere's identity is tied up in her

[94] Guinevere's significance within Camelot since "The Coming of Arthur" has always been based on what she represents rather than her personality. To Arthur, she is a symbol of perfect femininity that conveniently helps promote his vision of an ideal society and provides a goal toward which his subjects may strive.

function as a symbol of beauty: she literally is a "beauty queen." The role of queen carries with it considerable representational significance within Camelot's ideal society. Similar to how the king must be "faultless" (l. 121), the queen must be a model of womanly excellence, which is defined by the bards within her society as being "the pearl of beauty" (l. 114): a metaphor that directly links her worth with that of a precious stone. In her desire to replicate Guinevere and thereby achieve the recognition that Guinevere commands as queen, Elaine mistakenly equates Guinevere's status as object of the desiring gaze with the power to control her representation and to dictate her own identity.

Elaine's stated objective is to "enter in among them all" (l. 1045) at Camelot arrayed like the queen and to achieve the respect and admiration given to Guinevere. "[N]o man there will dare to mock at me" (l. 1046), she explains, and the court will instead "wonder" (l. 1046) and "muse" (l. 1047) at her, as well as "know" (l. 1051), "pity" (l. 1052), and "welcome" (l. 1053) her. By means of her carefully staged performance, Elaine accomplishes her goal of commanding Camelot's attention, and she does so in the precise way that she had envisioned. However, she fails to recognize that the ability to acquire the recognition of her society by drawing their gaze does not permit her the creative ability to alter the restrictive social structure within which the perception of ideal female identity is based. Elaine believes that by becoming this ideal, she can transform her identity into a potent symbol that will provide her with the agency to endow her life with meaning. In contrast, Guinevere's situation indicates that the role of an ideal, especially that of the queen, restricts more than it liberates within Camelot society. Guinevere angrily states, in response to what she interprets as Lancelot's unfaithful gift of the diamonds, that "bounds of courtesy" (l. 1213) control the way "[i]n which I as Arthur's Queen move and rule" (l. 1214). Within the confines of her role, she complains that she "cannot speak

my mind" (l. 1215) and thus has little power to express herself or meaningfully direct her representation. Guinevere's incensed rejection of the diamonds is as much a symbolic reaction against the rigidity of her own position within Camelot society as it is an expression of jealousy against Elaine. Guinevere dramatically rebuffs Lancelot's metaphoric link of the diamonds with her character by hurling the diamonds into the river immediately before Elaine's body arrives at Camelot, but she can only exhibit this agency in private to Lancelot, who is part of her limited sphere of influence. Guinevere's individual identity is subsumed into the hollow image of the queen that she embodies. In copying her, Elaine likewise becomes a simulacrum of ideal femininity, a facsimile of a fixed type without a signified meaning other than the static one determined by the society that created it.

As Janet Knepper points out, Elaine becomes a spectacle in her death (231-32). By staging a spectacle centered on the emblem of her dead body, Elaine purposefully transfigures herself into an object of the court's gaze. Guinevere's pity expresses a shared relationship with Elaine not on account of a common access to representational power, as Elaine predicts, but rather because the tragedy of Elaine's lifeless body vividly mirrors her own impotence and vulnerability within a social system based on unattainable paradigms. While Guinevere strains against the limitations restricting the assertion of her voice, Elaine silences herself by changing her body into a text to be read.

Elaine's letter, the written text that she presents along with her body, is the means by which she attempts to control the interpretation of her performance and, accordingly, is central to Cameron's composition of this illustration. The image depicts the attention of Arthur and

Guinevere as being fixed on Elaine's written narrative, which is literally superimposed on her body.[95] Cameron includes the full content of Elaine's missive in the textual accompaniment:

> Most noble lord, Sir Lancelot of the Lake,
>
> I, sometime call'd the maid of Astolat,
>
> Come, for you left me taking no farewell,
>
> Hither, to take my last farewell of you.
>
> I loved you, and my love had no return,
>
> And therefore my true love has been my death.
>
> And therefore to our Lady Guinevere,
>
> And to all other ladies, I make moan:
>
> Pray for my soul, and yield me burial.
>
> Pray for my soul thou too, Sir Lancelot,
>
> As thou art a knight peerless. (ll. 1264-74)

Elaine states a three-fold objective: to compel a final farewell that was denied her by Lancelot's deliberate avoidance of her at his departure from Astolat, to achieve a burial at Camelot, and to induce prayers for her soul. More broadly, she aims to capture the attention of her audience and thus gain value within Camelot. Rather than assuming responsibility for her own self-determined death, Elaine frames it as the natural outcome of Lancelot's rejection of her love, thereby representing herself as a passive victim of circumstance. On this basis, she places herself on equal standing with Guinevere and the other ladies within Camelot, proposing that the spectacle

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[95] The presence of Elaine's written text within the photograph functions as an additional layer of meaning in the illustration. The handwritten letter is shown within the photograph, which is itself accompanied by a handwritten section of text that is mechanically produced. Cameron's choice to depict this letter so prominently draws attention to the interrelatedness of the mechanical produced elements of this work with artistic agency.

of her tragedy is worthy of translation into legendary status on par with the fabled reputations of Arthur's courtiers.

While Elaine addresses Lancelot and Guinevere directly by name in the letter, she avoids naming herself, instead using her title of "maid of Astolat." Barton claims that the idyll is "all about names and naming" (141) and maintains that "Elaine's name . . . is never enough in her possession for her to be able to lose it. Her failure to fully establish herself makes the games she plays vulnerable to corruption and causes them to descend into fatal pathology" (142). In her letter, Elaine attempts to utilize her connection to Lancelot's and Guinevere's names, signifiers that have been idealized to the point where they represent concepts instead of real people, to gain importance by association. Consequently, Elaine's effort to attain validation by means of her own death has been interpreted as a radical act of self-determination. Parlin perceives Elaine's death as a positive act of "self-textualization" (130), and Elisabeth Bronfen similarly asserts that "[b]y transforming suicide into an act of self-textualization, Elaine at last controls her own life and insists on the public recognition of her love denied during her lifetime" (153). While this effort to secure recognition is outwardly successful, I believe that it does not culminate in a greater depth of personal meaning because Elaine does not sufficiently establish her own identity separate from the symbols of Lancelot and Guinevere. As Elaine has no real relationship to the queen other than experiencing similar gendered restrictions, and never possessed Lancelot's love or had any real reason to die because of failing to secure it, her self-determined representation in this manner is a hollow simulacrum of the real thing. Cameron's omission of Elaine's name in her last two illustrations from the idyll elucidates how Elaine becomes an icon, a marker devoid of specific consequence, as a result of her mistaken attribution of the ability to become the object of the gaze with the power to attain personal significance by controlling it.

The subject of Henry Peach Robinson's most famous composite photograph, *Fading Away* (1858), is comparable to Cameron's interpretation of Elaine's reception at Camelot and possibly influenced Cameron's thinking about her later work. (See fig. 27.) In this dramatic deathbed scene, a young woman rests propped up on a pillow in the foreground while two women—presumably grieving family members—look on solicitously. In the middle background, a man is turned away from the scene and looks out of a window, seemingly overcome with sorrow. Consumption is the implied cause of death in this image, although a preliminary study for the completed photograph provides a more detailed explanation. This study, titled *She Never Told Her Love* (1857), depicts the female subject reclining alone against a dark background and was exhibited along with *Fading Away* at the Crystal Palace in 1858 (Mogensen 9). (See fig. 28.) In this earlier work, Mogensen explains, Robinson represents the reason for the girl's death as repressed sexual energy in the form of untold love (10).

Because of Robinson's use of the realistic medium of photography to illustrate the final moments of a young woman within the private setting of her home, *Fading Away* was perceived as morbid by many when it was first exhibited.[96] Not only did the photograph show the very real threat of consumption, a widespread disease with which many contemporary viewers had experienced some degree of contact, but it also conveyed the cultural association of consumption with the artistic lifestyle, with failed romance (a connection enhanced by the concurrent exhibition of *She Never Told Her Love*), and with the fashionable aesthetic commodity

[96] Although the print was composed from several different negatives depicting models chosen by Robinson to play parts, some contemporary viewers were shocked by what they believed was a single print of a live scene depicting a woman who was actually dying. Marta Weiss accordingly explains that the image's self-conscious portrayal of photography's ability to represent reality and imagination simultaneously was at the heart of the sensation that it caused (81).

represented by a beautiful young woman's dead body (Mogensen 8; Weiss 81).[97] Viewed as tragic in its impartial affliction of the young as well as the old and its slow but steady onset of symptoms, consumption was often conceptualized in aesthetic terms within Victorian culture. Jannie Uhre Mogensen relates that "consumptive death in youth could, given the right circumstances, be a relief and a great aesthetic delight" (8). Robinson accentuated the aesthetic connotations of his subject by presenting a quotation from Percy Bysshe Shelley's *Queen Mab* along with the photograph at the 1858 Crystal Palace exhibition:

> Must then that peerless form,
> Which love and admiration cannot view
> Without a beating heart, those azure veins
> Which steal like streams along a field of snow,
> That lovely outline which is fair
> As breathing marble, perish! (ll. 12-17, qtd. in Weiss 99, note 4)

Weiss notes that the poetic image of an animate person changing into a marble effigy underscores the way in which Robinson's young female subject is paralyzed not only by her imminent demise, but also by her function as an art object within the photographic composition itself (99, note 4). As the subject of the poem is perceived by the speaker to be "breathing marble" even before she has passed, the woman in *Fading Away* is doubly transfixed by her impending death and by the commodification of her body as a spectacle of doomed beauty. The gaze of viewers on the deathbed tableau, which is mirrored by the intent focus of the female family members on the dying woman within the frame, inspires both an appreciation of the stylistic elements of the scene and a cathartic reaction of pity and fear. Viewers are absorbed by

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[97] Of course, Poe claimed that the death of a beautiful woman was the most poetic topic.

the transformation of a young woman into a metaphor of tragic beauty just as they turn away, like her father or lover, from the horror of her death.

As well as accessing the complex cultural ideas associated with consumption and unrequited love, Robinson's development of his original portrait into a *tableau vivant* more fully engages the concept of spectatorship. The figures within the frame enact and thereby draw attention to the viewer's simultaneous absorption within and aversion to the display of the expiring young woman's private drama. *Fading Away* compels its viewers to acknowledge their complicity as spectators participating in the commodification of the female subject by the act of viewing her life as an object of art, and the discomfort of Robinson's contemporary audience reflects their inability to maintain a comfortable critical distance from the scene. *Fading Away* shocks viewers by the piercing look that it provides into private domestic space and by extending photography's reach from documentary medium into stylized art form. Daniel explains that Robinson's deliberate use of theater symbols in his meticulous creation of the scene conveys the message that the image should be perceived as a staged work of art, not as a documentary snapshot.[98]

And yet Cameron's composition of Elaine's reception at Camelot displays Brecht's idea of the *Verfremdungseffekt* to a greater degree than Robinson's photograph of the dying young girl. Cameron deliberately structures this scene as a *tableau vivant*, but unlike Robinson's use of combination printing to seamlessly merge several negatives, she does not attempt to enhance the verisimilitude of her subject by significantly altering her studio space or using props more

[98] According to Daniel, several key aspects of Robinson's composition of the work are self-consciously theatrical: "the closing curtains (surely meant to symbolize the end of the young girl's life, but doing so through theatrical metaphor, as if announcing "the end of the final scene"), the shallow space, the back wall parallel to the picture plane, the immobile profile attitudes of the figures (related to the theatrical practice of accentuating poignant moments through a pictorial "freezing" of the action.)" ("Darkroom Vs. Greenroom" 16).

complex than a simple mattress on a nondescript raised platform and a backdrop of dark curtains. The figures in Cameron's image are clearly actors frozen in the act of performing an assigned role: the stiffness of their positions keeps the viewer from suspending disbelief. While Robinson designs his composition to seamlessly blend together different style elements into a unified whole, Cameron permits her design components to be visible. Cameron presents her image simultaneously as a staged *tableau vivant* of the type that was fashionable in her day and as a piece of fine art, thus provoking her reader to consider the distinction between the two categories.

Elaine also slowly "fades away" out of unrequited love, but unlike Robinson's consumptive subject, she exercises greater control over the spectatorship of her body. In presenting her body to Camelot as a beautiful work of art, Elaine aims to draw the court's gaze and inspire their admiration for her artistic ability. Cameron's inclusion of the text of Elaine's letter shows the importance that she gives to its function as Elaine's interpretation of the sign that she offers with her body. However, as *Fading Away* suggests, drawing the gaze does not grant the ability to change its effects. Robinson's subject compels his viewers to experience an emotional cathartic reaction by acknowledging the dying woman's tragedy and their own position as spectators, but in so doing, this private drama does not fully inspire its audience to question why the death of a young woman by consumption should be considered aesthetically beautiful. By structuring her image as a *tableau vivant* to a greater degree than Robinson, Cameron deliberately avoids inspiring a cathartic reaction in her audience and instead encourages them to consider the constructed nature of the ideas that underpin the illustration as a work of art.

Cameron's straightforward arrangement of the reception of Elaine's body contrasts against Elaine's own romanticized vision in the text. While Elaine perceives spectacle as a means of creating beauty, Cameron uses the spectacle of the *Verfremdungseffekt* in her composition of "And reverently they bore her into hall" to display beauty as a socially-constructed concept that is enacted through performance. By transforming herself into a spectacle, but failing to establish her own identity as a maker of beauty beyond the system of ideals established within the court, Elaine permits Camelot to determine the meaning of the symbols that she presents. Accordingly, the cathartic reaction that Elaine's tragic death stimulates in her audience does not result in any productive evaluation of the restrictive gendered social roles that contributed to her culture's equation of beauty with death.

The flaws in the court's system of interpretation are revealed by the spectating position they assume to the spectacle that Elaine creates. Simpson contends that the failure of the other characters in Tennyson's poem to understand Elaine's significance accurately exhibits the blindness of the court to the problems in its perspective on the world:

> Elaine's story is finally one of wasted potential and fragmented understanding indicative of the failing realm. None of the main characters understand Elaine or what she means because of their stereotypical views of women like Lancelot's; their self-indulgent passion and jealous pride like Guinevere's; or their self-assured, authoritative, one-dimensional views of the roles of men and women in society like Arthur's. All of these are remarkably Elaine-like ways of thinking that the poem dramatizes as inadequate and damaging. (359)

Constance W. Hassett and James Richardson similarly contend that Tennyson's "Lancelot and Elaine" is a narrative of misreading at every level (301). While occupying the position of

spectacle may afford power over spectators (297), Hassett and Richardson assert that Elaine does not derive agency from this situation because she permits herself to become a meaningless symbol. “Far from being a tantalizing half-absence,” they explain, “Elaine is the overknown, and she symbolizes to Lancelot the dangers of *being* overknown—commodified, taken for an image” (301). Although Elaine determines her own fate, her audience plays an important role in her implosive trajectory from aspiring artist to icon, as the symbols that she creates must be understood. In the idyll, the court is eager to read Elaine within their own interpretive system. Because the symbols that Elaine provides fit within an established female type, they accept the interpretation that she offers easily and grant her the position of honor that she desires. Cameron’s deliberate positioning of Lancelot, Guinevere, and Arthur as actors whose roles are as artificial as Elaine’s within the photographic *tableau vivant* shows how identity within this society is assumed rather than innate.

Rather than provoking reconsideration of existing structures of meaning that confine female identity to rigid types, Elaine reinforces them by transforming her body into the aesthetic object of the court’s gaze. She accepts Camelot’s flawed value system and permits herself to be subsumed within the hollow feminine ideal that constricted her viable opportunities in the first place. By becoming entombed within the role of ideal femininity, Elaine surpasses Guinevere’s position as a static symbol of beauty. At the idyll’s close, Elaine’s last wish is finally realized as the spectacle of her death culminates in an elaborate burial within Camelot. Accompanied by “gorgeous obsequies” (l. 1324), Elaine achieves her goal of attaining equal standing with Guinevere by being laid to rest “like a queen” (l. 1325). The design of Elaine’s tomb represents her final transformation into an ideal, as she is pictured on her tomb along with Lancelot’s shield at her feet and the lily of her namesake clasped in her hand, and “letters gold and azure” (l. 1334)

perpetually relate the story of her voyage to the court. In this way, Elaine achieves immortality, but only as a painted image.

Cameron's choice to depict Elaine within the tableau of spectacle and spectatorship that Elaine initiates shows the importance that Cameron places on the disintegration of Elaine's identity from artist to readable object within the idyll. Although she controls the delivery of her body to Camelot, Elaine relinquishes the design of her tomb—the final interpretation of her person and art—to the court to determine. By presenting her body as nothing more than a sensational visual accompaniment to her letter, Elaine shortsightedly draws the court's immediate attention at the long-term cost of her artistic potential. The spectacle of Elaine's arrival at Camelot thus does not result in any lasting change within the system of value that originally limited her opportunities for agency because she supports the objectifying function of the court's gaze rather than challenges it. In the end, Elaine silences herself as she becomes absorbed as a sign of beauty and doomed love within the court's own signification framework rather than achieving agency as a creator in her own right. She literally becomes an icon, a lavish work of art, and her identity becomes fixed within the static narrative of her tomb as an over-determined paradigm.

Illustrations "From Life"

In her *Illustrations*, Cameron offers a retroactive commentary on the meaning of the tragic events in "The Lady of Shalott." Her series of Elaine illustrations expand on Tennyson's idyll of artistic failure to display Elaine's story as a cautionary tale for the aspiring woman artist. The *tableau vivant* structure of these illustrations has a dual function. On one hand, it depicts how Elaine's radical transformation of herself into a *tableau vivant* garners attention but fails to gain her lasting recognition as a maker of art. In another sense, however, it provides an

alternative use of performance as a strategy for achieving agency. Cameron was undoubtedly well aware of the contradictory cultural association of the *tableau vivant* as a form both of high and of low art. Daniel points out that while the *tableau vivant* was appreciated for its refined aesthetic history,[99] it was often linked to photography in the nineteenth century to prove photography's unsuitability as an art form. To this end, a nineteenth-century critic declared that "[i]n figure subjects photography can only copy what the photographer has arranged; it cannot invent. It can reach the excellence of colourless *tableaux vivants*—nothing more" (qtd. in Daniel, "Darkroom Vs. Greenroom" 14).

Part of this criticism likely stemmed from the increasing popularity of *tableaux vivants* as a type of parlor entertainment, and as such, a female-dominated art form. Mary Chapman relates that many *tableau vivant* manuals in the period were addressed at middle- or upper-class women who had or desired to acquire social and/or artistic taste, and performances were represented as being created and enacted by women with a predominately male audience (M. Chapman 29–30). Accordingly, Chapman claims that the *tableau vivant* form reinforces ideological perspectives of women as powerless objects of the gaze. She argues that women in these performances "are immobilized both by plot and by the *tableau vivant* aesthetic, which deploys silence and immobility to convey privileged moments of meaning that pertain primarily to the domestic, female sphere" (31).

In the *Idylls*, Elaine's use of the *tableau vivant* form results in the immobilization that Chapman describes primarily because she does not negotiate any type of agency within it. Her goal is to achieve immortality by becoming a symbol, and the success of this objective results in

[99] Daniel notes *tableaux vivants* originated in high class homes and were often designed in the nineteenth century by respected fine art painters such as Lord Frederick Leighton and John Everett Millais ("Darkroom Vs. Greenroom" 14).

her identity being reduced to a two-dimensional rendering on her tomb, a *nature morte*. In this regard, Elaine's fatal conflation of agency with recognition and admiration more broadly indicates a systemic flaw in the cultural values that she embraces.

Elaine has often been interpreted as the female counterpart to Arthur as the ideal man within the *Idylls*.[100] Much like Arthur, Elaine advocates the worship of cultural ideals, and the implosive result of Elaine's attempt to establish her identity by becoming an ideal indicates the problem at the core of the value system that she represents. Simpson asserts that Arthur's glorification of women as the moral center of the realm constricts both men and women into narrowly-defined roles. This perspective is "a view which denies their complex humanity and moral responsibility and one many critics see as contributory to the fall of the realm" (361). Like Elaine's single-minded fealty to her goal, Arthur's relentless devotion to his ideal society eventually leads to the destruction of Camelot from the inside out. In "The Passing of Arthur," the final idyll in Tennyson's series, Arthur is compelled to address his role as king after his kingdom has crumbled. In his final moments, he chooses to engineer immortality by recreating himself into a symbol or legend and literally departing into the horizon to ensure the perpetual absence of his body. Herbert F. Tucker argues that Arthur morphs into a legendary text at the poem's end because the physical Arthur must cease to be and pass into epic in order for the story of his visionary society, and his identity as a kingly paragon, to endure outside time (340–41). Like Elaine, Arthur ultimately sacrifices his life to gain immortality as a cultural exemplar.

While Arthur's focus on transmitting cultural values is wider than Elaine's primary goal of achieving personal recognition, their similar prioritization of the sign over the signified

[100] J. Phillip Eggers's view conveys this perspective by reading Elaine as "nearest to Tennyson's ideal of womanly innocence" and comparable to the king in her misplaced idealism (Simpson 341–42).

indicates a common aggrandizing tendency stemming from a myopia in their perspectives. Tucker concludes that the "largest significance" of the *Idylls* "inheres in its wager that a private need—a man's personal bereavement, an epic aspirant's contest with the mighty dead—might fulfill itself in a communally representative creation" (344). He sees the last passage of Arthur as a transition into myth and legend, and ultimately, as tying together a shared cultural narrative that will give purpose to Tennyson's public (344). Arthur achieves this objective, however, by advocating the exaltation of image over substance, and this strategy calls reality into question by eroding the distinction between representation and the real. Elaine's story prefigures Camelot's final collapse into total reliance on symbols in the absence of signified reality. Under Arthur's guidance, this society becomes so saturated with signs that meaning becomes irrevelant by being endlessly changeable: it devolves into what Baudrillard terms the precession of simulacra. The epigram to *Simulation and Simulacra* explains that "The simulacrum is never that which conceals the truth—it is the truth which conceals that there is none. The simulacrum is true." At the last, Arthur transforms his identity and that of Camelot into symbols without any signified reality, and—like Elaine—accordingly becomes absorbed in the precession of the simulacra that he creates.

The results of Elaine's choice of sign over reality in "Lancelot and Elaine" reflects the farther-reaching ramifications of Arthur's exaltation of image in the *Idylls* as a whole and forms part of Tennyson's broader exploration of the complexity of images as identity markers. William R. McKelvy perceives the nineteenth century's "new visual economy" to be a major concern in "The Lady of Shalott." While Tennyson is an intensely visual poet—Arthur Henry Hallam described him in 1831 as "liv[ing] in a world of images" (qtd. in McKelvy para. 23)—McKelvy asserts that he is fixated both on the creative possibilities of increased visuality and on the

implications of representation replacing the real. The Lady of Shalott indicates, McKelvy claims, Tennyson's "deeply conflicted reaction to the century's evolving visual abundance" (para. 21) in her simultaneous "physical presence" and "interpretive opacity" (para. 21). Elaine's preoccupation with her imagination constricts her perspective of her own situation and narrows her potential outcomes to either securing Lancelot's love or dying, and Arthur's insistence on realizing his ideal society blinds him to the true state of the people who occupy the roles he creates. In the *Idylls*, Tennyson thus cautions against overreliance on image as the sole basis of identity, suggesting that replacing reality with image alone can restrict vision instead of expand it.

Cameron's *Illustrations* develops Tennyson's analysis of the permeable relationship between sign and substance in Arthur's and Elaine's narratives. While Cameron's portrayal of Elaine does showcase the tension between the real and ideal, Cameron's illustrations do not isolate or victimize Elaine, as Constance C. Relihan claims (123–25). Rather than taking power away from Elaine, Cameron exhibits how Elaine creates the role of passive victim that she subsequently performs, and thus uses her own considerable powers of representation to destroy herself inadvertently. Instead of using her position to leverage greater agency, Elaine shortsightedly chooses recognition over creativity and reinforces the restrictive gender system of Camelot in her mistaken equation of image with value and agency.

Cameron's careful presentation of her own artistic identity in the *Illustrations* and in her career more broadly offers a contrasting model of self-fashioning. The *Illustrations* are deliberately structured as an overt interpretation of the *Idylls*, and markers of Cameron's aesthetic ownership are visible throughout the work. Nearly every photograph in the work is accompanied by Cameron's full name in handwritten facsimile along with the term "From Life,"

a designation that draws prominent attention to the fact that the photographs were created by her in a specific time and place.[101] As well as serving a practical purpose as a type of copyright, these signatures link Cameron to the long tradition of artists attaching signatures to creative work as a symbol of their identities as creators. By signing her photographs, Cameron asserts both her role as an artist and the aesthetic value of her photographs as works of fine art, much like the Lady of Shalott's inscription of her name on her funeral boat. Unlike Elaine or the Lady of Shalott, however, Cameron does not respond to criticism by adhering more to convention, but rather uses the public exhibition of her work as a means of showcasing and promoting her identity as an original artist.

The title page prominently proclaims Cameron to be the sole author of the *Illustrations*, stating that the work is "by" her without any qualification of her as illustrator. The use of a famous illustrator's name was employed to help promote books in the nineteenth century, but often with a clear designation of the illustrator as a contributor to the work. In this case, the lack of a role qualifier blurs the boundary between author and illustrator, suggesting that Cameron's illustrations are instrumental to the overall meaning of the work. Similarly, Cameron's choice to include a poem dedicated to herself by Charles Tennyson Turner, Tennyson's brother, at the beginning of Volume One serves as a purposeful component of her effort in the *Illustrations* to assume the role of artist. Turner writes:

> Lo! Modern Beauty lends her lips and eyes
>
> To tell an Ancient Story! Thou hast brought
>
> Into thy picture, all our fancy sought
>
> In that old time, with skillful art and wise.

[101] In Chapter 2, I noted that this phrase was often linked to works of fine art, an association that undoubtedly also influenced Cameron's titling of her photographs.

The Sun obeys thy gestures, and allows
Thy guiding hand, whene'er thou hast a mind
To turn his passive light upon mankind,
And set his seal and thine on chosen brows.
Thou lov'st all loveliness! and many a face
Is press'd and summon'd from the breezy shores
On thine immortal charts to take its place
While near at hand the jealous ocean roars
His noblest Tritons would thy subjects be,
And all his fairest Nereids sit to thee.

Turner portrays Cameron as an artist who has the ability to control nature to perform her aesthetic will. Unlike many contemporary representations of the camera as a passive instrument at the mercy of the sun—a "pencil of nature," to use William Henry Fox Talbot's phrase—this poem depicts the photographer as an active agent who uses the camera to create beauty and the sun as medium of "passive light"—much like Cameron's description of herself in her letter as a "Priestess of the Sun." Cameron is able to express "all our fancy sought / In that old time, with skillful art and wise," and her process of photography is an art by which both she and the sun "set" a "seal . . . upon chosen brows."

Turner's poem is highly complementary of Cameron's artistic skill, and she likely included it to support her objective in the *Illustrations* both of establishing her own aesthetic identity and of achieving recognition for photography as a fine art.[102] According to Thelma S.

[102] Cameron is careful not to imply ownership over this poem, however. Excepting the title page, this poem is the only part of the *Illustrations* not presented in handwritten facsimile.

Fenster, the mixture of "female power and deference to male authority" depicted in the *Illustrations* "suggests Cameron's own situation: an ambitious artist who sought to change the standards of photographic representation [and] make money at the same time" (259). Cameron recognizes the power of self-image, but unlike Elaine, she also discerns the necessity of maintaining a vital connection to the real to avoid becoming absorbed back into her culture's existing aesthetic value system as a meaningless simulacrum. In this sense, Cameron designates Elaine's willing metamorphosis into an object of art as a crucial defeat for the woman artist. Not only does Elaine relinquish aesthetic and personal agency, but she also abandons the most important artistic task: she fails to help her audience to see the cultural structures supporting them more clearly.

In conclusion, as Cameron's most complex artistic project, the *Illustrations* best encapsulates her aesthetic philosophy, and she uses it both to strengthen her identity as an artist and to redefine fine art to include photography. Cameron's *tableaux vivants* enact Roland Barthes' idea of the *punctum*, an element of photographs that breaks through the image's objective surface representation of its subject to affect the reader directly (26–27). The incongruity of Cameron's poetic subjects with their seemingly mundane and unabashedly amateurish visual representations directs viewers' attention outside of the frame. Jane Gallop interprets Barthes' notion of the active reader of the photograph as promoting a type of "'active passivity,' an active viewing in which one contributes to seeing something that is really out there" (398). The *punctum*, she argues, conveys the viewer's desire for the real, the connection to reality that leads the attention beyond the frame (399). Cameron's Brechtian strategy in the *Illustrations* prompts active reading by exhibiting the relationship between the sign and the

---

This distinction indicates that Cameron believes to possess an aesthetic share in the parts that are handwritten, mostly textual selections from the poems.

signified. By displaying the mechanisms that underpin her creative work, Cameron directs the attention of her audience outside of the limits of her photographs, compelling them to acknowledge the performances involved in creating these images. Cameron thus encourages her audience, in recognizing how Elaine's story is deliberately constructed, to consider the ways in which the roles that they enact can be open to strategic change, too. As well as assuming an active role in constructing the self beyond the frame, Cameron suggests, an artist must be willing to redefine the frame itself.

Chapter 3 Figures

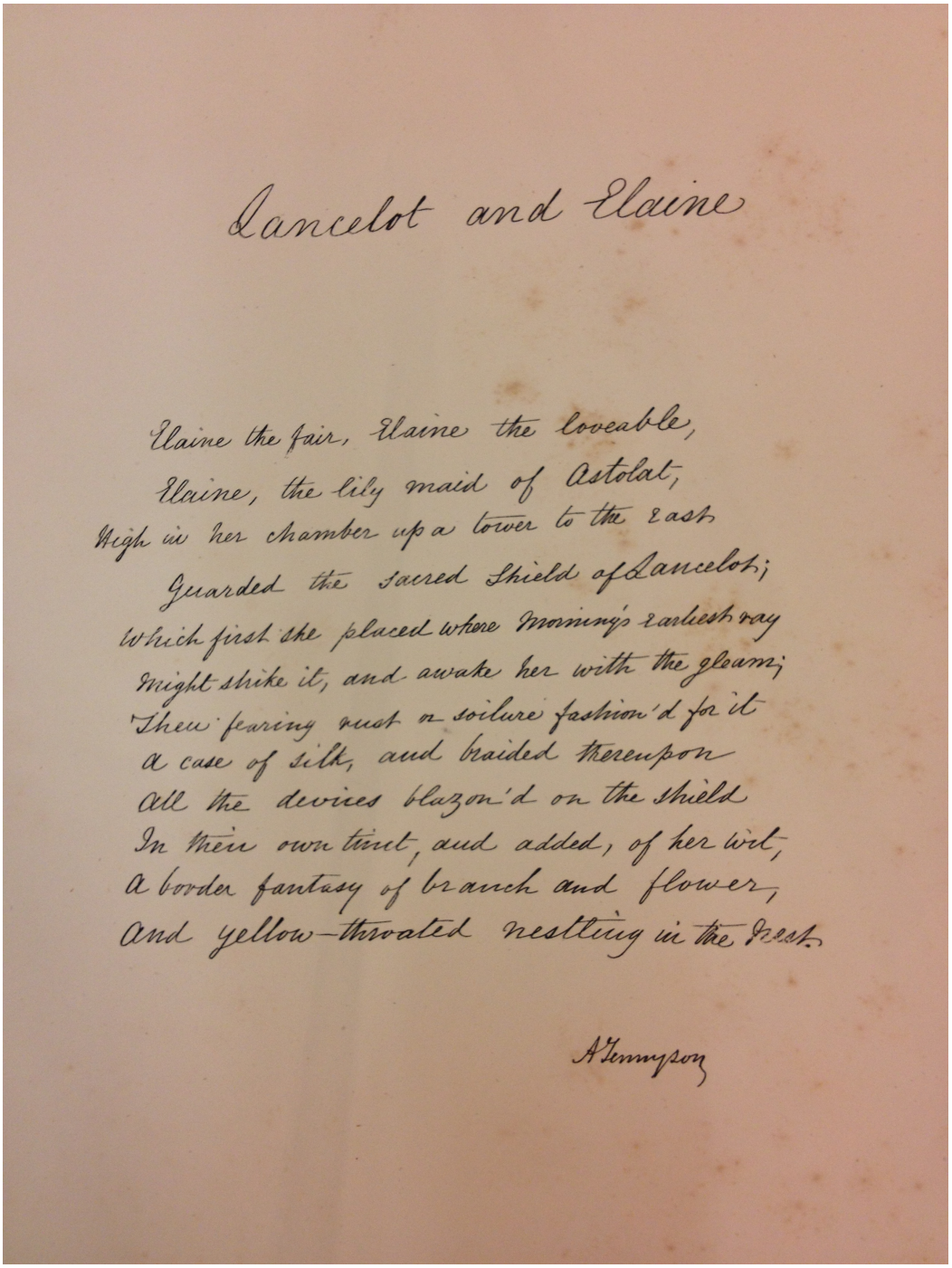
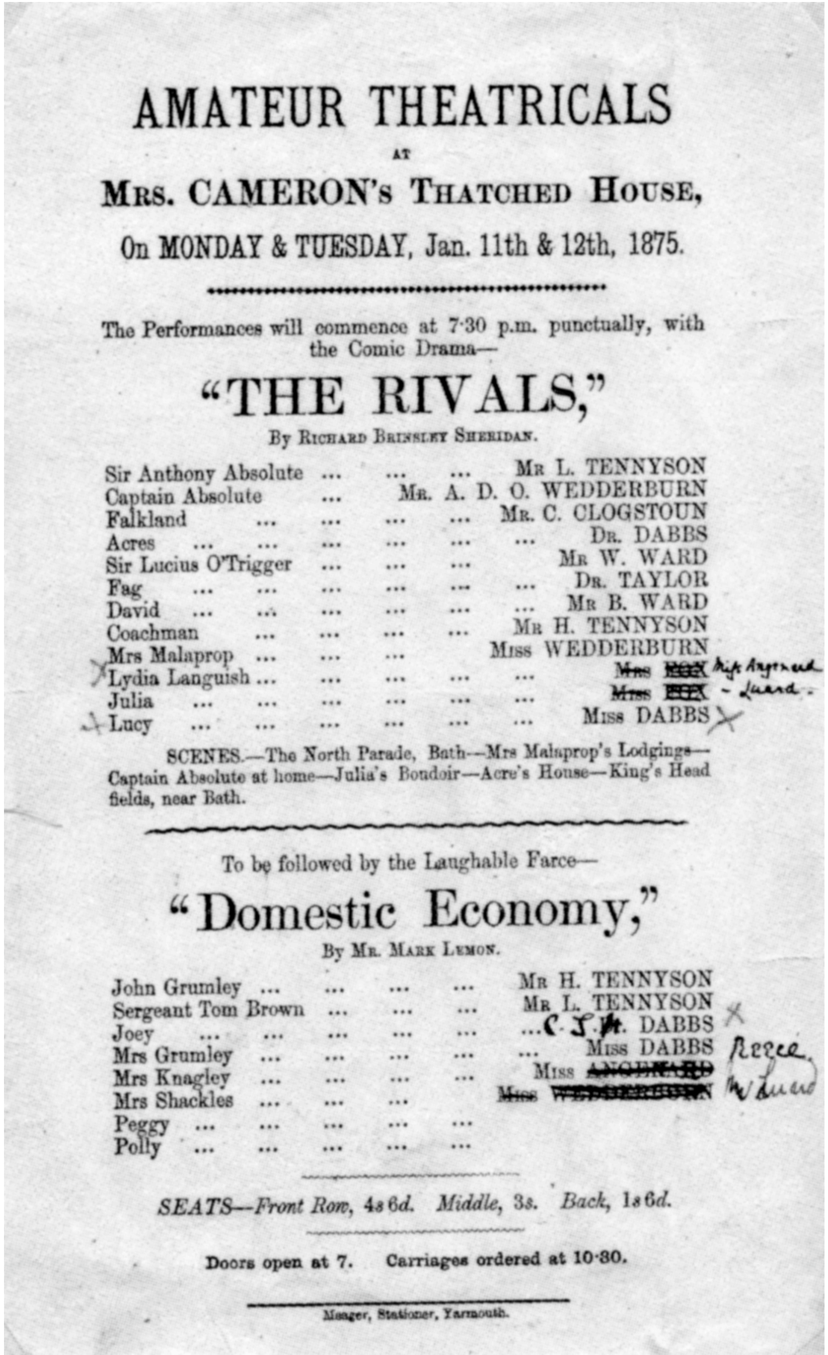


Fig. 17: Cameron, Julia Margaret. Lithographed text accompanying "Elaine, the Lily Maid of Astolat." *Illustrations to Tennyson's Idylls of the King, and Other Poems*. London: Henry S. King, 1874-75. Gernsheim Collection, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin.



AMATEUR THEATRICALS

AT

MRS. CAMERON'S THATCHED HOUSE,

On MONDAY & TUESDAY, Jan. 11th & 12th, 1875.

The Performances will commence at 7·30 p.m. punctually, with the Comic Drama—

"THE RIVALS,"

By RICHARD BRINSLEY SHERIDAN.

Sir Anthony Absolute	MR L. TENNYSON
Captain Absolute ...	MR. A. D. O. WEDDERBURN
Falkland	MR. C. CLOGSTOUN
Acres	DR. DABBS
Sir Lucius O'Trigger	MR W. WARD
Fag	DR. TAYLOR
David	MR B. WARD
Coachman	MR H. TENNYSON
Mrs Malaprop	MISS WEDDERBURN
Lydia Languish	~~Mrs [illegible]~~ Miss Angerand
Julia	~~Miss [illegible]~~ - Luard -
Lucy	MISS DABBS

SCENES.—The North Parade, Bath—Mrs Malaprop's Lodgings—Captain Absolute at home—Julia's Boudoir—Acre's House—King's Head fields, near Bath.

To be followed by the Laughable Farce—

"Domestic Economy,"

By MR. MARK LEMON.

John Grumley	MR H. TENNYSON
Sergeant Tom Brown	MR L. TENNYSON
Joey	...C. J. ~~M~~. DABBS
Mrs Grumley	... MISS DABBS
Mrs Knagley	MISS ~~[illegible]~~ Reece
Mrs Shackles	~~Miss [illegible]~~ Mrs Luard
Peggy	
Polly	

SEATS—Front Row, 4s 6d. *Middle*, 3s. *Back*, 1s 6d.

Doors open at 7. Carriages ordered at 10·30.

Meager, Stationer, Yarmouth.

Fig. 18: Playbill for *The Rivals*. Amateur Theatrical at Mrs. Cameron's Thatched House. Perf. 11-12 January 1875. Wilson Centre for Photography, London.

Fig. 19: Cameron, Julia Margaret. “Elaine, The Lily Maid of Astolat.” 1874. Albumen print. Gernsheim Collection, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin.

Fig. 20: Cameron, Julia Margaret. “Elaine.” 1874. Albumen print. Gernsheim Collection, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin.

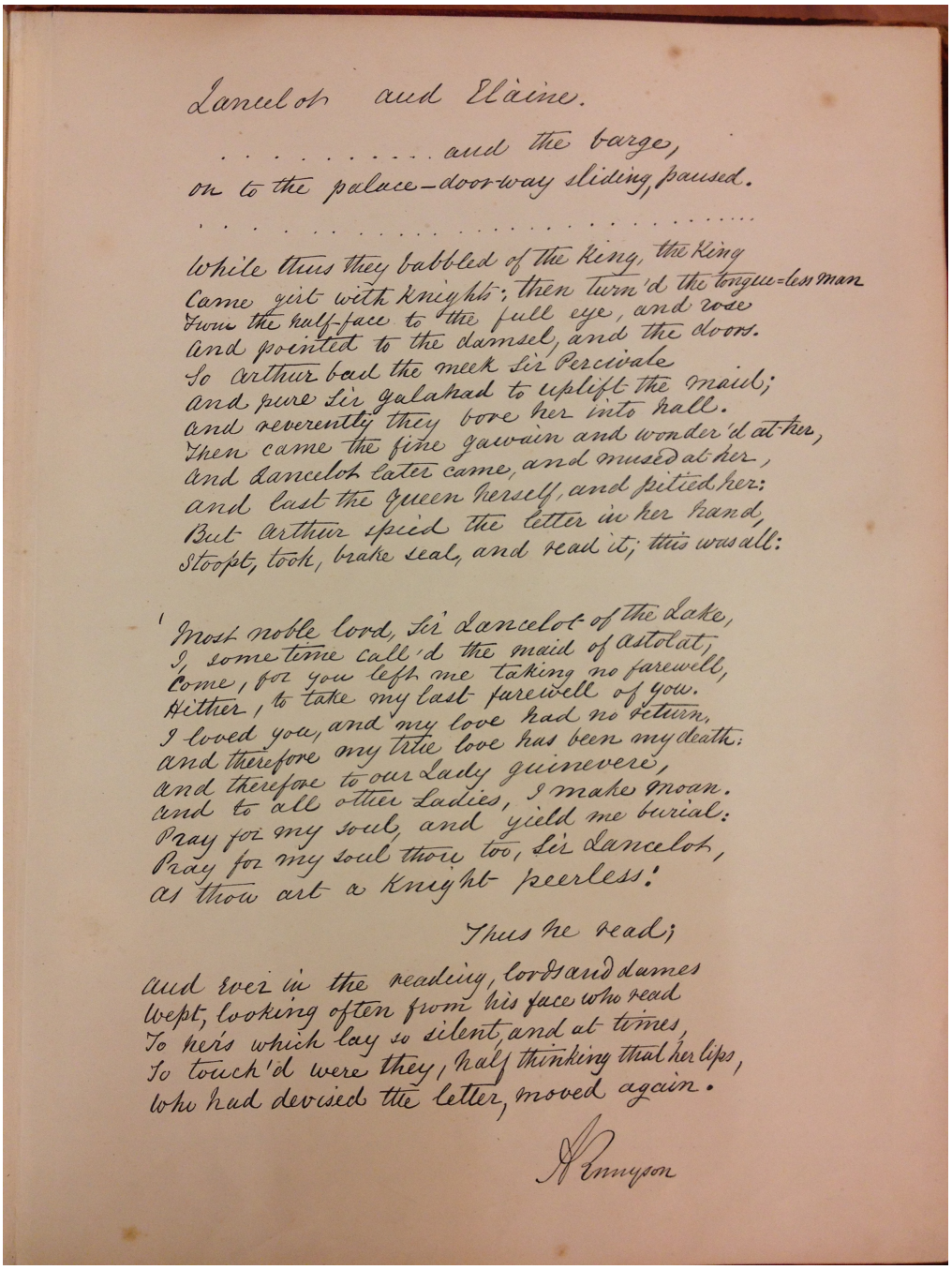
Fig. 21: Cameron, Julia Margaret. “Call, I follow, I follow, let me die!” 1867. Carbon print from copy negative. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Fig. 22: Rossetti, Dante Gabriel. *Beata Beatrix*. ca. 1864-70. Oil on canvas. Tate Gallery, London.

Fig. 23: Cameron, Julia Margaret. Untitled image from “Lancelot and Elaine.” 1874. Albumen print. Gernsheim Collection, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin.

Fig. 24: Robinson, Henry Peach. *The Lady of Shalott*. 1861. Combination albumen print. Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin.

Fig. 25: Cameron, Julia Margaret. “And reverently they bore her into hall.” 1874. Albumen print. Gernsheim Collection, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin.



Lancelot and Elaine.

. . . . . and the barge,
on to the palace-doorway sliding, paused.
. . . . . .

While thus they babbled of the King, the King
came girt with knights: then turn'd the tongue-less man
from the half-face to the full eye, and rose
and pointed to the damsel, and the doors.
So Arthur bad the meek Sir Percivale
and pure Sir Galahad to uplift the maid;
and reverently they bore her into hall.
Then came the fine Gawain and wonder'd at her,
and Lancelot later came, and mused at her,
and last the Queen herself, and pitied her:
But Arthur spied the letter in her hand,
stoopt, took, brake seal, and read it; this was all:

'Most noble lord, Sir Lancelot of the Lake,
I, sometime call'd the maid of Astolat,
come, for you left me taking no farewell,
Hither, to take my last farewell of you.
I loved you, and my love had no return,
and therefore my true love has been my death:
and therefore to our Lady Guinevere,
and to all other Ladies, I make moan.
Pray for my soul, and yield me burial:
Pray for my soul thou too, Sir Lancelot,
as thou art a knight peerless.'

Thus he read;
and ever in the reading, lords and dames
wept, looking often from his face who read
To hers which lay so silent, and at times,
So touch'd were they, half thinking that her lips,
who had devised the letter, moved again.

Tennyson

Fig. 26: Cameron, Julia Margaret. Lithographed text accompanying "And reverently they bore her into hall." *Illustrations to Tennyson's Idylls of the King, and Other Poems*. London: Henry S. King, 1874-75. Gernsheim Collection, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin.

Fig. 27: Robinson, Henry Peach. *Fading Away*. 1858. Combination albumen print. The Royal Photographic Society at the National Media Museum; Bradford, England.

Fig. 28: Robinson, Henry Peach. *She Never Told Her Love*. 1857. Albumen print. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

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